PARADIGMS OF REFUSE: WASTE ABJECTION AND REJECTION IN CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN LITERATURE AND CINEMA

BY

JESSICA SCIUBBA

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Italian
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2017

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Emanuel Rota, Chair, Director of Research
Professor Robert Rushing
Associate Professor Eleonora Stoppino
Assistant Professor Eric Calderwood

ABSTRACT

"Paradigms of Refuse" explores Italy and the Mediterranean as landscapes of crisis, sites where environmental threats, social inequalities, and geopolitical turmoil converge. These landscapes are increasingly being transformed into dumping sites where the material as well as the human excess of our modern societies are discarded. In this study, I propose the concept of refuse– which refers both to the matter thrown away or rejected as worthless, as well as to the acts of refusing, declining and rejecting – as a theoretical tool to approach different dimensions of exclusion and exploitation with reference to both human beings and the natural environment. "Paradigms of Refuse" moves across these different meanings of refuse in order to offer an account of environmental and social unrest in contemporary Italy. By mapping the social as well as the material figuration of the refuse through close analysis of contemporary Italian literature and cinema, I expose not only the detrimental impact of the human over the environment, but also the ways in which the human/non-human remnants of our consumer culture can be approached in transformative ways as instruments of subversion. Refuse can become a tool to foster awareness, to shake consciences, to create discomfort and blur divides between human and non-human, nature and culture, the self and the other.

Through refuse, I address the condition of the marginalized strata of the Italian society who are refused as the collateral waste of modernity while also refusing to conform to normalizing paradigms of inclusion: examples of these marginalized groups include migrants, the economically underprivileged, Roma communities, prostitutes. The employment of refuse as a theoretical tool allows to approach with coherence issues otherwise confined to distinct analytical paths, from the smuggling and disposal of waste, both human and non-human, to the insertion of the migrant, or other marginalized strata of Italian society, into the realm of worthless waste, with the consequent abjectification of the human (gendered) body.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation signs the end of a long journey that spans five years and two continents. Many are the people that I met along the way, and many are those who where with me before it all started, too many to count. Without them, I would not be here today, and I would not be the person and scholar that I am; now it is my turn to thank them. I want to especially thank Emanuel Rota, my Director of Research and adviser in these years at the University of Illinois, for having supported me from the very beginning; I thank him for having agreed to guide me in the unhortodox research path that lead to this dissertation, providing me with constructive criticism and encouragement at each step of the road. I want to thank him for the countless hours spent discussing ideas for this project and for having granted me the right balance of guidance and autonomy in my research. I also owe a great debt to Robert Rushing who, early in my grad school years, has spurred my research interest towards the field of Environmental Humanities and whose expertise in Cinema Studies has been crucial for the further developments of my dissertation. I want to thank Eleonora Stoppino for her sustained guidance in the past five years, for always having pushed me out of my comfort zone and for having urged me to venture towards what for me where new literary horizons. My deep gratitude goes also to Eric Calderwood whose expertise in the field of Mediterranean Studies and whose precious insights helped me to insert my dissertation into a broader, transnational perspective. Lastly, I feel the need to thank my former adviser Fulvio Pezzarossa from the University of Bologna who has always believed in my potential as a scholar and has encouraged me to apply to this Doctoral Program; whithout him, I would definitely not be here today.

While I cannot thank enough my committee members, and former advisers, for their sustained encouragement, feedback, and guidance, my dissertation was also impacted by the support of colleagues and friends who, for this, deserve a special mention. Emily DiFilippo, one of my first colleagues and sincere friend at the University of Illinois, offered her comments and suggestions from the very beginning when this dissertation was still an idea in my head, we share a deep appreciation for (waste) literature, Judith Butler, and our homeland. Corey Flack, colleague in Italian Studies and friend, has shared with me his experience and helped me navigate the various stages of our Doctoral Program. Priscilla Nelson-Charrat, colleague in

French and friend, for having supported me in the past two years, for having shared with me her experience and for having provided me with the inspiration for my closing section. Thank you to Federica Di Blasio from UCLA with whom I share a strong commitment to the socio-environmental issues at the core of my dissertation and the love for our land of origin, Abruzzo.

Too many are the Friends that have sustained me during these years, people that I met during the journey and people that have always been there for me. A special thank you goes to Elysse Longiotti who has proved to be a great friend before even knowing me, for that, I will always be thankful. Thank you to Francesca Costante for being there for me despite the thousands of miles and the time difference dividing us; the years go by, our lives have drastically changed, but our intercontinental friendship keeps being a safe harbor, my comfort zone. I am also grateful for having met Elisa Parsons-Facetti along the way who has shared with me two intense years at the University of Illinois; I want to thank her for having showed me what it means to be a tenacious, committed, and thoughtful scholar and person, but also how important it is to set priorities in life, and stand by them.

Lastly, and most importantly, I would not have started this journey, let alone this dissertation, without the unconditional love and support of my family. I am grateful to my parents for always having been there for me, and for always being supportive of my choices, even if they entailed moving across the Atlantic Ocean. I want to thank them for having raised me with an open mind and an open soul, for having instilled in me a strong sense of commitment to fight for the right cause, and a deep respect towards the environment we live in. Thank you to my husband and best friend Ragheb El Assouad for having embarked with me in this long, windy journey. His understanding and his constant support along these years have helped me maintain a healthier life/work balance; his encouragement and utmost faith in me and in my potential are what ultimately spurred me to complete this work. I am grateful to Ragheb for always reminding me to never loose track of what motivated me to embark in this project in the first place, and to face what lies ahead with renewed commitment. For this, and much more, the pages that lie ahead are dedicated to them.

Alla mia famiglia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Refuse

Noun: Anything that is rejected, discarded, or thrown away; rubbish, waste, residue; (now *esp.*) household waste. In extended use: a despised, outcast, or worthless group of people; the scum or dregs *of* a particular group or class.

Verb: The action or an act of refusing; a denial or rejection of something requested, demanded, or offered.

Abridged from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017

At dawn, on August 24, 2017 in Piazza Indipendenza, Rome, the Italian police dressed in anti-riot gear used water cannons and batons to force the evacuation of the square, occupied by migrants. The protesters – mostly refugees and asylum seekers including women and children – were contesting the eviction of roughly 800 people from a building in the city's center. In the aftermaths of the events, Monsignor Paolo Lojudice, auxiliary bishop for the Dioces of Rome, condamned the police's inadequate response pointing at how Rome: "si è trasformata in una città che fa 'piazza pulita', dove, nel cuore dell'estate, con i terremoti che incombono e con gli attentati che ci fanno aver paura, devono emergere il diritto e la giustizia a scapito di altro. Magari l'immondizia, quella vera, resta per le strade, ma le persone, famiglie intere con donne e bambini vanno rimosse."[1] In Lojudice's words, in the climate of fear generated by the threat of environmental disasters or of terrorist attacks, it is important to keep in mind our basic rights as

[1] This statement from Monsignor Lojudice echoed throughout Italy's mass media, see for instance the article "Vaticano accoglierà i rifugiati sfollati: Francesco Grana, "Sgomberi non sono la risposta. Rifiuti restano in strada, rimossi donne e bimbi," *Il fatto quotidiano*, August 24, 2017, http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/08/24/roma-vaticano-pronto-ad-accogliere-i-rifugiati-sfollati-dalla-polizia-sgomberi-non-solo-la-risposta-adeguata/3815303/

human beings, rights that are often denied to the marginalized strata of our societies, first and foremost to migrants and asylum seekers.

Lojudice's juxtaposition between waste and migrants is particularly poignant as it testifies to the urge of removing the leftover excess of our societies from the public space. The human excess, represented in this case by the protesting migrants, however, seems more disturbing compared to its non-human counterpart: waste; as such, it needs to be removed, and the public space cleansed from its disturbing presence. Despite the authorities' attempts to obliterate the signs of migrants' passage, however, the material traces of their presence were still visible on the urban landscape, as, after the evacuation, the square resembled an urban dumping site scattered with trash bags and leftovers of the makeshift camp. This episode perfectly exemplifies Zygmunt Bauman's disturbing yet poignant metaphor of migrants' lives as "wasted lives,"[2] lives that modernity has deemed as worthless. When displaced into "our backyards," migrants provide governments with an ideal "other," towards which addressing their security campaigns based on fears and anxieties. Migrants – the redundant byproduct of modernity – become "human waste" to be disposed of and cleansed, at all costs.

Defining my Terms

In "Paradigms of Refuse" I explore the junction between human and non-human excess and look at Italy and the Mediterranean as landscapes of crisis, sites where environmental threats, social inequalities, and geopolitical turmoil converge. These landscapes are increasingly being transformed into dumping sites where the material as well as the human excess of our modern societies are discarded. The concept of refuse, with its lexical ambiguity, is a particularly productive tool to navigate the production of material refuse/waste and the act of refusing/rejecting what is deemed as worthless. Furthermore, it allows to address the condition of

[2] Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Oxford: Polity, 2004).

the marginalized strata of the Italian society who are refused as the collateral waste of modernity while also refusing to conform to normalizing paradigms of inclusion: migrants, the economically underprivileged, Roma communities, as well as prostitutes, or unwed mothers. Migration inscribes itself in this framework and migrants' bodies become the emblem of this refuse, of this excess: they are refused and rejected by European societies, perceived as foreign bodies, as a threat to national integrity; at the same time, as a result of the countless shipwrecks happening in the Mediterranean, their corpses become contingent human waste that together with other forms of material waste contaminate the waters.

The employment of refuse as a theoretical tool allows to approach with coherence issues otherwise confined to distinct analytical paths, from the smuggling and disposal of waste, both human and non-human, to the insertion of the migrant, or other marginalized strata of Italian society, into the realm of worthless waste, with the consequent abjectification of the human (gendered) body. The image of refuse in its multiple declensions, whether organic or inorganic, human or non-human, physical or metaphorical, provides a tool to investigate literary and cinematic representations of waste, contamination, abjection, and rejection, in order to highlight the transformative as well as the paradoxical potential embedded within them.

Refuse as Waste

This dissertation starts with a reflection on Southern Italy as a place of contingent refuse, as a dumping site where toxic, organic, and inorganic wastes conflate in a polluting vortex that relegates the area to a constant state of environmental emergency. Here, refuse becomes synonym of waste, intended as both what is discarded as worthless, no longer useful matter, and the material surplus that exceeds the cycle of production. Waste, in all its forms, must be

concealed and disposed; indeed, when visible, it exposes the unspeakable side of our societies: it blurs the divide between private and public, inclusion and exclusion, legality and illegality.

But, as Susan Morrison reminds us, waste also functions as "an equalizer;" by allowing us "to see the fundamental similarities among us all […] waste produces a perception of affinity and connection while simultaneously disrupting through difference."[3] It forces us to acknowledge how, across gender and social divides, we all produce waste and will ultimately deteriorate and become material waste ourselves. Refuse exposes the wastefulness of us all as humans. We can then ask ourselves: how can waste literature – and cinema – raise compassion and awareness? The literary and filmic texts analyzed in this study compel us to face our inherent wastefulness and to empathize more with those humans who have been designated as wasted beings.

Refuse and Contamination

Refuse, in all its forms, entails a contaminating potential over both, the environment and the (non)human bodies that are exposed to it. The material leftover of our societies intended as waste – organic, inorganic, and even toxic – has the potential to threaten "trans-corporeal"[4] contaminations via contact with the polluting excess, eluding corporeal borders and divides. Toxins, for instance, are able to migrate from the discarded hazardous materials all the way to the (non)human bodies inhabiting of the surrounding territories, penetrating into the ground, groundwaters, and ultimately entering in the food-chain.

[3]Susan Signe Morrison, *The Literature of Waste: Material Ecopoetics and Ethical Matter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 175–76.
[4] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Nature: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

The theoretical framework of environmental humanities, through the works of scholars such as Serenella Iovino, Stacy Alaimo, and Elena Past,[5] provides interpretive lenses to look at the never-ending "trash-crisis" as well as at the invisible mechanisms of toxic contamination that involve Italy's territories, its shores and its (non)human inhabitants. In addressing the interconnectedness between the human, the non-human and the environment they live in, my analysis is also informed by theories of the non-human such as Donna Haraway's notion of nature-culture clusters,[6] and Rosi Braidotti's posthuman life-death continuum.[7] The commitment of this study to material ecocriticism and eco-ethical narratives – narratives that raise awareness on echological issues – directs my analysis towards alternative ways of approaching the Italian intellectual production through a fluid approach aimed at highlighting the ways in which human and non-human life, as well as the material world in which they are embedded, have equally been denigrated and are now entangled in a vicious cycle of "nature-culture" contaminations.

But the concept of contamination also hints at the risk of a possible biological – or even cultural – infection. In the age of global pandemics such as HIV or, more recently, Ebola, the threat of a potential contagion via the contact with a contaminated "other" generates global anxieties. In these instances, the biological/medical trope is embraced in order to promote and legitimize political acts of exclusion and containment. This rhetoric of contamination, in the Italian context, traces back to colonial discourses and to the Fascist racial laws against mixed marriages. In particular, the anxiety towards a possible contamination of the Italian race through sexual encounters with the African native represents a colonial trope based on assumptions of

[5] See for instance Elena Past, "'Trash Is Gold': Documenting the Ecomafia and Campania's Waste Crisis," *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20, no. 3 (2013): 597–621, Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*; Serenella Iovino, "Naples 2008, or, the Waste Land: Trash, Citizenship, and an Ethic of Narration," *Neohelicon* 36, no. 2 (2009): 335–46.
[6] Donna Jeanne Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
[7] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK; Polity Press, 2013).

cultural and biological superiority. Paradoxically enough, the potential contagion is perceived as a one-way process that compulsorily follows the pattern colonized/colonizer, migrant/western citizen, prostitute/client. Even when this contact is perpetrated on the hands of the dominant subject through rape and bodily violations, the axis of contamination, both symbolical and contingent, still follows the same asymmetrical rout.

In order to approach issues of biological and racial contamination, I embrace the biopolitical conceptual framework provided for instance by Roberto Esposito's reflection on contagion,[8] looking at the persistence of excluding, screening, and bordering practices over human bodies and landscapes in contemporary Italy, through the lenses of literary and filmic representations. In this perspective, it is only by establishing clear divides, by constantly monitoring the threshold, that it is possible to safeguard the bodily integrity of both, humans and nations. Once again, migrants provide an eloquent example of how this obsession with borders is enacted on human bodies. In a country like Italy, where the access to citizenship is based on the principle of the *ius sanguinis* that legitimizes citizenship only according to parental descent, the connection between the biological and the political realms reveals itself as inescapable. This hereditary aspect of citizenship entails an intrinsic ideological stance that sees the Italians as ethnically pure, thus acquiring the features of a preventive measure aimed at containing the risk of a possible ethnic and cultural contamination. Migrants' bodies are therefore transformed into corporeal border zones and become the target of specific surveillances and border controls. Their crossing of the national border signals their entrance in a legal/hygienic domain where their contaminating charge needs to be neutralized and quarantined in order to safeguard the cultural and biological integrity of the nation.

[8] Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.).

Refuse and Abjection

When migrants do not manage to survive the crossing, and perish in the deadly waters of the Mediterranean, their dehumanized bodies entangle with marine litter and the aquatic life.[9] The collapse of the boundary that divides the human from the non-human, sanctions their entrance into the realm of abjection, testifying to the ultimate abjectification of those humans who are perceived as the disposable excess of our modern societies.

The abject is here intended according to Julia Kristeva's[10] theorization referring to those aspects of the bodily experiences that perturb the integrity of the body: death, decay, fluids, orifices, sex, defecation, vomiting, illness, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth. The abject blurs the dividing line between life and death, human and non-human, self and non-self, the inside and the outside of the body. The woman's body, in particular, represents a privileged site for abjection; the pregnant female body or parturition, for instance, evoke distinct feelings of revulsion and attraction: they literize the slippage between the inside and the outside, entailing the evisceration of the female body.

Abjection unsettles identities, systems, orders; it provokes repulsion, disgust, but at the same time attracts. It locates itself on the threshold of the body and the body politic, entailing both a physical as well as a social and political reaction of repulsion/attraction. Hence, this category can also be used to approach social phenomena of exclusion and rejection, becoming a powerful tool to explore these social and cultural inscriptions on the surface of the human (gendered) body. Abjection represents the outside of what is perceived as socially intelligible and it is exactly in juxtaposition with this unintelligible space of otherness that the social is defined

[9] According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in the year 2016 over 5,000 migrants lost their lives while crossing the Mediterranean for further details see https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-top-363348-2016-deaths-sea-5079

[10] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

and constructed negatively. By referring to both to the action of casting out and to the condition of being abject, abjection becomes a theoretical resource that enables us to approach states of exclusion from multiple perspectives, including that of those who are obliged to inhabit the border zones within social, national, or heterosexual normativities.

In *Bodies that Matter*,[11] Judith Butler argues that modern subjectivity requires the production of a domain of abjected beings denied subjecthood and forced to live "unlivable lives." These abject beings, in order to survive their unbearable existences, are compelled to develop alternative agencies through subversive, at times repulsive, strategies, thus blurring the boundary between the socially or morally acceptable and the execrable, the self and the other. The migrant – whether documented or undocumented – enters the domain of social abjection through the excluding practices sanctioned by the sovereign power of the nation-state and legitimated by the proliferation of fears and anxieties of border-control. To use Imogen Tyler's words, the undocumented migrant – together with the asylum seeker, or the underclass – becomes a 'national abject', a border subject that, with his abject alterity, threatens the integrity of the neoliberal body politic.[12]

Refuse and Rejection

Intended as a verb, "to refuse" acquires the active potential of refusing, rejecting something that we deem unacceptable, unpleasant, even disturbing. Following this meaning of the term, throughout the dissertation I explore the ways in which refuse can also become a powerful tool of dissent, subversion, as well as repression. In some of the texts analyzed, refuse emerges as the refusal to passively surrender to paradigms of social and gender subjugation, or to conform to heteronormative codes of morality and gender roles. Refuse becomes an instrument

[11] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[12] Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2013).

of resistance also for the community of environmental activists in the Neapolitan province who refuse to passively surrender to the transformation of their territory, and their lives, into expendable waste lands, embracing instead subversive forms of resistance and of participated citizenship.[13]

But refuse can also entail repressing practices and behaviors: we can refuse to accept uncomfortable truths, or what/who we deem as non-belonging, as threatening to the integrity of the self. Italy's refusal to come to terms with its colonial past, and with its legacy, is part of this coward implication of the term. So is the refusal of hegemonic cultures to avoid the proliferation of waste (both human and non) at their periphery, and their conscious refusal to take responsibility for their actions – past and present – feeding into a poisonous cycle of rejection, refuse, and excess.

"Paradigms of refuse" moves across these different meanings of the term in order to offer an account of environmental and social unrest in contemporary Italy. By mapping the social as well as the material figuration of the refuse, this study exposes not only the detrimental impact of the human over the environment, but also the ways in which the human/non-human remnants of our consumer culture can be approached in transformative ways as instruments of subversion. Ultimately, I propose ways in which refuse can become a tool to foster awareness, to shake consciences, to create discomfort and blur divides between human and non-human, nature and culture, the self and the other. After all, we are dust and to dust we shell all return.

Mapping the Refuse, Structure of the Dissertation

My dissertation is structured in 4 chapters; each of them revolves around a specific landscape of refuse and around a specific declension of the term. This journey across Italy's

[13] See for example Marco Armiero, ed., *Teresa e le altre. Storia di donne nella Terra dei Fuochi* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2014), or Esmeralda Calabria and Andrea. D'Ambrosio, *Biùtiful Cauntri* (Lumiere & Co, 2007).

waste lands follows a circular trajectory: from the local and yet global dimension of the Neapolitan province, getaway and receptacle for the global mechanisms of mass production and waste disposal, to the transnational parable of migration and of the postcolonial movements occurring across the Mediterranean, and lastly concluding in full circle with the local or even hyper-local dimension of Naples with its suffocating hold over its inhabitants.

In chapter 1 "Refusing Waste: on the Subverting Power of Refuse in Eco-Ethical Narratives" I explore how waste is thematized in contemporary Italy through works such as Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra* (2006),[14] its film adaptation by Matteo Garrone (2008),[15] the documentary film *Biùtiful country* by Esmeralda Calabria, Andrea D'Ambrosio and Peppe Ruggiero (2007).[16] Here, I look at the refuse in its manifestation as discarded matter, toxic, organic or inorganic waste that pollutes the Neapolitan countryside and contaminates its environment. But refuse here also refers to the act of refusing to surrender to paradigms of subjugation that mark certain (non)human lives as expendable. This chapter focuses on dumping sites and landfills as (quint)essential spaces for the disposable excess of our societies, both human and non-human, to be discarded, quarantined, and removed from the public gaze. The eco-ethical narratives that I analyze unveil the invisible mechanisms of trans-species contamination and the subversive potential of waste as a tool to foster collective awareness and ecocritical resistance.

Chapter 2 "Mediterranean Refuse: Abject Bodies, Abject Zones in Narratives of Migration" focuses on the abjectification of the migrant's body within both the internal borders of the nation-state and the interstitial space represented by the Mediterranean. Here, I explore the

[14] Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra: Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (Milano: Mondadori, 2006).
[15] Matteo Garrone, *Gomorra* (01 Distribution, 2008).
[16] Calabria and D'Ambrosio, *Biùtiful Cauntri*.

figurations of refuse that emerge from narratives of migration, delving into how the human/non-human excess of our societies meets and entangles at the periphery of Europe. The Mediterranean becomes an abject space of intra-species and intercultural crossbreeding that destabilizes the borders between the human and non-human world. Starting from its contaminating waters, migrants are dehumanized, deprived of the human, social component and reduced to mere biological bodies. In this perspective, we can either look at the Mediterranean as a space of suspension of the judicial and lawful identity of the migrant or as the figuration of a fluid and polluted modern necropolis, where the putrefying bodies of the shipwrecked are "buried" under the contaminated waters of the sea. With this in mind, I examine literary as well as cinematic representations of Mediterranean crossings, including Giovanni Maria Bellu *I fantasmi di Portopalo* (2004),[17] Emanuele Crialese *Terraferma* (2011),[18] and Gianfranco Rosi's *Fuocoammare* (2016),[19] in order to underline the layers of abjection and rejection that invest migrants as a result of the collective anxiety prevailing in the Italian social and political contexts.

The texts I explore in the last two chapters of this study – through an emphasis on the representation of the woman's body as a site for abjection – problematize the normative roles dictated by patriarchal imperatives and by colonial paradigms of subjugation. In doing so, they open-up a space of subversion and liberation where identities become elusive and are thus negotiable across the threshold of repulsion. The reiteration throughout the texts analyzed of images depicting the ejection of bodily wastes – fluids in particular – often pouring out from women's bodies is aimed at underlining the threat posed by those non-normative identities that destabilize established boundaries and undermine the molar and physical entirety of the subject. The insistence on physical abjetcion functions as a disruptive element against a given image of

[17] Giovanni Maria Bellu, *I fantasmi di Portopalo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2004).
[18] Emanuele Crialese, *Terraferma* (01 Distribution, 2011).
[19] Gianfranco Rosi, *Fuocoammare* (01 Distribution, 2016).

the female body that must comply to a certain ideal of beauty and integrity. Any incoherence, any threat to this wholeness, any rupture of the dividing boundary between the inside and the outside of the body is perceived as a threatening ambiguity, thus triggering reactions of disgust and repulsion.

In chapter 3 "(Post)Colonial Refuse: Contagious Abjection and Wasteful Bodies Between Rome and the Horn of Africa" I address the multiple layers of refusal and social abjection that emerge from Igiaba Scego's works, from *Rhoda* (2004),[20] to her latest novel *Adua* (2015).[21] My analysis on the refuse here focuses on the representation of bodily wastes, abject bodies, and on the refusal to conform to heteronormativity. I also embrace refuse as a tool to investigate Italy's relationship to its colonial and postcolonial legacies. We see for instance a conscious refusal/rejection of the colonial past as if to obliterate it from the collective memory. Despite the attempts, however, the discarded relics of Italy's colonial past are still latent under the patina of urban decay. Through Scego's works, the chapter exposes the neglected traces of Italy's colonial memory and of its postcolonial present, focusing on how the abject dimension embraced by the author allows to transgress and subvert heteronormative paradigms of gender roles and morality as well as colonial tropes of racial contamination.

Chapter 4 "Refuse, Abjection, Contaminations: Body-Space Entanglements in Elena Ferrante's Naples" brings the dissertation full circle back to Campania, as it focuses on the representation of Naples as a site of material and social refuse and contamination within Elena Ferrante's novels. In line with the previous chapter, here I intend refuse as that which exceeds the borders of the self and of the human body. Bodily wastes and abject bodies are at the core of my analysis, together with a reflection on the contaminating potential of the city's material

[20] Igiaba Scego, *Rhoda*, (Roma: Sinnos, 2004), Kindle edition.
[21] Igiaba Scego, *Adua* (Firenze: Giunti, 2015).

excess over the human body. In this chapter I examine Elena Ferrante's *L'amore molesto* (1992),[22] and the quartet of *L'amica geniale* (*Neapolitan Novels*, 2011-2014)[23] in the light of her essay collection la *Frantumaglia*.[24] Ferrante's protagonists refuse Naples, and many aspects of its excessice identity manifestations, as the utmost materialization of patriarchal codes of morality, of surveillance protocols over women's bodies and of gender subjugation.

Lastly, I conclude with a brief epilogue "Refuse and Reuse" asking myselff, and the reader, how to possibly cope with the refuse once it exceeds the borders of the self. This section is centered on the transformative potential of the discarded when re-inserted into a living cycle of matter and beings. By exploring how the refuse has been embraced by artists across Europe as a means to raise awareness, provoke, and shake the numbed consciences of European citizens on the ongoing refugee crisis, I look at how practices of reuse, repurposing, and recycling can foster inclusive alternatives and approaches to socio-environmental issues.

My Canon

In my dissertation, I juxtapose texts that do not necessarily belong to a linear literary or filmic tradition; this is the result of a deliberate choice aimed at showing how certain tropes transcend codifications, blurring boundaries of genre, time, and space. By embracing refuse as both a theoretical framework of reference and as a call to action, this dissertation defies static labels and possibly perturbs the reader as it forces to reflect on the abject, unspeakable side of things. After all, refuse in all its forms has precisely the potential to destabilize, disorient, and repel.

Italy's literary and filmic traditions, along with the Western canon more broadly, are filled with reference to refuse; according to our definition of the term, if we look carefully

[22] Elena Ferrante, *L'amore molesto* (Roma: Edizioni E/O, 2015).
[23] Elena Ferrante, *L'amica geniale* (Roma: Edizioni E/o, 2011).
[24] Elena Ferrante, *La frantumaglia* (Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2012), Epub.

enough we can find traces of the discarded in virtually every piece of literature ever written or in every film ever shot. Rather than providing a comprehensive overview of refuse in literature in the Italian context, in my dissertation I gather a corpus of texts that deal with the refuse in its various declensions, bringing the attention to the vibrant agency of the discarded over human lives, via texts that were not necessarily conceived in this perspective. By looking at each of the sources through the filter of refuse, I focus on alternative readings of texts that – most certainly – have already been approached through other analytical tools, exposing the abject, disturbing side emerging from "unexpected" texts, and ultimately illustrating "how literary scholars can make both manifest and latent waste visible."[25]

In selecting my canon, I have paid particular attention to the ways in which each of the texts analyzed contributes to a new facet of the refuse: at the same time connected to the other texts yet unique in its own thematization of the concept. The sources selected testify to the polysemy of the refuse, alternatively hinting at the materiality of the discarded – human and non-human – or at the agential power entailed in the acts of refusing/rejecting. At the same time, refuse allows to bridge divides, and blur preconceived boundaries of acceptance and belonging even in terms of literary traditions. My reflection on refuse and abjection, for instance, exposes the line of continuity among Italian authors – such as Igiaba Scego and Elena Ferrante – that are not usually explored within a comparative perspective, and are instead confined to different analytical paths.

In my dissertation, I bring together texts ranging across a wide spectrum of cultural productions in the Italian context; from fiction films to documentaries, art installations, novels, investigative fiction. In doing so, my dissertation confronts preconceived hierarchies in the production of culture and contributes to problematize the supposed fixity of the national canon.

[25] Morrison, *The Literature of Waste*, 175–76.

Well aware of the different stylistic and formal features among my sources, in my analysis I have paid attention to the methodological tools to use each time to approach the texts, as well as to the spatial and temporal context in which they were conceived and to their critical reception. Through the filter of the refuse, I join the critical debate and propose my alternative and at times provocative take on the texts.

Intersectional Horizons of the Refuse

By locating my dissertation at the intersection between environmental humanities, bopolitics, gender and postcolonial studies, I engage in dialogue with recent studies in the Italian context such as Serenella Iovino's *Ecocriticism and Italy* (2016),[26] the volume *Ecocritical Approaches to Italian Culture and Literature* (2016) edited by Pasquale Verdicchio,[27] Ruth Ben-Ghiat's edited volume *Italian Mobilities* (2015),[28] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romero's volume *Postcolonial Italy* (2012),[29] Sandra Ponzanesi's *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture* (2004).[30]

While environmental humanities, and precisely the Italianist scholarship on the subject, are a cornerstone of my research, they present a predicament that I aim to confront: on the one hand, they seek to provide new tools to theorize a less conflictual relationship between human and nature, on the other, however, they seem to overlook the interconnectedness between abused landscapes and the social outcasts that often inhabit them, migrants in particular. Since the discourse on migration is often framed in medical or even ecological terms, I believe that it is of paramount importance to explore theoretic and aesthetic ways to approach and cope with this

[26] Serenella Iovino, *Ecocriticism and Italy: Ecology, Resistance, and Liberation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
[27] Pasquale Verdicchio, ed., *Ecocritical Approaches to Italian Culture and Literature: The Denatured Wild, Ecocritical Theory and Practice* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016).
[28] Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, eds., *Italian Mobilities* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
[29] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[30] Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

contradiction. Furthermore, with respect to the narratives of migration or to the postcolonial novels analyzed in the following chapters, some of the recent scholarship cited above is still characterized by a residual tendency to relegate the production of the so-called migrant Italian writers to literary enclaves located at the periphery of the official national literature. Through the theoretical categories of refuse and abjection, I propose a more fluid approach aimed at destabilizing and problematizing the divide between the self and the other, the canon and the margin.

In destabilizing the fixed boundaries of the national canon, this intersectional perspective opens-up the space for new trajectories of theoretical crossbreeding. In times of social, cultural, and environmental changes, it is indeed imperative to refuse constrictive labels and to critically engage in a constructive dialogue among disciplines in order to address the local, the transnational, and the non-national as important sites of cultural development and resistance.

CHAPTER 1

REFUSING WASTE: ON THE SUBVERTING POWER OF REFUSE IN ECO-ETHICAL NARRATIVES

"Forse il mondo intero, oltre i confini di Leonia, è ricoperto da crateri di spazzatura, ognuno con al centro una metropoli in eruzione ininterrotta. I confini tra le città estranee e nemiche sono bastioni infetti in cui i detriti dell'una e dell'altra si puntellano a vicenda, si sovrastano, si mescolano"

Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*[31]

1.1 Narratives of Ecocritical Resistance

In the introduction to *Culture and Waste*,[32] Hawkins and Muecke establish waste management as central to the maintenance of capitalism. It feeds into the cycle of production not only by allowing economies to discard their worthless excess so that the cycle of production and consumption can persist, but also by transforming waste into commercial value in the form of recyclable matter, antiques etc. But what happens when the organized crime infiltrates the mechanisms of waste management, when hazardous materials acquire a higher exchange value precisely in relation to their toxicity? And what happens when these toxic substances are illegally disposed and end up contaminating both the natural environment and the populations that inhabit it?

This chapter seeks to address such questions by relying on the expressive power of refuse emerging from the eco-ethical narratives analyzed. Here, as in the rest of the chapters, refuse serves as a theoretical tool to navigate both the production of material waste and the act of

[31] Italo Calvino, *Le Città Invisibili* (Milano: Mondadori, 2012), 112.
[32] Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke, eds., *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & LIttlefield, 2003).

refusing/rejecting the (non)human excess of our societies. The works analyzed address precisely this overlapping of meanings and symbologies, highlighting the interconnection between human and landscape entailed in the condition of being outcast. The following pages aim at outlining how these declensions of refuse are thematized in contemporary Italian novels and films such as Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra* (2006)[33] and its film adaptation by Matteo Garrone (2008),[34] as well as documentary works such as *Biùtiful cauntry* (2007)[35] and *Teresa e le altre* (2014).[36] The texts analyzed, both written and visual, attest to the toxicity of the hazardous materials illegally disposed in the periphery of Naples – and the Campania region more broadly – and to the consequential collapse of boundaries between the human and the non-human that the mechanisms of contamination entail. Through close readings and analysis of the works at issue, the chapter ultimately reflects on what it means to live as outcasts at the fringes of our societies of compulsive consumption. These works represent a selection out of the vast literary and filmic production revolving around the Campania waste crisis; my canon is chosen with attention to how these works reflect on the meanings of refuse, displaying both its passive and active dimensions and ultimately exposing their transformative potential.

This chapter embraces Serenella Iovino's call in "Corpi eloquenti"[37] to acknowledge the eloquent stories told by the acting force of things, bodies, and material phenomena. Stories that are often not linked to the human ability to conceive or perceive them, but that have their own intrinsic patterns of meaning that can cross-paths with - and contaminate - the human. When human creativity and the eloquent matter hybridize, the results are powerful discourses whose

[33] Saviano, *Gomorra*.
[34] Garrone, *Gomorra*.
[35] Calabria and D'Ambrosio, *Biùtiful Cauntri*.
[36] Armiero, *Teresa e le altre*.
[37] Serenella Iovino, "Corpi eloquenti. Ecocritica, contaminazioni e storie della materia," *IRENE - Interdisciplinary Researches on Ethics and the Natural Environment* (2015): 103–17, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.7359/711-2015-iovi.

narrative potential also entails political and ecological implications. As Iovino argues, the waste crisis in the Campania region is a perfect example of such dynamics as it involves multiple narrative agents operating at once in a complex narrative of social and environmental crisis.[38] Iovino goes on to explain how even the mere acknowledgement of the actors at play – waste, pollution, toxic substances, landscape and contaminated bodies (human and non-human) – opens-up a narrative space that exposes the interconnectedness among politics, criminal organizations, the massive exploitation of the territory, and the repercussions on both local communities and the environment. The eloquent matter makes use of the language of the body to address and unveil the extent of the institutional failure and of the socio-environmental decline. Matter inscribes its message on the corporeal surface of the human and the non-human and writers, artists, and directors have then an essential role in translating this message into words or images, revealing its transformative narrative potential. The result is often a revolting narrative space, where revolting is intended in its ambivalent potential of inciting feelings of repulsion/disgust, while at the same time producing a counter-discourse, a rebellion against the status quo.[39]

The works at issue offer diverse but complementary accounts of the same scabrous criminal dynamics in the geographical area of the so-called *Terra dei fuochi* (land of fires), an area that covers 1076 km^2 and 57 townships between the provinces of Naples and Caserta[40] known for the infamous practice of burning piles of waste in the illegal landfills. The exorbitant levels of radioactivity of these contaminated territories have dreadful repercussions on both the environment and the population's safety. Although a direct link between the toxicity of the local environment and the insurgence of illnesses has yet to be proven by the scientific community,

[38] Iovino, "Corpi eloquenti".
[39] Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*.
[40] Out of the 57 municipalities, 33 belong to the province of Naples and 24 to the province of Caserta

over the past two decades the region has seen a growth of neoplasia in the newborns, as well as an increase in the number of cancerous tumors and endocrinal disorders in the local community.[41]

The so-called *ecomafia* plays a crucial role in the massive exploitation of the territory and in the cycle of toxic human/non-human contaminations. Throughout the chapter, I often employ the term *ecomafia*, a neologism coined by Legambiente, Italy's major environmental NGO that refers to those sectors of the organized crime revolving around environmental abuse including unauthorized building and excavations and, most importantly, the illegal traffic and disposal of waste.[42] These illicit disposal practices result in the contamination of the surrounding territories, ground waters, rivers and seas, thus posing a serious health threat for the local populations as well as for the animal and vegetal species that populate the areas.

The toxic waste land of the *Terra dei fuochi*, however, resists the *ecomafia*'s attempts to hide the tracks of the environmental crimes being perpetrated upon the territory. Its poisonous fires, the unbearable stench of rotting matter, and the potential health repercussions on its (non)human inhabitants expose the signs of the invisible mechanisms of contamination that the massive illegal disposal of hazardous waste implicates.

1.2 The Neapolitan Waste Land: a Journey through *Gomorra*'s Underworld

No place like Naples, its massive port, and the toxic/intoxicating landscape of the *Terra dei fuochi* can better exemplify the link between discarded (toxic) matter, poisoned environments, and the human bodies of those who inhabit them; all of which deemed as

[41] Ettore Bidoli et al., "Cancer mortality in Southern Italy, 1999-2003," *Epidemiologia e Prevenzione* 35, no. 3–4 (August 2011): 200–206.
[42] On Legambiente's definition of "ecomafie" see https://www.legambiente.it/temi/ecomafia

worthless or expendable by the unscrupulous mechanisms of production and (illegal) waste management.

In Roberto Saviano's words, for instance, the port of Naples is an infected appendix of the city itself, a marine dumping site for garbage and boats' wastewaters, all converging ashore in an amorphous soggy mass solidifying in a hard crust under the Mediterranean sun (16). Point of departure and arrival of goods, waste, and people, neuralgic junction in a network of legal and illegal exchanges, the port of Naples – together with the peripheral territories of the Neapolitan province – are emblematic of the condition described by Zygmunt Bauman as "glocalization." Pointing at the global role performed by localities, Bauman argues that these "and big cities first and foremost among them – serve nowadays as dumping grounds for problems generated globally not by their initiative and without their consultation, let alone agreement."[43] At the hands of the *ecomafia*, the territories at issue have become dumping sites for the industrial waste of northern Italy or of other European countries, thus granting undisturbed asylum to the industrial leftover byproducts produced elsewhere.

Following the fictional Roberto in his "personal journey into the violent international empire of Naples' organized crime system" (see the subheading of *Gomorra*'s English edition),[44] we are brought behind the scenes of the *camorra*'s system and of the intricated global networks of organized crime that entangle in the city of Naples. The novel's controversial opening sets the tone for this chapter: the scene depicts a container in Naples' port packed with the frozen corpses of Chinese men and women making their way back to China, like a cargo of discarded waste. "I portelloni mal chiusi si aprirono di scatto e iniziarono a piovere decine di corpi. […] Morti.

[43] Zygmunt Bauman, "Glocalization and Hybridity," *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation,* Vol 2013, Iss 1 (2013), 1, https://doi.org/10.12893/gjcpi.2013.1.9.
[44] Roberto Saviano, *Gomorrah: A Personal Journey into the Violent International Empire of Naples' Organized Crime System* (New York: Picador, 2007).

Congelati, tutti raccolti, l'uno sull'altro. In fila, stipati come aringhe in scatola. Erano i cinesi che non muoiono mai."[45] Their mutilated limbs, their broken skulls on the ground are washed out with a water pump; human remains to be immediately disposed of, removed from the public gaze with impunity – as if they never existed – just like the toxic materials illegally buried, concealed in the Neapolitan province, or the hazardous waste shipped in containers to developing countries. Such a controversial yet crucial scene, however, is removed from *Gomorra*'s film adaptation by Matteo Garrone whose opening scene instead depicts a blood feud between two competing clans in the city's outskirts. Many are the continuities and dissonances among the two works in each of the narrative threads that compose them, but for the purpose of this chapter, my analysis will mostly focus on the sections that concern the illegal disposal of waste in the Campania region. To this end, my close reading of Saviano's *Gomorra* will be mostly focusing on the closing chapter titled *Terra dei fuochi*, entirely centered on the illegal disposal of waste by the local *ecomafia* in the provinces of Naples and Caserta.

Towards the beginning of the chapter, the author acknowledges landfills as the "emblema più concreto di ogni ciclo economico," the residual of consumption. But for Saviano, landfills also represent the discarded legacy of our societies: touring the caves and landfills in the area "è come camminare sui residui di civiltà, stratificazioni di operazioni commerciali, è come fiancheggiare piramidi di produzioni, tracce di chilometri consumati."[46] Reading waste in this almost archeological even geological perspective emphasizes the evocative power of the remnant and the transforming potential of the discarded matter on the environment. In the following paragraphs, Saviano continues describing how the stacks of waste piled in the countryside or along the mountain slopes have literally reshaped the landscape, altering its geographical

[45] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 11.
[46] Ibid., 313.

conformation: “Questi rifiuti, accumulati in decenni, hanno ristrutturato gli orizzonti, fondato nuovi odori, fatto comparire chiazze di colline inesistenti, le montagne divorate dalle cave hanno d’improvviso riavuto la massa perduta.”[47] Hills made of trash, mines filled with waste – likely toxic – “magically” reshape the natural environment.

In this “reversed de rerum natura” to use Serenella Iovino’s words,[48] the worthless matter literally re-forges nature, testifying to the irreducibility of waste, the discarded residue of our society, that can be concealed or transformed, but not destroyed. In her essay “Naples 2008, or, the waste land” Iovino describes waste as the haunting reminder of “the inherent corruption upon which every society is built.”[49] Waste destabilizes the nature-culture divide by bringing “the products of culture back to their biological origin, [functioning as] a non-human mirror of the human.”[50] By blurring the nature/culture, human/non-human dualism, waste hints at the condition of being cast-out, of becoming a disposable residue, either human or material, of the global society of mass consumption.

But this geography of waste does not affect only the visual perception of the surrounding landscape, as the rancid stench coming out of the camouflaged landfills, the acidic smell released by the chemical substances buried underground, and the toxic smoke of the burning waste dramatically alter also the olfactory experience of the space. The sight and smell of putrescent waste is only the tip of the iceberg of a much deeper and insidious mechanism of contamination, one that is invisible to the eye and that permeates food supplies, ground waters, air, defying the boundaries of the human. The collapse of the border that separates the human body from the non-human is here sanctioned by the penetration of poisonous substances in the digestive and

[47] Ibid., 314.
[48] Iovino, “Naples 2008, or, the Waste Land,” 340.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 341.

respiratory systems via the contaminated air that we breath or, most remarkably, via the contaminated food and water that we ingest.

The massive dumping of toxic substances, of industrial waste illegally disposed, reclassified, and recycled as fertilizer occurs with the connivance of chemists, entrepreneurs, and, sometimes, the local population, feeding into a smuggling system that transforms the otherwise worthless waste into asset. In the prosperous economy of illegal waste management, the so called toxic waste stakeholders play a crucial role in the almost cathartic process of waste repurposing. These unscrupulous figures are external consultants that mediate between entrepreneurs and organized crime to illegally dispose hazardous waste at a fraction of the market cost. Emblematic in this direction is Saviano's reference to the investigation "Re Mida" (King Midas) that derives its name from a wiretapped phone call of a smuggler proudly affirming: "E noi appena tocchiamo la monnezza la facciamo diventare oro;"[51] in the hands of the *ecomafia*, waste becomes as valuable as gold.

Why merely disposing waste when it can be repurposed, for instance, as compost material for the agriculture? It is precisely following this deathly logic of profit that thousands of acres of farmland across Southern Italy have been contaminated with all sorts of toxic substances, thus compromising crops and the health of thousands of unaware consumers. Roberto's encounter with Franco, a local stakeholder met during a train ride, will offer him an inside perspective on the "glocal" dimension of illegal waste smuggling and on the toxic contamination entailed in the mechanisms of disposal: "Parlava di rame, arsenico, mercurio, cadmio, piombo, cromo, nichel, cobalto, molibdeno, passava dai residui di conceria a quelli ospedalieri, dai rifiuti urbani ai pneumatici […]. Pensavo ai veleni mischiati al compost, pensavo

[51] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 321.

alle tombe per fusti ad alta tossicità scavate nel corpo delle campagne."[52] While Franco enumerates the toxic substances that he is able to routinely dispose in the Neapolitan countryside, Roberto's thoughts go to their contaminating potential over the environment that will house them. It is interesting to point out the array of words used to describe the process of illegal waste disposal, words ascribable to the human sphere and here associated to either inert matter or to the natural environment: the barrels containing highly hazardous materials are buried in *tombe* (graves) dug *nel corpo* (in the body) of the farmland, as to confer a certain degree of human dignity to the non-human. In my reading, this association contributes to blur, even on the semantic level, the line of demarcation between nature/culture, human/non-human.

In the film adaptation, the compulsory exploitation of the natural environment and its deadly effects on the local population are repeatedly emphasized throughout the scenes that concern the young Roberto and his training as a waste stakeholder with Franco. The two are depicted exploring dismissed areas such as a closed stone quarry and an abandoned gas station in search for empty spaces to be filled with barrels of hazardous materials, or loads of toxic wastes of various nature and origins. In their inspecting tours, Franco and Roberto always bear in mind that each material requires a specific space and procedure to be properly concealed or camouflaged as ordinary garbage, clinging to the assumed invisibility and disguise-ability of toxic substances. As Elena Past points out in her analysis of the film, the tropes of visibility and invisibility are crucial in *Gomorra'*s commentary on toxicity in the Campania region[53] as they expose the viewer to the stealth mechanisms of contamination that defy the borders of the human body.

[52] Ibid.
[53] Past, "Trash Is Gold," 611.

Figure 1: *Gomorrah*, still 1

The scene portraying Roberto and Franco inspecting a dismissed quarry is particularly eloquent in emphasizing the asymmetric power dynamics at play between the human and the non-human environment. The scene opens with a vertical panning shot of the quarry's walls towering over the two stakeholders; the geometrical lines of the rock faces, together with the loose frame of the shot, emphasize the prominence of the desert like environment over the two characters, who almost disappear. This visual perception, however, is in sharp contrast with the actual power dynamic at play that sees the natural environment of the quarry succumbing twice to human exploitation: in the past emptied as a source of raw material, and now empty space to be re-filled with hazardous waste. The deserted landscape of the stone quarry almost recalls an extraterrestrial environment to be conquered by the unscrupulous stakeholder, and at the same time establishes a parallel with the less sci-fi practice of disposing toxic waste in the deserted areas of developing countries.

This ambivalent correlation is echoed in another scene, located later in the film, that sees Franco and Roberto coming out of a container dressed in coveralls that resemble spacesuits. In

reality, the two have just landed in an unidentified African harbor to deliver a load of hazardous waste barrels passed off as humanitarian aids with the acquiescence of local authorities.

Figure 2: *Gomorra*, still 2

The scene opens with an extreme long shot on an empty dock and then cuts into a long shot of the unloading harbor; on the right side of the frame, Franco and Roberto are depicted in their protective coveralls – as astronauts coming out of a radioactive spaceship – surrounded by hazardous waste barrels. As the camera slowly zooms in, the port's personnel approach the two men helping them out of their protective attire. Well aware of the toxicity of the barrels, Franco and Roberto are completely insulated from the threat of contamination. On the acoustic level, their isolation is conveyed by the muffled sound coming out of their rebreathers with an estranging rhythmic cadence. As soon as their masks are removed, the overarching sound of their controlled breathing is disrupted by the commotion of the outside world. With regards to this scene, Anita Angelone points out how the spectators become participants of the two men's experience as they share their acoustic environment and are enveloped in the sound of the controlled breathing. By subjectivizing the soundtrack of the shot, the director places the viewers

in a position of complicity with the two stakeholders as they too are aware of the cargo's toxic content and of the high risk incurred by those who are not well protected against the contaminant.[54]

Conversely, the local dockers unloading the barrels seem completely unaware of the risk they are taking while grabbing the barrels of "humanitarian aids" with no precautions. A similar dynamic is at play in the scene that immediately precedes this, as black men – likely migrants – are depicted while unloading barrels of hazardous waste and dumping them in the pitch-dark space of the stone quarry with their bare hands and with no protection whatsoever. The level of insulation from toxicity almost sanctions the line of demarcation between the worthy and less-worthy human and it speaks to a hierarchy of status that sees certain humans as expendable.

Figure 3: *Gomorra*, still 3

In the scene, the pitch-dark environment of the quarry is lighted up only by the headlights of the trucks making their way down the gravel road, with the roaring sound of their engines breaking the nocturnal quietness. The utter darkness of the nocturnal setting hints at the elusive

[54] Anita Angelone, "Talking Trash: Documentaries and Italy's 'Garbage Emergency,'" *Studies in Documentary Film* 5, no. 2–3 (2011): 145-46, https://doi.org/10.1386/sdf.5.2-3.145_1.

mechanisms of illegal waste disposal that occur stealthily when around all is quiet, enveloped in the murk. At the same time, the impenetrable darkness also alludes to the invisibility of the toxic contaminants penetrating, undisturbed, in the bowels of the earth. The profiles of the black migrants are hardly discernible from the background while they unload the hazardous waste barrels and roll them down in a puddle of water before carelessly dumping them in a pile. Once again, the human figures almost disappear in the magnitude of the environment. In analyzing these scenes, Elena Past remarks how "the human beings dwarfed by the landscape in these imposing settings are themselves too small, nearly irrelevant, visually, yet because of their illegal work, are rather like human embodiments of the tiny contaminants that will be spread when they begin to fill these immense spaces with waste."[55] Either wittingly or unwittingly, humans act as contaminating agents and, at the same time, risk of being intoxicated by the hazardous substances that they themselves are disseminating.

The two scenes analyzed above testify to the transformation of certain territories – including Southern Italy and developing countries– into radioactive outposts of a new form of "colonial subjugation" ruled by criminal organizations and perpetrated through the illegal burial and disposal of hazardous wastes. Franco's "thirst for conquest," his incessant quest for potential dumping grounds soon proves to be ruthless not only towards the natural environment, but also towards its human inhabitants.

[55] Past, "Trash Is Gold," 612.

Figure 4: *Gomorra*, still 4

Emblematic in this direction is the scene that sees him and Roberto at the death bed of an elderly man who, for a marginal profit, had loaned his lands to the business of illegal waste dumping – underestimating the deathly consequences that this decision would have on the local community, himself included. Such a dramatic choice speaks to the transformation of these once fertile territories into wasted lands, as the high levels of toxicity contained in their soil, ground waters, and the in overall environment, makes them highly unsuitable for any kind of crops. The only solution for many landowners is to enter the toxic cycle of illicit waste disposal, not necessarily aware of the high risk at stake. It is interesting to point out how, such an iconic image of death – with the close relatives around the sickbed and the crucifix at the center of the composition to recall the sacredness of this moment – clashes instead with the conversation taking place, and with the presence of the two stakeholders. This sardonic juxtaposition attests to how deeply the contaminating mechanisms of illegal waste disposal have filtered, corrupting even the most intimate spheres of life (and death).

In the scene that immediately follows, right outside of the man's house Roberto meets an elderly woman who insists on giving him a basket of peaches just collected from her orchard

close by. The peaches, however, are rotting having they grown feeding from a ground poisoned by toxic waste. The basket of fetid peaches exemplifies the risk of trans-corporeal contamination threatening these territories and their inhabitants. The toxic substances buried under the Neapolitan countryside become contaminants that penetrate soil, water, and thus produce, moving up in the food chain all the way to the human consumer. The peaches' stench, so loathsome that Franco urges Roberto to toss them out of the car, exposes to the senses their otherwise hidden – read invisible – poisonous load. At the same time, this episode signals Roberto's coming to terms with his own conscience, his unwillingness to become complicit with the mechanisms of illegal waste management, and his ultimate rejection of the status quo, having the mechanisms of intra-species contamination become visible to his eyes.

Through our journey in the Neapolitan countryside, we are mad aware of how the subsoil of the Campania region is transformed into a receptacle for all sorts of refuse: toxic, radioactive, organic, inorganic, and even human. Significant in this direction is a passage in Saviano's *Gomorra* describing the exhumation procedures carried out by the local cemeteries, and the illegal practices of disposal of the human remains that follow:

> I cimiteri fanno esumazioni periodiche, tolgono quello che i becchini più giovani chiamano "gli arcimorti", quelli messi sotto terra da più di quarant'anni. […] Il costo dello smaltimento è elevatissimo, così i direttori dei cimiteri danno una mazzetta ai becchini per farli scavare e poi buttano tutto sui camion. Terre, bare macerate e ossa. Trisavoli, bisnonni, avi di chissà quali città si amonticchiavano nelle campagne casertane.[56]

Deprived of the residual dignity that was granted by the cemeterial burial, human remains – entangled with the non-human matter of rotten coffins and dirt – become trans-species refuse,

[56] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 315.

and join the cycle of unlawful disposal of waste. At some point, the excess corpses of the "arcimorti" (the arch-dead) become excessive even for their last resting place, and are thus discarded as worthless matter. But a mocking fate awaits them, as they are ultimately further reified and abjectified into macabre mementos to be sold at the flea market.

While in Garrone's adaptation this reference to corpses' exhumations is absent, its closing scene, depicting the killing and disposal of the corpses of two young criminals Ciro and Marco speaks of a similar reification of the human body. This scene is part of another narrative thread of the film revolving around the vicissitudes of two teenager thugs who try to make their way into Naples' underworld but end up murdered by the ruthless *camorristi*.

Figure 5: *Gomorra*, still 5

Murdered in the open, in broad daylight, their lifeless bodies are dumped into an excavator blade, piled one on top of the other and likely disposed of in total impunity as worthless human excess.[57] The high angle shot over the corpses of the two young thugs contributes to further underscore their abject status. The close up on the bulldozer collecting the two corpses and the

[57] Past, "Trash Is Gold," 612.

roaring sound of its engine resonating in the otherwise quiet scene recalls a previous moment in the film where a bulldozer was instead dragging barrels of toxic waste into the dismissed stone quarry transformed into illegal landfill. In both cases, the emptiness and apparent quietness of the surrounding space – with the squishing sound of water and the overarching silence in the background – are in sharp contrast with the presence of the bulldozer and with the outrageous crimes being perpetrated. The open space in which the crime is consumed recalls at once Campania's pastoral seaside views and an apocalyptic sci-fi landscape, where the latter figuration ultimately prevails, acting as a reminder that "life under the Camorra *is* science fiction—and space, its final frontier."[58] Abandoned quarries and desolated beaches serve as empty receptacles for the equally worthless matter of industrial waste and human corpses to be buried and concealed from the public gaze.

1.3 Landscapes of Refuse: Documenting Toxicity in *Biùtiful Cauntri* and *Teresa e le altre*

The nonfictional accounts of Campania's *ecomafie* depicted by Saviano in *Gomorra*, are echoed in Esmeralda Calabria's documentary *Biùtiful cauntri* centered on the illegal disposal of toxic wastes in the periphery of the Neapolitan territories of Giuliano, Qualiano, Acerra and Villaricca. By focusing on the repercussions of these savage toxic dumping on the local agriculture and animals, the documentary brings the attention to the pathways through which toxins move from the periphery to the center, contaminating the entire food chain, human beings included. The documentary follows several narrative threads that ultimately converge in mapping the cycle of trans-species contamination: toxic wastes infiltrate waters and food and silently enter the human body, eluding physical as well as geographical borders.

[58] Chuck Stephens, "Gomorrah: Terminal Beach," *The Criterion Collection*, 2009, https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1308-gomorrah-terminal-beach.

The opening scene of the documentary portrays the desolated landscape of the *Terra dei fuochi* shot from the interior of a moving car; what stands out are the white columns of smoke coming out of the many factory chimneys that pollute the environment in the form of microscopic toxic contaminants. From the very first scene, there is a strong emphasis on the olfactory perception that will then represent a constant feature throughout the documentary. Shortly after, the camera captures the interior of the car with a close-up on the driver, Raffaele Del Giudice: environmental educator and our guide in this journey across the Neapolitan waste land. Explicitly summoning the sense of smell, Raffaele refers to the unusual smell of the air and immediately understands that somebody has been spraying deodorants to cover the otherwise disgusting stench of waste coming out of the close by landfill, where he is headed. Once reached the destination – the *Cava Riconta* landfill – the camera captures a high angle shot of the indistinct mass of rotting matter in the landfill, and the many illicit piles of waste at the borders of the road including an asbestos dumping site.

Figure 6: *Biùtiful cauntri*, still 1

The documentary alternates live recordings and file footage, attempting to insert the everlasting *emergenza rifiuti* in a historical perspective, retracing the steps of the inquest on the illicit traffic

of waste started in the 1990's. The investigation showed, from the very beginning, the deep ties between the industrial sector of central and northern Italy and the *camorra* for the illegal disposal of the steel industry's waste dusts, and of the industrial waste of the automotive sector. The extremely high levels of cadmium, aluminum, arsenious found in the soil of the Campania region have to be traced back to the extensive landfill of the high toxicity of industrial waste products there buried, or to their repurposing as thickeners for compost used as a fertilizer in agriculture.

With his car, Del Giudice cruises the scarred landscape of the *Terra dei fuochi* and the sight of the thick fumes of the burned tires and trash at the side of the road immediately evokes the olfactory perception so prominent in this narrative of waste. As the filth of the Neapolitan countryside unfolds in front of our eyes, with its burning piles of trash, Del Giudice explains the existence of a code of dumping and burning that the *ecomafia* uses to communicate: first the local criminal base designates specific areas to dump the hazardous material, then small trucks unload a bed of combustion – usually tires and small amounts of toxic waste – and, ultimately, the piles of mixed materials are set on fire. Just like the toxic substances poured in the Neapolitan soil permeate through the ground and become trans-species contaminants for the local environment, the eco-criminal *camorra* infiltrates the local communities and erodes them from within.

The danger posed by the leakage of poisonous substances in the ground waters is repeatedly and overtly addresses in the documentary with reference for instance to the 200 m^2 lake of leachate in the *Cava Riconta* landfill. Leachate is the liquid substance produced by the decomposing waste in a landfill that should be drained through pumping wells and properly treated. In *Cava Riconta*, however, the absolute lack of any security measure, including the absence of pumping wells and of procedures to dispose of the leachate, results into the

consequent percolation of the contaminating liquid into the adjacent environment and, more precisely, into local ground waters and watercourses. The leachate produced in *Cava Riconta*, and in the many other licit or illicit landfills that pollute the area, contaminate local rivers and irrigation wells, hence threatening the safety of the local farmland, its products, and their consumers.

In his journey through the *Terra dei fuochi*, Del Giudice makes it clear that landfills and illicit dumping sites are not the only cause of the area's degradation and overall transformation into a toxic waste land. Areas traditionally reserved to agriculture and pasture, and even protected areas, are now highly contaminated also due to the presence of factories such as the Montefibre – a chemical plant in Acerra now closed.[59] With its obsolete facility, Montefibre has heavily contributed to the pollution of the area through its emissions of toxic exhaust pollutants and its improper disposal of hazardous byproducts abandoned in rotting barrels left in open air to deteriorate. Companies such as the FIBE Impreglio,[60] part of the international industrial group Salini Impreglio must be held accountable as well. In the year 2000, FIBE won the contract to manage the urban solid waste of the Campania region and to produce the so called *ecoballe*, waste bales made of CDR (*combustibile da rifiuti*, refuse derived fuel).[61] The *ecoballe* stocked in the storage sites around Naples, assembled in response to the region's waste crisis, are made of untreated and hazardous materials to be incinerated in waste-to-energy plants. However, due to the very low quality of the *ecoballe* – which contain high levels of toxic substances such as arsenic – and to their improper storage, the roughly seven million waste bales stocked in the site

[59] For further details on the Montefibre, see Paolo Frascani, *Napoli: viaggio nella città reale* (Bari: Laterza, 2017), 419.
[60] Ibid.
[61] In its final report on Refuse Derived Fuel, dating 2003, the European Commission, Directorate General Environment states: "Refuse derived fuels cover a wide range of waste materials which have been processed to fulfil guideline, regulatory or industry specifications mainly to achieve a high calorific value. Waste derived fuels include residues from MSW recycling, industrial/trade waste, sewage sludge, industrial hazardous waste, biomass waste, etc.," 1, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/studies/pdf/rdf.pdf

of Taverna del Re, located in Giugliano in Campania, have been deemed highly unsuitable for incineration.

Figure 7: *Biùtiful cauntri*, still 2

Improperly stored, piled up weather-beaten for well over a decade, the *ecoballe* are consistently deteriorating becoming hazardous "monnezza imballata" (wrapped garbage) as one of the interviewed in the documentary puts it, becoming a further threat for the local community and its economy.[62]

As Del Giudice flanks the multitude of *ecoballe* with his car, the soundtrack shifts from the pounding sound of background music to that of a solemn voiceover, likely archive material, denouncing the poor quality of the CDR contained in the waste bales, and questioning their potential use in waste-to-energy plants. Once again, the sense of smell is activated in this scene by the image of Del Giudice wearing a mask, hinting at the unbreathable air in the site's

[62] On May 30, 2017, the region's governor Vincenzo De Luca has initiated new procedures to dispose of the over 5,6 million tons of *ecoballe* in two years. So far, 56 thousand tons of waste bales have been removed – not necessarily disposed of – from the region's stocking sites. Only time will tell whether De Luca's plan is deemed to work or to fail. For the latest development on the topic see: "Rifiuti: Campania ripulita da 56mila tonnellate di ecoballe, ne rimangono ancora 5 milioni nei siti." *La Repubblica*, October 5, 2017. http://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/10/05/news/rifiuti_campania_ripulita_da_56_mila_tonnellate_di_ecoballe_ne_rimangono_5_milioni_ancora_nei_siti-177442466/

surroundings, as well as at its contaminating load. Like modern step pyramids made of garbage, the waste bales tower over the human projecting all their toxic materiality. The low-angle shot on the multitude of eco-bales further stresses their overarching contaminative potential and the imminence of the environmental threat they pose.

At the time when the documentary was shot, in the sole stocking site of Taverna del Re the waste bales occupied an area of over 3.5 million m^2, inevitably reshaping the geographical landscape of the region. As one of the farmers interviewed by Del Giudice says, the mountains of trash wrapped in plastic are destroying the landscape, erasing from the map over 850 acres of farmland, including his orchard and strawberry field. This reference to the material power of waste in altering the region's topography echoes Saviano's accounts and Iovino's conceptualization of a "reversed de rerum natura" mentioned in the previous section. In Taverna del Re, waste reshapes the natural environment also on the perceptive level by materially suffocating acres of farmland – both spatially and tangibly – as the ever-expanding stocking site and the dust lifted by the garbage trucks are literally asphyxiating the crops. The farmer goes on to denounce how what was once referred to as "the lung" of Giugliano is now a disgusting, sickening area where the stench of waste has replaced the smells of the natural environment. This humanizing metaphor that describes the natural environment as a vital part of the human body is particularly poignant in this context. Conversely, the farmer's greenhouse, where he grows his strawberries, is now invaded by a toxic cloud and the intoxicated strawberries are now inedible; his peach orchard is instead coated in dust, producing nothing but shrunken peaches that are unable to breathe, just like the fellow human that inhabit the same space.[63]

The interconnectedness between marginalized humans and the landscape of waste in Campania is further emphasized in the scenes that depict the Roma camp no 7 in Giugliano.

[63] Past, "Trash Is Gold," 615.

Once again, the live recording images establish a visual parallel with Saviano's non-fictional account in Gomorrah, and particularly with his description of the young Roma kids who looked like "bande di cowboy tra deserti di spazzatura bruciata,"[64] cowboy gangs in charge of burning the piles of waste in the deserted scenario of the Neapolitan waste land.

Figure 8: *Biùtiful cauntri*, still 3

In *Biùtiful cauntri*, while roaming in the squalor of the camp, amidst waste bonfires, scattered trash, and improvised shacks made of refuse, the camera catches all the unwitting curiosity of the local kids via medium shots and close-ups. The scene inevitably recalls Bauman's figuration of certain lives as "wasted lives" as it portrays those human beings living at the fringes of our society, among waste, making a living out of waste, and essentially being perceived as less worthy of human recognition. Not only do the Roma kids, and their whole community, live in poor hygienic conditions, literally at the border of one of the many illicit landfills of the area; they are also actively recruited by the *ecomafia* as waste collectors, instructed to clean the areas after the garbage trucks unload their cargo and to burn any residue left behind. Their peripheral status, with their camp literally bordering with a landfill, and their role as "waste rangers"

[64] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 327.

constantly exposed to the risk of intoxication, sanctions them as human rejects, expendable beings in the ruthless mechanisms of illicit waste disposal.

The expendability of human and non-human lives at the hands of the *ecomafia* is repeatedly stressed in the documentary and is exemplified by the narrative thread dealing with the contamination of a sheep flock with dioxin, and with its further extermination ordered by the local health department. The flock was first found positive to dioxin testing in 2003, showing high levels of the contaminant in the milk; in the months preceding the results, however, the family of shepherds kept eating and selling the sheep's milk and meat, unaware of the risk they were taking. The family is depicted in a trailer amidst the squalid desolation of the neglected Neapolitan countryside of Acerra. Traces of waste are scattered in the sheepfold and across the surrounding area, almost as to anticipate the fate reserved to its inhabitants, soon to be transformed in sacrificial animals on the altar of hazardous waste dumping. Images of dying lambs, of their carcasses being retrieved from the fold and put into black garbage bags are fearsome warnings for their human neighbors, as the dioxin that is killing them has now entered the food chain and poses a threat to both, human and non-human worlds. Roughly 90% of the human exposure to dioxin indeed occurs via ingestion of contaminated foods, mostly of animal origin. The toxin sediments in the animas' adipose tissue and, through the process of bioaccumulation, is then able to climb up in the human food chain.[65]

[65] For a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of animal dioxin intoxication see for instance Dragan and Schrenk's article "Animal Studies Addressing the Carcinogenicity of TCDD (or Related Compounds) with an Emphasis on Tumour Promotion," *Food Additives & Contaminants* 17, no. 4 (April 2000): 289–302, https://doi.org/10.1080/026520300283360.

Figure 9: *Biùtiful cauntri,* still 4

The camera lingering over the dying milk-fed lambs exhaling their last breaths, or over their carcasses lying amidst waste and other moribund sheeps, builds a mounting discomfort in the viewer as it exposes the otherwise invisible risk of contamination by dioxin. The abject potential entailed in these intoxicating mechanisms lies in their ability to move across species and to ultimately destabilizes the borders of the human body. And this blurring of the boundaries also acts metaphorically, as the dying animals become, in the shepherd's words, a metaphor for the condition of the humans residing in the same area, who are doomed to a similar fate "when they'll finish to kill these animals, [the authorities] can go ahead and start killing people, just like sheeps."[66] Only, the human carnage is not achieved via mass slaughter but via annihilating illnesses, such as cancers, or congenital anomalies.

Emblematic in escalating the discomfort of the viewer towards the seemingly inexorable massacre is the scene depicting a van collecting animal carcasses wrapped in black garbage bags hanging from the pen's fence, with the transformation of the animals into abject toxic containers being now complete. Just like a waste collector, the van's driver gathers the plastic bags and

[66] Transcript from the documentary, translation mine.

dumps them in the van's cargo, already filled with other carcasses: appalling loot from the Acerra countryside. Death by contamination or by slaughtering, either way the sheep flock is headed towards a one-way sacrificial journey. Being too contaminated for the slaughterhouse, the animals need to be killed and then burned to erase any leftover presence of the intoxicant substances, and exorcise their comeback. Joining the shepherd and his family in their mourning, one is left wondering: will the sacrifice of these animals prevent the dioxin from penetrating the food chain and save us humans? Or will the sacrifice have been in vain?

In one of the last scenes of the documentary, Del Giudice seems to indirectly answer to these questions as he enumerates the list of illegal landfills in the Campania region; surprisingly, Acerra and the whole province of Naples are not mentioned. Far from lacking them, this high-risk area is instead subject to all sorts of environmental threats: illegal landfills and dumping sites but also, electromagnetic pollution, incineration plants, massive toxic waste dumping. Erased from the map, the *Terra dei fuochi* has been doomed, marked as the expendable waste land to be sacrificed, together with its human and non-human inhabitants.

The feeling of helplessness, of subaltern powerlessness conveyed by *Biùtiful Cauntri* find their narrative counterpoint in *Teresa e le altre, storia di donne nella Terra dei fuochi,* a project of guerrilla narrative (as they have been described by the editor), of environmental justice from below edited by the environmental historian Marco Armiero. Set in the same toxic environment of the *Terra dei fuochi, Teresa e le altre* tells the story of a group of local women activists who are voicing their anguish in first person, in the attempt to build a counter-narrative of collective resistance to the decades of abuses endured by the community they inhabit. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the narrative voices of the collection are linked by the refuse to surrender to the destruction of their territory, and instead mobilize in forms of participated resistance. As

Serenella Iovino describes in the book's closing chapter, the stories narrated are all radical stories of environmental resistance, where the term radical also entails a sense of identity and material belonging, of rootedness in the contaminated landscape of the *Terra dei fuochi*.[67]

The narratives at issue expose the visceral bond between human bodies and the material world in which they are inscribed, with all the toxic, abject implications that such a contaminated space implies. Stories of sick, even rotting bodies, of likewise putrefying landscapes, and of a collective refuse to accept the status quo intertwine in these guerrilla narratives, giving voice to counter-narratives of eco-ethical resistance. The first account in the collection is from Nunzia Lombardi, activist and farmer born and raised in Marigliano (Na) diagnosed with ulcerative colitis at age 23. Despite the lack of indisputable scientific evidence connecting her illness to the contamination of the territories around her, Nunzia establishes a deep parallel between the human body rotting from the inside and the intoxicated soil of the Neapolitan countryside. Referring to the bodily manifestations of her illness, Nunzia writes: "la mia pelle spesso si lacerava e dalle piaghe fuoriusciva una sostanza bianca, che nauseava me, figuriamoci chi mi stava vicino."[68] Later on, referring instead to the recovery of an underground landfill in a farmland in her hometown, Nunzia recalls the suffocating feeling of nausea caused by the poignant stench emanating from the ground: "Man mano che mi avvicinavo alla recinzione il bruciore aumentava e non era più solo alla gola ma agli occhi, alla faccia, mi sentivo pervasa dalla quella puzza."[69] The nauseating smell coming out of Nunzia's lesions evoke the stench released by the hazardous waste buried underground: human bodies and intoxicated farmlands both infected and lacerated in their bowels.

[67] Iovino in Armiero, *Teresa e le altre, 153*.
[68] Lombardi in Armiero, *Teresa e le altre*, 24.
[69] Ibid., 31.

As Armiero writes "raccontare è resistere,"[70] and the voices of Teresa and the others provide subversive testimonies of resistance not only to the mechanisms of environmental injustice, but also to the hegemonic narrative of gender subalternity that dominates the public discourse in the peripheral space of the Neapolitan countryside. The protagonists/narrators of *Teresa e le altre* reject the status of passive victims and become instead participating activists in a collective fight against the institutional as well as societal disregard towards their war on waste. Aware of the interconnectedness between human bodies and the natural environment in which they live, these women fight for themselves and for the generations to come, otherwise destined to live in a world where oncological illnesses and congenital malformations proliferate uncontested.

In the perpetual waste emergency, the protagonists of the collection chose to take a side and stand by it. *Teresa e le altre* together with the other works analyzed in this chapter become corporeal narratives that uncover the invisible mechanisms of contamination on the surface of the written or visual text by exposing their toxic effects on the (non)human body. The insistence on the dichotomy visible/invisible, with reference to the non-visibility of the buried/concealed refuse, is at the core of a poignant reflection by Carlotta Caputo, Neapolitan anthropologist who worked on the waste emergency in Terzigno (Na) during her doctorate in Cultural Anthropology. Caputo formulates a research hypothesis according to which the local community has developed a coping mechanism to deal with the waste emergency based on what she refers to as "processi di 'scotomizzazione' – dal greco 'scotoma' (σκότωμα) 'oscuramento', 'ottenebramento.'"[71] Such processes rely on subconscious mechanisms that overshadow certain elements of the real world, which thus become invisible to the subject. Caputo goes on explaining how such processes affect

[70] Armiero, *Teresa e le altre*, 16.
[71] Caputo in Armiero, *Teresa e le altre*, 56.

the way people perceive spatial as well as cultural representations of waste, so much so that they can ultimately lead to dissimulate the visual perception of the 'rifiuti nello spazio' e, dunque, degli 'spazi dei rifiuti.'"[72] Far from being unaware of the ongoing state of environmental crisis, the local community simply represses the image of the landfill, or of other areas designated to dispose waste (whether legally or illegally); as if the act of concealing the spaces in which waste is disposed, piled or poured, could neutralize the environmental threat it entails.

But when the invisible mechanisms of cross-species contamination materialize in form of congenital malfunctions and urological illnesses, the nexus between environmental contamination and human body is ultimately exposed and the illusion of *scotomizzazione* is broken. For Ivana Corsale, journalist and documentarist,[73] disclosing the numbers of the epidemiological risk for the local population is key to foster civic engagement in the local community and to raise awareness at the national level. In her narrative account, Corsale points at the nexus between human beings and land, and therefore at the interconnectedness between illness and waste.[74] In order to validate her argument in the eyes of the public opinion, Corsale points at the high level of chemical substances found in the blood tests performed on the population of the so called *Triangolo della morte* (the death triangle) between the municipalities of Acerra, Nola, and Marigliano (Na). The results of the tests showed levels of dioxin and heavy metals highly exceeding the limits posed by the World Health Organization.

As Serenella Iovino remarks referring to the revealing power of contamination "gli intrecci materiali e narrativi di queste contaminazioni sono visibili nel declino fisico e sociale di

[72] Ibid.
[73] Ivana Corsale is the director of the 2011 documentary *Campania Infelix, Unhappy Country* (2011) that explores the connections between waste, health and *ecomafias* in the so called *Triangolo della morte*
[74] Corsale in Armiero, *Teresa e le altre*, 123.

questi luoghi e dei loro corpi avvelenati, siano essi umani o non umani."[75] The concept of contamination as a tool to read the complex interconnectedness among human and non-human environment has the "heuristic function" of exposing the visible and invisible layers of such embodied narratives allowing them to emerge in their eloquent materiality.[76] In this perspective, even toxic substances and refuse participate in the narrative eloquence of the material world, as they alterate perceptions, horizons, landscapes, living organisms and become material actors in the productive process via trans-species contaminations and hybridizations.

The narratives of refuse analyzed in this chapter do not merely expose the corporeal interconnectedness among material world and the human body, they also, and primarily, establish a connection between the wretched landscape of the Neapolitan province and its equally abjectified (non)human inhabitants, both hovering over the threshold between the bucholic and the contaminated, life and death. One of the narrators in the collection, Doriana Sarli, writes: "Ci sono territori, come Acerra, Pianura, Giugliano, che sono stati del tutto sacrificati da chi gestisce la questione del traffico dei rifiuti, e con loro sono stati sacrificati anche i cittadini che vi abitano."[77] Yet another testimony of how landscapes and citizens of the region have both been marked as expendable collateral damage within the profit driven mechanisms of illegal waste disposal.

Is there any room left for hope and redemption in such an apocalyptic scenario? Or, as the shepherd in *Biùtiful Cauntri* prefigures, will the sacrifice have been in vain? In describing the catastrophic scenario of the *Terra dei fuochi* Saviano writes: "Il paesaggio della Terra dei fuochi aveva l'aspetto di un'apocalisse continua e ripetuta, routinaria, come se nel suo disgusto fatto di

[75] Iovino, "Corpi Eloquenti," 113.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Sarli in Armiero, *Teresa e le altre*, 108.

percolato e copertoni non ci fosse più nulla di cui stupirsi."[78] In this passage, Saviano denounces the risk of becoming numbed to the horrors being perpetrated, as if the scabrous landscape of the Neapolitan waste land had the ability to paralyze the local communities, as if there was nothing left to do for them but to passively succumb to their ominous fate. Targeted as spaces of exception, due to the alleged ineptitude of the local communities, deemed too weak to resist, the region has been marked as an expendable zone where to dispose the worthless residues of a global mechanism of mass production/consumption. In the asymmetric system of global interdependencies, the territories of *Terra dei fuochi* become a glocalized waste land, as they serve, to use Bauman's terms, as delocalized outposts for dumping and recycling the industrial byproducts of distant parts of the globe.[79]

Although their fate seems to be written, Saviano and the other voices in the eco-ethical narratives analyzed in this chapter refuse to succumb and remain silent and through their eco-ethical accounts awaken the numbed consciences of their communities of belonging. In the introduction to *Teresa e le altre*, Marco Armiero writes that the collection was conceived as a way to reconstruct a story from below of the Campania region by unveiling "le asimmetrie di potere, il sistematico scegliere comunità marginali, spesso già contaminate, come 'zone di sacrificio' destinate ad accogliere ciò che nessuno vuole."[80] Responding to Armiero's call to action, in her account "Da Posillipo a Pianura sola andara" Doriana Sarli joins the other voices of *Teresa e le altre*, in refusing the fatalistic scenario that sees her community as irrevocably doomed. Her narrative becomes a testimony to the region's resistance: "Siamo diventati un corpo unico."[81] The community of activists across the *Terra dei fuochi*'s territory gathered in protest

[78] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 328.
[79] Bauman, "Glocalization and Hybridity," 2.
[80] Armiero, *Teresa e le altre*, 15.
[81] Sarli in Armiero, *Teresa e le altre*, 108.

becomes one body – one wounded, suffering body – with the human inhabitants of the region as well as with the non-human environment around them. The community and the poisoned landscape it inhabits become corporeal battlefields upon which to fight the war on waste. Whether bearer of the toxic effects of hazardous waste over the (non)human matter, or transformed into means of protest, this "Corpo unico" becomes the utmost site of resistance, a corporeal barricade against the irreversible transformation of the once *Campania felix* into an apocalyptic waste land.

CHAPTER 2

MEDITERRANEAN REFUSE: ABJECT BODIES, ABJECT ZONES IN NARRATIVES OF MIGRATION

"Of his bones are coral made,
Those are pearls that were his eyes,
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change,
Into something rich and strange."
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*[82]

2.1 Disposable Lives: Wasted Humans at the Threshold of Europe

The Mediterranean is an interstitial site of involuntary and at times coerced, hybridizations; by its nature, the "middle sea" positions itself as a locus of mediation, of in-betweenness, as an unstable and multidirectional space of encounter/clash. This space of encounter is marked by intersections of people across its shores, where environmental emergences and geopolitical turmoil intersect and where human and non-human traces, bodies, and matter are forced to coexist and contaminate each other. The risk of contamination does not exhaust on the symbolic level; the Mediterranean also serves as a polluted receptacle of organic and inorganic waste, as a fluid curtain under which sunken debris is concealed. In the past decades, as a consequence of the countless shipwrecks, migrants' bodies have become material human waste, transforming the Mediterranean into a fluid modern necropolis, where the decaying corpses of the drowned migrants are ultimately dehumanized, reduced to organic wrecks and drifted into abjection.

[82] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Comedy of The Tempest* (London Dent: 1894), 25.

On October 3rd, 2013 366 migrants lost their lives after a deadly shipwreck occurred in the waters of the Sicilian Channel, just a few miles from the coasts of Lampedusa the outpost of the Italian peninsula, and of Europe more broadly. The reactions of both political actors and mass media to the October shipwreck testify to the ambiguities implied in the emergency rhetoric embraced by both in relation to either the deaths or the survivors of the disaster. On the one hand, the proliferation of abject images showing corpses floating on the sea's surface depicted migrants reduced to mere biological bodies. On the other, the impossibility to univocally identify the survivors as either refugees or economic immigrants confined them to a limbo, a state of suspension of their legal status. While the dead of the shipwreck were symbolically granted *post-mortem* Italian citizenship during the memorial service, the survivors were charged by public prosecutors with the crime of "illegal migration."[83]

Migrants' bodies are thus subjected to two antithetical treatments according to whether or not they survive. Those who perish at sea are paradoxically granted recognition through *post-mortem* citizenship as if the mere immersion of the bodies in the waters of the Mediterranean entailed an instant redemption via the intrinsic cathartic potential of the sea. Myths and rituals of purification by water are immediately evoked by the "cultural conception of the ocean as so enormous, so powerful, so abundantly full of life that it is impervious to human harm."[84] Contemporary disposal practices diffused on a global scale, involving dumping at sea all sorts of organic and inorganic wastes such as sewage or toxic and radioactive materials, preserve traces of these cathartic beliefs, and "assume that dispersing the substances or forces across the breadth

[83] For further details about the October shipwreck and its aftermaths see Nick Dines, Nicola Montagna, and Vincenzo Ruggiero, "Thinking Lampedusa: Border Construction, the Spectacle of Bare Life and the Productivity of Migrants," *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 38, no. 3 (February 15, 2015): 430–45.
[84] Alaimo, "Dispersing Disaster," 181.

and depth of the sea will make them disappear."[85] And a similar distorted belief seems to drive the countless human smugglers who leave migrants to their tragic fate, at the mercy of the sea.

While the "catharsis" of migrants' bodies/corpses is immediately achieved through the death by water, the surviving migrants enter the state of 'bare life'[86] by virtue of their suspended judicial status. In addition, the questionable hygienic procedures endured by some of the migrants hosted in Lampedusa's reception center in the months following the shipwreck further concurs to their reduction to a state of bare life and to define Lampedusa as a spatial exceptionality. The acknowledgment of the migrant's body as less-than-human, its ascription to the realm of animality, is often achieved by means of a series of debasing practices and hygienic and purifying "rituals". The spraying of migrants' naked bodies for scabies, occurred in the months following the 2013 shipwreck in Lampedusa's reception centers, represents an emblematic instance of these hygienic practices aimed at preventing any risk of a possible contagion.

The presence of the "foreign bodies" of migrants within the body of the nation triggers feelings of filth and contamination and questions the line of demarcation between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. The fading of these polarized categories as points of reference in the localization of migrants within the space of the nation is due to the proliferation of liminal positions suspended between inclusion and exclusion. The blurring of the clear demarcation line between inside and outside led many scholars to depict the suspended lives of migrants as 'immanent outsiders' or 'citizens who do not belong' relegated to systems of 'differential inclusion.'[87]

---

[85] Ibid., 181-82.
[86] Dines et all, "Thinking Lampedusa."
[87] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "Between Inclusion and Exclusion: On the Topology of Global Space and Borders," *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 4–5 (2012): 58–75.

This abjectification of the migrant's body has increasingly received the attention of artists and scholars across the disciplines: from sociological and anthropological inquiries to literary and cinematic representations. The aim of this chapter is to look at the Mediterranean, through a literary and cinematic filter, as a liminal space marked by the coexistence of human and non-human traces, elements and beings. Theories of the non-human and biopolitics will provide the analytical tools to navigate both the dehumanizing practices perpetrated through un-human relations and the fecund or abjectifying entanglements of human/non-human connections occurring in the contaminating waters of the Mediterranean. These theoretical approaches become powerful analytical instruments that compel us to reflect on the tangible materiality of migrants' bodies and to consider the concrete impact of the overall institutional inadequacy to deal with the issue of migration within the context of the Mediterranean. In his powerful article "Bodies of Water," Joseph Pugliese remarks how in this space:

> Everything […] exceeds categories, borders, limits: humans fold into marine creatures, catch of the day to be auctioned off at the markets. This is how the global South breaches the defences of Fortress Europe: via punctured rubber dinghies and fishing nets. As necrogenic cargo, these human specters inhumed in fish defy frontiers: served on a platter, they enter your homes to become both your alimentation and your waste. A clandestine submarine life courses through your veins.[88]

Invoking the taboo of cannibalism, Pugliese provocatively alludes to the European obsession with borders, uncovering its frailities and inconsistencies. The collapse of boundaries between human and non-human world destabilizes the fault line between the self and the other, the acceptable and the repugnant, exposing the abject nature of these intra-species connections. In this perspective, the dehumanized corpses of migrants acquire a post-mortem degree of agency

[88] Joseph Pugliese, "Bodies of Water," *HEAT*, no. 12 (2006): 13–20.

through their abject potential of inciting reactions of disgust as their presence borders on abhorrence and loathing, threatening the bodily and moral integrity of the self via a potential contact and contamination.

Moving away from this abject perspective, in *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti proposes a necro-political approach to our times that provides alternative theoretical tools "for an ethics that respects both the horror and the complexity of our times and attempts to deal with them affirmatively."[89] From these specular stances, this chapter explores theoretical and aesthetic ways to approach the tragic nature of human/non-human entanglements in the liminal space of the Mediterranean, as well as their destabilizing yet transformative power when publicly exposed. This unsettling load is what I call the post-mortem agency of the migrant, made possible by what Jane Bennett referred to as "an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power."[90]

In the liminality of the "middle sea", human bodies are entangled with aquatic life and evoke a primordial intra-species unity, thus becoming "part of a dynamic, intra-active, water world."[91] Dismembered, unable to survive in an inhospitable place such as the sea bottom, those bodies are attacked by other forms of living beings and are transformed into multispecies entanglements. These trans-species figurations can only come into being in what Donna Haraway defines as a "naturalcultural contact zone"[92] emblematically embodied, in this case, by the interstitial space of the Mediterranean. Its waters can be described as a privileged space for "ecological, evolutionary and historical diversity" as neuralgic ecotones: spaces of transition "where assemblages of biological species [both human and non-human] from outside their

[89] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 131.
[90] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 23.
[91] Stacy Alaimo, "States of Suspension: Trans-Corporeality at Sea," *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 3 (2012): 476–93.
[92] Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 7.

comfort zones"[93] encounter and interact. Paradoxically, despite the asymmetrical nature of this human/non-human interaction, in which human bodies are transformed into either food for fish or passive receptacles for the marine life, there is something left for the human to gain. This intra-species coexistence allows the human to maintain its destabilizing, admonitory power and to become integral part of the endless marine cycle of life.

In the liminal space of the Mediterranean, the refused excess of our societies is discarded and removed from the public gaze, it is made invisible by water and by the tacit acquiescence of mass media and of the public opinion. Each of the narratives of migration analyzed in this chapter exposes the unspeakable side of migration, taking a stance against the indifference of the public opinion and the institutional inadequacy of European nation-states. Whether solid, or liquid, organic or inorganic, and I would add human or non-human, the useless residue of our societies is equally discarded and drowned in the sea depths, relying on their supposedly concealing and dispersing potential.[94] The polluted/purifying waters of the Mediterranean, just like the vilified bodies of the migrants, position themselves on the fleeting threshold between the pure and the impure, the inside and the outside, the human and the non-human.

2.2 Abject Entanglements at Sea: Migrants' Bodies and the Aquatic Life

The idea of the Mediterranean as an interstitial space of cross-species contact and as a privileged site for the abjectification of migrants' bodies is at the core of Danish artist Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen installation entitled *End of Dreams* presented in June 2014. The work,

[93] Ibid., 217.

[94] The word potential is used extensively throughout the article both as an adjective and as a noun, and is intended in its etymological meaning from the Late Latin *potentialis* "that which is possible," and according to the definition provided by the OED: *adj*. "Possible as opposed to actual; having or showing the capacity to develop into something in the future; latent; prospective;" *n.* "Something which is possible, as opposed to actual; capacity for growth, achievement, future development or use; resources able to be used or developed."

realized during his residency at the Italian art organization Qwatz, represents an ode to the countless migrants who lost their lives at sea in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean and reach Europe.

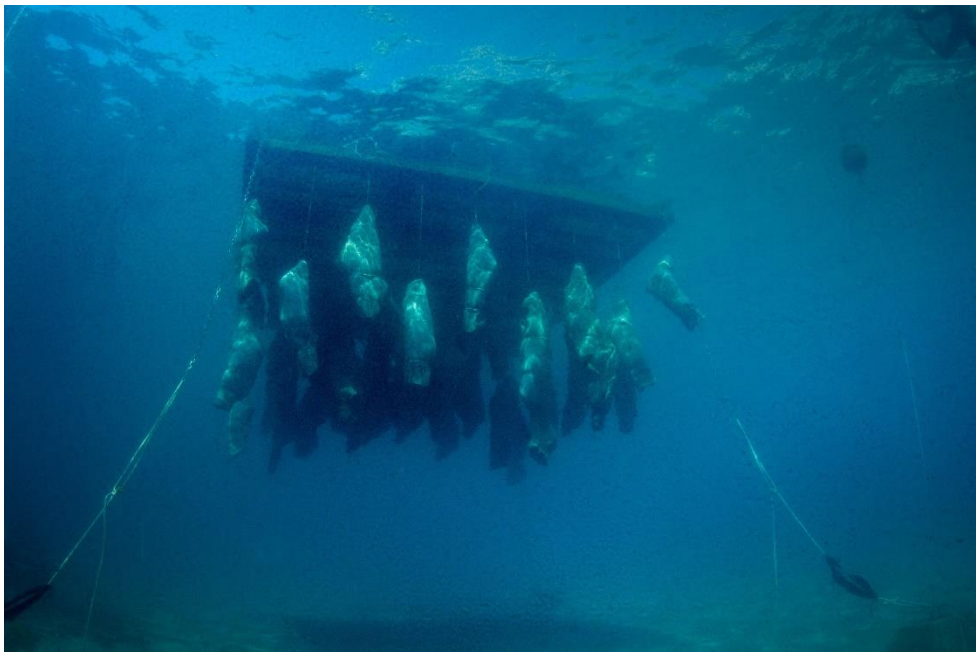

Figure 10: *End of Dreams*. Courtesy of Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen

End of Dreams was originally conceived as a sculptural installation composed by forty-eight mixed-media anthropomorphic sculptures, made of wire armature and concrete canvas – a material commonly used in disaster zones – immersed off the coast of Pizzo Calabro, a small town in Southern Italy overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea. Larson's idea was to leave the sculptures submerged in the waters for four months, thus allowing them to acquire a patina of aquatic sediments and organisms. The plan was to then recover them from the sea, mimicking the recovery of migrants' corpses, and to display them as a sculptural constellation marked by the transformative power of the sea. The sculptures/corpses, at first reminiscent of body bags, were expected to transmute into "underwater gardens," "nature-culture hybrids" where human artifacts and the aquatic life coexisted.

During a destructive storm, however, the impetus of the sea lashed out against the raft that was holding the sculptures in place and their remains were scattered across the sea bottom or hauled away by tidal currents. The anthropomorphic sculptures emblematically faced the same fate reserved to the countless corpses of migrants dispersed in the Mediterranean waters, at the mercy of the sea, establishing an even stronger parallel between the two experiences. As remarked by the artist himself, the abrupt intervention of nature brought his piece even closer to the experience of peril and trauma that he meant to convey in the first place.[95] The initial conception of the project was thus transformed by the same violent agency that claimed the lives of thousands of migrants. In the following months, several attempts to search and locate the sculptures were made and ultimately less than half of the initial forty-eight sculptures were "rescued." The underwater expeditions were filmed in order to capture on site the scattered remains of the original installation as they were being concretely transformed by the surrounding aquatic environment. Larsen, realizing the aesthetic potential of the underwater footage, decided to turn the tide and to transform *End of Dreams* into an even more evocative project aimed at exploiting and exposing the metamorphic power of nature and the destructive power of the sea over the human. The countless hours of footage were edited by the artist transforming *End of Dreams* into a video installation shot at 50 frames per second, producing "a soft, slow movement, varying between the revelation of the buried sculptures and the skimming of the surface of the water, like a drone surveying an area where surely something bad has happened."[96] The muffled sound of water, together with the non-diegetic background music generates an alienating and very suggestive effect, thus increasing the evocative potential of the underwater footage. The multi-media installation is composed by four HD screens surrounding the remains

[95] See the artist's portfolio on his website http://www.nbsl.info/
[96] Adrian Dannatt, "As in an Ocean on Nikolaj Larsen's End of Dreams," *IBRAAZ*, no. Platform 008 (December 2014), http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/114.

of the anthropomorphic sculptures, mimicking the original immersive environment of the sea with its distorted sounds and with the images blurred by the floating barrier of water, sand and sea debris.

Figure 11: *End of Dreams*. Courtesy of Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen

The footage alternates shootings of the destroyed raft, rotting litter (cans, old shoes and cigarettes) and sea bed patrolling where some of the anthropomorphic sculptures were still laying. In this space of transformation and coexistence, the abject entanglements made of human and non-human remains emerge, exposing what Adrian Dannatt describes as "the magical aura of the surviving objects in their abject dissolution and the beautiful orange ropes used to tie them to the rafts like umbilical cords floating through womb water."[97] The anthropomorphic features of the sculptures have been blurred by water's erosive power as well as by the growing layer of aquatic organisms and sediments accumulating upon them exposing the abject nature of the object-matrix. Larsen's installation seems to materialize and embrace Braidotti's vision of death

[97] Ibid.

as “the inhuman conceptual excess: the unrepresentable, the unthinkable, and the unproductive black hole that we all fear. Yet, death is also a creative synthesis of flows, energies and perpetual becoming.”[98] The life-death continuum theorized by Braidotti is what moved Larsen in the first place to conceive *End of Dreams* as a sculptural installation aimed at portraying the “life after death” of migrants’ corpses and the transformative power of the underwater world. Then, the “creative flows” prompted by the unpredictability of the natural environment forced the artist to re-envision his original project and transform it into a multimedia, itinerant installation, which, after having premiered at SALT Galata, *Istanbul*, in the Spring 2015, travelled north to the Fotografisk Center in Copenhagen, following the same ascending trajectory traced by migrants in their journeys of hope to Northern Europe.

This powerful fictional representation finds its non-fictional double in Giovanni Maria Bellu’s account of his investigations over the “ghost shipwreck” of Portopalo, in the Sicilian Channel.

> Abbiamo issato la paranza e l'abbiamo aperta sul ponte. In mezzo al mucchio del pescato c'era il corpo ancora intatto di un uomo scuro di carnagione sui venticinque-trent'anni. La pelle era in parte mangiata dai pesci. Gli altri che erano a bordo sono scappati a prua per non vedere. Prima di ributtarlo in mare non ho potuto fare a meno di notare che quel poveretto portava a un dito un anello dorato con una piccola pietra rossa a forma di piramide.

With these words, Giovanni Maria Bellu, journalist and reporter for the Italian newspaper La Repubblica, opened his article entitled “Negli abissi siciliani il cimitero dei clandestini” published on June 6th 2001.[99] With these words, Bellu broke the silence, and for the first time after almost five years, unveiled the truth about the so-called “ghost shipwreck” that occurred

[98] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 131.
[99] Giovanni Maria Bellu, “Negli Abissi Siciliani Il Cimitero Dei Clandestini,” *La Repubblica*, June 6, 2001, http://www.repubblica.it/online/cronaca/palo/palo/palo.html.

right outside Italy's territorial waters on the night of December 26, 1996, killing 283. Through an extensive and meticulous work, the journalist collected evidence of the fatal shipwreck consisting of both direct testimonies from the members of the local community of Portopalo, and video footage of the catastrophe's remains at the sea bottom.

Three years after the article first appeared on La Repubblica, Bellu published his investigative novel based on the phantom shipwreck, titled *I fantasmi di Portopalo* (*The Ghosts of Portopalo,* 2004). Throughout the novel, the author describes the several practices of abjectification and rejection to which undocumented migrants are subjected, as a result of the collective anxiety prevailing in the Italian social and political context. The novel provides a testimony to all the "ghost shipwrecked" who died in the crossing and whose bodies "haunt" the Mediterranean waters ending up intertwined in the nets of Sicilian fishermen. In the novel, Bellu gives coherence to his previous writings and voices the unspoken tragedy kept silent and invisible by mass media and local institutions. *I fantasmi* is the story of hundreds of migrants of Indian, Tamil, and Pakistani origins who tragically died in the attempt to reach Italy's shores and whose dehumanized, decomposed bodies were transformed into specters by the authorities' as well as by the local community's negligence. The fictional element appears in the otherwise factually accurate narration through the reconstruction of one of the migrants' vicissitudes, Anpalagan Ganeshu, during the shipwreck. It is not by chance that a reproduction of Anpalagan's identity card appears on the back of the book's cover. It will be in fact the recovery of this document that will urge the journalist to start his investigation and, with it, his journey to Portopalo and its unspeakable truths.

Under the homogenizing surface of the Mediterranean lies a stratified twine of marine sediments that testifies past and present events, exchanges, crossings. Through the coexistence of

organic and inorganic matter, human and non-human presences and residues, the Mediterranean unveils its connecting and contaminating power. The loss of the boundaries separating the human from the non-human, the inside from the outside of the body, life and death is achieved within the exceptional spatiality of the Mediterranean. As Cristina Lombardi-Diop points out, Bellu digs into the police reports and the town-talks as the "Sicilian fishermen dig out of the bottom of the Mediterranean sea […] fragments of its layered history: Punic amphora, plastic tanks, and migrants' dead bodies […], metonymic embodiment of the past and present of Europe's late modernity."[100] It is by virtue of this cross-species proximity that fishermen's nets become receptacles of debris, bringing to the sea surface inorganic litter and thorny truths. This is the case for the "ghostly" shipwreck of Portopalo, where local fishermen were compelled to face the dreadful discoveries caught by their trawl-nets: "Cominciò ad esaminare gli stracci e notò che si trattava di indumenti: maglioni, camicie, scarpe. C'era ancora qualche frammento bianco. Rabbrividì quando gli venne in mente che poteva trattarsi di ossa umane."[101] Despite the shocking nature of the findings, the local community of fishermen comes to the tacit pact of concealing the truth in order to safeguard their economic interests.

The weight of this secret, however, becomes unbearable for Salvatore Lupo, one of the fishermen in Portopalo, precisely the one who caught Anpalagan's ID; thus, when approached by Bellu, Salvatore decides to cooperate in the investigations for the recovery of the shipwreck. By means of a ROV (remote operated underwater vehicle), the journalist, with the help of the fisherman and of two specialized operators, plumbs the sea depths and faces a dreadful discovery: "È una visione spaventosa. Una cassa toracica infissa nella sabbia. Il costato è proteso

[100] Cristina Lombardi-Diop, "Ghosts of Memories, Spirits of Ancestors: Slavery, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic," in *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections*, ed. Annalisa Oboe and Anna Sacchi (New York: Routledge, 2011), 168.
[101] Bellu, *I fantasmi*, 30.

verso l'esterno, tenuto in piedi da un grumo di detriti scuri, come tessuti macerati. Ma è la posa a inquietare: ha un che di sguaiato, come volesse esibire un'inconfessabile violenza subita."[102] The sight of the human ribcage is followed by other similarly macabre findings like the skeleton of another shipwrecked whose remains have become the home for maritime animals and debris: "ha un che di tragico: il velo di sabbia è interrotto da inflorescenze sgraziate e ispide, nelle quali è difficile distinguere i detriti umani da quelli marini. Un riccio-matita s'è insediato sulla sua testa: è un diadema ma sembra un tumore. È il posto di frontiera della terra delle ossa e dei rottami."[103] As Laura Sarnelli[104] notes, in narratives of transmediterranean crossings, shipwrecks become the quintessential manifestation of the total collapse of boundaries between human/non-human, man/nature, subject/object, allowing for the emergence of "monstrous" intra-species entanglements, where the adjective monstrous is intended in its revealing potential, in its ability to expose the unspeakable side of death.

In her article "Europe Adrift," Ponzanesi describes the Mediterranean as "a place of transit where the asymmetries produced by globalization are intensified, literally and figuratively transported by the abject bodies of migrants, undocumented people, and refugees."[105] Abjected bodies reduced to lifeless and identity-less corpses haunting the waters of the middle sea; corpses dismembered and devoured by the wreath of the sea and by cannibal fish. Throughout the text, Bellu repeatedly exposes the macabre spectacle in all its destabilizing potential "I cadaveri interi avevano iniziato a rimanere impigliati nelle reti ai primi di gennaio del 1997 [...]. A febbraio i

[102] Ibid., 205.
[103] Ibid., 223.
[104] Laura Sarnelli, "The Gothic Mediterranean: Haunting Migrations and Critical Melancholia," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 147–65.
[105] Sandra Ponzanesi, "Europe Adrift: Rethinking Borders, Bodies, and Citizenship from the Mediterranean," *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings*, no. 11.2 (2011): 67–76.

corpi, mangiati dal mare e dai pesci, venivano ripescati a pezzi. La sera, nei bar di Portopalo, i pescatori si raccontavano storie dell'orrore."[106] Or later on:

> l'ultima novità era la leggenda del 'pesce cannibale', un'autentica catastrofe per l'economia locale. Qualcuno dei grossisti aveva cominciato a trattare al ribasso, sostenendo che i clienti parlavano con orrore della possibilità che il pesce di Portopalo, essendosi mischiato con tanti cadaveri, se ne fosse anche nutrito e che perciò si fosse, in un certo senso, 'umanizzato.'[107]

The legend of the "cannibal fish" possibly containing human traces having been exposed to and contaminated by the corpses of the migrants becomes a threat to the local economy. By appealing to the anxiety of a possible cross-species contamination, hinting at the utmost taboo of cannibalism, the local wholesalers try to decrease the price of locally caught fish, possibly "humanized".

Once again, the collapse of boundaries between the human and the non-human, relegates the migrant in a liminal space of abjection triggering feelings of pollution, filth, and contamination. The supposed inhumanity of migrants finds its concrete actualization in the Mediterranean waters where their bodies are irrevocably dehumanized, torn to shreds. Migrants become phantoms condemned to decay at sea; wretched beings unworthy of any commemoration or funeral ritual, silenced by repression and oblivion. The traditional ritualization of death, profoundly observed within the local community in Portopalo, fades before the repugnant recovery of decomposing corpses entwined within the fishing nets, corpses whose otherness is immediately exposed by the color their skins: "Un getto d'acqua libera la 'cosa' dal fango e dalle alghe. È il corpo di un uomo. Un uomo dalla pelle scura."[108] The reference to the migrant's dark skin establishes, even on the visual level, a line of demarcation between the European self and

[106] Bellu, *I fantasmi*, 32-33.
[107] Ibid., 145-46.
[108] Ibid., 34.

the non-European other, acting as a reminder of repressed colonial memories and hygienic obsessions. The persistence of colonial tropes of race and contamination within Italy's social fabric marks the bodies/corpses of nonwhite migrants as unassimilable, foreign bodies to be exorcised at all costs. The fishermen's decision to discard the migrant's corpse at sea is ascribable to the unassimilability of the foreign body. The postcolonial space of the Mediterranean, in Gaia Giuliani's words reactivates "figures of race," which "function as a legitimizing practice for those specific (and ever-changing) colour lines that contextually shape the biopolitical apparatus (legislative, political, social and cultural) of inclusion, exclusion and differential inclusion of the people who are entering the "gates" of Europe or already did."[109]

The abject alterity of nonwhite migrants is racially connotated and facilitates the ultimate rejection, as their irrefutable otherness is immediately exposed on the epidermic level. Even though the body is still recognizable and identifiable, the tacit agreement among the community of fishermen – as well as this subconscious racialization of the hierarchy or belonging – prevents Salvo from recovering the body, and leads him instead to the merciless decision of tossing back the corpse at sea: "disgraziatamente, quel cadavere non è solo un grosso pezzo di carne, se no tutto sarebbe più semplice: è ben conservato, i pesci hanno risparmiato il viso. Gli si potrebbe ancora dare un nome e un cognome."[110] The *omertà* (the code of silence) of the fishermen's community and of the whole town of Portopalo inscribes itself within a broader discourse that sees European societies as passive spectators of the deadly "spectacle" at play in the waters of the Mediterranean. Migrants' deaths are then rendered invisible by the obscurantism promoted by a certain share of institutions and mass media and by the negligence of the involved

[109] Gaia Giuliani, "Afterword: The Mediterranean as a Stage: Borders, Memories, Bodies," in *Decolonising the Mediterranean: European Colonial Heritages in North Africa and the Middle East*, ed. Gabriele Proglio (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 91–103.
[110] Bellu, *I fantasmi*, 34.

communities, embedded in a hierarchic logic that splits the Mediterranean in half: "a nordest il 'Mediterraneo superiore,' a sudovest il 'Mediterraneo inferior.'"[111] Geopolitical mappings project their asymmetries on societies and human beings and the lives of those that live on the margins of Europe's modernity become less worthy of human recognition and are therefore perceived as useless and rejectable.

I fantasmi di Portopalo offers a dreadful account of Mediterranean crossings turned into dehumanizing odysseys, and revolting carnages where migrants' bodies are transformed into worthless "human waste," to use Bauman's words: "that human waste of distant parts of the globe unloaded into 'our backyard.'"[112] Migrants who manage to survive the crossing, indeed, locate themselves in the domain of social abjection. As argued by Imogen Tyler, the figure of the migrant, whether documented or undocumented, enters the domain of social abjection through the excluding practices sanctioned by the sovereign power of the nation-state and legitimated by the proliferation of fears and anxieties of "border control and terror threats."[113] In this liminal space, migrants are transformed into human refuse, non-persons deprived of their social, juridical, and moral status and reduced to mere biological bodies, or even, to corpses.

But the annihilating vilification endured by migrants is a multidirectional one: it is shaped by the opposing and colliding drives of both the institutions/societies of arrival and the ruthless human smugglers. Migrants are reinserted in the domain of a primordial state of nature closer to the animal world, located on the threshold between humankind and animality; Bellu's description of the Yohannes, the boat used by the smugglers to transport migrants, is particularly powerful in this direction: "All'inizio della scala un tanfo di cibi avariati ed escrementi umani li obbligò a coprirsi la bocca e il naso col colletto della giacca. Sembrava d'essere nelle stalle d'un

[111] Ibid., 14.
[112] Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, 56.
[113] Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 9.

cargo per bestiame."[114] With its poor, I would say disgusting, hygienic conditions, with its smell of excrement and rotten foods, the Yohannes resembles more a cattle cargo than a passenger ship. At the hands of the merciless human smugglers, migrants are debased to the state of either animality or toxic waste, piled into freighters or dumped offshore to prevent being caught by the authorities: "È chiaro che, se è vivo, Anpalagan era nel gruppo di quei centocinquanta migranti che la Yiohan abbandonò, come un carico di rifiuti tossici, sulle coste del Peloponneso."[115] Once more, the waters of the Mediterranean are transformed into a liquid dumping of unwanted bodies soon to become corpses consumed by sea erosion or dismembered by fish.

Throughout the narration, Bellu reiterates disturbing images of rotten, dismembered bodies entangled with debris and fish, both at the sea bottom or trapped within the webs of the fishing nets, thus compelling the reader to face the abject fate reserved to migrants. The use of repugnant images functions as a disruptive tool that evokes the reader's revulsion and shakes his consciences via disgust. By locating the decomposing bodies of the migrant in the same physical and conceptual space occupied by waste and non-human beings, Bellu destabilizes established divides and borders, thus provoking a reaction of profound discomfort. Migrants' corpses are denied any form of human and moral recognition, they are doomed to a restless wandering, and the postures acquired by their bodies' remains seem to mirror this erratic condition: "Non c'è pace nei corpi abbandonati. Assumono pose ridicole, grottesche, paiono dei mentecatti in preda al panico: giullari macabre che si fanno beffe dei vivi attraverso la parodia dell'essere stati tali."[116] The material agency of the aquatic world surrounding the dismembered corpses invests them with an unsettling potential: through their grim and grotesque bodily poses they preserve the power of destabilizing the viewer, thus reacquiring a certain degree of agency after death.

[114] Bellu, *I fantasmi*, 103.
[115] Ibid., 85.
[116] Ibid., 206.

This breakdown of norms and barriers affects both social and spatial configurations, and the Mediterranean becomes a liminal space of in-betweenness, of nature-culture hybridity; as Sandra Ponzanesi remarks "Now that the notion of borders is no longer reconcilable with that of physical boundaries, material markets, or traditional representations, attention has shifted increasingly towards the idea of borders as *liquid figurations*, which have the osmotic capacity to blend cultural differences and to connect separate shores."[117] Ponzanesi continues her argument pointing out that this new figuration of borders must not to be embraced in a utopian perspective aimed at encompassing and conciliating the countless political, cultural, ecological and even geographical tensions that permeate the Mediterranean. Metaphors of liquidity can hint at the fluidity of the boundaries between the self and the other, the human and the non-human thus destabilizing rigid and reassuring categories in terms of identity construction. By disrupting such clean-cut distinctions these new figurations allow for the arise of liminal spaces of unsettling abjection characterized by the emergence of "nature/culture hybrids."[118] In this perspective, as Elena Past observes, "no Mediterranean space, human or non, can wholly separate itself from these cohabitations."[119] And it is by virtue of this iper-connectedness and cross-contamination among species that the Mediterranean becomes a posthumanist space in which the human is inexorably linked to the non-human, where the dismembered corpses of migrants are all in one with marine debris and with the aquatic life.

It is important, at this point, to underline the active role played by non-human beings and by the spatial environment in the recovery of a post-mortem agency of migrants' corpses, otherwise made powerless and invisible. Not only are these material figurations essential for the

[117] Ponzanesi, "Europe Adrift," 67.
[118] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 9
[119] Elena Past, "Island Hopping, Liquid Materiality, and the Mediterranean Cinema of Emanuele Crialese," *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 4, no. 2 (2013): 61.

shaping of intra-species connections and encounters; in Bellu's novel the Mediterranean acquires the features of a Greek divinity with the utmost power of unveiling the tragic truth behind the ghost shipwreck: "a un certo punto il Mediterraneo, proprio come un dio greco disgustato dal comportamento degli uomini, [ha] deciso di espellere dalle sue acque il cosiddetto mistero del naufragio fantasma."[120] The metamorphic nature of the Mediterranean Sea, allows its waters to become each time pristine paradise for tourists, liquid grave for migrants, dumping site, but also solid path for the endless networks of legal and illegal exchanges to be unraveled.

During the 2002 art exhibit Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany, the multidisciplinary network of artists and scholars Multiplicity[121] presented a multimedia project entitled *ID: a Journey through a Solid Sea*. The group started from the tragedy of Portopalo recounted by Bellu transposing the journalist's account into the video installation *Solid Sea 01 The Ghost Ship*. The purpose of the artwork was to trace the paths crossed by migrants and to depict the Mediterranean as a "hard space, solid ploughed by precise routes that move between points that are equally well-defined."[122] The installation consisted of two halls, one with the video footage featuring Bellu's underwater shots, as well as satellite maps and meteorological images of that precise day pointing at the exact coordinates of the shipwreck. The second hall instead gathered footage[123] of the interviews to the local community of Portopalo and to the relatives of the shipwrecked migrants.

---

[120] Bellu, *I fantasmi*, 103.

[121] Multiplicyty is a network of artist, architects and geographers based in Milan. In the occasion of the exhibit Documenta 11, the group was composed by Stefano Boeri, Maddalena Bregani, Francisca Insulza, Francesco Jodice, Giovanni La Varra and John Palmesino. Multiplicity's Solid Sea project was composed by four narratives realized by various artists over four years. Multiplicity. *Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship.* 2002. Video. Documenta11. Footage from the installation is available at http://www.radicate.eu/maddalena-bregani/

[122] *Documenta: Kurzführer. 11: Documenta 11, Plattform 5: Ausstellung* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

[123] The footage for this part of the installation featured shooting from a TV special for an Italian public TV channel, RAI Tre, "L'elmo di Scipio".

Figure 12: *Solid Sea 01 The Ghost Ship*, still

The blurry images from the underwater footage provide an unfiltered sight of the human/non-human remains scattered on the seabed, the complete lack of sound further stresses the documentaristic nature of the installation as the footage was originally intended as a visual evidence for Bellu's investigation. While the camera makes its way through the sandy seafloor, it is at times hard to discern the dividing line between human relics and non-human matter. Covered in sand, as if fossilized, the remains of the shipwreck are reclaimed by the surrounding aquatic life and transformed into either shelter or spectral underwater gardens. *Solid Sea 01*'s ultimate purpose was to outline a new geography of the Mediterranean as a space in which bodies and identities are commodified and ultimately reduced to dehumanized matter "unconsciously contributing to the solidifying of the Mediterranean, transforming a site of transit into a mounting barrier."[124] The resulting image of the Middle Sea as a territorialized solid space crossed by disciplined flows of different mobilities, however, collides with the liquid figuration of space outlined so far and fails in taking into account the synchronic dimension of such crossings and the myriad of trans-species interactions occurring in this liminal zone. Migrants'

[124] Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

routes, indeed, often overlap with those of local fishermen as testified by the narratives of migration thus far analyzed; and once human bodies trespass the liquid surface dividing the terrestrial from the marine life they are immediately embedded in a network of trans-species encounters that despises any attempt to univocally chart them into definite and static figurations.

2.3 Human and non-human networks in Emanuele Crialese's Terraferma

Analogous images of sea trash, abjectified human bodies, and bewildered fishermen are at the core of Emanuele Crialese's 2011 film *Terraferma*. The opening scene recalls one of the moments depicted by Bellu while describing the daily routine of Portopalo's fishermen inspecting their trawl-nets filled with fish, debris, and human remains. In the movie, however, the entangled matter caught from the sea bottom mainly consists of fish and trash of all sorts: plastic bags, empty bottles. The image of the fishing net represents a recurrent feature in Crialese's movies (see *Respiro*, 2002) aimed at underlining the interconnectedness among human and non-human beings and matter within the fluidic dimension provided by the Mediterranean setting; as noted by Elena Past in her compelling analysis of Crialese's movies:

> The image of the net becomes a poetic sign for Crialese, a visually overdetermined symbol that evokes human dependence on the sea, human entanglement with marine life, and the intensity of relationship for any life – human or nonhuman – so closely bound to another. Both porous and perilous, livelihood and instrument of death, the net encompasses the paradox of island existence.[125]

The net connects and entraps, it becomes a means of survival for fishermen and a deathtrap for fish, epitomizing the indissoluble bond between man and sea, the asymmetric relation of dependency of the former to the latter. While fully embracing Elena Past's analysis of

[125] Past, "Island Hopping," 57.

Terraferma in its effective outlining of the film's human/non-human relations and connections, it is important to provide in this context a complementary reading, bringing back the focus on migrants' bodies, or their absence, in the film's economy.

The scene immediately following depicts the boat's collision with what will soon reveal to be the wreck of one of the so-called *carrette del mare* (floating wrecks) and promptly establishes a further connection with the 'ghost shipwreck' narrated by Bellu. This time, it is the relic of a small wooden boat with inscriptions in Arabic likely coming from North Africa, one of the many old and unsafe boats used by human smugglers to illegally transport migrants between the two shores of the Mediterranean. No migrants' bodies or corpses, just the remains of a boat eroded by water, hinting at the countless migrants who lost their lives at sea and whose identityless corpses populate the seabed. These very first scenes epitomize the key elements of the movie: the indissoluble link between the sea and the communities that live along its shores and the depiction of the Mediterranean basin as a liminal space, a merciless fluid network that connects the territories around it through legal and illegal exchanges, through incessant flows of people and goods.

Terraferma is the story of a Sicilian family living in the small island of Linosa. 53,9 kilometers North-East of Lampedusa. The family portrayed by Crialese recalls Verga's characters in *I Malavoglia;* Ernesto, the head of the patriarchal family (cf. Padron 'Ntoni), is a fisherman who knows the ways of the sea and respects its rules; after having lost his son at sea (cf. Bastianazzo) Ernesto is left to take care of Giulietta, his daughter-in-law (cf. Maruzza), and Filippo, his grandson (cf. Alessi). But while Ernesto and Filippo are strongly anchored to family and local traditions, Giulietta and Ernesto's second son, Nino, are more inclined towards a mindset that sees in tourism, rather than in fishing, the economic future of their community. For

this reason, the rumors concerning the supposed arrival of migrants on the island's shores are silenced each time by Nino. Migrants are indeed perceived as a potential threat to a local economy increasingly based on tourism, undermining the deceptive depiction of the island as a quintessential Mediterranean paradise for tourists.

Once again, migrants are perceived as useless residues of our modernity, confined to the extreme borders of our societies, if not excluded from them, suspended in the precarious interstitial space represented, in our case, by the contaminating waters of the Middle Sea. The recovery of the boat's remains previously mentioned hints at the countless shipwrecks occurred in those very same waters, while the absence of migrants' bodies and corpses hints at the collective representation of the migrant as unworthy of being properly identified, buried, mourned. By contrast, the second scene of the movie is particularly significant in this perspective; it portrays the commemoration of the fifth anniversary of Ernesto's son's death, which occurred at sea, with a procession of the family and the local community united in grief. No commemoration instead, for the thousands of migrants who have lost their lives in the very same waters, and whose ironic absence in the movie's fabric resonates as a tacit admonishment.

The film proceeds with a scene depicting the arrival on the island of a ferry boat filled with tourists, likely coming from Northern Italy, who are immediately welcomed and approached by the members of the local community performing their lucrative version of hospitality. Willing to contribute to the household economy, Giulietta decides to rent out the house where she lives with her son Filippo to three young tourists, Maura, and her two travel companions, while temporarily relocating in the garage next door. The image of the boat filled with tourists, as well as their hearty welcome by the local community, strongly contrasts with the arrival of boat

migrants coming from the Southern shores of the Mediterranean who are instead seen as a threatening presence for the island's reputation.

But while the two progressive members of the family – Nino and Giulietta – seem to be completely devoted to the "touristic cause," Ernesto and, at times, Filippo show more compassion towards the wretched migrants. During a fishing trip with his grandson, Ernesto spots a small boat loaded with migrants waving their arms at them and then diving into the sea in an attempt to reach the fishing boat. Obeying the law of the sea, but breaking Italy's restrictive laws on migration, Ernesto and Filippo rescue the migrants; among them, an Ethiopian pregnant woman, Sara, and her child. The high emotional impact of the scene is achieved through the extreme close-ups depicting the tangled arms and hands of both the rescuers and the rescued; the twining of the bodies blurs the distinction between the self and the other, thus conveying the compassion and selflessness of Ernesto and his crew.

Figure 13: *Terraferma*, still 1

Throughout the movie, this blurring of the divide is extended also to the surrounding landscape where the human cohabitates with the non-human, becoming one with the marine environment in

an intertwining of "bodies of film actors, political actors, technological bodies, political bodies, bodies of water."[126]

Once in safety, Ernesto and his crew soon alert the authorities of their sighting, without, however, mentioning the migrants' rescue and thus potentially becoming indictable for abetting illegal immigration. As soon as the boat docks on land, the migrants taken on board by Ernesto disappear in the darkness of the night, while the helpless pregnant woman with her son remains with the two fishermen. Ernesto and Filippo, therefore, fill compelled to extend the duties of hospitality to the two, hosting them in their makeshift adobe in the garage. Giulietta, cornered, is forced to accept the presence of the woman and her son, on condition that the two leave immediately the following morning.

Giulietta's initial attitude towards Sara and her son on the one hand, and towards Maura and her traveling companion on the other are emblematic of a generally ambivalent attitude in the relation to the foreigner. While both the tourist and the migrant locate themselves in the dimension of mobility implicit in most definitions of hospitality, as Jennie Germann Molz and Sarah Gibson remark, "the privilege to be mobile, as well as the privilege to stop and visit, is always filtered through the prism of race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality."[127] This insistence on the mobile prerogative of hospitality paradigms also affects the ways in which the notion of home is constructed, "opening it up literally and figuratively to the intersecting flows and circulations of hosts, guests, buildings and objects that simultaneously challenge, reassert and perform a place as home."[128] Hospitality represents a liminal concept since it entails an essential transgression of the threshold, literally and symbolically speaking. As Majella Sweeney

[126] Past, "Island Hopping," 59-60.
[127] Jennie Germann Molz and Sarah Gibson, eds., *Mobilizing Hospitality: The Ethics of Social Relations in a Mobile World* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 14.
[128] Ibid., 13.

suggests, the threshold to be surpassed and destabilized can be the house entryway, or the border of the nation, or the boundary separating the self from the other.[129]

Through the contact with the stranger/the guest, the concept of home as a static entity is challenged and is instead relocated within a dynamic, relational dimension. In this perspective, the ship represents a particularly poignant locus for migrants, tourists, and the local community, becoming a crucial image in the narrative economy of the movie. For these three groups, the ship can represent not only a means of transportation but also a mobile dwelling, a means of livelihood, a place of hope and evasion, or a non-place of identity suspension. To use Foucault's words, the ship is defined as the "heterotopia par excellence," as "a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea."[130] In *Terraferma*, the entanglement between characters, places, and environments mirrors this dynamic, therefore not only ships and non-human elements but also human protagonists surrender themselves to the greatness of the sea.

This emphasis on mobility affects both the ways in which we conceptualize places and our everyday language. For instance, metaphors of mobility and fluidity in relation to migration are projected on human bodies and places through the symbolic use of images such as flows, waves, floods or tides; hence expressions such as "flow" or "wave of migration" become part of our everyday vocabulary. Along these lines, migrants are depicted as waves and flows often threatening the stability of the hosting nation while at the same time being "at the mercy of tides, waves, shipwreck and drowning [themselves]."[131] It is in this light that the migrants portrayed in *Terraferma* are literally dragged to shore by the morning tide after having survived a shipwreck,

[129] Ibid., 18.
[130] Michel Foucault 1926-1984, "Other Spaces: The Principles of Heterotopia," *Lotus International*, no. 48/49 (October 1985): 9–17.
[131] Molz and Gibson, *Mobilizing Hospitality*, 14.

and, at the same time, are perceived by the local community as a threatening "tidal wave," as foreign bodies that need to be contained. When migrants survive the crossing and reach dry land, as in the case of the ones rescued by Ernesto, they acquire an innate, contaminative potential. Once the biological survival is granted, multiple layers of social and physical debasement perturb these bodies, following different paths and various degrees of inclusion or exclusion according to the label used to categorize them: undocumented migrant, refugee, asylum seeker. Their crossing of the national borders signals the migrants' entrance in a legal/hygienic domain where their contaminating abjection needs to be neutralized and quarantined.

But female bodies in particular trigger additional feelings of fear and contamination. The reproductive migrant, through her generative potential, through her excessive fecundity, threatens the integrity of the nation state by fomenting fears and anxieties about "internal invasion." These bodies are therefore transformed into corporeal border zones and become the target of specific surveillances and border controls. The migrant potential mother is twice abjected: as a maternal body – personifying the border that guarantees other borders – and as a migrant body, disposable human waste living on the edge between being and non-being. This urge to monitor the body of the migrant woman inscribes itself in a broader discourse about control of the female body. It is through the imposition of heteronormative roles, practices, and performativities that the patriarchy's appropriation of the female generative power is achieved. Control, subjugation, and repression over the perceived Otherness of the "wasted lives" of female migrants are the elements on which the state and patriarchal societies find their own sense of identity and legitimation.

Sara, the Ethiopian woman rescued by Ernesto, inscribes herself in the discourses on patriarchal subjugation and on border control anxiety. The woman's body represents a privileged

site of abjection: as an undocumented migrant, as a pregnant woman, and as a woman who was raped by police officers while imprisoned in Libya; the baby that she carries in her womb is the indelible token of the endured abuses. The scene where the woman gives birth to her illegitimate daughter with the help of Giulietta represents one of the climatic moments of the movie. Here, the utmost embodiment of female abjection is performed. Parturition evokes feelings revulsion and attraction as it entailes an evisceration of the female body; before the cutting of the umbilical cord, there is no clear distinction between the mother and the child, the self and the other, the subject and the object.

This all-female (abject) experience establishes a strong bond between Sara and Giulietta breaching the wall of reluctance and mistrust among them. Despite her self-imposed detachment and her skepticism in hosting the two immigrants, Giulietta offers her unconditional help to the woman in need, in an act of female solidarity. After having helped the woman to give birth to her daughter and after having heard the woman's account of the violence endured during her journey, Giulietta unwittingly inscribes their relationship in what Irigaray calls the horizontal dimension of female genealogies residing in the "axis of sisterhood,"[132] in the importance of female horizontal linkages in the fight against patriarchal oppression. In another scene in the movie, Sara will explicitly sanction their bond by stating "Ora sei mia sorella" and will further stress the value of these horizontal female linkages by naming her daughter Giulietta.

Overall, Sara plays a crucial role in *Terraferma*'s narrative and political economy at many levels, for instance by hinting, through the acknowledgment of her Ethiopian national identity, at an implied critique of Italy's postcolonial legacy, as Ethiopia was part of the Italian East Africa between 1936 and 1941. The suggestive scene where Sara traces on the lighted globe

[132] Luisa Muraro, "Female Genealogies," in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carolyn (ed.) Burke, Naomi (ed.) Schor, and Margaret (ed.) Whitford, vii, 428 pp. vols. (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 317–33.

her journey from Addis Ababa (capital of the Italian Ethiopia) to Linosa, passing through Libya and the Mediterranean Sea evokes the phantoms of a thorny past that tends to remain unspoken, rejected by the nation's collective memory as an inconvenient truth. However, as Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo point out, it is extremely important to understand "how the postcolonial, migratory dimension is an essential component of the postcolonial condition in Italy."[133] The bodily presence of the migrant within the Italian social fabric undermines the idea of *Italianità,* still linked to racial and biological definitions of national identity rooted in Italy's repressed colonial legacy.

The destabilization caused by the material crossing of the national threshold on the side of the migrant provokes conflicting reactions of either anxiety or compassion within the hosting community. It is in this perspective that the contrasting and at times contradictory stances embraced by the movie's protagonists have to be understood. While Ernesto and Nino prove to be coherent and faithful to their opposite beliefs, Giulietta and Filippo alternatively engage in antithetical behaviors towards migrants. As already mentioned, despite her initial wariness, Giulietta overcomes her preconceptions establishing a sympathetic bond with Sara. Conversely, Filippo's immature attitude and his impulsive reactions lead him to embrace, each time, incoherent positions: welcoming and philanthropic while rescuing migrants at sea with his grandfather abiding the "law of the sea;" panic-stricken and irrational when beating a group of shipwreck migrants pleading for rescue during a tragic nocturnal boat excursion with Maura.

This latest episode, located towards the end of the film, is particularly remarkable for our discourse on the abjectification of migrants' bodies. Filippo decides to take Maura for a romantic night excursion with a small fishing boat and, once offshore, the *lampara* (a particular kind of boat for fishing by lamplight) is reached by a group of shipwrecked migrants trying to climb in

[133] Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, *Postcolonial Italy*, 10.

it. Filippo's reaction to the "assault" is extremely violent and irrational: he starts beating the men with the oar and when he is finally able to loosen their grip, he flees without even alerting the police. Possibly appealing to the feelings of fear and anxiety propelled by mass media and by local authorities, migrants are here perceived by Filippo as an imminent threat to their safety and, as such, are treated as less-than-humans, rejected and left to their fatal fate.

Figure 14: *Terraferma*, still 2

The sequence produces a high emotional impact, and the visual component is an eloquent tool, able to deliver a strong sense of inquietude and despair. Maura and Filippo are the only two figures that stand out from the otherwise dark background; the low-key lighting coming from the lamplight on the side of the boat limns their outlines creating deep shadows and emphasizing the contrast with the surroundings. The horizon is cast into the darkness together with the shipwrecked migrants desperately swimming towards the boat. The chiaroscuro effect between the foreground and the background evokes the tension that permeate the scene, thus mirroring the characters' feelings of fear and anguish. The extreme close-ups of the migrants' hands grasping the edges of the boat and violently struck by the oar, their bodies emerging and then

disappearing again in the darkness—all instill a strong sense of turmoil and unease in the audience.

The morning after, the numerous tourists crowding the black sand beach are dismayed by the sight of the group of migrants washed up ashore. The idyllic image of the island as a Mediterranean paradise is thus shattered and the truth is unveiled. The sequence proceeds in slow-motion, compelling the viewers to carefully reflect on the poignant images being portrayed. The bodily dimension dominates the scene through consecutive close-ups depicting the almost naked bodies of both the migrants being rescued and the tourists in bathing suits rescuing them: in the contortion of bodies, hands and arms, the skin color becomes the most evident marker of inclusion/exclusion. This moment of deep compassion, with tourists witnessing and assisting the shipwrecked, is immediately overthrown by the arrival of the local police, equipped with protective masks and gloves. The scene inscribes itself in the discourse on hygienic anxieties towards migrants that impose protocols of preventive measures in order to avoid a potential contagion. The establishment of hygienic boundaries between the self and the other, the citizen and the (illegal) migrant responds to what Lauren Berlant defines as "the brutal mode" of "hygienic governmentality" which "involves a ruling bloc's dramatic attempt to maintain its hegemony by asserting that an abject population threatens the common good and must be rigorously governed and monitored by all sectors of society."[134] Following Berlant's theorization of "hygienic governmentality," Imogen Tyler further elaborates on the concept, arguing how one of its most eloquent expressions is exemplified by "the extreme and fetishistic vilification of migrant populations in Europe […] this governance through abjection […] is operational in a

[134] Lauren Gail Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 174.

range of forms and practices of social cleansing."[135] In this particular case, the abject population at issue is embodied by the nonwhite migrant, whose alterity is irrevocably made visible by the color of his skin.

The "cleansing" metaphor is particularly suitable in this context, given the reiterated juxtaposition of images depicting waste, debris, and migrants' bodies. Significant in this direction is an underwater scene located towards the end of the film depicting Filippo diving into the sea; the camera cruises the volcanic seabed and captures moments of trans-species coexistence with fish meandering albeit the leftovers of the human passage: a plastic bag, a passport, a toothbrush, a shoe.

Figure 15: *Terraferma*, still 3

The morning tide, with its flow, brings ashore the polymorphous token of the night's shipwreck: waste, both human and non-human, physically and morally contaminating the "immaculate" nature of the Mediterranean.

The cinematic medium is especially suitable to convey the destabilization of borders and divides at play as well as the tensions implied in the movie's narrative fabric. In particular, the aquatic scenes scattered throughout the film hint at this fluidity of boundaries and at the

[135] Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 38.

continuous shifting of perspective by means of both visual and sound effects. Elena Past points out how "Crialese's underwater scenes feature underwater sound, with literally dampened sound waves travelling with different intensity through the liquid medium […] Things become buoyant, and suddenly relationships between up and down change, as humans and nonhumans alike can travel horizontally, vertically, diagonally through space."[136] This emphasis on fluidity is stressed from the very beginning: *Terraferma*'s opening scene is set under water; it portrays the sea surface shot from below the sea level and then the gradual appearance into the frame of the boat bottom. The muffled, deep sounds reverberate within the sea depths; all around just water, fish, and the trawl net attached to the boat. As already mentioned, the net is a crucial hermeneutical element within the movie, and it is not by chance that in the opening frame its presence becomes so eminent as to occupy half of the frame, symmetrically dividing it in two. But this potential symmetry is destabilized by the fluid nature of the liquid and undulating boundary opposed by water against the permeable wave of the net.

It is no coincidence that the closing scene is constructed as a specular image of the opening, featuring as the privileged protagonist the environment itself, the Sicilian Channel, only viewed from a different perspective. This time, the same boat floating on the Mediterranean waters is viewed from above, in a bird's eye shot, and it depicts Filippo fleeing from Linosa to take Sara and her children to the Sicilian *terraferma*. The ostensible stasis conveyed by the monotone fluctuation of the waves is counterbalanced by Filippo's race against time, the ending scene representing his strenuous attempt to redeem himself, driven by his sense of guilt and by the urge to make things right. In this scene, characters lose their individuality, their subjectivity dissolves in the waters of the surrounding sea.

[136] Past, "Island Hopping," 60.

Figure 16: *Terraferma,* still 4

This dissolution of the human into nature mirrors the vanishing of the isle of Linosa itself from geographical mappings. The small island literally disappears in a previous scene of the movie set in the garage where the family is living with Sara and his children; the room is immersed in complete darkness except for the faint light coming from a lightened globe. Sara traces the trajectory of their journey from Ethiopia to Libya passing through the Sahara Desert, and when she asks the family to show her their current location, Giulietta answers that the island is too small to be depicted on the map. Linosa, exactly like the protagonists in the closing scene, is swallowed by the surrounding sea in the Sicilian Channel, ending up "Off the map," to use Iain Chambers words, "hidden from the cartography of permissible routes."[137] The Sicilian Channel and with it the small islands that spangle its waters, such as Linosa or Lampedusa, are transformed into "the unauthorized itineraries of illicit passage. Here, with its nightly delivery of the desperate and the dead on northern Mediterranean beaches, we are forced to register a contemporary 'middle passage.'"[138] Witnesses and victims of this inhuman trade, Sara and her

[137] Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 68.
[138] Ibid.

son are among the thousands of illegal migrants fleeing from the African continent in search of a better future.

The multimedia installment *Solid Sea* mentioned in the previous section provides compelling insights on the prolific practices of border construction at play both within the Mediterranean and along its shores. As Chambers notes, "the *Solid Sea* project itself considers how the Mediterranean basin is rapidly being transformed and 'solidified' through the impositions of frontiers and controls and the increasing rigidity of identities tied to specific forms of passage: tourist, mercantile, military."[139] What is left out of these standardized cartographies are the routes crossed by human smugglers and "illegal" migrants. Instead of looking at the Mediterranean and its islands as a "mounting barrier," as the outpost of Europe's Fortress, Chambers proposes an "uprooted geography articulated in the diverse currents and complex nodes of both visible and invisible networks"[140] shaped throughout thousands of years of shared history and encounters. Far from any attempt to romanticize the discordant complexity of its nature, the Mediterranean is here embraced in its contaminating potential; it is envisioned as a space of transition, and as such of countless possibilities, not necessarily propitious.

2.4 Screening bodies, screening Lampedusa in Gianfranco Rosi's *Fuocoammare*

The fear of identity contamination posed by the Mediterranean as a network of transit and identity crossbreeding materializes in the proliferation of liquid frontiers sanctioned by European protocols of border control and enacted by its monitoring agencies on the surface of migrants' bodies. In the aftermaths of the 2013 October shipwreck, Italy launched the operation Mare Nostrum, a military-humanitarian operation aimed at monitoring and rescuing migrants in the

[139] Ibid., 67-8.
[140] Ibid., 68.

waters between Italy and Libya. The operation was then replaced in 2014 by Triton, a EU operation with the main purpose of ensuring border control. Both operations essentially translated into a border displacement from the European coasts, to the Mediterranean Sea thus shifting the stage of the rescuing operations from the European dryland, with Lampedusa as its outpost, to the open sea. This shift also minimized the contact between the local population and migrants with most of the transfer operations to the reception center now occurring at night. Gianfranco Rosi's 2016 documentary *Fuocoammare* mirrors this border displacement through its binary structure, which follows two distinct narratives that almost never intersect: on the one side, the extremely ordinary lives of Lampedusa's inhabitants; on the other the rescue operations of migrants at sea, and the identification and sanitization procedures that follow. While the accounts of migration so far analyzed in this chapter testify to the permeability of the boundaries between (non)humans as well as between humans and the natural environment they inhabit, in this last section, I look at how *Fuocoammare* reproduces and strengthens the island's duality by reinstating the borders of the European self in relation to both humans and environment. It does so through a polarized narrative that confines migrants to a state of isolation – almost quarantine – deliberately precluding any potential contact between them and the local community if not through the figure of the doctor, Dr. Pietro Bartolo, who acts as a sanitizing barrier. The close analysis will focus on the narrative of migration and will trace an attentive overview of Lampedusa's abject zones where migrants are treated as biological, medical bodies, and ultimately as disposable human waste.

While the island is in itself a privileged site of cultural and social seclusion, the space reserved to migrants is a stronghold within the island whose militarization is functional to the securitization of the national frontier. The director's choice to represent these two narratives as

mutually exclusive – as well as the insistence on the association between migration and the medical trope – almost seem to ratify the institutional anxiety to preserve the bodily and cultural integrity of the local community (microcosm of European societies) from the threat posed by the contaminating non-European other. Whereas the scenes featuring the local community are mostly characterized by a relational interchange between the human and the surrounding landscape, the scenes that concern migrants' vicissitudes are set in liminal spaces where the suspension of identity and of human recognition is enacted. The result is an alternative vision on the island as a militarized space, a border zone where the connection between human/nature/culture has been supplanted by the disruptive presence of military equipment and by the irruption of border patrol and sanitary protocols**.** The emphasis on the technological dimension contributes to stress the primacy of the military over the natural dimension of the island in relation to the migration narrative.

This insistence is reiterated throughout the documentary in the depiction of the operations of sea patrolling and migrants rescuing and reflects the process of Lampedusa's 'borderization,' its identification as a preemptive frontier, one of the EU hotspots. According to Paolo Cuttita, this process of border production is achieved through specific moves such as "establishing a detention center, concentrating migrants, dispatching border guards, employing patrol boats"[141] in other words through a de facto militarization of the island's territory aimed at reinforcing Fortress Europe. But the process of frontier securitization is also achieved through the imposition of sanitary procedures, hygienic protocols that further sanction paradigms of inclusion/exclusion transforming migrants' bodies into corporeal border-zones.

[141] Paolo Cuttitta, "'Borderizing' the Island Setting and Narratives of the Lampedusa 'Border Play,'" *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 13, no. 2 (May 2014), 196.

Significant in this direction is the scene that introduces migrants on screen. From an extreme long shot on a helicopter patrolling the sea, suspended between the grey tones of a cloudy morning sky and the deep dark grey of the underlying water, the scene cuts to a low angle shot from within the aircraft and, for the first time, the migrants' raft enters the visual field through a close up on the helicopter's onboard monitor. Migrants' appearance is thus mediated through the virtual eye of the screen and it is only over fourteen minutes into the film that they physically make their entrance. The camera catches all their disorientation during the rescuing operation that involves military personnel in protective masks, coveralls, and sanitary gloves. The non-diegetic sound of a radio conversation among the military personnel discussing the triage protocol: there are no alarming sanitary cases on board, with the exception of a few cases of scabies and one person with varicella who will be boarded for last. This emphasis on sanitary measures reflects "the connections between disease, security and borders" which, as Coker and Ingram suggest, "have long histories, [demonstrating] that public health practices at borders are shaped by attempts to secure states, identities and social arrangements."[142] Surveillance, screenings, and preventive practices at the border, therefore, become essential tools in order to preserve the integrity of the body-nation and contain the access of potentially contaminating others.

The urge of "screening migrants," as Yosefa Loshitzky reminds us, "of differentiating between the "indigenous" population and desired and undesired migrants, is still influenced by popular and racist myths according to which immigrants bring disease and pollution to the body

[142] Richard Coker and Alan Ingram, "Passports and Pestilence: Migration, Security and Contemporary Border Control of Infectious Diseases," in *Medicine at the Border: Disease, Globalization and Security, 1850 to the Present*, ed. Alison Bashford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 159.

of the nation (and the continent) and therefore need to be screened and contained."[143] Rosi, through his divisive perspective on Lampedusa, seems to subconsciously condone this approach as a means to safeguard the local community. The emphasis on the screening practices and in general on the medical trope that runs throughout the migration narrative speaks to this urge to surveil the border that divides the 'indigenous' from the 'stranger' and finds its visual actualization in the numerous scenes that portray moments of contact/non-contact between the European self and the non-European other, starting from this very first scene. From now on, the insistence on sanitary measures becomes a prominent feature of this narrative thread and the biological dimension of migrants' bodies is emphasized, frame after frame through the close-ups or extreme close-ups on migrants' body parts. Hands, in particular, acquire a symbolic value as they epitomize the moment of potential contact between the European self and the African other. The two stills below exemplify this insistence and highlight two distinct, but consequential moments of the rescuing operations: the transfer of migrants from the military vessel to the inflatable raft that will take them to the shore, and the migrant's crossing of the national frontier.

Figure 17: *Fuocoammare*, still 1

[143] Yosefa Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

The still on the left depicting the border patrol officer helping the migrant woman moving from one vessel to the other establishes an interesting parallel with the scene from Crialese's *Terraferma* analyzed in the previous section. On one hand, in the fictional narrative the extreme close-ups on hands produces a high emotional impact by drawing on the pitiful collapse of boundaries between the self and the other, the rescuer and the rescued; on the other hand, in the non-fictional account, the boundary is visually and materially reinstated through the barrier of the blue sanitary glove between the officer and the migrant's bare hand, preventing the epidermal contact and therefore a potential contagion. In the prolog to *Contract and Contagion*, Angela Mitropoulos remarks that "contagion, after all, and as with contract, indicates not only a form of generation but also of relation and subjectivity. As in the contractual, contagion implies a kind of contact."[144] Here, the relational component disappears as the direct contact is prevented by the material barrier imposed by the hygienic measures that ultimately construct the migrant as the untouchable other, deprived of subjectivity and marked as abject.

The shot on the right instead refers to the second stage of the operations and depicts the nocturnal arrival of a rescue ship carrying migrants in the pitch-dark dock of Lampedusa's *Porto Vecchio* (Old Port). Once ashore, Dr. Bartolo carefully inspects the hands of each and every migrant; the significance of this moment is visually emphasized through the low-key lightning. Enveloped in the surrounding darkness, migrants are reduced to numbers, becoming anonymous profiles, shadows whose contours and identities are not discernible. What matters at this particular step of the procedure, are not the features of migrants' faces or the stories of their lives but their sanitary conditions. The blue beam of the flashlight torch directed on migrants' hands responds precisely to this purpose: inspecting and assessing the presence of potential markers of

[144] Angela. Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Minor Compositions, 2012), 14.

distress. Once again, the image of the doctor in blue sanitary gloves touching migrants' bare hands hints at the anxiety towards a potential contamination by contact.

The overarching silence that characterizes the scene reverberates throughout the documentary in the lack of communication in both narratives, the narrative on migration in particular, as one of the features of the docufilm is the lack of any voice-over, commentary, and non-diegetic music. Migrants' torn is visually expressed through the extreme close-ups on their faces, their eyes, and the few instances of direct verbal exchange contribute to underscore, by contrast, the lack of interaction between rescuers/officers and migrants as well as the absence of migrants' firsthand accounts. One of the few exceptions to this absence is given by the testimony offered by a Nigerian migrant in the reception center through his mourning rap song:

> This is my testimony. We could no longer stay in Nigeria. Many were dying. Most were bombed, and we fleed from Nigeria. We ran to the desert. […] We stayed for many weeks in Sahara Desert. Many were dying with hunger. Many were drinking their piss. All to survive, we drank our piss to survive, because of the journey of life. […] And we got to Libya and Libya would not pity us, they would not save us because we are Africans, and they locked us in the prisons.[145]

These words provide an isolated account of the journey of migration told from the inside, from the perspective of those who endured extreme violence and suffering at every step of their path. The sordid dormitory of the reception center reverberates with the chaotic chorus of migrants accompanying the mourning rap. The Nigerian migrant begins his song by explicitly defining it as a testimony to commemorate the journey of the survivors and of the countless victims. While retracing the tragic steps of the crossing from Nigeria, to Libya's prisons, passing through the Sahara Desert, the ruthless waters of the Mediterranean and finally Lampedusa's reception center, the abject element emerges from the testimony through the image of migrants drinking

[145] Transcribed from the film soundtrack.

their urine in order to survive in the desert while blinded by hunger and thirst. During their journey, migrants move from one non-place to the other, suspended in a dimension of either transit, while crossing the desert or the Mediterranean, or stillness, while detained in prison or in Lampedusa's reception center. Dehumanized and deprived of their identities and of their status as "persons," migrants are rejected at each step as worthless human refuse.

The emphasis on migrants' body, the insistence on the sanitary protocol conveys the standardized perception of migrants as non-persons deprived of their social, juridical status and reduced to mere biological bodies, or even to corpses. The bodily dimension is further stressed by the presence of haptic elements that permeate the narrative fabric of the docufilm. While the sight is constantly solicited by virtue of the very nature of the visual medium, other senses are singled out in various moments; the sense of touch (or its impossibility), for instance, is recalled by the camera lingering on the intertwining of arms and hands in the rescuing operations, by the doctor's inspection of migrants' hands, by migrants' overlapping of limbs in the cargo in one of the final scenes, or by the manual inspections performed on migrants by police officers. A further layer of sensory perception, the sense of smell, is then activated by the reference to migrants' suffocating smell of fuel, or by the sight of their corpses lying amidst trash in the extremely constrictive space of the boat cargo, recalling the account of the Yohannes cargo provided by Bellu and analyzed earlier in this chapter.

Figure 18: *Fuocoammare*, still 2

But this insistence on migrants' biological bodies is partially balanced out by the testimony provided by Dr. Bartolo, who has visited over two hundred and fifty migrants in his twenty-five years of service on the island. Throughout the docufilm Dr. Bartolo offers his internal perspective on the issue and, through his words, migrants are once again humanized, even when all the efforts fail and what is left of them is nothing but their utmost figurations as corpses. About halfway through the documentary, the doctor opens the doors of his personal archive to Rosi's discrete camera. In the otherwise dark room, the picture of a derelict boat overload with human cargo stands out from a computer's monitor; the image serves as the starting point for Dr. Bartolo heartfelt testimony and as an exemplum for the inhumane conditions reserved to migrants during their journey. As the doctor recalls, most of the eight hundred and forty people crammed in the boat were indeed in precarious health, showing signs of dehydration, hunger, exhaustion, and even of chemical burns by fuel, extremely common among migrants and too often deadly.

In this scene of high emotional impact, Dr. Bartolo states that it is a moral duty of every man to help these people, the word used in Italian is *persone*, literally "persons," human beings with their very own identities, rights, and obligations. With his words and, most of all, with his

actions and humanity, Dr. Bartolo reinscribes migrants in the domain of personhood, reinstating the often-denied human dignity and treating their bodies, and even their cadavers, with profound deference. The doctor's touching testimony reaches its emotional climax with the reference to his experience in performing corpse inspections; this scene introduces the figuration of the migrant corpse as a destabilizing element as it appeals to the juxtaposing feelings of compassion towards the human that once inhabited the lifeless body, and repulsion towards death and its corporeal manifestation. Dr. Bartolo alludes to his post-mortem inspections on children's and pregnant women corpses, and delves into abject, perturbing details that expose the visceral side of the bodily dimension: women who had given birth during shipwrecks with the umbilical cords still attached to their wombs, or the removal of bodily samples such as fingers, ribs, ears after the autopsy. The further outrages to the already vilified bodies of migrants, even after death, translate into hounting nightmares, excruciating images that remain indelible in the doctor's mind.

These reflections on the abject status of migrants' bodies are echoed in the scenes located towards the end of the docufilm portraying the rescuing operations of another *carretta del mare* (makeshift vessel) carrying migrants mostly coming from the Horn of Africa. Although the transfer operations prioritize the migrants in precarious health conditions, the rescuing personnel handles their bodies like deadweights and piles them one on top of the other. Once on the military vessel, the identification protocol is initiated, together with the sanitary measures needed to stabilize the conditions of the dehydrated, fainting, or wounded migrants. The emphasis on the medical trope once again is rendered through the close-ups on migrants' bodies wrapped in thermal blankets and through the extreme close-up on the wounded, bleeding eye of one them. This shot, in particular, provokes a sense of uneasiness, almost disgust, through the image of a

tear mixed with blood that lines the migrant's face; this insistence on bodily fluids, by exposing an internal element on the external surface of the body, hints at the abject dimension to which migrants' bodies are cast.

The persistence of the abject perspective permeates the final stage of the rescuing operations reserved to the recovery of the forty cadavers of migrants, most of which found in the ship cargo. Laying down side by side completely wrapped in black or blue bags secured with ropes, these migrants' corpses, stripped of their identity, so closely recall the anthropomorphic sculptures in Larsen's installation discussed earlier in this chapter; the fictional element of the artistic representation is this time validated by the non-fictional medium of the documentary in all its dehumanizing resonance.

Figure 19: *Fuocoammare*, still 3

The live recording of the scene produces a sense of agitation and features the diegetic sound of the engine noise in the background overlapping with the officers' voices announcing the presence of fifteen more corpses to be retrieved. The presence of the rescue personnel cramming the deck in their white protective masks, coveralls, and sanitary gloves contributes to further underscore the aseptic nature that defines the non-place of the military boat deprived of any

identity or relational residue and instead transformed into a floating medical outpost, mere transit zones of suspension.

In this light, the boats deployed in the migration narrative acquire the features of abject spaces described by Isin and Rygiel as those spaces that "reduce people to abject inexistence,"[146] condemning them to live in "inexistent states of transient performance in which they are made inaudible and invisible."[147] In such spaces, migrants are rendered voiceless, cast in the abject dimension in terms of social and bodily configurations. By perturbing the integrity of both the human body and the body-nation, migrants represent the quintessential "'national abject', the abject 'other' of citizenship"[148] reduced to the condition of wretched social outcasts, confined to the fringes as the embodiment of society's excess.

The cargo of the makeshift vessel depicted in one of the last scenes of the docufilm is the ultimate manifestation of the island's abject spaces, and of migrants' abjectification occurring within its perimeter.

Figure 20: *Fuocoammare,* still 4

[146] Engin F. Isin and Kim Rygiel, "Abject Spaces: Frontiers, Zones, Camps," 185.
[147] Ibid., 198.
[148] Tyler, *Revolting Subjects,* 69.

The sequence opens with a long shot on the empty rusty boat lulled by the sea tide; the commotion that characterized the first sight of the boat filled with migrants is here replaced by a surreal calm, an almost absolute stillness interrupted only by the swishing sound of water. The scene then cuts to an inside shot of the ship cargo and the quietness of the previous frame is abruptly replaced by the amplified noise of the boat's engine and, most importantly, by the destabilizing sight of tens of migrants' corpses piled in the cargo, laying on the floor amid empty plastic bottles, shoes, clothes, lifejackets. In the claustrophobic abject space of the cargo, human corpses are entangled with one another and with the non-human refuse. Rosi's camera exposes to the public eye the abject, unspeakable side of migration through the unsettling images of corpses deprived of their identity and of their humanity. As Roberto Chiesi points out, in this scene Rosi dares to show, with his distinctive respect and accuracy, the obscenity of death.[149] The camera lingers in complete silence over the twine of human limbs and scattered matter exposing the ultimate dehumanization of migrants' corpses. Transformed into human refuse, entangled with other forms of material debris, migrants embody the worthless human excess of our societies, the utmost figuration of 'bare life' that can be killed and disposed of in total impunity[150] at the threshold of Europe.

[149] Roberto Chiesi, "Fuocoammare Di Gianfranco Rosi," *Cineforum* 56, no. 3 (2016): 17.
[150] Joseph Pugliese, "Crisis Heterotopias and Border Zones of the Dead," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 23, no. 5 (October 2009): 672, https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903183627.

CHAPTER 3

(POST)COLONIAL REFUSE: CONTAGIOUS ABJECTION AND WASTEFUL BODIES BETWEEN ROME AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

3.1 Rejected Memories and Abject Bodies: Echoes of the Colonial Legacy in Postcolonial Italy

Figure 21: Dogali Obelisk, Rome

> L'occhio si posa sul monumento con una noncuranza mista a ribrezzo. L'area è sporca, degradata, puzzolente. Lattine di birra, graffiti osceni, involucri del vicino *fast food* la rendono sgradevole alla vista e all'olfatto. […] Intorno alla stele la notte si spaccia, ci si prostituisce, ci si fa di sostanze sempre meno chiare, sempre più ambigue. Di giorno invece è come se il monumento si nascondesse dalla vergogna[151]

Indifference, disgust, dirt, decay, stench, these are the semantic fields that Somali-Italian writer Igiaba Scego associates to the Dogali Obelisk, the monument that commemorates the roughly

[151] Rino Bianchi et al., *Roma negata: percorsi postcoloniali nella città*, Sessismoerazzismo; Sessismoerazzismo. (Roma: Ediesse, 2014), 49.

500 Italian soldiers fallen during the battle of Dogali in 1887, in modern Eritrea, between the troops of the Kingdom of Italy and the Ethiopian Empire.[152] The nineteenth century Roman monument, designed by Italian architect Francesco Azzurri, consists of an Egyptian obelisk and a stone base with a bronze plaque covered in the names of the fallen in the battle. The Dogali Obelisk was erected shortly after the battle and was originally located in front of the old façade of the Termini station, before being moved to its current location in the 1920s.[153] Albeit its original commemorative purpose, the nameless small square in which the obelisk resides, between Via delle Terme di Diocleziano and Viale Luigi Einaudi, is an identitiless non-place of transit, whose historical and identity value has been completely repressed from the collective memory.

The state of neglect that characterizes the obelisk and the surrounding area today is reminiscent of the indifference reserved to the colonial memory of the space. Walking in the gardens that surround the obelisk, the senses are immediately overwhelmed by the extreme decay of the space; probably being used at night as a makeshift bivouac and as a latrine en plein air, this space has now become a dumping site where residues of food, cans, and used condoms are discarded, and where shady deals take place. As if ashamed of the heavy moral burden of this colonial past, Rome has disguised its traces under a coat of urban decay. It is no coincidence then, that the obelisk is located in the area adjacent to the square behind the railway station of Roma Termini, the *Piazza dei Cinquecento* named precisely after the 500 soldiers who lost their lives during the battle of Dogali. As Scego points out "La stele e la vicina Piazza dei

[152] For a reading of the Battle of Dogali see for instance Giuseppe Finaldi, "Italy's Scramble for Africa from Dogali to Adowa," in *Disastro! Disasters in Italy since 1860: Culture, Politics, Society*, ed. John Dickie, John Foot, and Frank Snowden (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale* (Roma: Editori Laterza, 1976).
[153] For an in-depth overview of Italy's colonial monuments, see Krystyna Von Henneberg, "Monuments, Public Space, and the Memory of Empire in Modern Italy." *History & Memory* 16, no. 1 (Spring/Summer2004 2004): 37-85.

Cinquecento sono un grido nel silenzio assordante dell'oblio coloniale."[154] Standing next to each other, these two relics of Italy's colonial past are nothing but colonial phantoms wrapped in a cloud of smog and oblivion.

While some residues of Rome's colonial past lurk underneath a patina of collective neglect, such as in the two instances above, or in the rationalist architecture of the *Cinema Impero* in the district of Torpignattara, others have been completely removed from the city's urban space and, at the same time, from the city's collective memory. *Piazza di Porta Capena* is a perfect example of this repression; the square was once the epicenter of Italy's colonial feasts hosting the Axum Obelisk, brought to Rome by Mussolini in 1937, paraded as an emblem of Italy's imperial project, and placed in front of the Ministry of the Colonies, now the FAO building. After decades of protests and negotiation, the obelisk was returned to Ethiopia in 2005, finally adhering to the original peace agreement stipulated in 1947. At present, *Piazza di Porta Capena* is a mere traffic junction deprived of any testimony of its colonial past; at its center, instead, rise two white columns with a plaque in memory of the victims of 9/11. No reference to the colonial memory of the place, wiped out of the collective imagery.

Just as the material traces of Italy's colonial past resurface in Rome's urban space despite the attempted removal from the national memory, the immaterial traces of the colonial rhetoric are echoed in Italy's current perception of migrant communities and in their inclusion/exclusion from the country's social fabric. This chapter seeks to address how colonial tropes such as assumptions of moral and biological superiority as well as contamination anxieties are enacted on postcolonial women's bodies and are embraced in order to either assert or subvert patriarchal paradigms of domination. Through Igiaba Scego's novels, *Rhoda* (2004), *Oltre Babilonia*

[154] Scego in Bianchi et al., *Roma negata,* 69.

(2008),[155] *Adua* (2015), the chapter addresses instances of moral and physical corruption rooted in the colonial rhetoric of contamination by establishing elements of continuity and rupture with reference to the Italian colonial and postcolonial experiences.

Second-generation writers like Igiaba Scego and Cristina Ali Farah, through their works and activism, contribute to this process of identity negotiation "by remapping urban spaces as loci of cultural signification in contemporary lives and questioning traditional articulations of power in urban environments."[156] Igiaba Scego's writings, in particular, all primarily set in Rome, mirror the ways in which migrant communities, mostly those coming from the ex-colonies, strive to negotiate their identities, also in relation to the urban space, in the attempt of reproducing social and spatial dynamics of the lost home country ironically in spaces that were once conceived to celebrate Italy's colonial feats. Through its colonial and postcolonial sites, the city's landscape itself becomes a living text that embodies narratives of social, environmental, and power relations.

In Scego's texts, Rome's urban space is not mere backdrop for the events to take place but it mirrors the abject dimension to which the postcolonial protagonists of the narrations are confined: the widespread urban decay is the objective correlative for the characters' physical and psychological degradation, both neglected and rejected by the society around them. Their acceptance/rejection of normative paradigms of inclusion find a parallel in the ways they experience Rome's urban space which is perceived as either familiar or completely foreign. The new urban topography of postcolonial Rome lies on the relics of its rejected colonial past. In *Adua*, for instance, the protagonist describes the area surrounding Termini station saying: "Dovevo attraversare Piazza dei Cinquecento per raggiungere quella strana Somalia che era

[155] Igiaba Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, Mele Donzelli; Mele Donzelli. (Roma: Donzelli, 2008).
[156] Caterina Romeo, "Remapping Cityscapes: Postcolonial Diasporas and Representations of Urban Space in Contemporary Italian Literature," *Semestrale Di Studi e Ricerche Di Geografia* XXVII, no. 2 (2015): 101–11.

cresciuta nelle retrovie di quel quartiere ferroviario."[157] The square becomes entryway to the Somali neighborhood developed around a space scattered with colonial reminiscences. This area embodies the contamination between colonial past and postcolonial present, as Rome's multicultural social fabric has appropriated the space and the areas around it in unexpected ways, transforming them into gathering places for the city's "post-colonial communities." At the same time, however, in Scego's narratives, postcolonial bodies and cityscapes are thematized as sites of resistance and identity negotiations via abjection.

This chapter focuses on the layers of social as well as physical abjection inscribed on these "postcolonial bodies" as they are represented in Igiaba Scego's *Rhoda, Oltre Babilonia* and *Adua*. The body of the postcolonial subject and, in particular, the female body, represents the site of multidirectional struggles where issues of gender, sexuality, race, and agency intersect, undermining the configuration of the self in terms of both identity and belonging. In the context of diaspora, these bodies are constructed as "strange bodies," to borrow Sara Ahmed's terms, being perceived as inherently abject and unassimilable; they are the "effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities."[158] In other words, the perception of their essential alterity is filtered through "histories of determination"[159] that acknowledge them as a threat to the integrity of the community associating them with filth, defilement, and contamination. From *Rhoda* to *Oltre Babilonia*, or *Adua*, Scego's protagonists are women who struggle to accept their own identity and who, to affirm a certain degree of agency, are compelled to embrace abject paths and subversive behaviors. Throughout the novels analyzed in the current chapter, the essential abjection of female (post)colonial bodies presents itself as a pressing feature: hanging in the

[157] Scego, *Adua*, 169.
[158] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London; Routledge, 2000).
[159] Ibid., 51.

precarious balance between pure and impure, life and death, women's bodies become privileged sites for the ultimate enactment of abjectifying practices and representations.

Scego's 2004 *Rhoda* introduces tropes, identity claims, but also narrative devices that find an echo throughout the author's literary production, as we will see in the following pages. *Rhoda* is a fragmented polyphonic narration told by many voices wrought with the overall laceration of the woman's body. It is the story of one woman, one body and the endless labels attached to her: Rhoda the prostitute, the sister, the sinner, the Muslim, the lesbian. The protagonist is suspended in the liminal condition of her displaced identity, in her circular meandering between Mogadishu, Rome, London, Rome, Naples and, again, Mogadishu. After the loss of their parents, at the outbreak of the Somalian civil war in 1991, Rhoda and her younger sister Aisha move to Rome where their aunt Barni takes care of them. Rhoda is the symbol of the Somali woman caught in-between tradition and the desire for a higher degree of agency, at the same time fighting for and against the pressure of religious and cultural norms. Her body becomes the token of her cultural heritage; it is concretely marked through the practice of infibulation, perceived by Rhoda as an irreversible mutilation, if not negation, of her own sexuality. Furthermore, her unexpected affection for an older woman, Gianna, results into an unforeseen and inconceivable turn, representing a threat to the dogma of heteronormativity to which Rhoda feels the need to comply. The urge to suppress her "unacceptable" sexual drive drags her into a self-destructive spiral that leads to a progressive deterioration of her body via prostitution, illness via sexual contagion, and ultimately death.

A similar narrative structure, as well as a similar emphasis on the representation of non-normative sexualities and of subaltern female bodies are at the core of *Oltre Babilonia.* This choral novel tells the story of two mothers and two daughters whose destinies are connected by a

city, Rome, and by a Somali man, Elias, lover of Miranda, husband of Maryam and father of Mar and Zuhra. *Oltre Babilonia* is a story of social as well as familiar rejection, where the two sisters are called to fight day by day with their stratified identities, hybrid languages, fatherless lives, detached mothers and with the color of their skins, indelible marker of their irreducible alterity. In the novel, family stories intersect with the tragedy of Somali's history creating scars that seep through the bodies of the many characters involved in the narration. The two sisters, are invested of multiple layers of abjection in relation to race, illness, and sexuality; rape, menstrual blood, bulimia, abortion, and physical violence scar their bodies, as well as their souls. Mar, for instance, blurs clear cut boundaries of race and gender identifications: she is neither white nor entirely black, nor does she fit into the binary imperative of heteronormativity. Zuhra, instead, is condemned to live with the burden of the extreme bodily violation endured during her childhood, as she was repeatedly raped by the custodian of the boarding school where her mother had left her after having been abandoned by Elias. This episode will forever scar her, affecting her way of (non)experiencing her own sexuality and her relationship with her body.

Scego's insistence on the abject perspective within the matrix of race, gender, and sexuality is reiterated in her latest novel *Adua*, which is a two-voice narration told by the same name protagonist and her father Zoppe. The novel revolves around the vicissitudes of the middle-aged Somali woman who lives in Rome, alternating references to her present as a disillusioned woman and wife of a young Somali immigrant and to her turbulent past as a naïve Somali young girl who moved to Italy in the 70s with the illusion of a carrier as a movie star. The connection with Italy's colonial past is made explicit by the author from the very title and is constantly echoed throughout the narration as the woman is named after the first defeat of Italy's

colonialist attempts, the battle of Adwa.[160] But Italy's colonial past constantly resurfaces throughout the text, for instance through Zoppe's accounts of his family and of his past as interpreter during the Fascist regime or, most importantly, through the reference to colonial tropes of racial superiority and the representation of black women as sexually prurient. Almost in didactic terms, Scego tackles these issues focusing on themes and representations that she holds dear: the Somali diaspora in Rome, the exoticization of black women's bodies, female genital mutilations.

The postcolonial novels analyzed serve as a starting point to explore the abjectigying practices and attitudes to which the postcolonial female body is exposed, being perceived as inherently impure by both the (post)colonial apparatus – and its obsession with race, contamination – and the patriarchal society of belonging. In her texts, for instance, Igiaba Scego engages with this supposedly impurity of women's bodies by referring to the practice of infibulation. The controversial practice of Female Genital Mutilations, of which infibulation is one example, is rooted in religious/popular beliefs and is anchored to essentialized patriarchal paradigms of gender roles' construction. When displaced, as a consequence of transnational migrations, the infibulated body becomes the emblem of a perturbing otherness that at the same time repels and attracts and is thus unavoidably abjectified by the Western reifying gaze. On the one hand, the infibulated body can be perceived as an abnormal, repugnant deformation, hence becoming the stigma of an irreducible, primordial alterity. On the other hand, the same body, with its staggering potential and its exotic, ancestral allure can ignite primitive and unspeakable fantasies in the eyes of the European "pioneer," evoking colonial reminiscences of unexplored lands and bodies to be possessed and subjugated.

[160] For details about Italy's defeat during the Battle of Adwa see Angelo Del Boca et al., *Adua: le ragioni di una sconfitta* (Roma: Laterza, 1998).

In tracing the continuities and ruptures between Italy's colonial past and its postcolonial present, the chapter also looks at the persistence of colonial anxieties of racial and bodily contaminations. The threat of global pandemics via contact with supposedly contaminated Others – read migrants – is echoed every day by mass media across Europe. In these instances, the biological/medical trope is instrumental in promoting and legitimizing political acts of exclusion and containment. These anxieties bring back memories that date back to Fascist Italy, when the promulgation of racial laws against interracial unions between colonizers and colonized was dictated by the fear of sexual contamination that could have caused the consequent phisical and moral degradation of the 'razza italica.' Biological and cultural assumptions of superiority, based on eugenic studies, were also at the core of fascist obsessions with physical as well as social hygiene: the body of the individual was hence located outside of the natural and private spheres and relocated within the public dimension of the nation.[161] As remarked by Negri and Hardt, the fear of contagion has outlived the decolonizing process and, in the contemporary transnational perspective, has become an integral part of globalization's consciousness evoking colonial tropes towards the colonized including obsessions with hygiene, or the lack of it, and sexual prurience.[162]

3.2 Wasteful Bodies: Exposing the Abject in Igiaba Scego's Writings

In her essay "Theorizing Waste," Rachel Ariss argues against the confinement of "women's embodiment to a unidimensional sphere of material waste and production;"[163] Ariss challenges the medical construction of women's reproductive bodies as either productive, when

[161] Giuliani, "Afterword," 73.
[162] Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 135-36.
[163] Rachel Ariss, "Theorizing Waste in Abortion and Fetal Ovarian Tissue Use," *Canadian Journal of Women & the Law* 15, no. 2 (December 2003): 281.

successfully carrying out a pregnancy and giving birth, or wasteful, when reproduction "fails" resulting in the discharge of worthless reproductive tissue or, even worse, fetal tissue. Drawing on Emily Martin's analysis of reproduction,[164] Ariss stands against the derogatory language of waste and decay embraced by the medical community to refer to women's ovarian tissue or to fetal tissue. This language shapes the common perception of women's bodies as intrinsically wasteful; in the juxtaposing logic that sees women's bodies as either productive or wasteful, any deviance to the reproductive norm, and therefore its tangible by-product, is seen as degenerate, worthless.

Igiaba Scego's *Oltre Babilonia* offers remarkable insights on the issue through its emphasis on female bodies, bodily fluids, and abortion, especially in relation to women's reproductive bodies. The abject element makes its appearance very early in the narration – as early as in its prologue – with Zuhra's long digression on bodily fluids, menstrual blood in particular. In *Powers of Horrors*, Kristeva includes corporeal wastes among the utmost threats to the integrity of the symbolic order,[165] where menstrual blood "stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference. […] menstrual blood signifies sexual difference."[166] It is precisely to unavoidably define herself as a woman that Zuhra starts her digression on menstruations, acknowledging it as a marker of her womanliness. The insistence on the issue is achieved also with a terminological reflection on menstruation, usually referred to with euphemisms or convoluted metaphors[167] in

[164] See Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction: With a New Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).
[165] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 70.
[166] Ibid.
[167] The passage mentions Italian expressions such as "sono indisposta," "ciclo," "le mie cose" "marchese," but also "Godude" in Somali, "aunt Flo, aunt Rosie, aunt Martha" in the US, "vampiritos" in Mexico or "mirtillo rosso" in

the attempt to diminish its abject, perturbing charge. In the passage instead, Zuhra states: "A me piace chiamarle così, mestruazioni. È un termine medico, normale, igienico. Ma la gente ti guarda male se le chiami con il loro nome vero, autentico. A me piace, mi sembra un atto di sovversione pura, chiamarle così."[168] The simple act of uttering the word menstruation (from the Latin *menstrum*, literally once a month) becomes an act of pure subversion as it exposes the unspeakable side of femininity in its most visceral form.

But while on the symbolic level Zuhra embraces this abject side of her femininity, she is then repelled by the idea of her menstrual blood being visibly exposed, as, because of its destabilizing potential, it must be concealed: "Io sono sempre più umida. Il pantalone è fottuto. Ti immagini se arrivasse ora il pellegrino? Mi vedrebbe così immersa nel mio sangue mestruale. Immersa nei liquidi, umida, appiccicaticcia, sudata. Io vedo solo grigio, però. Il mio sangue mestruale sgorga, ma io non lo vedo bello e rosso come tutte."[169] The range of images used to describe Zuhra's state, soaked in her bodily fluids, humid, and sticky, evoke a sense of transgression of bodily boundaries where bodily secretions, blood and sweat, contribute to define her as abject, polluted, untouchable; as if, during menstruation, the female body literally liquefied, defying the borders of the self and threatening its dissolution.

The menstruated body is perceived as an unclean body and produces feelings of filth and shame, with its bodily fluids uncontrollably exceeding the borders of the body, potentially exposing the visceral self to the outside world, it is viewed "with disgust and the powers of contaminating."[170] As Amy Russel points out: "the idea that blood, which is understood as life-

---

Finland to underline ways in which all over the world the word menstruation is an unspeakable word that needs to be replaced by more neutral and less unsettling images.

[168] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 16.

[169] Ibid., 20.

[170] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 206.

giving and necessarily internal for life to exist, to be experienced externally, appears to invert understandings of the human body and instils a sense of pollution."[171] Menstruation must be concealed and, with it, all of its markers such as bloodstains, tampons, pads and their outlines on clothes must be hidden, rendered invisible in order for the menstruating woman to be perceived as "normal," non-deviant and to fit the idea of hygienic, proper body.[172] Still, despite posing a threat to the bodily integrity of the subject, menstruation represents an embodiment of the self and, as such, it cannot be completely rejected, expelled;[173] for this reason, it needs instead to be normalized through a strict menstrual etiquette that defines the codes of acceptability, and self-discipline.[174] A constant vigilance over the menstruating female body is of paramount importance to maintain the security and cleanness of the body. As Marsha Rosengarten argues,

> Her very (human) being stained, a site of embarrassment, a sight/site not to be seen. The menstruating female in is not merely in possession of a body that produces 'dirt' but, if unable to exercise constraint—a signifier of agency—she is potentially out of place herself. If she cannot manage and thereby contain this 'essential' aspect of her being, she is not an acceptable social being[175]

The menstruating woman can only claim her status and viability as a subject if she succeeds in self-containing her body by securing the leakage "through the refusal of menstrual blood as that which exceeds the boundary assumed to constitute the self."[176]

---

[171] Amy M. Russell, "Embodiment and Abjection: Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation," *Body & Society* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 90-1, https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X12462251.
[172] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 111.
[173] J. Brooks Bouson, *Embodied Shame: Uncovering Female Shame in Contemporary Women's Writings* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 4.
[174] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, 112.
[175] Marsha Rosengarten, "Thinking Menstrual Blood," *Australian Feminist Studies* 15, no. 31 (March 2000): 92.
[176] Ibid., 94.

It is no coincidence then, that Zuhra starts menstruating in a public space; caught by surprise, without pads or tampons in her purse, the "threat of being 'outed' as menstruator"[177] forces her to ask for help to a stranger woman standing by and to seek immediate refuge in the closest public restroom, the one inside the Ara Pacis museum, so as to adhere to the menstrual etiquette. At this point, it is worth mentioning Zuhra's surprise in entering this unexpectedly clean space, as public restrooms are usually spaces of extreme filth: "Sono andata nel bagno dell'Ara Pacis. È pulito. Non è malaccio. I bagni pubblici sono sempre veri inferni terrestri. Fango, liquidi viscerali, escrementi mai levati, sporcizie assortite. Questo aveva solo un vago odore di usato."[178] The explicit reference to excrements, visceral fluids, and waste hints at the realm of abjection; as Kristeva argues "excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, the society threatened by its outside, life by death."[179] But while excrements, like other bodily wastes such as urine, are excreted by our bodies as worthless excess, menstruations have been constructed in medical terms as a failure of the reproductive body, as "menstrual blood is that which the body does not need *because* it has not produced the object for which the lining of the uterus is intended."[180]

Following Emily Martin's analysis of medical texts, while the non-fecundated female body and the repulsive excess of its bodily fluids are described in diminishing medical terms as wasteful, the depiction of male reproductive bodies and the production/excretion of semen are always referred to in positive terms. Even the overproduction of sperm is celebrated as a token of this body's exemplarity and efficiency, although it is medically-acknowledged that "only about

[177] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, 113.
[178] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 21.
[179] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 71.
[180] Rosengarten, "Thinking Menstrual Blood," 96-7.

one out of 100 billion sperm ever makes it to fertilize an egg."[181] What makes the difference, when comparing the excretion of bodily fluids connected to either male or female reproductive systems is the ability to control their secretion. Since the excretion of menstrual blood is an uncontrollable process, the menstruating female body is perceived as a "site of diminished agency"[182] and therefore of unviable subjectivity. The uncontrollable breach of bodily borders from within caused by menstruations sanctions female bodies as unruly, abject, as a threat to the integrity of the self. And it is precisely by virtue of a supposedly complete control over the secretion of semen that the bodily borders of male subjects are perceived as clean, thus preserving the integrity of the male self. But what happens when the male subject is unable to exert agency over his body, failing for instance to control his erection/ejaculation? Despite this lack of control may undermine the adherence to a given code of masculinity, as argued by Rosengarten, this risk cannot be compared to the constant threat posed by the very materiality of menstrual blood whose nature as an uncontrollable seepage of bodily wastes defines the menstruating body as a site of abjection.[183]

In her writings, Scego repeatedly alludes to male semen, systematically connecting it to episodes of bodily violations, as if to underscore the abject potential embedded in male bodily fluids. Scego challenges the positive representation of male semen as an indicator of the efficiency and vigor of the male body. In doing so, the author also problematizes Kristeva's concept of abjection according to which tears and semen, although technically bodily wastes, are not characterized by the same abject charge as excrements or menstruations since they do not evoke filth and pollution.[184] In Scego's accounts, the abject dimension of male semen is

[181] Martin, *The Woman in the Body*, 48.
[182] Rosengarten, "Thinking Menstrual Blood," 99.
[183] Ibid., 100.
[184] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 71.

reinstated as all references to ejaculation are connected to bodily violations, and as semen is represented in its repulsive materiality: in the context of a sexual abuse, male bodily fluids are expelled from a body and poured into (or over) another body that functions as a passive receptacle. In *Oltre Babilonia,* for instance, this materiality is evoked by the reference to the haptic dimension, in particular the sense of taste, with the allusion to the acrid taste left by the abuser's semen: "Mi lavavo le cosce con il sapone ogni giorno, meticolosamente. E quel sapore acre? Non si toglieva dalla bocca neppure con mille dentifrici."[185] This disgusting aftertaste needs to be cleansed, its traces thoroughly removed, as if getting rid of them could obliterate the violation itself.

In her latest novel *Adua*, Scego refers to semen in similar terms: "Un rivolo melmoso cola misero sul pavimento. […] Vorrei un po' d'acqua per levare quel sapore acre dalla bocca,"[186] the same reference to the acrid taste, the same need to get rid of it, although in a less compulsive urge as this time the woman is consciously, yet disgustedly, acquiescent in the intercourse. Nevertheless, this awareness does not diminish the abject charge of this moment and its subjugating power; Adua feels compelled to submit herself and pander to the obscene requests of the tycoon by virtue of a twofold subjugating drive: that imposed by the patriarchal asymmetric structure in which she is embedded, and that sanctioned by the evocation of the equally asymmetric axis colonizer/colonized. This master/subaltern power dynamic, however, is a paradoxical one, as the woman is rendered subaltern by an impotent man; the latter is unable to properly hold his erection, leaving Adua at the same time astonished and disgusted. The tycoon's ineptitude, his inability to control his bodily performance, poses a threat to his virility and to his integrity as a subject, yet he is still able to maintain his control over Adua and to exert his

[185] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 11.
[186] Scego, *Adua*, 137.

abjectifying agency over her body. The abject dimension is evoked also through the terms chosen by Scego to describe the bodily fluid, the slimy liquid meagerly trickling on the ground is a disturbing, disgusting image that, once again, invokes sensorial perceptions thus adding, through its materiality, a further layer of abjection to the episode.

But sexual abuses and bodily violations are not a limited to women's bodies, and so is the abjectifying potential of these acts. Scego address the abjection of male bodies not only by referring to male bodily fluids, but also, and especially, by referring to an episode of male-male rape. In another passage of *Oltre Babilonia*, the author alludes again to semen though this time referring to the sexual abuse endured by Majid, Elias' father, at the hands of an Italian fascist soldier: "Sentiva sempre quel caldo orrendo. Quel bagnato. Quella schiuma dentro di sé. Sentiva il battere ritmico del pene del fascista dentro di lui. Poi sentiva vergogna. Sentiva tutta la sua virilità perdersi nell'oscenità di quel momento."[187] Majid is physically cast into abjection: the integrity of the body is compromised by the contaminating flow of bodily wastes that exceed the borders of the violating self and infringe the margins of the violated abject. But, through penetration, Majid is abjectified also with regards to his virility since, as Butler remarks, "the impenetrability of the masculine [is experienced] as a kind of panic, a panic over becoming 'like' her, effeminized."[188] Heteronormativity sanctions the man as the penetrator, not the penetrated, and the transgression of this dogma entails an inherent effiminization, a symbolic castration of the penetrated male body. In this case, being Majid a colonized Somali man, male rape enacts the "'emasculation' of the black male"[189] and serves as a further tool of subjugation, thus preserving

[187] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 159.
[188] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 51.
[189] Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 131.

and executing the 'hegemonic masculinity of the colonizer over the colonized.[190] Moreover, as Darieck Scott remarks, "the ejaculate […] is nonproductive, non-generative because it is not used to produce a pregnancy, and insofar as it is humiliating because it underlines, enforces, substantiates the black man's lack of status as a 'man.'"[191] Not only, as previously argued, semen is in itself an embodiment of abjection, but in instances of sexual abuse it becomes an abjectifying tool through which the violator validates his abuse on the violated body.

As shown so far, the depiction of bodily refuse resonates throughout Scego's writing in its various manifestations, provocatively portraying bodies as wasteful. The episode around Mar's abortion, in *Oltre Babilonia*, inscribes itself in this discourse as the death of an aborted fetus is often seen as "especially wasteful"[192] as opposed to the living fetus embodying hope and potential. In "Theorizing Waste," Rachel Ariss argues that "in a woman's refusal to create a baby, abortion can be read (via Kristeva) as a reassertion of bodily borders that have been disrupted. [...] If abortion is seen as abjection, it is one route through which fetal tissue can come to be seen as waste—it is out of a body and, as abjected, waste."[193] The aborted fetus is made waste as it is rejected by the aborting woman as a threat to the integrity of the self; at the same time abortion is perceived by many as a wasted opportunity and the aborting woman is stigmatized for disrupting the norm that compulsively sees female bodies as reproductive bodies. Scego's words on the issue are particularly significant in this direction as the fetus is literally vomited by Mar, in an act of almost violent expulsion: "Del suo bambino. Si ricordava. Di averlo vomitato. Di quel macchinario sopra di lei. Era un'ossessione."[194]

---

[190] Aliraza Javaid, "Feminism, Masculinity and Male Rape: Bringing Male Rape 'out of the Closet,'" *Journal of Gender Studies* 25, no. 3 (May 2016): 284, https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2014.959479.
[191] Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 146.
[192] Ariss, "Theorizing Waste," 269.
[193] Ibid., 270.
[194] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 330.

But in this account on abortion, Scego adds one more disturbing element, as the decision to abort the fetus is imposed on Mar by her partner Patricia. If we accept abortion as the right of the self to reinstate the borders of the body and of the subject, and therefore its integrity, by reacquiring control over one's own body, isn't this imposition a further threat to self-assertion? Referring to her inability to exert control over her body, Mar states: "Tutti volevano avere l'ultima parola sul mio corpo, sul bambino. Mar aspettava di vedere il vincitore della contesa. Attendeva il suo futuro con fastidiosa indolenza;"[195] Scego constructs Mar as a passive spectator of her own destiny, as a subaltern unable to speak for herself. In this account, abortion fails to reinstate the integrity of the subject and instead casts the woman into a deeper abject dimension by virtue of her inability to exert control over the margins of her own body, her own selfhood, her own life.

But this is not the only instance in the novel in which Scego refers to the act of vomiting, as it is in fact reiterated throughout *Oltre Babilonia* and is invoked to address the inability to contain the self – from its use to refer to the expulsion of the aborted fetus, to its association to eating disorders, bulimia in this particular case. In the very first chapter of *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines food loathing as the most elementary form of abjection.[196] Compared to other eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia is particularly abjectifying and threatening to the integrity of the self as it produces a compulsive alternation between binging and purging that shatters any illusion of bodily control and self-containment.[197] In a dualistic conceptualization, the anorexic body is perceived as a pure body whose purity derives from the total control of the mind over the body; bulimia, instead, embodies the threat to this purity and the bulimic body is

[195] Ibid., 32.
[196] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.
[197] Sarah Squire, "Anorexia and Bulimia: Purity and Danger," *Australian Feminist Studies* 18, no. 40 (March 2003): 23.

conceived as messy, disruptive, out of control[198] Furthermore, as Sarah Squire points out in her essay *Anorexia and Bulimia*, "the threatening nature of bulimia can be located in the fluidity (of the body's boundary, of the contours of the self) produced by the practice of bulimia, a fluidity that disgusts and threatens not only because it is fluid but because it is a fluid that seeps and clings."[199] In *Oltre Babilonia,* Zuhra experiences this primordial abjection of food loathing although bulimia is referred to as a past condition. Despite having recovered from the eating disorder, however, the impulse to vomit reopens old wounds for Zuhra: "mi viene da vomitare, ma trattengo qualsiasi cosa si agiti dentro di me. Una ex bulimica si farebbe conficcare i chiodi nel ventre pur di non vomitare di nuovo. […] il cesso non avrà più la soddisfazione di vedere il mio cibo maciullato dai succhi gastrici."[200] Once having regained control over her body and therefore having re-established the borders of the self, Zuhra is terrorized by the threat posed by the impulse to vomit. Even the reference to gastric juices and their ability to mangle food and transform it into sludgy bodily waste is enough to perturb Zuhra as they hint at the clingy, seeping fluidity of bulimia, and therefore at its abjectifying potential over her body.

3.3 Body-Refuse: Contaminating Female Bodies and Colonial Obsessions

As seen thus far, Scego's novels are characterized by a constant reference to the categories of race, gender, sexuality that unavoidably intersect, dialoguing with each other and establishing a breeding ground for further considerations on representations of race and blackness.[201] In *Rhoda* and *Adua*, for instance, relics of the eroticized image of the colonial

[198] Ibid., 22.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 127.
[201] See Lombardi-Diop, Cristina, and Romeo, Caterina. "Paradigms of Postcoloniality in Contemporary Italy" in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity, e*d. Cristina Lombardi-Diop, and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 13.

Black Venus, with her exotic sexuality, echo the ways in which both women are perceived by Italian society.[202] The colonial rhetoric exemplified the representation of the indigenous woman as *Venere nera*; Sandra Ponzanesi remarks how this image

> became a forceful trope for expressing the contaminated and yet highly asymmetrical relationship between the ruler and the ruled. It allegorically rendered and vindicated the position of the white male colonizers expanding their authority and property over the virgin soil of the imperial territory, of which the black Venus is the quintessential emblem of the other, both in racial and in sexual terms.[203]

In Scego's latest novel, the protagonist Adua is explicitly constructed to fit the representation of the colonial Black Venus as portrayed in the 1970's "*filone erotico esotico* (exotic soft-core cinematic cycle.)"[204] As Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto points out referring to Luigi Scattini's Blaxploitation trilogy, this genre "can be linked to American Blaxploitation film because of its exploitation of nineteenth – and early twentieth-century representations of the colonial Black Venus."[205] The exoticization of the black female body perpetrated through 1970's cinematic representations is a direct successor of the late nineteenth century representations of the colonial Black Venus. In the Italian context, these representations circulated widely through illustrated pamphlets depicting nude or seminude Black Venuses "whose exotic sensuality had been historically portrayed alongside a sense of danger and fear of cannibalism."[206]

It is precisely with this frame of reference in mind that Scego constructs Adua's character. Blinded by the desire to become a movie star like her idol Marilyn Monroe, Adua soon

---

[202] See Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto, "Blaxploitation Italian Style: Exhuming and Consuming the Colonial Black Venus in 1970's Cinema in Italy," in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, 191-203, eds. Cristina Lombardi-Diop, and Caterina Romeo, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 191.
[203] Ponzanesi, Sandra, "Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices," in *Italian Colonialism. Legacies and Memories*, eds. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 166.
[204] Giuliani, *Bianco e Nero*, 191.
[205] Ibid., 192.
[206] Ibid., 191.

realizes that international fame comes at a very high price for a young Somali woman. In the only film she ever took part in, *Femmina Somala,* Adua's character echoes erotic icons such as Zeudi Araya in *La ragazza dalla pelle di luna* as it is clearly noticeable in her description of one of the movie's scenes: "Sono nuda…/Con la sabbia che mi ricopre come oro…Issata su un albero in attesa di essere divorata… / […] Sdraiata su una pelle di vacca mi mostro oscenamente a un mondo ignaro."[207] This passage vividly recalls the iconic image of Zeudi Araya lying naked with her hands covering her breasts, her body dusted with sand. Scego draws fully from a range of colonial tropes to point at their persistence in the Italian imagery well beyond the end of the colonial experience.

The Black Venus is a destabilizing – even abject – figure as it embodies at once unutterable desires, sexual fantasies and "primordial fear[s] of the Other."[208] This ambivalence is discernible also in Scego's writings: while in *Adua* the reference to the Black Venus recalls ideas of sexual prurience and exotic eroticism, in *Rhoda* it is associated with a primordial abject alterity and fears of contamination. In this perspective, despite being inscribed in the Italian social fabric through a process of cultural assimilation, Rhoda is ultimately cast out of it by virtue of her skin color, which is perceived as an unavoidable mark of otherness, as a synonym of moral and sexual perdition and physical abnormality. Her body becomes an escapism for sexual fantasies, an empty canvas on which to project unutterable desires and perversions: "Per tutta la notte fui alla mercé di Tommaso e delle sue voglie inconfessate. […] I primi mesi fui solamente il suo giocattolo personale."[209] Moreover, as previously mentioned, the color of

207 Scego, *Adua*, 130.
208 Sandra Ponzanesi, "Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices," in Italian Colonialism: Legacies and Memories, ed. Jaqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 176.
209 Scego, *Rhoda*, sec. 4. "All night long, I was at the mercy of Thomas and his unacknowledged desires. [...] For the first few months I was only his personal toy."

Rhoda's skin is perceived as synonym of sexual prurience, and her body is subjected to a further degree of objectification: "E tutti pensavano che con una donna nera si poteva fare di tutto."[210] The woman becomes the receptacle for the white man's transgressions, transforming herself into a "*Hidra del sesso*" a monstrous and repelling figure out of place and out of time. This mythological reference is particularly significant for the further developments of the woman's bodily "transfiguration" and of her contaminative potential, as the Lernaean Hydra was an ancient monster with reptilian traits whose blood was so virulent that even its traces were lethal.

The reference to the infecting potential of the postcolonial female body explicitly recalls the colonial fear of sexual contamination. It is exactly in response to this anxiety and the consequent phisical and moral degradation of the 'razza italica' that could derive from it, that Fascist Italy promulgated racial laws against interracial unions between colonizers and colonized based on eugenic studies and Fascist obsessions with hygiene. In this light, medicalization and surveillance practices in the colonial context "implicarono la stigmatizzazione della nerezza, associata all'impurità, alla sporcizia, alla malattia ed al contagio."[211] These mechanisms are at the core of the racialization process that lead to the construction of Italy's identity as inherently white and to the perception of blackness as a site of abjection and contamination.

In Rhoda, references to this rhetoric and to the fear of contagion via the sexual contact with the infected other are presented in an inverted perspective. Rhoda's first sexual intercourse sanctions the beginning of her moral and physical degeneration through an abjectifying trajectory that subverts the classical paradigm of contamination typical of the colonial discourse. Rhoda's infection with the HIV virus in the European context – as a consequence of her sexual encounters with the contaminated Western body – undermines and overturns the rhetoric of the European's

[210] Ibid., "And everyone thought that with a black woman you could go overboard.".
[211] Ibid., 120.

anxiety with cultural and physical contamination by drawing on the same range of terminology and conceptualizations. As Hardt and Negri point out, the obsession with hygiene and contagion represents a constant feature of the colonizing discourse:

> Physical contamination, moral corruption, madness: the darkness of the colonial territories and population is contagious, and Europeans are always at risk. […] Once there is established the differential between the pure, civilized European and the corrupt, barbarous Other, there is possible not only a civilizing process from disease to health but also ineluctably the reverse process, from health to disease[212]

This rhetoric of contamination, with its contagion anxieties, has outlasted decolonization and is relocated and re-conceptualized in the context of transnational dislocations currently affecting Western countries and is most evident with respect to AIDS pandemic as it is reminiscent of a similar "colonialist imaginary: unrestrained sexuality, moral corruption and lack of hygiene."[213]

Scego draws on this rhetoric but inverts the parts in the contaminator/contaminated dynamic; it is through the physical contact with the corrupted body of the Western society that Rhoda is irrevocably infected, polluted, ushering in the degrading parable that will lead her to a temporary self-annihilation: "Ma la Rhoda di prima, quella devota, religiosa, generosa, umile, amorevole, aristocratica non c'era più. Era stata sepolta dalla nuova Rhoda impura, insaziabile e sporca."[214] In *Rhoda*, it is the Somali woman who is instilled with an infected gene, resulting into a moral and bodily degenerating experience: her contamination does not merely affect the

[212] Michael Hardt, *Empire,* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 135.
[213] Ibid. 136.
[214] Scego, *Rhoda*, sec. 4. "But the previous Rhoda, the devout, religious, generous, humble, loving, aristocratic one was gone. She had been buried by the new Rhoda, the impure, dirty and insatiable one."

biological or anatomical sphere, but it also involves a symmetrical decadence and abjection on the psychopathological counterpart.[215]

Rhoda is thus compelled to internalize a contaminating power that entails a twofold level of viral burden "both hereditary and contagious, which is to say contagious on the vertical level of lineage as well as on the horizontal level of social communication."[216] HIV carries in itself this double-layered contaminative potential, therefore undermining both the present and hypothetical hereditary future preemptively conceived as shattered and diseased. As remarked by Roberto Esposito "the idea of contagion, which is broad enough that it includes the entire civilized world, at a certain point closes around its own sacrificial object, drastically separating it from the healthy type, pushing it toward a destiny of expulsion and annihilation."[217] The infection transforms the woman into a sacrificial object that needs to be expelled and ostracized from the healthy body of society to prevent a further spread of contamination.

Furthermore, Scego's inversion of the colonial trope of physical contamination echoes the tradition of the Indian anti-colonial literary production on the question of the violation of the colonized woman's body by the western oppressor. In this literature, the colonizer is perceived as the "untouchable person," the contact with whom entails a disgraceful contamination. The sexual intercourse, in fact, arises a "ritual pollution transmitted through bodily fluids"[218] that needs to be exorcized through a purifying bath. The image of the native woman violated by the western oppressor – with the raped body of the woman personifying the abuse of the colonized nation –

---

[215] Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 118. For a biopolitical analysis on immigration as an immunitary threat to national integrity and on the phobia of racial contact and contagion in the context of Italian cinema see Welch, Rhiannon Noel. "Contact, Contagion, Immunization Gianni Amelio's Lamerica (1994)" in *Italian Mobilities*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom (New York: Routledge, 2016), 68-87.
[216] Esposito, *Bíos*, 122.
[217] Ibid., 124.
[218] Pamela Lothspeich, "Unspeakable Outrages and Unbearable Defilements: Rape Narratives in the Literature of Colonial India," *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 1 (2007), 13.

represents a recurring feature in anticolonial literature.[219] In Western pro-colonialist literature, instead, the *topos* of the European woman's rape by the "savage native" has often been adopted to underline the essential dichotomy between the civilized West and the barbarian "Other," therefore justifying the civilizing mission at the basis of the colonial discourse.

3.4 Impure Female Bodies: Infibulation and Migration in Igiaba Scego

From *Rhoda* to *Oltre Babilonia* and up to her latest novel *Adua,* Igiaba Scego consistently insists on the issue of female genital cutting[220](FGC),[221] infibulation in particular, which comes to embody the emblem of female abjectification, hovering over the threshold between allure and disgust. It appears therefore unavoidable to problematize and reflect on the practice of infibulation perceived by Scego, in line with scholars such as Nawāl Saʿdāwī as a denying act of the right to bodily integrity.[222] Traditionally intended as a "para-hygienic" practice, FGC can be acknowledged as a double layered action, "inscribed in body practice and moral form […] when Somali girls are circumcised, the 'male' – and thus 'unclean' – parts are removed from the female body, while simultaneously a male image is bodily inscribed through

[219] On this topic see Pamela Lothspeich "Unspeakable Outrages."
[220] The debate over the issue also extends to the terminology used to refer to the practice. Here I personally chose the term Female Genital Cutting because I perceive it as more objective and precise and most of all because it is deprived of the value-laden meanings and implications that characterize terms such as Female Genital Mutilations (used by many Western feminists as well as by many health organizations, and rejected by others as offensive, reifying), or Female Circumcision (which is instead perceived as reductive since it associates the practice to male circumcision which is much less invasive). For further insights on the issue see Nyangweso, Mary, *Female Circumcision: The Interplay of Religion, Culture, and Gender in Kenya*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).
[221] According to the World Health Organization's definition, FGC refers to several distinctive practices, comprising "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons" in *Female Genital Mutilation: A Joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA Statement* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1997) 3. As described on the WHO website,these procedures include clitoridectomy, the "partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce", excision the "partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora," and infibulation or "pharaonic circumcision" consisting in the "narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris" "Classification of female genital mutilation," WHO, accessed July 19, 2016, http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/fgm/overview/en/
[222] See Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī, "Imperialism and Sex in Africa," in *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Movement in Imperialist Discourses.* Ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 40-6.

the infibulation scar in the form of a fake penis."[223] In this tradition, infibulation represents a cultural mark aimed at humanizing the irrational animality embedded in the excised parts; by securing the woman's moral integrity, her "sewed" body becomes the emblem of the family's honorability.

Far from any voyeuristic, essentializing, or even interventionist aim,[224] this excursus on the issue of infibulation constitutes an indispensable step in the attempt of depicting the plurality of meanings, legacies, and representations that invest the bodies of postcolonial subjects in the context of diaspora, through the fictional filter of Scego's female protagonist. As Sandra Ponzanesi remarks, in order to constructively engage with such a complex and controversial debate, it is important to understand how "the discursive strategies within which infibulation has come to exist in Africa are different from the discursive strategies which condemn it in the Western countries."[225] Although it is fundamental to rethink and to question the ongoing persistence of this practice, residues of the colonial discourse are still discernible in the Western rhetoric on infibulation and female genital cutting in general. From the perspective of many African scholars, the encounter between Europe and Africa, in fact, maintains an essential asymmetry; as Ajayi-Soyinka points out

> [it] does not take place under a normal acculturation process in which there is a mutual exchange and acknowledgment of ideas. […] Both the colonized and the colonizer emerge from two patriarchal systems, one seeking to dominate and the other fighting against domination. Thus,

[223] Aud Talle, "Female Circumcision in Africa and beyond: The Anthropology of a Difficult Issue," in *Transcultural Bodies: Female Genital Cutting in Global Context* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 91-92.
[224] For an in-depth analysis of Western "voyeuristic" approaches to the issue of infibulation and female circumcision see Sara Johnsdotter, "Persistence of Tradition or Reassessment of Cultural Practices in Exile? Discourses on Female Circumcision among and about Swedish Somalis," in *Transcultural Bodies: Female Genital Cutting in Global Context. Ed. Ylva Hernlund, Bettina Shell-Duncan* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 107–34.
[225] Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes*, 188.

> during anticolonial struggles, women are invariably reconstructed as the battle bodies upon which the power contests are fought out.[226]

Along these lines, the discourse over FGC has been exploited by a good portion of Western feminists and mass media perpetrating the objectification of African women. It is precisely in the light of such reifying discourses that the displacement of circumcised bodies caused by exile and diaspora involves a reenactment of a traumatic experience: the infibulated woman is summoned to face the objectifying gazes of both the media and the public opinion through which her scars are revived time after time. Once again, the body of the African woman is charged with significations that transcend its physicality and testify to an inherent alterity; it is on the scars of this "strange body" that the woman's reification takes place, this time at the hand of the Western objectifying rhetoric. Infibulation carries in itself the label of an inexorable Otherness; and this anomaly, at times, raises unspeakable perversions in the male sexual imagery, evoking a primitive, unexplored land to be conquered by the European pioneer. The woman's body is thus exoticized, invested with a primordial, ancestral allure.

Rhoda's body, for instance, is transformed into an empty vessel to be breached, defiled and corrupted by the man's exoticizing gaze, enacting the same estranging and essentializing logic at the basis of the Orientalist discourse where "the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe:"[227] Along these lines Scego writes: "Quando gli spiegai che ero vergine e 'cucita' lui si eccitò ancora di più. Quella novità inaspettata lo stava galvanizzando."[228] As a result of the diasporic fluxes of people, cultures and bodies across borders, Otherness transcends the geographical frontiers of the faraway "Orient" and is re-

[226] Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, "Transcending the Boundaries of Power and Imperialism: Writing Gender, Constructing Knowledge," in *Female Circumcision and The Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 61.
[227] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 190.
[228] Scego, *Rhoda*, sec. 4. "When I explained him that I was virgin and 'sewed' he became even more aroused. That unexpected news was galvanizing him."

inscribed in the European context. Rhoda's body blurs the line between "here" and "there," locating itself in a suspended dimension where the enactment of transgressive sexual experiences is allowed.

In *Adua*, Scego brings up again the issue of FGM, this time providing an alternative perspective, that of the Somali father of young Adua right after the practice has been performed. About halfway through the novel, in a section entitled *Paternale* (paternal reprimand), Scego gives voice to traditional beliefs of female impurity, honor, and shame in a sardonic tone:

> Ora ti sei liberata Adua. Non hai più quel maledetto clitoride che rende sporca ogni donna. […] Dopo ci sarà solo la felicità di essere pura, finalmente chiusa come Dio comanda. […] È bello essere pura. È bellissimo. Pensa che bella vita senza più quell'immondo batacchio che ti pendeva osceno tra le cosce, come se fossi un uomo. Io ne ho viste di donne con il batacchio […] Fanno ribrezzo, sono carnivore, violente. Rumoreggiano. Ti sei salvata, Adua, da questa vergogna. Ora tu sei chiusa, pulita, bella. Sei come mia madre, come la madre di mia madre, e come tutte le donne degne di stima di questa nostra grande famiglia[229]

The passage builds a binary system of reference that relegates women to the realm of abject impurity or immaculate virtue according to whether or not they are infibulated. Those who are, are worthy of being acknowledged as honorable members of the family (mothers, wives, daughters), women whose bodies are now pure, cleansed from the filthy animality of their clitoris, with their "honor" sewed on the surface if their bodies. Those who are not infibulated instead are described with words such as "ribrezzo," "carnivore," "violente," "sporca;" they are disgusting, voracious, and violent, with their obscene "clapper" (the clitoris) hanging from their thighs like a mock penis. The word that Scego chooses to describe the supposed obscenity of the

[229] Scego, *Adua*, 92-3.

clitoris is particularly significant as "immondo" meaning filthy, impure, comes from the Latin *immundus* from which also the word for trash, *immondizia*, derives.

In a subsequent passage, Scego goes back to the issue, this time from the perspective of the Somali woman, describing the moment in which the infibulated body is violated in all its disturbing vividness. Adua's two procurers Arturo and Sissi remove her stitches and lacerate her body with a pair of scissors: "e fu così che in quella strana notte di maggio fui sverginata da un paio di forbici."[230] Her virginity and her dignity are taken away through an act of brutal violence while the two initiate Adua to sex and perversion with the essentializing attitude of the European pioneer who conquers unbreached territories, treating the Somali woman like an exotic animal at their mercy. Scego consciously fills the passage with explicit references to the colonial discourse, mentioning for example the Fascist song *Faccetta nera*, and reiterating tropes such as that of the Black Venus, or the Western voyeuristic/repulsed reaction to the sight of the infibulated body.

While in *Rhoda* and *Adua* Scego alludes to the practice of FGM from the perspective of young Somali women to emphasize its erotic-exotic potential in the eyes of the societies of arrival, in *Oltre Babilonia* the author describes the ritual, and the beliefs associated to it, through the life experience of the previous generation of Somali women: Maryam, Howa and Bushra. In those times, the few women who were not properly infibulated, were considered filthy reincarnations of the fearsome Queen Arawelo, a legendary ruler who used to kill the men who were not able to give her pleasure, and to castrate boys. The story tells that even though her body had been dismembered and burned after her death, Arawelo "ricresceva in ogni donna. La pendula non era forse una delle manifestazioni di Arawelo? La clitoride veniva tagliata alle

[230] Ibid., 124.

bambine affinché non diventassero come quella vecchia sporca e immonda."[231] Since the clitoris was seen as the manifestation of the infamous queen, the only way to prevent her from coming back to life and threatening men's virility was via infibulation. Having managed to avoid infibulation, Bushra, Elias' stepmother, was thus perceived by her community as the insatiable reincarnation of Arawelo and, for this reason, ostracized.

A different fate awaited lifelong friends Maryam and Howa instead, and their stories become a testimony to the lasting parable of sufferance, contradiction, and reticence endured by Somali women. Through the depiction of Howa's operation, infibulation is described in its crude carnality; by providing a visual account of the procedure, lingering on details such as mutilations and fluids coming out of the woman's body, Scego exposes the abject side of this practice, thus producing in the audience a sense of repulsion and discomfort: "Le aveva fatto un male cane quella dannata infibulazione. Se la ricordava ancora. L'avevano presa in quattro donne e la quinta le aveva tagliato il lembo di pelle che pendeva dalla vagina. In realtà non avevano tagliato solo quello, ma parecchia roba intorno. [...] Poi si ricordava il sangue sulle cosce, l'ago che penetrava la pelle."[232] Only years later, the pious Muslim Howa, while speaking with the Somali doctor Jumaale, will learn how the practice is not prescribed by Islam.

FGM is in fact often justified in religious terms referring to the hadith of Umm Attya; this hadith, which is not mentioned in one of the most authoritative hadith collections, by Muhammad al-Bukhari, is extremely controversial since the many variations of the story provide different interpretations of the practice. As reported by Noor Kassamali, in these versions Prophet Muhammad "is alleged to have said, 'Reduce but do not destroy; this is enjoyable to the woman and is preferable to the man.' [While] another version of the same hadith says 'Do not go

[231] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 377.
[232] Ibid., 199.

in deep. It is more illuminating to the face and more enjoyable to the husband.'"[233] Many scholars have indeed argued that, given the absence of Qur'anic references to FGM, this hadith is too tenuous and does not provide enough evidence to sanction the practice as Islamic.[234] Through the authoritative words of doctor Jumaale, *Oltre Babilonia* assumes a didactic tone to denounce the mystification that connects infibulation to Qur'anic provisions: "Il *gudnisho* era una cosa non scritta sul Corano."[235] Here, as in many other instances throughout Scego's writing, the non-mediated use of a Somali word such as *gundisho* emphasizes the author's attempt to establish a connection with the Somali community of the diaspora, through the mimetic reproduction of its hybrid, contaminated language.[236]

Shifting from the authoritative voice of the Somali doctor, to the firsthand experience of Maryam and Howa, to the ways in which infibulation is perceived by the new generations of Somali migrants, the author provides the reader with various internal perspectives on such a controversial issue. Through Zuhra's voice, Scego speaks for the second generation of the Somali diaspora, embracing an irreverent and sarcastic stance on infibulation: "Cucite come rollè arrosto. Ecco, le somale come degli arrosti."[237] Zuhra brings a more detached and aware perspective, by questioning the validity of the practice from within the Somali community. The postcolonial, diasporic dimension, however, puts her in a privileged condition, allowing her to denounce the violence perpetrated on women's bodies without the fear of being ostracized by the community to which she belongs.

---

[233] Noor Kassamali, "When Modernity Confronts Traditional Practices: Female Genital Cutting in Northeast Africa," in *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity*, ed. Herbert L. Bodman and Nayyirah Tawḥīdī (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 44.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 199.
[236] Along the same lines, but in an inverted perspective, when Scego engages with the Italian audience, Somali words and expressions are paraphrased to address the various configurations that practices such as infibulation acquire within the western context.
[237] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, 339.

3.5 Subversive Refuse: Agency through Abjection and its Limits

The postcolonial novels analyzed in this chapter are characterized by a perturbing charge at various levels: not only do they destabilize the divide between here and the elsewhere, the self and the other, morality and corruption, but they also invite the reader to rethink and question one-sided theoretical frameworks. Scego seems perfectly aware of the theoretical implications of her work, which deliberately engages with feminist as well as postcolonial critiques, for instance by echoing, more or less explicitly, colonial tropes on race and contagion, the debate on the subaltern's agency, and the pervasiveness of the heteronormative discourse. In doing so, the author exposes the intersectional nature of the factors and constraints that shape the displaced identities of her protagonists – from Rhoda to Adua – that often feed into an abjectifying parable. The persistence of the colonial rhetoric on race and contamination, in both postcolonial Italy and Somalia, constructs their bodies, and the body of all postcolonial subalterns, as unassimilable "strange bodies" that, as such, need to be expelled, exorcised. Hanging in the precarious balance between life and death, pure and impure, sainthood and depravedness, those bodies become the site for the ultimate enactment of abjectifying practices and representations.

The reference to bodily wastes resonates throughout Scego's writing – from menstrual blood, to vomit, or aborted fetuses – provocatively hinting at the portrayal of female bodies as particularly wasteful compared to their male counterparts. However, in contrast with Kristeva's understanding of male semen as less abject than other female bodily secretions, in Scego the reference to male bodily fluids is always associated with sexual abuse and semen is reinvested of its abject potential. Scego's accounts on infibulation, then, open-up the space for further reflections on the supposed impurity and wastefulness of female bodies implied in the enduring of this practice and on the inescapable abjectifying trajectories that they entail. In the country of

origin, the non-infibulated body becomes synonym of filth, obscenity, and disgust, and thus labels the non-infibulated woman as an "essere immondo" casting her in the realm of abjection. Specularly, in the European context, it is the infibulated woman who is seen as abject precisely by virtue of the mutilation.

Among the other novels analyzed, *Rhoda* arguably provides the most provocative account of how abjection can function as a self-asserting tool leading to a certain degree of agency via "revolting"[238] choices. Crushed by the burden of social, cultural, religious and family expectations, the woman succumbs and ushers in a decaying parable that will lead her to a brutal death through a sacrificial, yet inescapable journey. Throughout the abjectifying parable, culminating with her death and dismemberment, Rhoda is fully aware of the consequences of her choices, even of the most debasing ones. This decaying trajectory puts Rhoda in connection with the tradition of the "abject saint" who, in both Medieval Christianity and Islamic Sufism, embraces marginality, humiliation, and shaming as paths to transformation and redemption.

Only by detaching herself from the polluted and corrupted European context, Rhoda is finally able to ease the unbearable burden of moral decay and dishonor that afflicts her: "Poi sono partita ed è cominciata una nuova fase. Una fase pulita. Una fase in cui non dovevo indossare la maschera di una superdonna. Una fase in cui ero davvero me stessa e non il tragico simulacro in cui mi ero trasformata sotto il peso di uomini osceni."[239] Although the physical pollution is irreversible, the moral degeneration can still be exorcized through a purifying return to the home country. Her honorability and her human dignity are reinstated through her attempt of subverting the dehumanizing, objectifying paradigm that was crushing her. Once this cathartic

[238] Here revolting is intended, as in other instances in the study, according to Imogen Tyler's theorization as that which provokes revulsion as well as the act of revolting/refusing.
[239] Scego, *Rhoda*, sec. 5. "Then I left and a new phase began. A clean phase. A phase where I didn't have to wear the mask of a superwoman. A phase where I was really myself, not the tragic simulacrum in which I had transformed under the weight of obscene men."

process is initiated, not even the threat of death can lead Rhoda astray, and her reaction to the assault perpetrated by a group of her compatriots is a token of utmost resistance:

> Volevano rubare il kalashnikov a Balil e a me l'onore. [...]
>
> In quei mesi in Somalia, ero purificata, depurata, ripulita. In un certo senso ero tornata vergine. Per questo lottai con tutta la mia forza per il mio onore. [...] Gridavo, mi dimenavo, ma alla fine la vinsi sul mio aggressore. [...] Livido di rabbia per il mancato stupro l'uomo mi colpì a tradimento con il pugnale per tutto il corpo. Avevo ferite aperte e sanguinanti dappertutto. Il taglio più grosso era all'altezza del ventre[240]

Rhoda's body becomes the site of an actual martyrdom for the sake of preserving her honor's integrity, so hardly reattained, while, at the same time, the virulent blood flowing from it sanctions Rhoda as untouchable and unsavable and acts as a reminder of her physical contagiousness.

Despite her utmost sacrifice, death does not prevent Rhoda's body from being further violated and outraged; her grave is profaned and her corpse dismembered at the hands of her own Somali people. Her cultural, religious, and ethnic belonging is repudiated and her bodily simulacrum punished for its irreversible corruption:

> Sono due giorni che mi hanno tirato fuori. Sono stati tre ragazzi. Giovani, magri, armati. Mi hanno tirato fuori. Uno mi ha sputato in faccia e l'altro ha preso il coltello e mi ha asportato l'occhio sinistro dall'orbita. Ci ha giocato un po', si è divertito. Però non sono riusciti a

[240] Ibid., "They wanted to steal Balil's Kalashnikov and my honor. [...]
In those months in Somalia, I was purified, cleansed. In a way, I was virgin again. For this reason, I fought with all my strength for my honor. [...] I was screaming, struggling, but in the end, I prevailed over my aggressor. Livid with rage for having failed to rape me, the man suddenly struck me with the dagger all over the body. I had open wounds and I was bleeding everywhere. The biggest cut was at the level of my belly."

> prendermi i denti. Balil e i suoi amici sono arrivati prima. Balil è un caro ragazzo. […] Ha vegliato la mia tomba una settimana[241]

With these words, towards the beginning of the novel, the protagonist's voice emerges from the afterlife to tell her version of the story, to trace, in retrospect, the (self)annihilating path that led her to embody the ultimate figuration of abjection: a lifeless, dismembered body. As Kristeva remarks in defining abjection, "the corpse [...] is death infecting life,"[242] it blurs the fault line between human and non-human, life and death; the boundary that preserves the integrity of the subject is thus shattered, the threat of pollution and filth is instilled and life is endangered. The desecration of Rhoda's grave and the consequent mutilation of her corpse causes a further decay in the abject dimension as it entails an even greater corruption of the lifeless body's integrity. Rhoda's character is consciously constructed by Scego as a fictional martyr functioning as a symbol for the many abjectified and voiceless "strange bodies" whose identities do not fit into preconceived paradigms of belonging.

In Scego's writings, abjection becomes a powerful theoretical resource that enables to approach states of exclusion from multiple perspectives, including that of those who are obliged to inhabit the border zones within social, national, or heterosexual normativities.[243] The disruptive potential of Scego's novels provides a powerful testimony, a voice to the abjectified and violated body of the subaltern; through the insistence on unsettling and disturbing images, Scego manages to graft the unspeakable fallout of social asymmetries onto the concreteness of the gendered and racialized body.

---

[241] Ibid., sec. 1. "It's been two days since they have dug me out. They were three guys. Young, skinny, armed. They dug me out. One spit in my face and the other took the knife and removed my left eye from its orbit. He played a little with it, he enjoyed himself. But they didn't manage to take my teeth. Balil and his friends got here earlier. Balil is a good boy. […] He watched over my grave for a week."
[242] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[243] Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 21.

CHAPTER 4

REFUSE, ABJECTION, CONTAMINATION: BODY-SPACE ENTANGLEMENTS IN ELENA FERRANTE'S NAPLES

4.1 Naples's Excessive Bodies: City of Refuse and Abjection

As discussed in the first chapter of this study, in the past decades Naples has increasingly become a receptacle of material, often toxic, waste and a vehicle of human/non-human contaminations, threatening the integrity of its inhabitants, physically and morally, through its high levels of pollution and crime. Embracing Serenella Iovino's vision of Naples as "a narrative populated by substances, choices, voices, human presences, illness, scars, memory forgetfulness, natural catastrophes, war, contamination, fear, death, and life"[244] the following pages look at the city's material agency over human (gendered) bodies through the literary filter of Elena Ferrante's works. Ferrante's brilliant yet unsettling writing is literally imbued with Naples' contaminative essence, which is described in all its corruptive agency. While the author's identity remains unknown, her compelling depictions of the city's perturbing potential – together with her explicit reference to her Neapolitan childhood in the non-fiction work of *La frantumaglia*[245] – testify to her visceral bond with the city.[246]

Suspended in a precarious balance between the reminiscence of its past magnificence and the threat of the present decay, the city of Naples embodies the juxtaposing feelings of repulsion/attraction that define the realm of abjection. In *The Body and the City* Steve Pile argues

[244] Iovino, *Ecocriticism and Italy*, 38.
[245] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*.
[246] As Mariangela Tartaglione points out "la linfa vitale della Potenza narrativa di Elena Ferrante è attinta dalle viscere di Napoli, città che l'ha vista nascere e crescere, diventando strato connaturato alla sua epidermide, e almeno a questo dato biografico, che in limine contamina Elena Ferrante/scrittrice, non si possono concedere dubbi." Mariangela Tartaglione, *La "Guerra amorosa": Il materno nella narrativa di autrici italiane del secondo Novecento* (Roma: Aracne editrice S.r.l., 2014), 177.

that abjection brings together social, bodily and spatial instances in a "perpetual condition of surveillance, maintenance and policing of impossible 'cleanliness,'"[247] and it is exactly in this impossibility, in this loss of control, that the subversive potential of abjection resides. The rupture of the corporeal integrity of both bodies and spaces opens up the potential for non-normative ways of experiencing and transgressing socio-spatial constraints. The perpetual condition of surveillance over an unachievable ideal of cleanness described by Pile finds in Naples its quintessential materialization: the never-ending trash crisis and the emergency approach invoked each time by local institutions to contain the potential waste contamination speaks to the impossibility of monitoring and maintaining the integrity of the city's body. This material excess produced within the city's borders represents a socio-environmental threat and for this reason needs to be concealed.

This chapter explores the collapse of boundaries between bodies and spaces within Elena Ferrante's works and highlights the consequent compenetration between the inside and the outside of the gendered body. In order to do so, the analysis engages the concepts of refuse, abjection, and contamination as theoretical tools able to expose the excessive bodily and spatial configuration that emerge within the texts analyzed. These concepts problematize the supposedly fixed categories of gender roles in which womanhood is "innately" inscribed and allow us to understand the material agency exerted by the social and spatial dimensions in which these representations are embedded. Hence, while looking at the destabilizing potential entailed in the embracement of abject practices and identifications, the chapter also explores how abjection

[247] Steve Pile, *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 90.

functions in blurring the line of demarcation that defines the access to both private and public spheres. Mapping abjection, indeed, occurs not only in relation to the body but also to space.[248]

In a letter to Goffredo Fofi published in *La Frantumaglia* (*Fragments*), Elena Ferrante describes the city of Naples as an "extension of the body," as the origin of all perceptions;[249] Naples destabilizes the divide between private and public, the individual and the community, imposing its presence as a filter through which experiencing and literally sensing both spatial and human relations. Through Ferrante's words, Naples emerges as an excessive city that perturbs the integrity of the subject within its borders. In the dense pages of *La frantumaglia*, Ferrante describes her physical and emotional dismay recalling an episode that occurred during her childhood while lost with her sister in the familiar yet disorienting meanders of the city. Again, Naples becomes a corporeal presence, an extension of the human body that weights on spatial and sensorial perceptions: "me la sentii sulle spalle e sotto le scarpe, scappava insieme a noi, ansimava col fiato sporco, lanciava urla pazze di clacson, era estranea e nota insieme, limitata e sconfinata, pericolosa ed eccitante, la riconoscevo smarrendomi."[250]

The city's destabilizing potential, together with its plurality of embodiments can be ascribed to what Walter Benjamin has defined as its porous essence.[251] In his reflections on Naples, Benjamin argues that "porosity is the inexhaustible law of the life of the city, reappearing everywhere;"[252] Naples and its life style are "dispersed," "porous," "commingled," "crammed," in other words unsettling and overwhelming; words that resonate in Ferrante's experience of the city throughout her writings. In describing the destabilizing turmoil that affects

[248] Aine O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone," *Screen* 40, no. 3 (September 1999): 250.
[249] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*, sec. 9.
[250] Ibid., sec. 16 *La città*.
[251] Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).
[252] Ibid., 168.

both the urban space and social relations, Benjamin exposes the abject side of the city which lies in its ability to attract the stranger with its eroticism while at the same time repelling him with its contagious indigence, its indolence, its excess. Naples' perturbing space blurs the border between "private affairs" and "collective matter,"[253] so much so that practices and behaviors usually confined to the private realm of domesticity literally "flood out," "burst" from private doors and invade the city's public space. The poorer the neighborhood, the more the divide between private/public fades into communal ways of living social as well as familiar relations; as Benjamin describes, "poverty has brought about a stretching of frontiers […] There is no hour, often no place, for sleeping and eating."[254] From the pages of Benjamin's essay, Naples emerges in all its perturbing potential as a destabilizing and contaminating space whose intoxicating excess of identity compels even the stranger to adapt to the space itself. What is porous embodies and incorporates extraneous elements and external pressures,[255] blurring borders and clear cut divides. Porosity hints at the permeability of boundaries and at the possibility of violating them. As Iovino points out, this permeability also refers to the formation of "discursive practices through bodies. Phenomena such as gender, sexuality, class, social practices and their narratives are filtered through this porosity as forms of an 'emergent interplay' of natural-cultural factors."[256] In a very similar way, abjection opens up the space for new discussions over the permeability of boundaries – whether national, spatial or corporeal – and over the possibility of transgressing them in order to negotiate non-normative identities.

As Mario Niola points out, Naples eludes static categorizations and rigid theorizations and "appare al tempo stesso un eccesso di natura e un eccesso di cultura. Nemmeno l'acqua a

[253] Ibid., 171.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 81.
[256] Iovino, *Ecocriticism and Italy*, 22.

Napoli è risolvibile in una formula unica. Essa è comunque H_2O più qualcosa, come ben sa chi la beve. In questo qualcosa, in questo surplus sta, precisamente, l'intrigo teorico di Napoli con la sua estetica obliqua."[257] Everything in Naples – including its waters – contains a contaminative load, becoming bearer of an excess that is immediately transmitted to the bodies that inhabit its space. Far from being merely symbolical, this contamination materially permeates, and poisons, both the human and non-human worlds, as seen in the eco-ethical narratives analyzed in the first chapter.

The only way to navigate the city's urban space is by absorbing part of it, by embracing the slippery essence of the *napoletanità* made of material as well as symbolic places,[258] and that find in Spaccanapoli, the street that seems to divide the old town center in two, its spatial manifestation: the place where all the social, historical, temporal fractures of the city are symbolically overexposed. This materiality is continuously embodied throughout the city in the numerous sculptures, in its geographical and urbanistic features, or in its material agency over human relations and becomes a crucial component in Ferrante's works, as a latent instinct always ready to resurface. Her protagonists are women who try to escape the city by relocating to distant places, refusing the disturbing appeal to their roots, but this *napoletanità* becomes an ineluctable aura that the city projects even from a distance. Naples, and all the aspects of *napoletanità,* incites alternative feelings of aversion and nostalgia, and, by virtue of its perturbing sensuality is often perceived as vulgarly excessive, while still carrying the comforting sounds and the gestures of familiar reminiscences.

[257] Marino. Niola, *Totem e ragù: divagazioni napoletane*, 1. ed. (Napoli: T. Pironti, 2003), 14.
[258] Ibid., 27.

The destabilizing excess of the city finds its equivalent in the perturbing bodies of the Neapolitan women, mothers in particular, described in Ferrante's texts. Writing to Goffredo Fofi in reference her first novel *L'amore molesto*, Ferrante states:

> Non mi pare di aver stabilito consapevolmente un nesso metaforico tra Amalia e Napoli. [...] è possibile che alla fine proprio il personaggio più sfuggente, meno catturabile, più densamente ambiguo, questa Amalia che assorbe fatica e botte ma non si piega, si sia fissata con la carica di napoletanità meno delimitabile e quindi risulti una sorta di donna-città strattonata, irretita, percossa, inseguita, umiliata, desiderata e tuttavia dotata di una sua straordinaria capacità di resistenza.[259]

The quotation suggests that despite Ferrante's initial unawareness to build a parallel between the city and Amalia, Naples' excess and its abject potential have ultimately crystallized on the page in Amalia's character: a woman who, despite the violence endured, is still able to resist precisely by absorbing a small portion of the city's perturbing power. The image of the woman-city at once desired and violated is however problematized by the intrinsic chauvinism that characterizes the city of Naples in both its public and private dimensions, as I will later discuss in the chapter.

While exploring the relation between spaces and bodies, female bodies in particular, the current chapter ultimately looks at the complex and unsettling representation of the mother-daughter relationship, and feminine bonds in general, so crucial in Ferrante's works. This destabilization through refuse and abjection allows for the breaching of a fixed figuration of the feminine identity, thus opening up the potential for the transgression and subversion of imposed gender roles and expectations. As Stiliana Milkova remarks, in her novels Ferrante problematizes the relationship between mothers and daughters and takes it to its extremes: daughters who feel

[259] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*, sec. 9.

repulsion for their mothers, or mothers who reject their daughters appear in the novels in order to question the imperatives of fixed gendered hierarchies and roles.[260] But this repulsion/refusal is not confined to the domain of familiar and social relationships; a more concrete, physical, degree of abjection, in fact, permeates Ferrante's novels, where the representation of bodily fluids and of abject female bodies, whether pregnant or in their ultimate figuration as corpses, destabilizes the idea of femininity codified by the heteronormative paradigm. Through abjection, the female body/corpse blurrs the boundary betwee the inside and the outside, life and death, thus becoming an instrument of resistance and subversion towards a given feminine identity that is rendered elusive.

Ferrante's works have been analyzed especially in reference to the disruptive representation of mother-daughter genealogies and of her exploration of the feminine experience more in general; from *L'amore molesto* (1992), to *La figlia oscura* (2006), Ferrante's writings lend themselves particularly well to psychoanalytic readings and considerations also by virtue of the author's explicit interest in psychoanalysis and feminist theory. Despite denying any pragmatic, "propagandistic" intent behind her writings in *La frantumaglia* Ferrante acknowledges her debt to her Freudian readings and to the debate on female childhood and on daughters' attachment to the maternal figure ongoing in the 1980s[261] in the shaping of her debuting novel *L'amore molesto*. Many critics have in fact approached her works through these interpretive lenses, mostly looking at the symbolic order that underlies the visceral tie between mothers and daughters. From the recovery of the bond with the maternal as an essential step for

[260] Stiliana Milkova, "Mothers, Daughters, Dolls: On Disgust in Elena Ferrante's La Figlia Oscura," *Italian Culture* 31, no. 2 (01 2013): 91, https://doi.org/10.1179/0161462213Z.00000000017.
[261] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*, sec. 16 *L'immagine della madre*.

the recovery of a repressed past,[262] to the daughter's desire of the maternal in terms of control over the mother's body and sexuality;[263] from the symbiotic nature of the maternal love towards the child, with maternity described as burdening, annihilating, to[264] the "lapse out of the symbolic order and into the psychic landscape of disgust"[265] intended as a powerful tool through which outlining alternative figurations of "daughterhood, motherhood, and the (pregnant) female body."[266] But critics have also addressed the extremely powerful bond between Ferrante's texts and the city of Naples which has often been associated with the maternal, and with female bodies more broadly. In her analysis of *L'amore Molesto*, Mariangela Tartaglione remarks how "Napoli assuma le fattezze del corpo di una donna anziana, un corpo topografico che pare dilatarsi ed espandersi in ogni dove, fino a quasi fagocitare e a fondersi con le due protagoniste del romanzo."[267] Naples thus becomes a "città-madre" (Tartaglione, Falotico) or "città molesta" (Tartaglione) in *L'Amore molesto*, and a "microcosmo asfissiante" in *L'amica geniale* (Benedetti, Falotico), but it is always presented in its ambivalent power of attraction/repulsion over the lives and bodies of its inhabitants.

This chapter builds on the critical reception of Ferrante's works and, in bringing together the theoretical reflections on female genealogies and the eminence of Naples, explores the latter as a city of refuse, excess, and contamination. Its contaminative potential is expressed through its space, its language, its behaviors, becoming a site of material as well as moral excess and corruption. In order expose the city's contaminating material agency, this chapter will explore

---

[262] See Patrizia Sambuco, *Corporeal Bonds : The Daughter-Mother Relationship in Twentieth Century Italian Women's Writing* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 2012.).
[263] Adalgisa Giorgio, *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 128.
[264] Marianna Orsi, "Due partite di Cristina Comencini, La figlia oscura di Elena Ferrante e la demitizzazione della maternità," *Intervalla* Special Vol, no. 1 (2016): 94–110.
[265] Milkova, "Mothers, Daughters, Dolls," 94.
[266] Ibid. 91.
[267] Tartaglione, *La "Guerra amorosa,"* 178.

Elena Ferrante's novels *L'amore molesto* (*Troubling Love*, 1992), *L'amica geniale* (2011) and *Storia della bambiana perduta* (2014) in the light of the theoretical apparatus outlined by the author in *La frantumaglia* (2003). *L'amore molesto* will be considered also in dialogue with its film adaptation by Mario Martone (1995)[268] and the correspondence between the author and the director published in *La frantumaglia*. Through the works analyzed, the following pages look at the intra-connectedness between bodily and spatial dimensions and at the ways in which the city's urban space "shapes private lives through the dominance of public spaces [bringing] together architecture, geography and people."[269] By looking at Naples as a city of refuse the following pages address the city's nature as a space of contingent refuse and of social corruption but they also explore the ways in which Naples is refused, rejected by Ferrante's female as the utmost protagonists as a site of oppression and inherent violence, as the spatial manifestation of the lasting legacy of patriarchal surveillance and subjugation over female bodies.

In *L'amore molesto*, Ferrante explores a daughter's attachment and refuse towards her mother's body/corpse and, with it, towards their troubled and obsessive relationship within Naples' unsettling space. After her mother's death, Delia goes back to her hometown for the funerals and there she is deluged by a copious flow of memories that will lead to the surfacing of multiple layers of abjection in terms of both bodily and identity configurations. The city of Naples emerges through the lines of the narration not as a mere backdrop answering to the need of defining the spatial coordinates of the narration, but as a filter through which experiencing reality and as a latent presence permeating every gesture, every sound, every place. Naples' excessive nature is projected on the "excessive" bodies of the female protagonists who disrupt

[268] Mario Martone, *L'amore molesto (1995)* (Arrow Films, 2007).
[269] Lesley Caldwell, "Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City," in *A Companion to the City* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd: Oxford, UK, 2008), 339.

fixed identities and social expectations and entice reactions of attraction/repulsion to their excess.

A similar depiction of the city's space emerges through the lines of the quartet of *L'amica geniale* (*Neapolitan Novels*) in reference to the Rione Luzzatti, the neighborhood in which the protagonist Elena lives with her family and around which the story takes shape. The Rione is described in all its violent excess as a source of moral corruption; its contaminative nature penetrates the lives and bodies of its inhabitants. This infective potential has a particular influence on women who are confined to the domestic dimension, silent and remissive on the surface, but "rabbiose," literally rabid as wild dogs, when enraged. The Rione is characterized by an excess of identity and acquires the features of a microcosm that reproduces in scale the corrupting agency of the whole city over the development of human relations, both within its perimeter and beyond.

But also another element of contamination and abjection repeatedly surfaces through the folds of the narration in Ferrante's works: starting from the waters of the Gulf of Naples, images of liquidity – spatial, corporeal and simbolyc/verbal – acquire a similar polluting or even deathly connotation. These fluid figurations entail an intrinsic contaminative potential that lies in the dissolution of bodily as well as social barriers and constructs. So much so that in all the novels analyzed even water becomes a privileged site of abjection: at once attracting and repelling, purifying and contaminating, bearer of life and death. The sea, for instance, is alternately associated with peril and drowning, or with purification and liberation. This abjectifying potential eminently resides in the loss of control over the senses and over the integrity of the body caused by the contact with water. While in *L'amore molesto* the narration is triggered by the event of Amalia's drowning in the waters of the Tyrrenian Sea, in *L'amica geniale* water is

presented as a threatening yet purifying/relieving force; it represents an instrument of containment, a warning for having transgressed the borders of the familiar though infectuous space of the rione, but also the only possible escape from it.

4.2 Abject Embodiments in *L'amore molesto*: a Dialogue between Ferrante and Martone

L'amore molesto marks Elena Ferrante's debut on the international literary stage. The novel and its cinematic adaptation directed by Mario Martone are at the core of this section, and are here analyzed in the light of their correspondence published in *La frantumaglia* in order to explore the abject bond between bodies, spaces, and human relations so crucial in Ferrante's works. *L'amore molesto* tells the story of the troubled mother-daughter relation between Delia, a woman in her fourties and her mother Amalia. Tracing back the stages of their conflicted bond strarting from the finding of Amalia's corpse, Delia narrates in the first person the story of her tormented quest for the truth surrounding her mother's death while at the same time recovering the repressed memories of her childhood in the dingy, contaminating urban space of Naples. Her mother's funeral compels Delia to go back to her despised hometown that she had left years before in the attempt of emancipating herself from the city's oppressive grip. The investigations will reveal hidden sides and events in her mother's life, starting from her furtive relationship with Caserta, an elderly man who had been part of Amalia's life since their early adulthood and who was at the woman's side right before her death.

Since the very beginning, we are immediately projected in the tragic dimension of death that permeates the narrative fabric in its entirety, as the opening lines of Ferrante's novel read: "My mother drowned on the night of May 23rd, my birthday, in the sea at a place called

Spaccavento, a few miles from Minturno."[270] The convergence between the mother's death and the daughter's birthday is not accidental: only through the utmost detachment from the maternal body can the subject ultimately emerge. In her analysis of *L'amore molesto*, Adalgisa Giorgio argues that Amalia's choice to end her life by drowning on her daughter's birthday has to be interpreted in psychoanalytic terms as the outcome of her ultimate "wish to kill the Delia who had both betrayed her as a child and rejected her as an adult, and to give birth to a new Delia."[271] The death of the mother has indeed been interpreted as the driving force for Delia's transformation and for the recovery of her repressed past; death by water in particular "allude *in nuce* alla possibilità della protagonista di riscoprire le molteplici ovidiane metamorfosi del sé a cui andrà incontro lungo il suo viaggio – fisico e simbolico – nelle viscere di Napoli."[272] The connection between water, death, and transformation is thus introduced from the very first lines of the novel and will represent a recurrent feature throughout the narration.

Page after page, the reader is presented with a series of destabilizing moments that concur to underscore the subversive potential entailed in the figurations of human bodies, spaces, and the material world allowing the narration to unfold in all its abject disruption. Abjection makes its appearance very early in the narration through its utmost figuration: the cadaver. The image of Amalia's corpse blurs the fault line between human and non-human, life and death. As Kristeva remarks in defining abjection – and as seen in the previous chapter – "the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing

[270] Elena Ferrante, *Troubling Love* (New York: Europa Editions, 2006), 11.
[271] Giorgio, *Writing Mothers and Daughters*, 129.
[272] Tartaglione, *La "Guerra amorosa,"* 160.

us."[273] Amalia's corpse suddenly emerges from the written text, almost regurgitated ashore as marine debris by the sea tide, in all its perturbing load:

> The next day two boys saw her body floating few yards from the shore. She was wearing only her bra. […] I saw the body, and, faced with that livid object, felt that I had better grab onto it in order not to end up in some unknown place. It hadn't been assaulted. It showed only some bruises, a result of the waves that, though gentle, had pushed her all night against some rocks at the edge of the water. It seemed to me that around her eyes she had traces of heavy makeup. I observed for a long time, uneasily, her legs, olive-skinned, and extraordinary youthful for a woman of sixty-three[274]

Having lost its status as a subject, Amalia's corpse is described as an unsettling "livid object" which produces a reaction of uneasiness, almost repulsion, in Delia. But while in the written text, despite its inherent abject nature, the corpse preserves a certain degree of dignity being described as "extraordinary youthful" despite the woman's age, the film confronts the audience with a long shot depicting "a bloated naked corpse washed up on a beach."[275]

Figure 22: *L'amore molesto*, still 1

[273] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[274] Ferrante, *Troubling Love*, 14.
[275] O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples," 250.

The scene has a high emotional impact and incites feelings of filth and discomfort; as O'Haely remarks, the unsettling potential of this scene resides in the multilayered abjection that invests Amalia and that is concretely exposed through the visual medium: the camera lingers over the bare corpse of an elderly naked woman whose flaccid and pale flesh publicly displays the uncanny spectacle of her death.[276] The abject perspective is overtly introduced in this scene, which exposes the intimate dimension of the female naked body to the public gaze, and this exposure of the private to the public will represent a constant throughout the narration, linking together bodies, spaces, and sensory perceptions. In the scene portraying the recovery of Amalia's corpse, the abject side of the spatial dimension is represented by the sea: the body emerges, almost naked, from the waters of the Tyrrenian Sea and just like a liquid curtain, the wave motion of the sea tide alternatively veils and unveils the tragic spectacle of the woman's death. Water's abject fluidity hints at the intrinsic contaminating power of death in a two-way pollution that goes from the living body to the lethal waters and from the lifeless corpse to the cathartic sea. This bond between water and contamination represents a recurring feature in the narration, both in the novel and in the film adaptation, and underscores the permeability of boundaries between human/non-human bodies and places and their perturbing potential.

The spatial dimension and its connection with the sensory experience represent a crucial element in both versions of *L'amore molesto*. While throughout the novel – starting from the very first paragraph – Delia traces the sites of her memory by providing detailed space-time coordinates, in the film, explicit reference points are replaced by the visual embodiment of space and time, respectively rendered through Delia's frantic roaming in the streets of Naples or by means of the sepia-toned flashbacks to her childhood's neighborhood. Furthermore, Delia's relation with the spatial dimension is often filtered through her sensory perception: in

[276] Ibid., 251.

experiencing the city, she is either guided or overwhelmed by her senses, with a preeminence of the sense of smell.

Figure 23: *L'amore molesto*, still 2

The medium close up on Delia smelling her mother's bra dissolves into an aerial shot of Naples, whose contours slowly appear on the screen. These overlapping shots anticipate the importance of the sensory perception, the olfactory dimension in particular, in relation to the city and its embodiment, almost suggesting a constitutive (abject) connection.

In her correspondence with Martone, Ferrante expresses the turmoil and the contradictory feelings evoked by the city of Naples and her reaction to Martone's film, which visually materialized the abstract materiality of the written word: "Il film, le dico subito, mi ha causato un violentissimo disagio. [...] I luoghi, le persone e i fatti si sono mostrati nella loro materialissima determinazione e, ai miei occhi, nella loro nuda riconoscibilità. Dallo schermo, subito, mi è arrivata direttamente addosso l'inquietudine che mi ha sempre causato Napoli, i suoi suoni, le sue parole."[277] But Ferrante's depiction of Naples is not less troubled, nor less visually detailed

[277] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*, sec. 8.

than Martone's cinematic counterpart; so are the characters and the constant reference to the disturbing language of the mother, the "obscene" Neapolitan dialect that vigorously resonates throughout the pages of *L'amore molesto*. During Delia's first accidental encounter with Caserta, for instance, the woman is "hit by a stream of obscenities in dialect, a soft river of sound that involved me, my sisters, my mother in a concoction of semen, saliva, feces, urine, in every possible orifice;"[278] Neapolitan dialect is presented by Delia as a contaminated, repugnant language, as the only possible vehicle through which giving voice to obscenities otherwise unutterable in Italian, obscenities that Delia has tried to remove from her vocabulary and from her memory through the categorical refuse of the maternal language.

Indeed, besides the feelings of unsettlement and discomfort induced in the author by the naked directness of the visual medium, the novel itself is charged with a powerful sensorial materiality, mostly related to aural, tactile, and olfactory perceptions, which defines the ways in which the characters' experience and are affected by the spatial dimension of the city. Perhaps, the novel's materiality manages to be even more perceptible and unsettling than its cinematic double, and this destabilizing potential is achieved precisely through the constant appeal to the sensory sphere, invoked each time to describe places, gestures, feelings and relations. In this light, it is interesting to compare how Amalia's funeral procession is rendered in both the film and the written page. In the novel, Delia provides a detailed map of the topographical reference points crossed by the procession, at the same time retracing the map of her childhood reminiscences rooted in these very same places. The result is a city that melts under the sun, with its overflowing streets, its humid stones and the rotten vegetables of the Stant'Antonio Abate's market.

[278] Ferrante, *Troubling Love*, 19.

> The streets of topographic memory seemed to me unstable, like a carbonated drink that, if shaken, bubbles up and overflows. I felt the city coming apart in the heat, in the dusty gray light, and I went over in my mind the story of childhood and adolescence that impelled me to wander along the Veterinaria to the Botanic Gardens, or over the cobbles of the market of Sant'Antonio Abate, which were always damp and strewn with rotten vegetables[279] (17)

The city unravels in front of the reader's eyes, street after street, and the sensorial perceptions are once again invoked, with a particular emphasis on the sense of smell; as Delia observes, the stench emanated by the rotten vegetables anticipates the smell of the already festering flowers laying on her mother's coffin: "I anchored myself to the paving stones of the piazza with the soles of my shoes, I isolated the scent of the flowers arranged on the hearse, which was already putrid."

On the screen, this same scene preserves its sensoriality with the olfactive component being visually activated by the dirty streets overflowing with garbage bags and empty boxes accumulated besides waste bins, hinting at the smell of rottenness and physical corruption so vividly present in the text. Naples emerges as a city-refuse, a festering city whose material excess, in the form of trash, infests the urban space. The gray and dusty light under which the city seems to liquefy is maintained in the dull tones of the cobblestones, of the walls, of the hearse and of the participants, all dissolving in a monotone scale of grays.

[279] Ibid., 17.

Figure 24: *L'amore molesto*, still 3

The medium close up of Delia carrying the coffin catches her guilty sense of physical relief after having set down her mother's coffin in the hoarse; the scene cuts in a high-angle shot over the funeral procession which minimizes the individuality of the participants, and Delia herself almost dissolves in the indistinct grey crowd. The scene proceeds in a long take and the camera slightly tilts upward, the shift in planes of depth produces a change of focus, for a moment the image on the foreground is blurred and this rack focus creates a dramatic effect of suspension and anticipation, and suddenly reveals a close up of a white-haired man, who will soon be acknowledged as Caserta, looming over the procession.

What is left out, in the film adaptation, starting from this very same scene, is the novel's constant reference to the unsettling, unspeakable dimension of fluid abjection through the insistence on menstruation. The pages dedicated to Amalia's funeral are characterized by the insistence on bodily fluids as a disruptive element that contributes to further undermine Delia's already precarious physical and psychological balance. In this scene, the reference to the maternal corpse, the idea of an excessive, potentially polluting body that needs to be concealed and disposed is echoed by Delia suddenly experiencing her menstrual flow while carrying her

mother's coffin (task usually reserved to men). Delia is reminded of her femininity by means of another abject excess, which associates her to the realm of the untouchable, contaminating. Delia feels the proximity of this internal struggle as soon as she is relieved from the material weight of the maternal corpse. The inexorable flux of her menstrual blood acts as a reminder of her sexual difference, despite her attempts of transgressing normative roles: "When the coffin was set down in the hearse, and it had started off, a few steps and a guilty relief were enough for the tension to release the hidden stream from my womb. The warm liquid that was coming out of me against my will gave me the impression of an agreed-upon signal among aliens inside my body."[280] Her menstrual flow, involuntary and irrepressible, is perceived as an admonishment for her "unnatural" behaviors, and threatens the integrity of the body, which liquefies: "That involuntary dissolving of my body frightened me like a threat of punishment."[281] This constant reference to the likeage of bodily fluids, together with Delia's challenge to social norms and conventions, locates the woman on the fleeting threshold between moral/immoral, proper/improper, clean/unclean, therefore casting her in the dimension of abjection. These passages build a strong parallel with Scego's accounts on female bodily fluids analyzed in the previous chapter, as in both menstrual blood becomes a marker of difference, a moment of distress in the protagonists' subversive trajectories.

Delia inhabits the borderline that sanctions her ambiguous femininity and this transgressive disposition is rendered visible in the cinematic transposition of the female protagonist. Delia's theatrical play on garments, born from the refuse of a codified idea of femininity, almost becomes a carnivalesque and subversive performance of gender roles and expectations.

[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid., 15.

Figure 25: *L'amore molesto*, still 4

As Ferrante mentions in her letter to Martone in reaction to the film, what is particularly disturbing is the "messinscena del gioco degli abiti," the mise-en-scène of the clothing game through which Delia is able to juggle between her masculine shapeless pants suit and her hyper-feminine, hyper-revealing red dress. Through this game, continues Ferrante, Martone shows how for Delia, clothes are nothing but "parvenza di corpi", bodies' semblance, and after having put on the red dress in the lingerie shop of the Vossi Sisters, Delia becomes "quel corpo in rosso che conduce la sua inchiesta in una Napoli a tratti espressionista, divorato da una passione oscura e molesta" representing "un momento importante per l'iconografia del corpo femminile oggi, sintesi della donna alla ricerca di sé."[282]

Martone's initial portrayal of Delia's androgynous appearance, with her masculine clothes and look, do not find an explicit equivalent in the novel, but references to her non-normative femininity are scattered throughout the written text. Her very short hair, whose deep black is slowly fading in a flattening grey, her aversion to makeup all conflate in the depiction of

[282] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*, sec. 8.

a woman that doesn't conform to a preconceived ideal of beauty. Delia is trapped in what Ferrante describes as the "rovescio programmatico della figura sessualmente densa che lei ha attribuito alla madre."[283] In both versions of *L'amore molesto*, Delia's obsessive attraction-repugnance towards the maternal figure is the source of her deep sense of inadequateness that affects the perception of her own body and consequently of her own sexuality; not being able to completely inscribe herself in a preconceived image of femininity, she is not able to fully achieve and lapse into sexual pleasure. With her overwhelming sensuality, with her supposedly irreverent conduct, Amalia becomes the unachievable model for the daughter to comply with, at the same time, however, causing repulsion and disdain.

The film visually captures the ways in which "women's access to space is permeated by the patriarchal agency of the city,"[284] following a strict protocol of gazes, clothing, roles. Delia's androgynous attire allows her to safely navigate the streets of Naples granting her a certain degree of freedom and "invisibility" to the male gaze, while at the same time labeling her as both "an independent woman and an outsider."[285] When her femininity is instead exposed by the revealing red dress, her access to the public space is problematized and Delia becomes the target of unwanted male attentions bordering on sexual harassment. This sudden change in perceptions exemplifies how female bodies are transformed into corporeal border-zones upon which patriarchal codes of values and behaviors are inscribed. In her analysis of Martone's film, Leslie Caldwell points at the appropriation of female bodies by both male gazes and the eyes of the camera and remarks how "the looks at, and between, the characters, especially at Delia, the heroine, record an invasive intimacy, a visual aggression and an awareness of bodies through a regime of looking that renders the physicality and sensuality of Naples through an explicitly

[283] Ibid., sec. 5.
[284] O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples," 250.
[285] Ibid. 249.

hierarchical relation between the sexes."[286] It is in this light that the image of the "man-city" personified by Caserta emerges in *L'amore molesto* to symbolize the inherent chauvinism that characterizes Naples' public space.[287] Caserta's body is described almost in harmony with the materiality of the urban environment, mastering the protocol of objectifying gazes and of abjectifying gestures through which the male/subject constantly reaffirms his dominant position over the female/object.[288]

As Nancy Duncan suggests "the private/public dichotomy (both the political and the spatial dimension) is frequently employed to construct, control, discipline, confine, exclude and suppress gender and sexual differences preserving traditional patriarchal and heterosexist power structures."[289] In order to sanction and maintain the integrity of social morals, female bodies have been the target of constant monitoring practices imposed on them by their families and by the society around them. In a passage of *La frantumaglia,* Ferrante reflects on this surveilling obsession over women's bodies, starting from the etymology of the word "surveillance" itself:

> La parola sorveglianza è stata malamente segnata dai suoi usi polizieschi, ma […] ha dentro il contrario del corpo ottuso dal sonno, è metafora ostile all'opacità, alla morte. Esibisce invece la veglia, l'essere vigile, ma senza appellarsi allo sguardo, bensì al gusto di sentirsi in vita. I maschi hanno trasformato il sorvegliare in attività di sentinella, di secondino, di spia[290]

As already mentioned, surveillance represents a distinctive feature of abjection which involves a vain but constant controlling over the threshold between purity/impurity, morality/immorality, in

[286] Caldwell, "Imagining Naples," 341.
[287] Sambuco, *Corporeal Bonds,* 120.
[288] Ibid., 121.
[289] Nancy Duncan, ed., *BodySpace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (London: New York: Routledge, 1996), 128.
[290] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia,* sec. 16 *Vortici*.

order to contain and to prevent the corruption of the self. And it is precisely in response to this urge of policing and monitoring the female body that Delia, since her childhood, felt the obligation to guard and protect her mother especially outside the comfort zone of the domestic space. The transgression of the domestic threshold entails a threat to women's moral integrity and exposes them to the twisted game of male gazes. The compulsory inclusion of women in the domestic realm, however, does not free them from patriarchal authority, but rather makes them particularly vulnerable to men's violence both inside and outside of the home. While the private space of the home remains invisible, impenetrable to the outside observer and therefore conceals the unspeakable truths occurring within its borders, its transgression inevitably translates into a parallel transgression of societal norms and therefore women who venture the outside world wittingly expose themselves to potential dangers (Rose 35).[291] Women's access to the public space is always already filtered through an unspoken code of morality imposed by the heteronormative discourse which sanction women's bodies as control zones upon which enacting old and new forms of patriarchal subjugation.

One of the most significant moments in the novel that testifies to Delia's over-protective drive is exemplified by the reminiscence of her childhood trips on the tram with her mother: "if the tram was crowded […] I was possessed by a mania to protect my mother from any contact with men, as I had seen my father do in the same situation. I placed myself like a shield behind her […] It was wasted effort; Amalia's body couldn't be contained. Her hips spread across the aisle toward the hips of the men on either side of her."[292] Terrified by the prospect of any potential contact between her mother's body and other men, Delia becomes a human shield, a sentry whose only moral duty is to safeguard her mother's honor. But despite the efforts,

[291] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 35.
[292] Ferrante, *Troubling Love*, 53.

Amalia's body is too excessive and perturbing to be contained, and only later in her life Delia will acknowledge how her childhood perception was biased by the weight of patriarchal morals and beliefs imposed by the society around her and, first of all, by her father. Soon the woman realizes that "maybe it was the opposite. Maybe it was the men who pasted themselves to her, like flies to the sticky yellowish paper that hung in butcher shops."[293] Not much has changed since Delia's childhood attempts, on the tram, to protect her mother's body from men's devious yearnings; in fact, similar dynamics are still at play in 20th century Italy, Naples in this particular case, and public transportations continue to embody places of promiscuity, of forced contact, of uncomfortable proximity: "Women suffocated between male bodies, panting because of the accidental closeness, irritating even if apparently guiltless. In the crush men used the women to play silent games with themselves."[294] The public space is therefore permeated by an all-encompassing objectifying perspective that sees women's bodies as targets of male unwanted attentions.

In her correspondence with Martone, Ferrante describes Naples as a "Città maschile ingovernabile sia nei comportamenti pubblici che in quelli privati."[295] The depiction of Naples as a masculine city is clearly emphasized in both versions of *L'amore molesto,* particularly in the scene portraying Delia in her revealing red dress, navigating the city's streets

> a young man came suddenly out from the shelter of a doorway, grabbed me by one arm, laughing, and said to me in dialect, "What's the rush? Let me dry you off!" The tug was so strong that I felt the pain in my collarbone and slipped on my left leg. I didn't fall,

[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid., 52.
[295] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*, sec. 8.

only because I hit the garbage can. I regained my balance and pulled myself free, shouting, to my own amazement, insults in dialect.[296]

As Mariangela Tartaglione points out, the city, with its insolence and its noisy streets, becomes "humus malsano in cui si annidano vizi antichi e nuove brutture, relazioni guaste e, appunto, «amori molesti»."[297] In Delia's frantic quest for the truth, and in her chasing of her mother's lover, the city's streets, described by Tartaglione as "fetidi rigagnoli inondati dalla pioggia battente e dal fango," become symbolizations for the necessary decomposition of the self in infinitesimal debris and fragments.[298] The path for the recovery of Delia's repressed past, and of her refused Neapolitan origins, crosses the city's fetid streets where the woman is physically and verbally overwhelmed by the city's vulgar excess materialized in the obscene language and behaviors of Neapolitan men performing their rudimental version of masculinity.

In the film adaptation, the scene carries the same destabilizing power, portraying Delia in her soaking wet red dress, frantically wandering the streets of Naples while chasing the old Caserta.

[296] Ferrante, *Troubling Love*, 67.
[297] Tartaglione, *La "Guerra amorosa,"* 179.
[298] Ibid., 180.

Figure 26: *L'amore molesto*, still 5

The urban space is literally drenched in a grim and vulgar atmosphere that is only partially imputable to the weather. The porous nature of the city exposes it to both atmospheric agents and the unutterable vulgarities of male's arrogance, it absorbs men's obscenities and regurgitates them on women's bodies. This scene visually displays the multiple ways in which Delia's body is objectified and abjectified by the bully who almost assaults her, both physically and verbally. Once more, water becomes bearer of corruption, the fluid border between morality and immorality; respectable and despicable behaviors are made slippery, gender relations slimy.

As O'Haely points out, "in the economy of the film [water] is not a purifying agent, but a sinister, unruly fluid."[299] Another scene that epitomizes this polluting potential is represented by Delia's encounter with her childhood companion Antonio Polledro, Caserta's son, at an old, dingy thermal structure, the *Stufe di Nerone* in Pozzuoli, on the outskirts of Naples. Here, after having previously rejected the man's sexual advances, which border on sexual assault, Delia silently and seedily masturbates him in the turbid waters of the pool.

[299] O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples," 253.

Figure 27: *L'amore molesto*, still 6

The moment is captured in a medium long shot with a close up on Antonio almost completely immersed in the water with his head and his arms stretched over the pool's border, while Delia silently slides away from his side and from the camera focus. The scene cuts to a long shot on the same image, revealing a symmetric composition that has Antonio as its focal point ironically positioned under a sign that reads: "È obbligatoria la doccia prima di entrare in vasca" (It is mandatory to shower before entering the pool). No dialogue is involved in the scene, everything happens in silence, in the muffled, distorted silence of the thermal structure; the only perceptible sound is the eco of water ticking on the pool's surface, amplified by the emptiness of the surrounding space, which underlines the sordid alienation that this encounter produces on both characters.

While this scene in the film perfectly inscribes itself in the overall economy of the narration and in its depiction of water's polluting potential, the written counterpart is set in a completely different environment: a sordid hotel room. Ferrante discusses this change of location in her letters to Martone twice, the first time in response to the screenplay that Martone had sent

her and the second time in her reaction to the film itself. While in the first Ferrante seems a bit reluctant, not necessarily in relation to the location choice, but to the depiction of Delia's relationship with her own body, in her letter to Martone written after the film premiere the author expresses all her recognition towards the director's achievements in the visual adaptation of a highly controversial scene:

> Mi riferisco alla Bonaiuto sotto la pioggia di una Napoli angosciosa, a come il suo corpo scivola fino all'ambiente-grotta della sauna, fino alla scena bellissima sia per i suoi valori visivi, sia per i suoi valori simbolici, della masturbazione in acqua (scena di gran lunga più abbacinante che nel mio libro: il mutamento di ambientazione dello scambio sessuale tra Delia e Antonio è efficace)[300]

Ferrante alludes to the connection between water and corruption/abjection by underlining how, in finding shelter from the rain shower, Delia finds herself in the sordid space of the thermal baths where she lapses into sexual surrender, transgressing moral and even hygienic codes of behavior, slipping into abjection, at the same time contaminating and contaminated by water. Under the surface of the murky water, in the public space of the thermal baths, the unspeakable takes place; once more, water functions as a liquid curtain able to conceal what cannot be publicly accepted and exposed. At the same time, however, the aquatic setting of the sexual exchange, precisely through this concealment, evokes the religious belief according to which water washes away all sins, counterbalancing the sinful nature of the act of masturbation.

In Ferrante's novel, instead, water acquires different symbologies and Delia's immersion in it precedes the sexual exchange with Polledro. As already mentioned, in the novel the scene does not take place in a thermal structure but in a hotel room and, almost as soon as Delia enters the squalid space, she takes a shower in the filthy bathroom. Water enables Delia to detach

[300] Ferrante, *La frantumaglia*, sec. 8.

herself from her own body, hence destabilizing the integrity of the self. At the same time, however, in this scene water reacquires its cathartic function; the shower bears the features of a cleansing ritual through which scrubbing away the polluting traces of her bodily and moral corruption thus allowing for her true self to emerge:

> I let the water run for a long time before getting under it. […] I was separated from myself: the woman who wanted to be shot off like an arrow, eyes wide open, was observed dispassionately by the woman under the water. I soaped myself carefully and did so in such way that every gesture belonged to an external world without deadlines.[301]

Furthermore, as Kimberley Patton remarks, water's purifying potential also signifies an intrinsic metamorphosis of the purified subject and "revolutions in the life cycles"[302] represent the most eminent instance of such transforming power. For Delia, this metamorphosis enables her to reconnect with the hidden, refused traces of her maternal genealogy.

> My mother, who for years had existed only as an annoying responsibility, at times nagging, was dead. But as I rubbed my face vigorously, especially around the eyes, I realized with unexpected tenderness that in fact I had Amalia under my skin, like a hot liquid that had been injected into me at some unknown time.[303]

Under the surface of her skin, Delia finds liquid traces of the mother, her identity is rendered fluid, melted with the maternal, the line of demarcation between mother and daughter is thus blurred and the integrity of the subject once again undermined. Water's abjecifying potential is thus reinstated.

---

[301] Ferrante, *Troubling Love*, 86.
[302] Kimberley C. Patton, *The Sea Can Wash Away All Evils: Modern Marine Pollution and the Ancient Cathartic Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 42.
[303] Ferrante, *Troubling Love*, 86.

Despite the different setting, the novel already contains all the unsettling elements that will be later re-elaborated by Martone in his film adaptation. As soon as Polledro enters the room, Delia finds herself paralyzed, unable to express her discomfort, to react and reject Antonio's sexual advances, passively surrendering her body to the man in an encounter that borders on an abuse. Both, Delia and Antonio, are enacting their rudimental versions of the heteronormative paradigm, performing roles and gestures to which they both feel the need to comply, in order to be accepted and to conform to societal expectations. Delia is suspended in an alienating dimension, unable to experience sexual pleasure despite her attempts, incapable of trespassing the threshold of self-acceptance and awareness of her own sexuality, oblivious victim of that patriarchal law that estranges women from their own bodies and forces them to comply to codes of morality and self-censure. "For a long time I had been sure that I would never cross that threshold. […] And I was paralyzed by a growing embarrassment, because of the copious liquids spilling out of me."[304] Abjection emerges again through the lines of the narration via the constant reference to Delia's copious bodily fluids that provoke in her, as well as in the reader, a sense of uneasiness, almost repulsion. Once more, the connection between spatial dimension and the feelings and experiences endured by the characters involved is highly evocative. The dingy, constrictive, third-rate hotel room mirrors their sordid sexual exchange, while the filthy bathroom anticipates the abject way in which Delia relates to her own body and to Antonio's presence.

The scene that immediately follows this unsettling moment, in both the novel and the film, introduces a change in pace, mood, and location. Delia is immersed in the public space of an overcrowded Naples, swallowed up by the dense "swarm of pedestrians"[305] flocking in the

[304] Ibid., 91.
[305] Ibid., 96.

streets and, while navigating the public space, Delia is consciously but unmindfully re-exposed to the insisting and objectifying stares of men. The film adaptation successfully conveys the feeling of casualness that drives Delia on her way home. Non-diegetic music breaks the silence of the previous scene on the notes of a Southern Italian folk song;[306] the traditional rhythms of the popular tarantella usher Delia in her wandering the streets of Naples. The music's pressing rhythm conveys the confusion that surrounds the woman first at the train station – in the midst of a mostly male crowd – and then in the city's streets. The scene that portrays the woman reemerging from the station's underground passage is filmed with an overhead shot, the camera slightly descends to a medium shot and follows Delia as she wanders the streets filled with local shops and fruit stands, immersed in a diverse crowd and careless of the insisting looks of the men passing by.

Delia's relation with the urban space of her hometown is further complicated when she ventures her childhood neighborhood, the Gianturco, to visit her disowned father who still lives in the same decrepit apartment. Here, in both versions of *L'amore molesto,* Naples becomes a city of the margins, in terms of both geographical as well as social marginalities,[307] and its dereliction is portrayed through the polluting noise and the sordid landscape of the city's urban sprawl. While roaming the streets of her childhood, Delia realizes how the once rural space immersed in the dusty Neapolitan countryside has now transformed into "a jaundiced neighborhood of the periphery, dominated by skyscrapers, choked by traffic and by the trains that, slowing down, snaked alongside the buildings."[308] The dusty desolated landscape has now been replaced and literally "chocked" by the smoggy urban space of Naples' sallow and fetid

[306] The song is called "Tarantella del Gargano," written in the 15th century by an anonymous author and, in this version, is performed by Daniele Sepe.
[307] Caldwell, "Imagining Naples," 343.
[308] Ferrante, *Troubling Love,* 108.

outskirts. Here, Delia finds herself trapped "in a shadowy light stinking of urine, squeezed between a wall that sweated large drops of water and a dusty guardrail that protected me from the automobile lane;"[309] in the tight claustrophobic brink between cars and a filthy wall Delia is exposed to the polluting potential of the city's urban space that imposes its material agency by unsettling. The feelings of suffocation and entrapment are repurposed in the film adaptation in the scene that sees Delia zigzagging in an entanglement of cars and construction works on her way to her paternal house.

Figure 28: *L'amore molesto*, still 7

In this shot, the camera is submerged in the city's streets and captures Delia in a long shot almost disappearing in the urban space: as if swallowed up by the traffic jam, her silhouette is barely distinguishable, framed by cars, signages and roadworks and filtered through the grid of an improvised fencing. The buzz of traffic, with the incessant sharp noise of car horns speaks for the

[309] Ibid.

poisonous urbanization of suburban areas like the Gianturco, now "plagued by the same problems as the city center."[310]

Nevertheless, despite the abrupt transformation of the neighborhood, the disconnected streets, the destitute buildings whose layout "followed the same unimaginative geometry"[311] are still sadly recognizable in the eyes of the woman, testifying to the persistent misery, both material and emotional, of the surrounding area and of her childhood years. In the filthy apartment, Delia faces her father, who had tormented her mother till the very end, only to be reminded of all the abuses endured together by mother and daughters, victims of brutal patriarchal codes of morality and conduct. Chased by a spurt of vulgarities pouring from her father's mouth like a poisonous stream, Delia flees the building and looks for shelter in the dingy streets, soon finding herself in front of the worn-out door of the old *Coloniali* shop that belonged to the Polledro family. The woman ventures in the pinch dark basement that once used to be the grocery shop and that now functioned as Caserta's hideout. While exploring the constrictive place, flashbacks of her childhood days spent in those very same spaces with her friend Antonio resurface from her memory, and with them the repressed memory of the sexual abuse endured by the young girl at the hands of Antonio's grandfather also resurfaces. There, together with the truth about her painful past, she finds the suit that her mother wore the night of her death, right before getting undressed and drowning.

As Laura Benedetti remarks, the "descent into Delia's psyche coincides with a descent into the city of Naples, its interiors, its subway, and the old basement shop."[312] By literally descending into Naples' corrupted womb, by remapping the traces of her topographical memory

---

[310] Ewa Mazierska, *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cinema /* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 62.
[311] Ferrante, *Troubling Love*, 110.
[312] Laura Benedetti, *The Tigress in the Snow: Motherhood and Literature in Twentieth-Century Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 105.

scattered throughout the city, starting with the old Coloniali shop, Delia is able to recollect the repressed reminiscences of her violated childhood. It is in the dingy, filthy space of the old store that the woman finally gets rid of the red dress and wears instead Amalia's blue suit, filling the emptiness left by her mothers' body, inhabiting the space that once was hers. In *L'amore molesto*, spatial and bodily transgression and the risk of contamination are essential steps in Delia's path to achieve self-awareness/knowledge. Only by embracing abjection, by "exploring the porous boundary between the clean and the not clean, the self and the (m)other" Delia is able to recover the repressed memory of her childhood abuse.[313] Amalia's death will ease Delia's interior tension allowing her to come to terms with her disintegrated self and absorb fragments of her mother's identity – starting from her beloved blue suit. Delia challenges the integrity of her own self, choosing instead to inhabit the abject space that mantains her viscerally bond with the mother.

4.3 A world "without margins:" exposing the Rione's contaminating potential in *L'amica geniale* and *Storia della bambina perduta*

In the quartet of *L'amica geniale* (*My brilliant friend*, also known as *The Neapolitan novels*), published between 2011 and 2014, Elena Ferrante reiterates some of the themes at the core of her previous novels: the importance of female bonds, troubled mother/daughter relationships, the permeability of the boundaries between humans and the material space they inhabit. *L'amica geniale*'s quartet is a bildungsroman that follows the evolution of the conflictual but powerful friendship between Elena Greco (Lenù) and Raffaella Cerullo (Lila) from childhood to adulthood within Naples' urban space. The events, spanning from the postwar to the present, testify to the impact of the sociocultural context of belonging in the shaping of family,

[313] O'Healy, "Revisiting the Belly of Naples," 254.

social, and gender roles and to the struggles faced by women in the fight for a higher degree of agency amidst poverty, violence, and corruption. The indissoluble bond that connects the two friends is rooted in their common upbringing and in the material agency that their hometown exerts upon them, equally affecting, and infecting, their life choices and paths. But while Elena has the chance of pursuing an education, ultimately fulfilling her childhood's dream and becoming an internationally renowned writer, Lila is forced to abandon her studies to support her family's business and to secretly feed her intellectual hunger by roundabout means. Both, however, are overwhelmed by Naples' abject load, which emerges as an attractive yet oppressive force, source of creative inspiration and inherent corruption.

Once again, Ferrante underlines the contaminating power of her city and in particular of the Neapolitan neighborhood Rione Luzzatti. Located just across the rail track, not far from the overbuys train station of Napoli Centrale, the Rione is presented in all its infecting potential as the source of all the violence taking place within its perimeter. Stronghold of the Solara family, a local clan affiliated with the Camorra, the neighborhood is the scene of repeated episodes of violence and crime ranging from beatings, to usury, drugs dealing, and even assassinations. While taking into account the quartet as a whole, herein the focus will be on the first and the last volumes, *L'amica geniale* and *Storia della bambina perduta* respectively, as they most significantly display the traces of the abject bond between human bodies and material spaces at the core of this analysis.

Throughout the quartet there is a constant emphasis on borders: geographical, physical and symbolical; the Rione's borders, in particular, define an ambivalent space that is at once familiar and threatening. Transgressing the borders of the neighborhood becomes an obsession for Elena and her friends, starting from their early childhood. Significant in this perspective is

the episode that sees the young Elena and Lila skipping school, committed to transgress the Rione's perimeter and to reach the sea, for the first time leaving the familiar streets of the neighborhood behind them and venturing into the unknown: "Da tempo alle spalle non avevamo più il tunnel, che era il confine col rione. La strada percorsa ci era ormai poco familiar."[314] Roughly halfway through, however, the two young girls are hit by a violent storm and decide to abandon their adventure, running back to the Rione's "reassuring" space. Once more, just like in Ferrante's novel previously analyzed, water reveals all its ambivalent potential; in this episode, in particular, it becomes an admonishment for having transgressed the borders of the Rione's familiar, although "infecting," space: "Una luce violacea spaccò il cielo nero, tuonò più forte. Lila mi diede uno strattone, mi ritrovai poco convinta a correre nella direzione del rione. Si levò il vento, i goccioloni diventarono più fitti, nel giro di pochi secondi si trasformarono in una cascata d'acqua."[315]

Later on in the novel instead, in an episode set during Elena's adolescence, water – the sea in particular – is represented as the ultimate escape from the contaminated neighborhood. During her stay in Ischia, the largest of the Phlegrean islands in the Gulf of Naples, Elena leaves her hometown for the first time, and this estrangement from the familiar space of the Rione relieves her, both psychologically and physically, from its constrictive and polluting aura. As soon as the ferryboat leaves the shore, dividing Elena from her mother and the dryland, mixed feelings of both fear of the unknown and happiness for her first experience away from home surface in the young woman's mind. The first contact with the sea water and the sun almost has a purifying power on Elena's skin: "L'acqua di mare, il sole mi cancellarono rapidamente dal viso

[314] Ferrante, *L'amica Geniale*, 72.
[315] Ibid., 73.

l'infiammazione dell'acne"[316] soothing her adolescential lack of confidence and allowing for a new, reinvigorated self-perception to emerge. This sudden change does not pass unnoticed in the eyes of the men around her and her permanence on the island also marks the beginning of Elena's complex relation with her own sexuality, as she is sexually abused by an elderly man, Donato Serratore, member of her community and father of her future lover Nino. Elena will frequently recall this experience in later stages of her life in all its abject potential as a moment of both uncomfortable pleasure and repulsion that permanently marked her way of perceiving her sexuality and relating to men.

Escaping and re-entering the borders of the Rione entail an equal destabilization of reference points and can translate into either positive or negative, and at times traumatic, outcomes. In *L'amica geniale*, Elena recalls the surprise experienced outside of the Rione while exploring Naples with her father. By observing his way of interacting with the space and the people around him, Elena notices how this new side of her father almost clashes with his behaviors at home, as if the simple action of stepping out of the familiar streets of the Rione could elicit an immediate improvement, almost detoxification, in terms of social relations and attitudes. "I confini del rione sbiadirono nel corso di quell'estate. Una mattina mio padre mi portò con sé. [...] Per strada si comportava con una socievolezza, una cortesia lenta, che in casa non aveva quasi mai. [...] Possibile che solo il nostro rione fosse così pieno di tensioni e violenze, mentre il resto della città era radioso, benevolo?"[317] In other occasions instead, the neighborhood – despite its corruption – is perceived as a refuge, the safe place of the familiar in opposition to the feeling of otherness perceived while venturing the upscale neighborhoods of downtown Naples: "Fu come passare un confine. Mi ricordo un fitto paesaggio e una sorta di

[316] Ibid., 206
[317] Ibid., 134-5.

umiliante diversità. Non guardavo i ragazzi, ma le ragazze, le signore: erano assolutamemte diverse da noi. Sembrava aver respirato un'altra aria, aver mangiato altri cibi, essersi vestite su qualche altro pianeta, aver imparato a camminare su fili di vento."[318] The feeling of inadequateness and alterity experienced once crossed the perimeter of the Rione is overwhelming; it literally reveals to Elena the polluting potential of its space as if its waters, its air, its food were vehicles of contamination, capable of infecting its inhabitants. In this occurrence, the intrinsic violence that characterizes every aspect of the life in the Rione transcends its borders and is replicated in the streets of the affluent Naples; the episode will indeed culminate in a fight between Elena's friends and a group of wealthy young men after one of them had been offended and provoked by Lila's brother Lino. Only the brutal but timely intervention of the Solara's brothers will put an end to the fight, with the resort, however, to an even harsher, almost inhuman savagery. This manifestation of the neighborhood's brutality outside of its borders is so destabilizing that Elena feels as if "il rione si fosse allargato e avesse inglobato tutta Napoli, anche le vie della gente perbene."[319] As if the perimeter of the Rione had swallowed up the entirety of the city, contaminating – with its virulent potential – even the respectable side.

Throughout her life, Elena tries to distance herself, both geographically and culturally, from the inherent violence and abjection that characterizes the Rione and its community. Her decision to leave Naples and move to Pisa to study at the *Normale*, and later to Florence, will be dictated by the need to escape the constrictive space of the neighborhood. The feeling of liberation that follows this distancing is reiterated throughout the quartet spanning Elena's entire life. It emerges for instance for the very first time when she ventures outside the neighborhood

[318] Ibid., 188.
[319] Ibid., 192.

with Lila: “Quando penso al piacere di essere liberi, penso all’inizio di quella giornata, a quando uscimmo dal tunnel e ci trovammo su una strada tutta dritta a perdita d’occhio;”[320] or later on in her life, during her frequent travels abroad to promote her books “Montpellier, invece, che pure era di gran lunga meno eccitante di Parigi, mi diede l’impressione che i miei argini si fossero rotti e che mi stessi espandendo.”[321] Her freedom of movement goes in parallel with her personal and professional success as a writer, allowing her to break geographical and cultural barriers, moving across space as well as social roles and status. But this sense of emancipation is threatened each time she gets closer to Naples when she is punctually overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety, almost disgust: “A ridosso della città mi affacciai al finestrino. Più il treno rallentava scivolando dentro lo spazio urbano, più mi prendeva uno sfinimento ansioso. Avvertii la sgradevolezza della periferia con le sue palazzine grigie oltre i binari, i tralicci, le luci dei semafori, i parapetti di pietra.”[322] The dreariness of the urban periphery, with its unpleasant landscape, perturbs and unsettles Elena.

In order to protect herself from the abjectifying power of the Rione, even after having moved back to Naples, the woman struggles to strictly define and separate the exclusive space reserved to her professional and cultured life, from the debasing dimension of the neighborhood and its inhabitants: “Avevo tenuto le mie origini così separate da me che, pur passando non poco tempo al rione, non avevo mai invitato nell’appartamento di via Tasso nemmeno una persona che avesse a che fare con la mia infanzia e la mia adolescenza.”[323] All the characters, Elena included, seem to be at various degrees contaminated by the life in the neighborhood, not being able to transcend its borders without being inevitably affected by it. So much so that Elena comes to

[320] Ibid., 70.
[321] Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta* (Roma: Edizioni E/O, 2014), 18.
[322] Ibid., 29.
[323] Ibid., 182.

perceive herself as the actual embodiment of her city's moral and material corruption: "Ebbi l'impressione, nei momenti di maggiore scontento, che i guasti di Napoli si fossero insediati anche nel mio corpo."[324] Geographical and corporeal borders are blurred at various levels throughout the narration, unsettling clear cut divides between human bodies and spaces but also among humans, threatening the integrity of the subject in terms of acceptable and execrable behaviors, as well as of gender roles and identifications.

Only Nino, Elena's high school sweetheart who later becomes her lover, is capable of crossing the Rione's threshold without being affected by it, as if immune to its virulence: "Sapeva entrare e uscire dal rione come voleva, senza farsene contaminare."[325] Before moving from the Rione with his family in his childhood, Nino had been exposed to its violence for a short period of his life, therefore internalizing a small portion of its viral burden and developing a resistance to it. As described by Roberto Esposito, the mechanism of immunization precisely functions by injecting the body with the antigen against which the subject has to be protected, thus leading to the development of antibodies that will allow the organism to recognize and resist against subsequent expositions to the pathogen.[326] While the rest of the Rione's community has been irreversibly infected, Nino is protected from the contaminative contact with the local "carriers" and is thus able to safely navigate the neighborhood's space, in terms of both geographical boundaries and social relations.

The abjectifying nature of the Rione is often emphasized through its association with despising images belonging to the natural, mostly animal world that reproduce its seemingly innate violence, poverty, and filth, and entice feelings of revulsion and disgust. The interconnection between human bodies and non-human nature is a crucial component of the life

[324] Ibid., 170.
[325] Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 326.
[326] Esposito, *Bíos*, 42.

in the Rione; this interconnectedness inevitably implies a trans-corporeal bond between the human and the contaminated environmental dimension.[327] Insects and reptiles, in particular, evoke the slippery essence of corporeal borders; minuscule animals plague the neighborhood, contaminate food, air, water, and creep into women's bodies polluting them:

> Da bambina mi sono immaginata animali piccolissimi, quasi invisibili, che venivano di notte nel rione, uscivano dagli stagni, dalle carrozze in disuso dei treni oltre il terrapieno, dalle erbe puzzolenti dette fetienti, dalle rane, dalle salamandre, dalle mosche, dalle pietre, dalla polvere, ed entravano nell'acqua, nel cibo, nell'aria, rendendo le nostre mamme, le nonne, rabbiose come cagne assetate. Erano contaminate più degli uomini[328]

Women in particular succumb to the Rione's "infective" potential and become rabid dogs, even more contaminated than their male counterparts, eaten alive by their frustration. Not even Elena, despite her efforts, is able to escape this infective violence which emerges during a moment of rage against her unfaithful lover Nino:

> Lo colpii a pugni chiusi nel petto e mentre lo facevo mi sentii come se ci fosse una me scollata da me che voleva fargli ancora più male, che voleva schiaffeggiarlo, sputargli in faccia come avevo visto fare da piccola nei litigi di rione, gridargli uomo di merda, graffiarlo, strappargli gli occhi. Mi meravigliai, mi spaventai. *Sono sempre io quest'altra così furiosa? Io qui, a Napoli, in questa casa lurida, io che se potessi ucciderei quest'uomo, gli ficcherei con tutte le mie forze un coltello nel cuore? Devo trattenere quest'ombra – mia madre, tutte le nostre antenate – o devo scatenarla?*[329]

What differentiates Elena from the genealogy of women that preceded her is her lucid awareness that allows her to reflect on the perturbing nature of her condition of being a woman and of being

[327] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self /* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.
[328] Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 33.
[329] Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 85.

oppressed by the constrictive roles and expectations imposed by the patriarchal society and by heteronormativity. Elena's body becomes the site of a perpetual struggle between her intellectual awareness and the legacy of frustration and rage inherited by the genealogy of women that had preceded her, her mother in particular.

Elena's relationship with her mother Immacolata echoes the controversial mother-daughter bond at the core of Elena Ferrante's previous novels and takes it to the extremes, losing, as Laura Benedetti points out, its painful ambivalence, and asserting instead a firm refusal:[330] "[...] io odiavo mia madre, la odiavo davvero profondamente."[331] Benedetti continues underlining how this rejection does not merely concern her mother's codes of values and behaviors but is extended to her body, perceived as deformed and repugnant; more precisely it is the left side of Immacolata's body, with her limp and her walleye[332] that perturbs Elena to the point of becoming a real obsession. As Benedetti remarks, the insistence on her mother's malformation metonymically reflects Elena's "matrophobic attitude" driven by her haunting fear of becoming like her, of absorbing her disablement;[333] during her adolescence, for instance, Elena is hounted by the phobia of turning into her mother "zoppa, con l'occhio storto" despised by everyone and doomed to a loveless life.[334] Ironically, despite her constant struggle to escape the abject magnetism of her mother's disabled body, after Immacolata's death Elena will unconsciously end up mimicking her limb. Only her friend Lila will be able to confront her with the truth, responding to her complains of discomfort and pain with her usual revealing bluntness: "Non ti fa male niente Lenù. Ti sei inventata che devi zoppicare per non far morire del tutto tua madre, e

[330] Laura Benedetti, "Il linguaggio dell'amicizia e della città: L'amica geniale di Elena Ferrante tra continuità e cambiamento," *Quaderni d'italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2012): 176.
[331] Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 65.
[332] Benedetti, "Il linguaggio dell'amicizia e della città," 176.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 92.

ora zoppichi veramente, e io ti studio, e ti fa bene. [...] Ti senti forte, hai smesso di essere figlia, sei diventata veramente madre. [...] A te persino i dolori ti fanno bene. Ti è bastato zoppicare un pochino e ora tua madre se ne sta quieta dentro di te."[335] Lila, attentive observer of her friend's behavior, believes that Elena's limb is nothing but the external manifestation of her inability to accept her mother's death. It is by unconsciously performing that very same disablement, by symbolically incorporating of a portion of the maternal body, that the woman internalizes the loss, choosing to accept a legacy that she had refused for her whole life, thus sanctioning a reconnection with the genealogy of the mother.

In her analysis of Ferrante's saga, Caterina Falotico points out how "il tema materno viene a coincidere qui come altrove con il ventre molle e putrefatto di Napoli che è l'origine darwinianamente intesa a cui i personaggi tentano di sottrarsi studiando, svolgendo professioni e naturalmente andando altrove."[336] Despite the willingness to distance herself from the abject visceral bond with the mother/Naples both geographically and intellectually, Elena, just like many other Ferrante's female characters, is not able to fully free herself from the impasse and is compelled to live in the precarious balance between the attachment to her roots and her emancipatory drive. But when the impossibility to emancipate the self from the mother/Naples' centripetal force prevails, as in Lila's case, the perception of the self and of the material world is blurred[337] triggering what is by Ferrante here defined as *smarginatura*: the dissolution of borders among people, objects, spaces. The term is introduced in *L'amica geniale* and is attributed to Lila: "Il 31 dicembre del 1958 Lila ebbe il suo primo episodio di smarginatura. Il termine non è mio, lo ha sempre usato lei forzando il significato comune della parola. Diceva che in quelle

[335] Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 350-51.
[336] Caterina Falotico, "Elena Ferrante: The Cycle of L'amica Geniale between Autobiography, History and Metaliterature," *Forum Italicum* 49, no. 1 (05 2015): 93.
[337] Ibid., 94.

occasioni si dissolvevano all'improvviso i margini delle persone e delle cose."[338] Lila, just like the world around her, exceeds the borders that define and separate the self from the other, human and nature, becoming inherently 'without margins' not containable in a steady form: "nessun profilo ben disegnato poteva contenerla in modo definitivo, tanto che una nuova pettinatura, un nuovo abito, un nuovo trucco degli occhi o della bocca erano solo confini sempre più avanzati che dissolvevano i precedenti."[339] As a result of this borders' dissolution, traces of her own self slowly start to surface on the bodies and behaviors of other members of the Rione's community and the collapse of corporeal borders leads to an overlapping of identities, even entailing the queering of gender identifications.

Alfonso, one of Elena's classmates, is the perfect embodiment of this boundaries' transgression as he slowly transforms into Lila's queer surrogate, a "maschio-femmina" whose body absorbs and incorporates pieces of Lila. In a moment of closeness with Elena, Alfonso himself acknowledges his transformation and says: "Lila mi ha obbligato – non so come dire – a prendermi un po' di le; lo sai che tipo è, ha detto: comincia da qui e vedi cosa succede; così ci siamo mescolati – è stato molto divertente – e ora non sono quello che ero e non sono nemmeno Lila, ma un'altra persona che piano piano si va precisando."[340] Alfonso's queer identity unsettles the "compulsory order sex/gender/desire"[341] and in doing so poses a threat to the stability of the Rione's morality, highly rooted in heteronormative values. In particular, by becoming Lila's queer double, he captures the attention of one of the two Solara's brothers, Marcello, who had been torn by an unreciprocated love for the woman since their adolescence, and engages with him in an extramarital homoerotic relationship**.** Alfonso's "unnatural," "degenerate" sexuality

[338] Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 85-6.
[339] Ibid., 260.
[340] Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 197.
[341] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 9.

perturbs the respectability of the Solara family by threatening the ideal of heterosexual masculinity embodied by Marcello and Michele. By transgressing the threshold between the socially acceptable and deplorable, and by undermining the Rione's moral integrity, Alfonso enters the domain of social abjection and is ultimately expelled from the body of the community. When his corpse is found in a beach in the outskirts of Naples: "Lila gli era sparita del tutto dalla faccia e la mascolinità, malgrado gli sforzi, se lo stava riprendendo. [...] Poi un giorno sparì definitivamente [...]. Il suo corpo fu ritrovato giorni dopo sulla spiaggia di Coroglio. Era stato ucciso a bastonate chissà dove e poi buttato in mare."[342] Water is once again presented in its abject potential as a site of both death and purification: Alfonso's corpse is found ashore washed away of any traces of femininity; through his death, the integrity of the Rione's heteronormativity can ultimately be reinstated.

Water's fluidity, with its alternately cathartic or corrupting agency, hints at the permeability of boundaries between the human and the material world, at the dissolution of the borders that maintain the integrity of the self, hence inscribing itself in the discourse of the abovementioned feeling of *smarginatura.* This perception of being 'without margins' is often associated with the impression that "qualcosa di assolutamente materiale, presente [...] intorno a tutti e a tutto da sempre, ma senza che si riuscisse a percepirlo, stesse spezzando i contorni di persone e cose rivelandosi."[343] The destabilizing perception of being *smarginato,* deprived of the material borders that define the individual, distinguishing between the human and the non-human, the self and the other, is caused by the agency of the material world. This overarching material force exposes the "trans-corporeal" bonds between human bodies, non-human traces, and the territory that they inhabit. Episodes of *smarginatura* are scattered throughout the quartet,

[342] Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 286.
[343] Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 85-6.

but one better than others exemplifies the interconnectedness between human experience, material world, and the powerful agency of the latter over the former, the episode set during the devastating earthquake in Irpinia in 1980: "Il terremoto – il terremoto del 23 novembre 1980 con quel suo frantumare infinito – ci entrò dentro le ossa. Cacciò via la consuetudine della solidità."[344] The quake intervenes in the narration revealing its own eradicative agency, dissolving the concreteness of corporeal boundaries. It literally penetrates human bodies becoming one with them, shaking their essence from within. Lila, more than anyone else, is profoundly affected by this destabilizing, destructive power that tears her to shreds and transforms her into a completely different woman:

> Ora quell'altra donna sembrava essere emersa direttamente dalle viscere della terra, non assomigliava nemmeno un poco all'amica che pochi minuti prima avevo invidiato per come sapeva selezionare parole ad arte, non le assomigliava nemmeno nei lineamenti, erano storpiati dall'angoscia. [...] Si torceva, tremava, si accarezzava la pancia, pareva non credere più a nessi stabili[345]

What is left of Lila after the quake is a woman 'without margins' who seems to have emerged from the trembling quivering womb of the earth and whose bodily features are distorted in a grimace of anguish. Overwhelmed by the devastating exprience Lila forcedly reveals to Elena "il sentimento del mondo in cui si muoveva"[346] and in a state of frantic delusion she shout out how the borders of the whole world around were collapsing "l'auto s'era smarginata, anche Marcello al volante si stava smarginando, la cosa e la persona zampillavano da loro stesse mescolando liquido e metallo."[347]

[344] Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 158.
[345] Ibid., 160.
[346] Ibid., 162.
[347] Ibid., 161.

This fear over the dissolution of the boundaries among humans and between human flesh and non-human matter, which haunted Lila since her childhood, is intensified and publicly disclosed by the earthquake. The borders that safeguard the integrity of human bodies are rendered even more faint and elusive by nature's material agency: "si spezzavano come il filo di cotone. Mormorò che per lei era tutto uno sciogliersi di materie eterogenee, un confondersi e rimescolarsi."[348] Naples' geographical positioning along the side of the active volcanic area of the Phlegraean Fields, together with its geological structure resulting from the interplay between volcanic, tectonic, and sedimentary processes expose the city to the constant threat of natural disasters. The instability of the geographical space reverberates in the frailty of corporeal boundaries and serves as a constant reminder of the precariousness of the human condition; it produces a sense of collective destabilization with the consequent loss of social as well as spatial reference points. In this account of the earthquake in Irpinia, Ferrante's provides a literary testimony for the repercussions of natural disasters on local communities and their narratives, attesting their transformative potential over "not only the existences of those touched by it, their everyday habits and domestic geographies, but also the social landscapes of towns and cities".[349]

In order to sustain the precariousness of human existence, Lila feels compelled to constantly control and monitor the world around her; this exercise of compulsory surveillance is the only possible way through which the collapse of boundaries between the human body and the material world can be contained. Lila's need to surveil the system of social and spatial interactions around her will compel her to live a life of self-confinement within the rigid perimeter of the Rione: "Voleva cancellarsi perché non si tollerava. L'aveva fatto di continuo, durante tutta la sua esistenza, a cominciare da quel suo chiudersi in un perimetro soffocante,

[348] Ibid., 162.
[349] Iovino, *Ecocriticism and Italy*, 89.

limitandosi in misura crescente proprio quando il pianeta confini non ne voleva avere più."[350] Unable to keep bearing the weight of this consuming obsession, Lila ultimately disappears, leaving nothing but elusive traces behind her, and provoking a sense of loss and dismay in her community. Elena, in particular, can't help but wondering about the fate of her best friend, conjecturing potential scenarios that often see Lila voluntarily dissolving into the material world, and ultimately vanishing without leaving a trace, in Naples' corrupted womb: "A volte mi chiedo dove s'è dissolta. In fondo al mare. Dentro un crepaccio o in un cunicolo sotterraneo di cui lei sola conosce l'esistenza. In una vecchia vasca da bagno colma di acido potente. Dentro un fosso carbonio d'altri tempi, di quelli a cui dedicava tante parole."[351] Before her disappearance, Lila relentlessly roamed the city's streets in order to ease her pain, meticulously studying Naples' history in libraries and archives. During one of these researches, Lila chanced upon the history of the ancient *fosso carbonario*, a trench used to discharge waste waters, and is at once fascinated and repelled by it. Through Lila's words, the narration digresses on this "luogo della monnezza," which is described as a filthy dumping site where "ci scorrevano le acque luride, ci gettavano le carogne degli animali."[352] In addition, in the same place, during the gladiatorial games in Ancient Rome, "si era cominciato a versare anche molto sangue di esseri umani."[353] This space, once used as a receptacle for human and non-human refuse and later as the arena for atrocious duels to the death,[354] is now home to the monumental church of San Giovanni a Carbonara; a sacred space built on the ruins of ancient blodsheds and waste: "tutta quella putredine, tutto quello scempio d'arti spezati e occhi cavati e teste spaccate veniva poi coperto – letteralmente coperto – da una

[350] Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 441.
[351] Ibid., 450.
[352] Ibid., 425.
[353] Ibid.
[354] In ancient times, and up to the middle ages, every city used to have a moat outside of its walls intended for wastewaters or carcasses. For a more detailed description of Naples' old *fosso carbonario* and the church of San Giovanni a Carbonara see *Napoli Nobilissima* vo. 15, p. 18.

chiesa dedicata a San Giovanni Battista [...] sotto c'era il sangue e sopra Dio, la pace, la preghiera."[355] The image of the *fosso carbonario* is particularly significant in the economy of the novel, as it materializes as the ultimate site of abjection within the city's urban space. The antithetical coexistence between sacred and filth, at once fascinates and perturbs Lila and speaks to the city's inherent corruption. In Ferrante's works, from *L'amore molesto*, to *L'amica geniale*, Naples is presented in all its contaminating load, not as mere backdrop for the unfolding of the narrative plot, but as a space with its own infecting agency over the lives of those who inhabit within its borders and beyond. In her nonfiction book *La frantumaglia,* Ferrante describes how Naples' long history of deterioration anticipates the ills of Italian or even European societies; Lila's words in *Storia della bambina perduta* echoe this ominous potential. As her reflection moves from the peculiarity of Naples' corrupted nature to that of the rest of the world, the powerful image of the *fosso carbonario* becomes a metaphor for the society's moral as well as material deterioration: "L'intero pianeta, diceva, è un grande Fosso carbonario."[356] Naples is a microcosm whose contagious load is stealthily spreading outward: while displaying the inherent corruption of its own community, the threat of a moral and environmental epidemic is extended well beyond its borders.

[355] Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 426.
[356] Ibid.

EPILOGUE

REFUSE AND REUSE: ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF THE DISCARDED

Refuse urges us to look beyond the borders of the self, to face the excess that derives from our compulsive discarding, and to question our modes of living. Given the inherent impossibility of getting rid of the refuse once and for all, there is no definitive closure, nor immediate solution to the issue on both, the environmental and social level. So how do we cope with this excess in a more conscious and "productive" manner? We can start by acknowledging how the discarded can be re-envisioned in ways that foster alternative systems of inclusion, rather than just passively surrendering to the apocalyptic scenario that sees our lives – and the environment we live in – as irreversibly intoxicated by waste – literally or metaphorically. Refuse can be either permanently discarded, disposed of in ways that do not leave room for any transformative outcome (if not for an irreversibly polluted one), or it can be re-used, repurposed, recycled.

Artists across Europe have answered this call to action and have acknowledged the ethic and aesthetic value of recycling waste. In the Spring of 2017, for instance, the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (MUCEM) in Marseille held an exhibit titled *Lives of Garbage – The Economy of Waste*.[357] The exhibit was aimed at documenting "the ways in which waste is collected, transformed and treated around the Mediterranean," gathering testimonies from across its shores from Naples to Tunis, Cairo, Tirana, Istanbul, Marseille. The various sections that composed the exhibit – *Classifying, Repairing, Collecting, Reusing* and *Reducing* – were all functional to outline the different stages of the economy of waste, its fallouts, its

[357] See the dedicated page on the museum's website http://www.mucem.org/en/lives-garbage

potential transformative directions, and ultimately to question our lifestyle and our models of consumption.

Emblematic in this recycling trajectory, and for the connections established between discarded matter and migration, are the various ways in which migrants' lifejackets – abandoned on the shores of the Greek island of Lesbos – have been repurposed by many artists across Europe. Using them as a statement of dissent to shake the numbed consciences of European citizens, and to put the refugee crisis in the public focus, Chinese artist based in Berlin Ai Weiwei repurposed over 14,000 lifejackets in his imposing installation in Berlin, wrapping them around the six monumental columns of the *Konzerthaus*, early in 2016.[358] In a similar vein, young Greek artist Achillea Souras[359] used migrants' discarded lifejackets to build impermeable igloo-like tents as part of his installation *S.O.S. Save our Souls* in the Italian showroom *Moroso* during the 2017 Design Week in Milan. The young artist envisioned his project not only as an instrument to raise awareness and dissent around the ongoing refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, but also, and especially, as a way to contribute to the rescue operations. The igloos are indeed conceived as temporary low-cost sheltering solutions whose building material is a by-product of the very same refugee crisis that they aim to respond to.

Lifejackets are the remnant of migrants' passage at the threshold of Europe; as such, they possess a powerful evocative potential. Their material presence reshapes the island landscape, transforming its shores into a liminal space of transient, discard, and hope. At the same time, they represent a token of the many arrivals, of the lives who survived the crossing, but they also function as a reminder of the countless migrants who, instead, never made it to those shores, and

[358] In June 2017, the same artist inaugured another installation entitled *Soleil Levant*, this time at the Kunsthal Charlottenborg Museum of Copenhagen, barricading the museum's windows with over 3,500 lifejackets salvaged from the isle of Lesbos.
[359] For more details about Achilleas Souras' installation S.O.S. Save our Souls, see http://moroso.it/sos-%E2%80%A2-save-our-souls-%E2%80%A2-project-by-achilleas-souras/?lang=en

perished at sea. Through their installations, artists bring the migrant crisis, and its material leftovers, from the periphery of the Mediterranean shores, to the neuralgic centers of European cities. When re-contextualized, the discarded lifejackets maintain their evocative charge, and their materiality compels bystanders to acknowledge their disturbing presence. Standing in plain view, in all their bright, colorful matter, lifejackets become warning signs aimed at shaking European consciences from their numbness.

Despite their awakening potential, these works of art fail however to confer an active role to migrants, running the risk of portraying them as passive victims, unable to speak for themselves. Moved by a similar concern, in 2011, the non-profit Foundation Spiral – under the patronage of the UNHCR – promoted the humanitarian project *Refugee ScART*, an artisans workshop composed by fifteen refugees whose products are entirely realized using discarded matter – plastic in particular – collected in the streets of Rome. Over the past six years, the group of refugees has collected and recycled over fifteen tons of plastic, transforming the waste discarded by the city's inhabitants into works of art now displayed in various museums across the city, including the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo (MAXXI).[360] *Refugee ScART* is a project of active citizenship through which refugees are not perceived as social burdens, but as active contributors to the community in which they leave. The project fosters inclusion and acceptance, while at the same time offering refugees an active role, a source of income, and a way to give back to their community as they donate part of their revenues to charity. By reinventing themselves and becoming active participants in their new communities, the refugees involved in the project become part of an inclusive network of solidarity linking together local communities, migrants, and the environment.

[360] For further details on the Refugee ScART project see http://www.maxxi.art/al-maxxi-refugee-scart-larte-dei-rifugiati/

If we go back to the etymology of the word refuse, from the Latin *refutare* (re + futare), to pour against, to throw, we can see that the term entails a sense of scatteredness, of dispersal. What we discard ends up scattered, torn to shreds, it slowly decomposes into smaller pieces, and eventually disperses into cycles of trans-species contamination. On the contrary, reuse and recycling convey a sense of coming together, of regathering what had been previously dispersed. Recycled objects are the result of a process of recollection and transformation of disassembled, discarded pieces: after having been scavenged and re-forged, the formless matter becomes a new whole. The act of recycling does precisely that, it reintroduces the discarded – both human and non-human – in a living cycle. In doing so, it ultimately provides a social and environmental alternative to the refuse as it allows to reconfigure, objects, spaces, and communities, to re-include the once displaced people, and discarded matter into a transformative trajectory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998.

———. *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Ajayi-Soyinka, Omofolabo. "Transcending the Boundaries of Power and Imperialism: Writing Gender, Constructing Knowledge." In *Female Circumcision and The Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka, 47–82. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005.

Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

———. "Dispersing Disaster: The Deepwater Horizon, Ocean Conservation, and the Lmmateriality of Aliens"" In *American Environments: Climate, Cultures, Castastrophe*, edited by Christof Mauch and Sylvia Mayer, 177–92. Heidelberg: Winter, 2012.

———. "States of Suspension: Trans-Corporeality at Sea." *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 3 (2012): 476–93. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/iss068.

Angelone, Anita. "Talking Trash: Documentaries and Italy's 'Garbage Emergency.'" *Studies in Documentary Film* 5, no. 2–3 (2011): 145–56. https://doi.org/10.1386/sdf.5.2-3.145_1.

Ariss, Rachel. "Theorizing Waste in Abortion and Fetal Ovarian Tissue Use." *Canadian Journal of Women & the Law* 15, no. 2 (December 2003): 255–81.

Armiero, Marco, ed. *Teresa e le altre. Storia di donne nella Terra dei Fuochi*. Milano: Jaca Book, 2014.

Bauman, Zygmunt. "Glocalization and Hybridity." *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation, Vol 2013, Iss 1 (2013)*, no. 1 (2013). https://doi.org/10.12893/gjcpi.2013.1.9.

———. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. Oxford: Polity, 2004.

Bellu, Giovanni Maria. *I fantasmi di Portopalo*. Milan: Mondadori, 2004.

———. "Negli abissi siciliani il cimitero dei clandestini." *La Repubblica*, June 6, 2001. http://www.repubblica.it/online/cronaca/palo/palo/palo.html.

Benedetti, Laura. "Il linguaggio dell'amicizia e della città: L'amica geniale di Elena Ferrante tra continuità e cambiamento." *Quaderni d'italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2012): 177–87.

———. *The Tigress in the Snow: Motherhood and Literature in Twentieth-Century Italy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, c2007.

Ben-Ghiat, Ruth, and Stephanie Malia Hom, eds. *Italian Mobilities*. 1 Edition. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015.

Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*. New York: Schocken Books, 1986.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Berlant, Lauren Gail. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

Bianchi, Rino., Igiaba Scego, Nadia. Terranova, and Andrea. Branchi. *Roma negata: percorsi postcoloniali nella città*. Roma: Ediesse, 2014.

Bidoli, Ettore, Maurizio Montella, Silvia Bruzzone, Angela De Paoli, Mario Fusco, Luisa Frova, Monica Pace, Marilena Pappagallo, and Diego Serraino. "Cancer mortality in Southern Italy, 1999-2003." *Epidemiologia E Prevenzione* 35, no. 3–4 (August 2011): 200–206.

Bouson, J. Brooks. *Embodied Shame: Uncovering Female Shame in Contemporary Women's Writings*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009.

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge, UK; Polity Press, 2013.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

———. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Calabria, Esmeralda, and Andrea. D'Ambrosio. *Biùtiful Cauntri*. Lumiere & Co, 2007.

Caldwell, Lesley. "Imagining Naples: The Senses of the City." In *A Companion to the City*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd: Oxford, UK, 2008.

Calvino, Italo. *Le Città Invisibili*. Milano: Mondadori, 2012.

Cassano, Franco. *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

Chambers, Iain. *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Chiesi, R. "Fuocoammare di Gianfranco Rosi." *Cineforum* 56, no. 3 (2016): 14–17.

Coker, Richard, and Alan Ingram. "Passports and Pestilence: Migration, Security and Contemporary Border Control of Infectious Diseases." In *Medicine at the Border: Disease, Globalization and Security, 1850 to the Present*, edited by Alison Bashford, 159–76. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Colpani, Gianmaria, and Adriano José Habed. ""In Europe It's Different": Homonationalism and Peripheral Desires for Europe." In *LGBT Activism and the Making of Europe*, 73–93. Gender and Politics Series. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137391766_4.

Crialese, Emanuele. *Terraferma*. 01 Distribution, 2011.

Cuttitta, Paolo. "'Borderizing' the Island Setting and Narratives of the Lampedusa 'Border Play.'" *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 13, no. 2 (May 2014): 196–219.

Dannatt, Adrian. "As in an Ocean on Nikolaj Larsen's End of Dreams." *IBRAAZ*, no. Platform 008 (December 2014). http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/114.

Del Boca, Angelo. *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale*. Roma: Editori Laterza, 1976.

Del Boca, Angelo. *Adua: le ragioni di una sconfitta*. Roma: Laterza, 1998.

Dines, Nick, Nicola Montagna, and Vincenzo Ruggiero. "Thinking Lampedusa: Border Construction, the Spectacle of Bare Life and the Productivity of Migrants." *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 38, no. 3 (February 15, 2015): 430–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2014.936892.

Documenta <11, 2002, Kassel>, ed. *Documenta: Kurzführer. 11: Documenta 11, Plattform 5: Ausstellung*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002.

Dragan, Yvonne P., and Dieter Schrenk. "Animal Studies Addressing the Carcinogenicity of TCDD (or Related Compounds) with an Emphasis on Tumour Promotion." *Food Additives & Contaminants* 17, no. 4 (April 2000): 289–302. https://doi.org/10.1080/026520300283360.

Duncan, Nancy, ed. *BodySpace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*. London; New York: Routledge, 1996.

Esposito, Roberto. *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

European Commission, Directorate General Environment. "Refuse Derived Fuel, Current Practice and Perspectives (B4-3040/2000/306517/MAR/E3). Final Report. July 2003. http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/studies/pdf/rdf.pdf

Falotico, Caterina. "Elena Ferrante: The Cycle of L'amica Geniale between Autobiography, History and Metaliterature." *Forum Italicum* 49, no. 1 (05 2015): 92–118.

Ferrante, Elena. *La Frantumaglia*. Epub. Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2012.

———. *L'amica geniale*. Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2011.

———. *L'amore molesto*. Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2015.

———. *Storia della bambina perduta*. Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2014.

———. *Storia del nuovo cognome*. Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2012.

———. *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*. Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2013.

———. *Troubling Love*. New York: Europa Editions, 2006.

Finaldi, Giuseppe. "Italy's Scramble for Africa from Dogali to Adowa." In *Disastro! Disasters in Italy since 1860: Culture, Politics, Society*, edited by John Dickie, John Foot, and Frank Snowden. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984. "Other Spaces: The Principles of Heterotopia." *Lotus International*, no. 48/49 (October 1985): 9–17.

Frascani, Paolo. *Napoli: viaggio nella città reale*. Bari: Laterza, 2017.

Garrone, Matteo. *Gomorra*. 01 Distribution, 2008.

Giorgio, Adalgisa. *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2002.

Giuliani, Gaia. "Afterword: The Mediterranean as a Stage: Borders, Memories, Bodies." In *Decolonising the Mediterranean: European Colonial Heritages in North Africa and the Middle East*, edited by Gabriele Proglio, 91–103. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016. http://hdl.handle.net/10316/34189.

———. *Bianco e nero: Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani.* Firenze: Le Monnier università, 2013.

Grana, Francesco. "Sgomberi non sono la risposta. Rifiuti restano in strada, rimossi donne e bimbi." *Il fatto quotidiano*, August 24, 2017. http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/08/24/roma-vaticano-pronto-ad-accogliere-i-rifugiati-sfollati-dalla-polizia-sgomberi-non-solo-la-risposta-adeguata/3815303/.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Habib, Samar, ed. *Islam and Homosexuality*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2010.

Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Hardt, Michael. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Hawkins, Gay, and Stephen Muecke, eds. *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & LIttlefield, 2003.

International Organization for Migration. "Mediterranean Migrants Arrivals Top 363,348 in 2016; Deaths at Sea 5,079." January 6, 2017. https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-top-363348-2016-deaths-sea-5079

Iovino, Serenella. “Corpi eloquenti. Ecocritica, contaminazioni e storie della materia.” *IRENE - Interdisciplinary Researches on Ethics and the Natural Environment* 9788879167116 (2015): 103–17. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.7359/711-2015-iovi.

———. *Ecocriticism and Italy: Ecology, Resistance, and Liberation*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

———. “Naples 2008, or, the Waste Land: Trash, Citizenship, and an Ethic of Narration.” *Neohelicon* 36, no. 2 (2009): 335–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-009-0004-6.

Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann, eds. *Material Ecocriticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

Isin, Engin F., and Kim Rygiel. “Abject Spaces: Frontiers, Zones, Camps.” In *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror*, 181–203. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007.

Javaid, Aliraza. “Feminism, Masculinity and Male Rape: Bringing Male Rape ‘out of the Closet.’” *Journal of Gender Studies* 25, no. 3 (May 2016): 283–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2014.959479.

Johnsdotter, Sara. “Persistence of Tradition or Reassessment of Cultural Practices in Exile? Discourses on Female Circumcision among and about Swedish Somalis.” In *Transcultural Bodies: Female Genital Cutting in Global Context. Ed. Ylva Hernlund, Bettina Shell-Duncan*, 107–34. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Johnson, William. “Confrontations: Biùtiful Cauntri and Traces of the Trade.” *Film Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2008): 66–69. https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2008.62.1.66.

Kassamali, Noor. “When Modernity Confronts Traditional Practices: Female Genital Cutting in Northeast Africa.” In *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity*, edited by Herbert L. Bodman and Nayyirah Tawḥīdī, 39–61. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Martone, Mario. *L’amore Molesto (1995)*. Arrow Films, 2007.

Larsen, Nikolaj Bendix Skyum. "Portfolio." Accessed March 23, 2017, https://www.nbsl.info/portfolio

———. *End of Dreams*. 2015. Mixed media. SALT Galata, Istanbul.

Legambiente. "Ecomafia." Accessed May 04, 2017. https://www.legambiente.it/temi/ecomafia.

Lives of Garbage. MUCEM, Marseille. http://www.mucem.org/en/lives-garbage

Lombardi-Diop, Cristina. “Ghosts of Memories, Spirits of Ancestors: Slavery, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic.” In *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures,*

Local Communities, Global Connections, edited by Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi, 162–80. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Lombardi-Diop, Cristina, and Caterina Romeo, eds. *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*. First edition. Italian and Italian American Studies. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Loshitzky, Yosefa. *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c2010.

Lothspeich, Pamela. "Unspeakable Outrages and Unbearable Defilements: Rape Narratives in the Literature of Colonial India." *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 1 (2007).

"Maddalena Bregani on Solid Sea (01): The Ghost Ship (by Multiplicity)" by Tiziana Casapietra, www.radicate.eu, http://www.radicate.eu/maddalena-bregani/

Marlow-Mann, Alex. "The Tears of Naples' Daughters: Re-Interpreting the Sceneggiata in Mario Martone's L'amore Molesto." *Italianist* 29, no. 2 (June 2009): 199–213. https://doi.org/10.1179/026143409X12488561926342.

Martin, Emily. *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction: With a New Introduction*. Boston: Beacon Press, c2001.

Mazierska, Ewa. *From Moscow to Madrid: Postmodern Cities, European Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003.

Mezzadra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson. "Between Inclusion and Exclusion: On the Topology of Global Space and Borders." *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 4–5 (2012): 58–75. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0263276412443569.

Milkova, S. "Mothers, Daughters, Dolls: On Disgust in Elena Ferrante's La Figlia Oscura." *Italian Culture* 31, no. 2 (01 2013): 91–109. https://doi.org/10.1179/0161462213Z.00000000017.

Mitropoulos, Angela. *Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Minor Compositions, 2012.

Molz, Jennie Germann, and Sarah Gibson, eds. *Mobilizing Hospitality: The Ethics of Social Relations in a Mobile World*. Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007.

Moore, Lisa Jean. *Sperm Counts: Overcome by Man's Most Precious Fluid*. New York: New York University Press, 2007.

Morrison, Susan Signe. *The Literature of Waste: Material Ecopoetics and Ethical Matter /*. First edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Multiplicity. *Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship.* 2002. Video. Documenta11.

Muraro, Luisa. "Female Genealogies." In *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, edited by Carolyn (ed.) Burke, Naomi (ed.) Schor, and Margaret (ed.) Whitford, 317–33. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

Napoli nobilissima. Rivista di topografia ed arte napoletana. 15 (1906).

Niola, Marino. *Totem e ragù: divagazioni napoletane*. Napoli: T. Pironti, 2003.

O'Healy, Aine. "Revisiting the Belly of Naples: The Body and the City in the Films of Mario Martone." *Screen* 40, no. 3 (September 1999): 239–56.

Orsi, Marianna. "Due Partite Di Cristina Comencini, La Figlia Oscura Di Elena Ferrante e La Demitizzazione Della Maternità." *Intervalla* Special Vol, no. 1 (2016): 94–110.

Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Past, Elena. "'Trash Is Gold': Documenting the Ecomafia and Campania's Waste Crisis." *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20, no. 3 (2013): 597–621. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/ist075.

———. "Island Hopping, Liquid Materiality, and the Mediterranean Cinema of Emanuele Crialese." *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 4, no. 2 (2013): 49–66.

Patton, Kimberley C. *The Sea Can Wash Away All Evils: Modern Marine Pollution and the Ancient Cathartic Ocean*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Pile, Steve. *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity*. London; Routledge, 1996.

Ponzanesi, Sandra. "Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices." In *Italian Colonialism: Legacies and Memories*, edited by Jaqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, 165–89. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005.

———. "Europe Adrift: Rethinking Borders, Bodies, and Citizenship from the Mediterranean." *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings*, no. 11.2 (2011): 67–76.

———. "Of Shipwrecks and Weddings: Borders and Mobilities in Europe." *Transnational Cinemas* 7, no. 2 (2016): 151–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/20403526.2016.1217627.

———. *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora*. Albany: State University of New York Press, c2004.

———. "Queering European Sexualities through Italy's Fascist Past: Colonialism, Homosexuality, and Masculinities." In *What's Queer about Europe? Productive Encounters and Re-Enchanting Paradigms*, 81–90, 2014.

———. "The Non-Places of Migrant Cinema in Europe." *Third Text* 26, no. 6 (November 2012): 675–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2012.734565.

Pugliese, Joseph. "Bodies of Water." *HEAT*, no. 12 (2006): 13–20.

———. “Crisis Heterotopias and Border Zones of the Dead.” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 23, no. 5 (October 2009): 663–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903183627.

Refugee ScArt. MAXXI. Rome. http://www.maxxi.art/al-maxxi-refugee-scart-larte-dei-rifugiati/.

“Rifiuti: Campania ripulita da 56 mila tonnellate di ecoballe, ne rimangono ancora 5 milioni nei siti.” *La Repubblica*, October 5, 2017. http://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/10/05/news/rifiuti_campania_ripulita_da_56_mila_tonnellate_di_ecoballe_ne_rimangono_5_milioni_ancora_nei_siti-177442466/

Romeo, Caterina. “Remapping Cityscapes: Postcolonial Diasporas and Representations of Urban Space in Contemporary Italian Literature.” *Semestrale Di Studi e Ricerche Di Geografia* XXVII, no. 2 (2015): 101–11.

Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Rosengarten, Marsha. “Thinking Menstrual Blood.” *Australian Feminist Studies* 15, no. 31 (March 2000): 91–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640050003265.

Rosi, Gianfranco. *Fuocoammare*. 01 Distribution, 2016.

Russell, Amy M. “Embodiment and Abjection: Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation.” *Body & Society* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 82–107. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X12462251.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

———. “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors.” *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 1989): 205–25. https://doi.org/10.1086/448481.

Sambuco, Patrizia. *Corporeal Bonds: The Daughter-Mother Relationship in Twentieth Century Italian Women’s Writing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

Sarnelli, Laura. “The Gothic Mediterranean: Haunting Migrations and Critical Melancholia.” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 147–65.

Saviano, Roberto. *Gomorra: Viaggio nell’impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della Camorra.* Milano: Mondadori, 2006.

———. *Gomorrah: A Personal Journey into the Violent International Empire of Naples’ Organized Crime System.* New York: Picador, 2007.

Saʿdāwī, Nawāl al-. “Imperialism and Sex in Africa.” In *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Movement in Imperialist Discourses*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka, 40–46. Westport: Praeger, 2005.

———. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1982.

Scego, Igiaba. *Adua*. Firenze: Giunti, 2015.

———. *Oltre Babilonia*. Mele Donzelli; Mele Donzelli. Roma: Donzelli, 2008.

———. *Rhoda*. Kindle Edition., 2004.

Schinkel, Willem. "'Illegal Aliens' and the State, or: Bare Bodies vs the Zombie." *International Sociology* 24, no. 6 (2009): 779–806. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580909343494.

Scott, Darieck. *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination /*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare's Comedy of The Tempest*. London: Dent, 1894.

Souras, Achilleas. *S.O.S. Save Our Souls.* 2017. Moroso, Milan Design Week. Milan. http://moroso.it/sos-%E2%80%A2-save-our-souls-%E2%80%A2-project-by-achilleas-souras/?lang=en

Spackman, Barbara. *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy /*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

———. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 361–65. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Squire, Sarah. "Anorexia and Bulimia: Purity and Danger." *Australian Feminist Studies* 18, no. 40 (March 2003): 17–26.

Stephens, Chuck. "Gomorrah: Terminal Beach." *The Criterion Collection*, 2009. https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1308-gomorrah-terminal-beach.

Sullivan, B. "Rape, Prostitution and Consent." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 40, no. 2 (2007): 127–42. https://doi.org/10.1375/acri.40.2.127.

Talle, Aud. "Female Circumcision in Africa and Beyond: The Anthropology of a Difficult Issue." In *Transcultural Bodies: Female Genital Cutting in Global Context*, 91–106, 2007.

Tartaglione, Mariangela. *La "Guerra amorosa": Il materno nella narrativa di autrici italiane del secondo Novecento.* Roma: Aracne editrice S.r.l., 2014.

Trappolin, Luca. "Gender Victims and Cultural Borders: The Globalization of Prostitution in Italy." *Dialectical Anthropology* 29, no. 3–4 (2005): 335–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-005-2825-7.

Tyler, Imogen. *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 2013.

Verdicchio, Pasquale, ed. *Ecocritical Approaches to Italian Culture and Literature: The Denatured Wild*. *Ecocritical Theory and Practice.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016.

Von Henneberg, Krystyna. “Monuments, Public Space, and the Memory of Empire in Modern Italy.” *History & Memory* 16, no. 1 (Spring/Summer, 2004): 37–85.

Welch, Rhiannon.N. “Contact, Contagion, Immunization: Gianni Amelio’s Lamerica (1994).” In *Italian Mobilities*, 68–87, 2015.

World Health Organization, UNICEF, and United Nations Population Fund, eds. *Female Genital Mutilation: A Joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA Statement*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 1997.

Young, Iris Marion. *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing like a Girl” and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.