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Heterotopic and Striated Spaces in the Mediterranean Crime Fiction of Amara Lakhous and Jean-Claude Izzo

Quand on n'a rien, posséder la mer – cette Méditerranée – c'est beaucoup. Comme un quignon de pain pour celui qui a faim. (Izzo 2015, 289)¹

Abstract: This essay focuses on the representation of space in Mediterranean crime fiction of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The question is whether we can speak of a kind of heuristics in Mediterranean crime fiction of the last decades, particularly in the filigree of representations and perceptions at the spatial level. To this end, the contribution focuses on two authors, namely Amara Lakhous and Jean-Claude Izzo in whose work the multiethnic component plays a significant role. The first aspect analyzed concerns the presence of heterotopias (Foucault 2020, 11–28) as expressions of a state of crisis and a form of non-communication. This is the case in *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio* (2006) by Amara Lakhous in which one of these small-scale counterspaces – an elevator – plays a particularly significant role as one focal point of the diverse and multiethnic landscape of a Mediterranean metropolis – Rome – that can call itself such despite not enjoying a direct outlet to the sea. The second area of investigation concerns the presence of smooth and striated spaces (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, 663–697) which, in their constant variation in the face of ever new impediments or infractions – in a singular analogy with crime, which also constitutes an obstacle or a kind of interruption to the normal flow of life – are at the center of Jean-Claude Izzo's trilogy dedicated to Marseille and Fabio Montale. In Izzo's three novels, the Mediterranean is connoted both as a space of crisis and of communication – that is, as a large-scale heterotopia – while Marseille, in its distinct offshoots, appears as a surface in constant redefinition, in which striations relentlessly oppose – in a hegemonic key – forms of deterritorialization.

1 “When you have nothing, owning the sea – the Mediterranean – means a lot. Like a crust of bread when you're starving” (Izzo 2018, 35).

I

When considering Mediterranean noir, particularly that of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the tendency is to foreground a kind of approach entrusted to itineraries or topographical criteria. These include, first and foremost, being close to the sea surface and/or being located in a kind of European south, to which can be added, in many cases, the presence or the role played by the Mediterranean aquatic space in the narrated story.

Javier Sánchez Zapatero and Alex Martín Escribà in a 2011 article titled *La novela negra mediterránea: Crimen, placer, desencanto y memoria* emphasized certain aspects common to the Mediterranean crime stories of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Jean-Claude Izzo, Andrea Camilleri, and Petros Márkaris.² Among them was the convergence towards the same reference authors who had preceded and influenced them (particularly George Simenon with the addition of other writers sensitive to the political element such as Leonardo Sciascia), the nimble combination of the daily routine, the investigative journey, and the continuous evolution of the protagonists beyond the individual case along with the role played by frequent and, at times, extensive cultural, linguistic, and gastronomic digressions or intertextual references of a literary nature. In addition, they emphasized the need to take into account the political disillusionment common to these communist-oriented authors with which was associated – in varying proportions – disenchantment (of a high degree in the Catalan writer) and a strongly critical posture towards the fascist drifts of the society depicted (particularly in Izzo's trilogy).

The two scholars also dwelt on memory, which was analyzed according to different categories and orientations: sometimes in view of a national or regional collective perspective, sometimes according to individual or supra-individual logics (the family memory or the memory of the social or political core of belonging) or, in some cases, with a dialectical approach between individual orientations and collective dynamics.

To these aspects it is necessary to add another, essential in the narrative economy and on the aesthetic level, namely the role played by metropolitan spaces, such as Barcelona, Marseille, and Athens. The by now already stereotyped representation of the investigator caught in the private space of his office, shrouded in a solitude interrupted by the sound of the telephone or unexpected visits, loses its relevance in the face of the depiction of specific Mediterranean urban latitude, often peripheral or marginal, which hold a certain significance on the page and in the construction of the story. The reference relates to the different physiogn-

2 See Sánchez Zapatero and Martín Escribà (2011, 45–51).

omies of these investigators who – sometimes willingly but mostly unwillingly at least at the beginning of what is about to become an investigation – find themselves conducting their research operating at distinct latitudes, for example in the historic area of Barcelona or in the suburbs of Marseille (as expressions of precise social and economic categorizations) or in the chaos of the car-crowded arteries of Athens. These are metropolitan scenarios that, in this sense, become a backdrop which operates at different levels, as will be seen. In addition, the displacements are not exclusively centripetal; in fact, the investigator, or protagonists at the center of these crime fictions tend to flee from the chaotic nature of urban spaces and take refuge in nearby but isolated places. This is the case, for example, in Vallvidrera, a Barcelona neighborhood far from the urban center, where Carvahlo's intimate nature manifests itself in relation to a dual ritual, cooking and burning books in the fireplace.

Fabio Montale, too, used to take refuge in a small house outside Marseille, an inheritance from his parents; a modest dwelling with only two rooms, eight steps away from the sea and equipped with a small boat with which – in pursuit of further isolation and solitude – he went fishing. It is from a window of that intimate space that he, as he specifies, “a toute la mer pour soi” (Izzo 2015, 289).³ Isolated, then, and detached from Marseille, he spends his time in what is his space of disconnection – facing the sea that resurfaces in many pages of his trilogy – as an expression of what is manifested as we shall see, a heterotopic place par excellence.⁴

Alongside these spaces of disconnection, there are the urban scenarios that represent in their own way an element of stability and chaos (this is also evident from the title of the first volume of Izzo's trilogy, *Total Khéops*). Indeed, in these novels, the city takes on a specific role: it becomes one of the protagonists and not merely a scenic element or a backdrop relegated to a secondary role. The metropolitan space (cf. Peraldi 2016, 930–933), be it Marseille, Barcelona or Athens, is characterized by the constant movement and teeming of characters of different

3 “You open the window and you have the sea all to yourself” (Izzo 2018, 46).

4 Something similar and different at the same time also characterizes the private space of Salvo Montalbano, who lives in a house facing the Mediterranean Sea in the town, imaginary and real at the same time, of Vigata; an ideal location – even too much so in its acting as an oleographic, almost postcard-like space, albeit chiselled with a sufficient dose of realistic acumen – that allows him to swim throughout the year and enjoy a position of absolute privilege in front of the seascape. By heterotopia Foucault means those real places, found in every culture of every time that are defined spaces, but “absolutely different” from all others to which they are opposed and that are different places that serve as “mythical and real contestations of the space in which we live” (Foucault 2020: 12 and 14). The translation is mine.

ethnic and social backgrounds to which are added allusions to concrete architectural elements (for example, the cathedral of La Major or the old port in Marseille) or to specific subdivisions (neighborhoods, streets, areas, thresholds, real or implicit boundaries, and again forms of geographic and social verticalization along with gradients of distinct order). The characters, in particular Montale, travel streets and roads, drive through the arteries of the city, search for individual suspects and witnesses in different neighborhoods and distinct urban spaces. The outcome is that of a multifaceted portrait that proves capable of representing the physical, material, social but also ethical and human reality of the cities in which the characters live, think, and move. These are urban spaces, in essence, with which the protagonists seem to relate in a seesaw of love and hate, affection and annoyance, escapes, and returns.

Drawing attention to the significance of the urban center of gravity is Jean-Claude Izzo who, in the paratextual section of the second novel in the trilogy, writes:

Rien de ce que l'on va lire n'a existé. Sauf, bien évidemment, ce qui est vrai. Et que l'on a pu lire dans les journaux, ou voir à la télévision. Peu de choses, en fin de compte. Et, sincèrement, j'espère que l'histoire racontée ici restera là où elle a sa vraie place : dans les pages de ce livre. Cela dit, Marseille, elle, est bien réelle. Si réelle que, oui, vraiment, j'aimerais que l'on ne cherche pas des ressemblances avec des personnages ayant réellement existé. Même pas avec le héros. Ce que je dis de Marseille, ma ville, ce ne sont, simplement, et toujours, qu'échos et réminiscences. C'est-à-dire, ce qu'elle donne à lire entre les lignes (Izzo 2015, 255).⁵

Finally, in the third novel, after resorting to some introductory formulas of a similar tenor to the previous ones, in the *Author's note* he adds:

Quant à Marseille, ma ville, toujours à mi-distance entre la tragédie et la lumière, elle se fait, comme il se doit, l'écho de ce qui nous menace (Izzo 2015, 515).⁶

5 "Nothing of what you are about to read actually happened. Apart, of course, from what's true. And what you may have read in the newspaper, or seen on TV. Not so much, when you come down to it. And I sincerely hope that the story told here will stay where it should: in the pages of a book. Having said that, Marseilles itself is real. So real that I really wouldn't like you to look for any resemblances to people who actually lived. Even with the main character. What I have to say about Marseilles, my city, is once again nothing but a series of echoes and reminiscences. In other words, whatever you can read between the lines" (Izzo 2018, 18).

6 "As for Marseilles, my city, always halfway between tragedy and light, it naturally reflects the threat hanging over us" (Izzo 2007, 15).

These are the words that Jean-Claude Izzo uses at the paratextual level as a warning and synthetic depiction of the urban space of reference.⁷ They prove to be perfectly in line with the vicissitudes experienced by the character of Fabio Montale, a transparent evocation of a poet intimately connected to the Mediterranean – Eugenio – in whose production one can find linguistic echoes and motifs genuinely connected to that vast marine expanse.⁸

In the last thirty years – in the panorama of critical-literary hypotheses around and about the Mediterranean as the narrative engine in which mystery is produced, crime is committed, and investigations are developed – there has been a growing assumption of the importance of urban space that acquires its own significance – tending to be divisive – on the transcultural and multi-ethnic plane and that requires to be analyzed in terms that are both systematic and selective. It can be seen, for example, as a space that allows one to probe – in its being situated on or near the Mediterranean as an urban perimeter capable of relating West and East, Europe and Africa, North and South – the variants of a magmatic narrative at the center of which is a mystery and in which different ethnicities, religious beliefs, and notions of belonging or of being different, in their coexistence within a single space, intersect page after page. In this sense, the discourse uses, in some circumstances, the theoretical frameworks of decolonialism, transculturalism, and deconstructionism as approaches on the methodological level, and otherness and the logic of difference as relevant analytical paths.

The Mediterranean is considered in these cases – on the level of its epistemic and narrative construction, of the objects that characterize it and of the subjects that live there – as a space in which boundaries or thresholds are present and may be of different order and nature, often changeable. It is a space where at the same time a kind of clash and fragmentation – in some rare cases also of connection – between distinct cultures is generated.

The terms used to define these phenomena and their manifestations are distinct but in themselves convergent. Whether one speaks of contact zone, transculturality, third space or even clash of civilizations does not matter (cf. Soja 1996, 57; Lombardi-Diop 2012). Whichever way you look at it, these are formulas that allude to instances of clash, trespass, or the crossing of boundaries. The essential question relates to a specific fact, namely, whether or not we can speak of a kind of heuristics of Mediterranean crime fiction in recent decades, particularly in the watermark of representations and perceptions at the spatial level. To attempt to

7 Regarding the representation of Marseilles in Izzo see Kalt (2018, 51–83 and 246–267), Edeling (2012, 263–264), Burtscher-Bechter (2010), Sánchez (2009) and Winkler (2010).

8 See Montale (1984, 51–61) and, for example, the analysis of Lollini (2009, 357–372).

probe the tightness of this critical perspective, one must decipher the formulas and tools narratively employed to represent it. The first step in this endeavor lies in the fact that the literary depiction of the Mediterranean has in common with noir and especially with the investigation at its core a high threshold of sensitivity towards the perception of difference and liminal zones. With respect to the free motion of life, its liquid flux, the hindrance – that is, the crime – that intervenes to stop this flow allows access to a privileged observatory. It allows one to grasp the incongruity or ripple and to subvert the map of the urban surface or the quadrants of that marine space; in essence, it allows one to become aware of the disjointed element that interrupts the linearity of the liquid or solid surface and the boundaries – tacit or openly visible – present within it.

Moreover, the Mediterranean benefits from another peculiar characteristic, namely that of being both a frontier space and an area of contact where Europe meets Africa and its multifaceted declinations. This is perfectly grasped in the case of an author such as Amara Lakhous who, born in Algiers in 1970, learns classical Arabic (in the Koranic school), Algerian Arabic (with which he comes into contact in his hometown) and French, which he studies in school from the third grade, at an early age. The study of philosophy in adulthood leads him to question the religious fundamentals of the civilization in which he lives, the logic associated with the war of liberation along with the dogma of male superiority. At the end of his university studies, he begins working with Algerian radio, an activity for which he came under constant threat. For that reason and to save his life, being tired – as he writes – of waiting for his murderer, he leaves Algeria and in 1995 lands in Rome, exactly in Piazza Vittorio, without taking anything with him except a manuscript as a clear sign of his narrative vocation.

In 2006, he released his second novel, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio*.⁹ The title – in addition to exhibiting the issue of the problematic confrontation between distinct identities and notions of belonging (cf. Ponzanesi 2004; Brogi 2011; Comberiati 2012) – is anchored in a space understood in a double guise; generic with regard to the elevator, specific with regard to Piazza Vittorio as an urban space dislocated with respect to the sites of Roman classicism. The latter implicitly refers back to the concept of palimpsest, in its covering of different layers, manifestos, symbols, and messages that are often even contradictory or discordant, with a coming and going of beings from disparate places and countries.

The novel also condenses in itself other peculiarities: first, it is a kind of re-writing – and not a simple translation – of an Arabic novel by Lakhous published

⁹ Some reconsiderations about this novel echo what was analysed in Fabris (2021). The object and intent of the investigation are distinct.

in 2003 in Algeria (cf. El Ammari 2022). Second, it is an investigation entrusted to the first-person accounts of the various tenants of a building located in Piazza Vittorio in whose elevator takes place the murder of one of them, the worst, a violent and brutal being called ‘The Gladiator’. Following the latter’s death, the protagonist Amedeo disappears, fueling a series of speculations.

At the structural level, the novel is developed by lining up, one after the other, excerpts from Amedeo’s diary, in which he traces his encounters with each of the tenants, along with fragments of his past, and which are collected under the title – suggestive and surprising at the same time – of first, second, third howl (until the tenth). Each of these sections alternates between the spontaneous statements of the same tenants and frequenters of the area, who were called upon to give their version in the wake of Gladiator’s murder and Amedeo’s disappearance. Such sections are titled “the truth according to Benedetta Esposito,” “the truth according to Ibqal Amar Allah,” etc., etc.

An interesting aspect concerns the anachronies of the sections in which Amedeo expresses himself; in them, in fact, diaristic fragments with alternating dates follow one another, suggesting how memory is shaped in magmatic form. These are fragments in which the main narrator Amedeo – Amara Lakhous’ alter-ego – allows his own painful memories to flow freely. Not only that; he arranges them according to a kind of chronological anarchy that, in mixing distinct dates, cancels any form of linearity. In the face of this abandonment of the constraints of rectilinearity – in contrast with what happens, for example, in the multi-layered narrative textures set up by another author with a Mediterranean imprint such as Italo Calvino and which require a certain amount of effort to find a way out of in order to reshape the narrative – the reader is now no longer asked to put the puzzle back together. The synchronic perception appears dominant, in line with the quantity and variety of suggestions derived from the chaotic nature of the urban universe, with spaces that accommodate different codes and figures such as precisely Rome (cf. Derobertis, 2008, 218–221; Parati 2010, 432–446) and Marseille.

The perception of something magmatic that unites past and present, individual and collectivity, instant and eternity is manifested through howling as a form of liberation and venting. Amedeo, in this regard, questions: “L’ululato è l’aborto della verità?” (2006, 72).¹⁰ Its nature as a meaningless sound alludes to a form of aphasia toward what is found painfully compressed at the center of the human being. At the same time, another function of the howl is, in the opposite direction, social recall; in fact, it is through this sound that the animal makes its position

10 “Is wailing an abortion of the truth?” (Lakhous 2018, 73).

known to its fellows. In the case of Amedeo it is the call for all outcasts and immigrants, or for those who – like him – find themselves in an elsewhere they have not freely chosen.¹¹

Alongside Amedeo, the protagonists of this choral novel – who intervene in the first person through a mosaic of spontaneous statements – are characters from the Global South; in fact, we find a Sri Lankan immigrant, a Peruvian woman, an Iranian spillover, or the protagonist himself, Amedeo aka Ahmed, who claims to be from the South of the South. They are joined by a Dutchman, some Romans, a Neapolitan woman who feels in her own way, in an instinctive form, a *déraciné*, and then the Milanese Antonio Marini. The novel thus presents a kind of liquid modernity according to Zygmunt Bauman's indications (2008, 110), to be understood from an antihegemonic perspective. Through these figures, the knot of identity and that of nationalities and ethnicities is indirectly addressed according to criteria unrelated to a postcolonial logic, and, equally, without yielding space to the allure of sterile 'goodist' instances.

The neuralgic center of the narrative is provided by the heterotopic space of the elevator mentioned in the title, which is the subject of constant contrasts and discussions and is a clear example of a Foucauldian counter-place. It is in fact one of those real places, present in every culture of every time, that are defined but absolutely different spaces; places that are opposed to all others. Thus, the elevator in the novel represents a place connected to its surroundings, but in a way that suspends, neutralizes, or reverses the set of relations with external spaces (cf. Foucault 2020, 23); something similar to what happens in the semi-enclosed, large-scale space of the Mediterranean.

The elevator – the subject of heated disputes between the various tenants and visitors of the building in Piazza Vittorio – perfectly identifies a place open to other places, characterized by a system of opening and closing (the two doors) that in this case does not depend on religious dogma or military regulations, but is determined by the distinct ideological positions and geographical affiliations and origins (particularly from a global South) of the individual apartment residents or visitors.

In this real place we witness the overlapping of different attitudes and positions that are mutually incompatible; here then is the prohibition of access to it – established by the concierge – for the Peruvian caregiver because of her excessive weight, or Amedeo himself who spontaneously renounces using it in an open polemic against any form of exclusion. In essence, the issue is about the position or

11 In addition to these aspects, in Amedeo's case, the howl also gives reason for his being an adopted son of the she-wolf, and thus of Rome, which he shows he knows perfectly well.

attitude taken by each of the tenants and visitors towards the use of the elevator and especially towards the logics of power related to it.

In this view, the elevator is the key place in the economy of the story not only because the murder is committed in it, but also because, like a mantra, it returns in the free depositions of the characters. In this counterspace, different forms of racial beliefs come to predominate – with the will to exert control over order and eliminate barbarism as evinced by Professor Marini's Leghist-like rantings – or it is the site of compensation logics; the latter being the case of the Gladiator who, defeated by life, violently imposes his will in that confined space.

Additionally, through the perceptions of the individual protagonists in the depositions or from Amedeo's diary fragments – one can grasp the urban spaces, peripheral or otherwise, experienced essentially on foot and which – in their narrative depictions – take on multiple valences. This is the case of the fountain in front of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, where the political refugee Parviz sits to feed the pigeons and where he becomes the victim of prejudice along with forms of control and the exercise of public power. A different situation characterizes Termini station – whose name, as we read, indicates that “il viaggio è finite” (Lakhous 2006, 115)¹² – where a different, other city comes to light in which Peruvian immigrants gather. In this case the comparison promoted by one of them, the caregiver Maria Cristina, is with stray dogs in their allowing free flow to instincts, between small alcohol-induced fights or sexual acts consumed “sulla triste panchina di un giardino pubblico”, or on the pages of newspapers strewn on the ground, or even “su un treno abbandonato o sotto un albero nascosto” (Lakhous 2006, 67).¹³ The underlying goal of these fleeting relationships is a form of venting in that one weekly afternoon of freedom: “Ognuno di noi svuota nel corpo dell'altro la propria voglia, speranza, angoscia, paura in tristezza, rabbia, odio e delusione, e questo lo facciamo in fretta come gli animali che hanno paura di perdere la stagione della fertilità” (Lakhous 2006, 66).¹⁴

Moreover, in relation to the concepts of smooth and striated space formulated by Deleuze and Guattari (2003, 557), in some of the scenarios described by Lakhous in this novel, forms of enclosure or control or alternatively minimal spaces that eschew striations are recognizable. The latter is the case of Termini station, as a space removed from the control of the state apparatus and in which there is a re-

¹² “In Rome there is the Termini station. ‘Termini’ means terminal, the journey is over” (Lakhous, 2018, 117).

¹³ “On an abandoned train car or under a hidden train” (Lakhous 2018, 67).

¹⁴ “Each of us empties into the other's body our own desire, hope, anguish, fear, sadness, rage, hatred, and disappointment, and we do this quickly, like animals afraid of missing the season of fertility” (Lakhous 2018, 66–67).

turn to a kind of nomadic smooth space; this is also evident from the comparison with the animal world. Striated space, on the contrary, is that of law and control, as in the case of the fountain of Santa Maria Maggiore or other urban sceneries evoked in the text, where there are fences, barriers, and forms of control and limitation of individual freedom. The latter is especially the case with the elevator, which, in Professor Marini's view, should be subject to strict regulation and controlled access.

The discourse on urban spaces and the simultaneous perception of different times and forms of communication manifested in some of the scenarios present at the narrative level leads one to consider what Bertrand Westphal calls "a semantics of tempusculs" in which points, as minimal entities, escape all linearity in a context of hybridity and dialogue (Westphal 2009, 31).¹⁵ Accordingly, also included in *Scontro di civiltà* we find a semantic axis in which we witness the prevalence of simultaneity and a dialogical attitude; for example, in some fragments from Amedeo's diary, in the individual depositions or even in the segments set in the gardens of Piazza Vittorio or in Sandro's bar where mingling and verbal exchange reign.

In effect, even though Rome does not actually overlook the sea, a continuous reference in the text to the Mediterranean¹⁶ to be understood as a magmatic universe that serves as a threshold or space of communication or clash – in its ensuring or not the contact between East and West, between Europe and Africa and between North and South, in their multifarious declinations – for the figures that alternate in the novel. In this sphere, the urban fabric of Mediterranean crime fiction takes on the guise of a space in which there are boundaries that may be of a different nature and order, and of which we become aware through distinct paths of appropriation (in Amedeo's case, for example, as a function of his constant moving around the city on foot). Urban settings, therefore, do not merely serve as a scenic element, relegated to the background, but take on a specific role in gathering interests and manifestations of power along with successful or unsuccessful forms of communication.

The narrative texture, in its being sensitive to the perception of difference, also stands out for another aspect: with respect to the free flow of life to gain importance is the crime and the mechanisms of opening and closing that allow access to a given space. Thus, the discovery of the Gladiator's murderer comes to lose – in the course of the narrative – its significance; rather, what captivates the reader lies

¹⁵ My translation.

¹⁶ See Federica Mazzara, who analyzes the alternative Mediterranean of which Amara Lakhous is the spokesperson on the cultural and literary level and in relation to Italian borders. Cf. Mazzara (2012).

in the trajectories (including spatial ones) and the situatedness of those who revolve around the protagonist. In this regard, one of Lakhous' authors of reference is surely Gadda, who in *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* had depicted the living space in the two vertical and horizontal gradients to represent the different social levels of the "palazzo dell'Oro" (Gadda 2018, 25) where there were two staircases, "A e B, co sei piani e co dodici inquilini cadauna, due per piano" (Gadda 2018, 16),¹⁷ of which the second "era un porto di mare"¹⁸ while "la A più tranquilla della consorella: tutti signori autentici da quella parte" (Gadda 2018, 32).¹⁹

In *Scontro di civiltà*, Lakhous, too, makes use of vertical and horizontal gradients (the elevator, the stairs, Piazza Vittorio), but he ascribes different meanings to them: the elevator is the heterotopic space par excellence, in its being the expression of a state of crisis on the communicative level and in which the relationships that are generated refer to a different regime than outside. The stairs in turn, as a place of passage, seem to take on the guise of a space of communication (this is where the Peruvian caregiver retreats to weep and where scraps of conversation between her and Amedeo take place). Finally, one has the square, as the focal center of the neighborhood, in which the characters involved in the investigation navigate or act.

The discourse around the depiction of space, in Lakhous' perceptual logic, acquires, in these terms, a heterotopic significance with regard to the elevator (as the space of crisis) and is characterized by an alternation of nomadic smooth spaces and regulated striated spaces concerning the places in which the multi-ethnic subjects move and also in relation to the unravelling of the enigma, i.e., the crime.

II

The discourse on urban spaces and on the role assumed by heterotopia in its reflection, to a lesser extent, of a vast semi-enclosed marine perimeter such as the Mediterranean, and on the synchronic perception of elements and objects as manifestations of a smooth or striated space in constant transformation induces almost spontaneously to consider the case of Marseille in Jean-Claude Izzo's noir constructions. The latter, in the Montale trilogy, advocates a sensitive narrative weaving of

17 "A and B, with six floors and twelve tenants each, two per floor" (Gadda 1996, 9). Regarding the analysis of Gadda's novel in relation to that of Lakhous see Camesasca (2009), Schwaderer (2013), Jaran (2014); in relation to the question of space in Gadda see Alfano (2009).

18 "It was like a railroad station" (Gadda 1996, 30).

19 "Stairway A was a bit quieter than its counterpart: all real respectable on that side" (Gadda 1996, 31).

an urban space facing the Mediterranean where different cultures, ethnic affiliations and geographical, religious, and cultural backgrounds coexist. In Fabio Montale's first-person narrative, the reader gradually comes to discover how Marseille has become, over the years, a port city refuge for dissidents and outcasts, a landing space for people fleeing (even from themselves), exiles or persecuted people from all corners of the world. Therefore, there is no ethnic core to the city; rather, it serves as a multi-ethnic space where difference is the norm. This is even more true when considering the representation of urban space where – even if some historic buildings or neighborhoods survive – the dominant criterion is that of change, with a constant tendency to transform the urban landscape into striated spaces, progressively subjected to control and squaring.

In Izzo's Marseille, there are thus places characterized by a variegated nature or by multiple connotations; for example, those marked by exclusion and marginalization in which the arrogance of those who – in the grip of a verbal violence declined according to different degrees of intensity – stand up as supporters of a form of post-colonial supremacy as happens in the case of some representatives of the police force. Alternatively, there are also places that promote encounter, inclusion, and exchange or that are delineated as spaces of redevelopment, capable of assigning to certain city scenarios a new multiple identity, socially, culturally, and linguistically.

In general, the metropolitan space of Marseille is contrasted in Montale's perceptual network with the Mediterranean, which is presented as a smooth (which is not the same as homogeneous) and nomadic space. It (the Mediterranean space) is seen through the window that allows him (Montale) to perceive the interior as a complementary moment of the exterior; that is, of the Mediterranean watery surface. In this way, the transition from smooth to striated space and vice versa is realized in the archetype of smooth space, namely the sea, which – as Deleuze and Guattari have argued – was the space over which man's control and power was first exercised with the intention of transforming it into a model of regulation. However, and Izzo confirms this, the Mediterranean aquatic space as a smooth space par excellence has a de-territorializing capacity that is superior to striations (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, 669–670).

Thus, the Mediterranean topography is brought to underscore the uprooting of people from their homes and their landing to another space; in this case to Marseille where the social and cultural networks that define individuals are broken and disrupted and where complex, multiple, often unresolved identities are generated in neighborhoods populated by immigrants, similar to the building described in Lakhous' novel.

In this sense, the Mediterranean and the morphology of its shores allow – as a large-scale heterotopia – a proliferation of stories that Izzo brings together under

the common denominator of Marseille. It is not single crime, in this case, that gives rise to noir or polar, but it is building speculation, mafia trafficking and economic interests that generate, in Izzo's trilogy, a multiple epistemic space that is deposited in the intricate topographical networks of the metropolis and the thresholds that characterize it. The Mediterranean described or evoked by Izzo is also a heterotopic space that for Fabio Montale always refers back to a time out of phase with the present, in an attempt at deterritorialization or escape, in the terms identified by Michel Foucault.

As elsewhere in the Mediterranean coastal morphology (i.e., the narrative depiction of thresholds) and the topography of Marseille's neighborhoods actively influence the construction of the plot and reflect the increasing transience of the existence of those who live there. In this case, it is not a generic sea (like the one Salvo Montalbano turns his gaze to), but a watery space that presents precise scenarios and angles, marked by spatial indications and habits that refer to the ways of the everyday.

The perspectives from which Izzo looks at that aquatic space are multiple; for example, one can decipher the way the Mediterranean is perceived by standing on land, following Montale's gaze at Marseille and also at how the latter is defined in relation to the complex network of identities that populate it – as a metropolitan space in close contact with the heterotopic sea surface. One can also see how it offers some alternative points of view – between smooth and striated spaces – with respect to hegemonic discourses of a postcolonial kind. It is no coincidence that in the end it is the Mediterranean Sea that becomes the marine space of annihilation, of death par excellence for the protagonist, Montale, who in *Solea* writes:

Je m'étais dit que la solution à toutes les contradictions de l'existence était là, dans cette mer. Ma Méditerranée. Et je m'étais vu me fondre en elle. Me dissoudre, et résoudre, enfin, tout ce que je n'avais jamais résolu dans ma vie, et que je ne résoudrai jamais (Izzo 2015, 544).²⁰

Concerning Marseille, its mixed and multiple nature, to which Izzo refers on several occasions, is evoked in its being described as “rose et bleue, dans l'air immobile” (Izzo 2015, 578),²¹ to the point of almost making it a real character. In fact, in *Total Khéops*, Izzo writes that the city is

une utopie. L'unique utopie du monde. Un lieu où n'importe qui, de n'importe quelle couleur, pouvait descendre d'un bateau, ou d'un train, sa valise à la main, sans un sou en poche, et se

²⁰ “I told myself that the solution to all the contradictions of existence was there, in that sea. My Mediterranean. And I'd seen myself melting into it, at last resolving all the things I'd never managed to resolve in life, and never would.” (Izzo 2007, 39).

²¹ “pink and blue in the still air” (Izzo 2007, 72).

fondre dans le flot des autres hommes. Une ville où, à peine le pied posé sur le sol, cet homme pouvait dire : « C'est ici. Je suis chez moi. »
Marseille appartient à ceux qui y vivent (Izzo 2015, 209).²²

In fact, as Foucault writes, utopia is present in places that do not exist; in this sense, Marseille is a hypothetical space that exists in Izzo's imagination but does not correspond to the actual urban profile. As Foucault writes, utopian spaces are "born in the heads of men or, to tell the truth, in the interstices of their words, in the thickness of their stories or even in the place without place of their dreams, in the emptiness of their hearts; in short, it is the sweetness of utopias" (Foucault 2020, 11).²³ Moreover, Foucault continues – approaching in my opinion the striations described by Deleuze and Guattari – "one lives, dies, and loves in a squared, cropped, variegated space, with bright zones and dark zones, unevennesses, steps, hollows and humpinesses, with some regions hard and others brittle, penetrable, porous" (Foucault 2020, 12).²⁴ In relation to this, he refers both to the zones of passage and those of temporary stops opposed by heterotopias as "situated utopias," real places out of all places. This is exactly the case of Fabio Montale's *Mediterranean*, which – unlike the holographic one of Inspector Montalbano – is present at different levels, beginning with its concrete depiction and precise individuation. It is described from different points of view, for example from the thresholds that delimit it and depict a metropolitan landscape subject to economic and political power and control that from the mainland turns to also include the sea surface on which it faces and is reflected and a place where the south for those who represent power and authority becomes synonymous with danger, as in Lakhou's novel. Thus, those who migrate from the south to the north, "les migrants de sud vers le nord" (Izzo 2007, 583), become elements to be excluded, punished, controlled, and if possible, eliminated.

As already pointed out about *Scontro di civiltà*, also in the third of the novels in Izzo's trilogy – the one in which spatial trajectories gain more prominence than

22 "a utopia. utopia. The only utopia in the world. A place where anyone, of any color, could get off a boat or train with his suitcase in his hand and not a cent in his pocket, and melt into the crowd. A city where, as soon as he'd set foot on its soil, this man could say, 'This is my home.' Marseille belongs to the people who live in it" (Izzo 2006, 218).

23 The translations from Foucault's 2020 are mine. Here is the Italian version: "[...] sono nati, come si suol dire, nella testa degli uomini o, a dire il vero, negli interstizi delle loro parole, nello spessore dei loro racconti o anche nel luogo senza luogo dei loro sogni, nel vuoto dei loro cuori; insomma è la dolcezza delle utopie".

24 Here is the Italian version: "Si vive, si muore, si ama in uno spazio quadrettato, ritagliato, variegato, con zone luminose e yone buie, dislivelli, scalini, avvallamenti e gibbosità, con alcune regioni dure e altre friabili, penetrabili, porose".

in the first two – the south becomes synonymous with danger and threat. Commissioner Pessayre, who was born in Algiers and arrived in Marseille at the age of six by sea, is the spokesperson for a socio-political message that is intrinsic to a post-colonial reading of the Mediterranean, and where that space appears subject to continuous streaks, with elements such as obstacle, hindrance, and separation. Indeed, Izzo writes,

Pour l'Europe du Nord, le Sud est forcément chaotique, radicalement différent. Inquiétant donc (Izzo 2015, 584).²⁵

He goes on to point out how, in the future, “les États du nord réagiront en érigeant un *limes* moderne [...] comme un rappel de la frontière entre l'Empire romain et les barbares” (Izzo 2015, 584).²⁶ This is the dimension of Guattari's and Deleuze's striated spaces where the smooth is continuously absorbed by the political-economic logic that proceeds unstopably, without wavering, even in terms of gentrification. This is evident from what Commissioner Pessayre adds as she takes up Izzo's demands:

Ce nouveau monde est clos. Fini, ordonné, stable. Et nous n'y avons plus notre place. Une nouvelle pensée domine. Judéo-christiano-helléno-démocratique. Avec un nouveau mythe. Les nouveaux barbares. Nous. Et nous sommes innombrables, indisciplinés. Nomades bien sûr. Et puis arbitraires, fanatiques, violents. Et aussi, évidemment, misérables. La raison et le droit sont de l'autre côté de la frontière. La richesse aussi. (Izzo 2015, 584).²⁷

The “we” alludes, in this case, to the Algerian origin of the woman for whom, as she declares, it is as if from Marseilles she could see the port of Algiers; and where the element of communication between the two extremes is given by the Mediterranean, a marine space in itself atypical in its being almost closed, heterotopic par excellence.

Mention has been made of the striated space and of his unabated proceeding unabatedly at the expense of smooth one; for the latter, even in its continuous tendency toward deterritorialization, is destined to succumb under the weight of the

25 “To those in Northern Europe, the South is by its very nature chaotic, radically different, and therefore disturbing” (Izzo 2007, 78).

26 “the countries of the North will end up building a new frontier, what the Romans used to call a *limes*, to protect them from the barbarians.” (Izzo 2007, 78).

27 “This new world is a closed world. Finite, ordered, stable. There's no place in it for the likes of us. A new philosophy holds sway. Judeo-Christian, Hellenistic, democratic. With its myth of the new barbarians. Us. And we're uncountable, undisciplined, nomads of course. We're also uncontrollable, fanatical, violent. And poor, of course. Reason and law are on the other side of the frontier. Wealth too” (Izzo 2007, 78).

new and ambitious projects of the Euro-Mediterranean. And so, the littoral – smooth in its haphazard and chaotic development – becomes a space that

les paysagistes conseils d'Euroméditerranée voulaient détruire. Dans cet article de la revue *Marseille*, ils parlaient « d'une froide répulsion résultant de cet univers de machine, de béton et de charpente rivetée sous le soleil ». Les cons !

Le port était magnifique de cet endroit-là. On se le rentrait dans les yeux en roulant. Les quais. Les cargos. Les grues. Les ferries. La mer. Le château d'If et les îles du Frioul au loin. Tout était bon à prendre (Izzo 2015, 604).²⁸

The intentions are, on the contrary, to reset those landscapes “synonymous with chaos for technocrats,” that is, what is called “a landscape disuse.”

Thus, traversing that area by walking along the shoreline becomes for Montale a way of appropriating it (as it is for Lakhous' protagonist) by going along it “until” he reached “the outer harbor of La Joliette. Facing the Sainte-Marie lighthouse” (p. 75), or when he takes a ferry making the crossing together with the inhabitants of the area, or again when he is seen moving with a small boat gliding over its surface. It is a path that, in his detachment from everything, leads him to reenact a kind of rudimentary sea baptism to which his father had subjected him:

Au large des îles de Riou, j'avais coupé le moteur et laissé flotter le bateau. A cet endroit, approximatif, où mon père, me tenant sous les aisselles, m'avait trempé pour la première fois dans la mer. J'avais huit ans. [...] « N'aie pas peur, disait-il. N'aie pas peur. » Je n'avais pas eu d'autre baptême. Et quand la vie me faisait mal, c'est toujours vers ce lieu que je revenais. Comme pour tenter, là, entre mer et ciel, de me réconcilier avec le reste du monde (Izzo 2015, 568).²⁹

It almost seems as if the adopted sons of Marseilles, the escapees attempt to find their own common feeling and a kind of belonging as a function of that sea, the Mediterranean, with its wide expanse, “l'infini blue du monde” (Izzo 2015, 584)³⁰

28 “the consultant landscape architects of Euroméditerranée wanted to destroy. In that article in the magazine *Marseilles* – it is Montale who narrates in the first person – they called them ‘a cold, repellent universe of machines, concrete and rivets under the sun.’ The idiots!

From here, the harbor looked magnificent. You got a real eyeful of it as you drove. The piers. The freighters. The cranes. The ferries. The sea. The Château d'If and the islands of the Frioul in the distance. All ready for the taking” (Izzo 2007, 98).

29 “Off the Riou Islands, I'd cut the motor and let the boat drift. It was here, more or less, that my father had help me under the armpits and dipped me in the sea for the first time. I was eight [...] ‘Don't be afraid,’ he said. ‘Don't be afraid.’ It was the only baptism I'd ever had. And whenever life became too painful, this was where I came, here, between the sea and the sky. As if it was only here that I might be able to make peace with the world” (Izzo 2007, 77).

30 The “infinite blueness of the world” (Izzo 2007, 78).

III

In conclusion, therefore, it can be stated how, in Lakhous' Rome, there are heterotopic spaces – the elevator – that reproduce on a small scale the nature of the Mediterranean as a counterspace along with the smooth and striated spaces of urban geography that gather subjects, identities and ethnicities on par with distinct and simultaneous objects and times that seem to allow for flashes of a trans-cultural communication.

We face, in the case of the elevator, a heterotopia founded on separation and crisis, where there can be no communication and where hindrance (in this case the crime) is produced. Beginning with the observation that examinations around urban space are by their very nature intricate, parceled out and destined to refract into multiple othernesses, Izzo's depiction of Marseille and its Mediterranean is characterized by greater complexity. First and foremost, Marseille is proposed as a kind of utopian space – in Izzo's narrative constructions – contrasted with the marine heterotopia in which Montale as a child is immersed by his father in a kind of secular baptism and in which he finds himself in moments of crisis to the point of deliberately choosing to die there. Above all, it is the eternal struggle of a city where those who land from the South move like nomads eventually succumbing in the face of the constant striations imposed by the state, politics, and the will to control that is exercised over both urban and marine space.

The attempt has been to deconstruct the map of urban spaces and places of passage marked by their being destined for temporary stops, evoked in *Scontro di civiltà* and Montale's trilogy. In the latter text, one must consider, on the one hand, the scenarios in which the narrative texture is distributed – and thus ultimately the external and internal spaces in their specificities – and, on the other, the related epistemological mechanisms. Thus, one must consider the fluid nature of the urban Roman space or the urban and marine spaces of Marseille in their being capable of reflecting the split identities of those who move there, alongside its osmotic nature capable of accommodating – in a non-peaceful form – subjects and suggestions from a South understood from a European, Mediterranean perspective, a perspective that ultimately implicitly also addresses the global South.

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