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A Female Mediterranean South? Italian Women Writers Gendering Spaces of Meridione: Nadia Terranova's *Farewell ghosts* (2018)

Abstract: The present contribution interrogates a Mediterranean literary imagery by observing the ways in which women writers utilize the Italian South (*Meridione*), as they re-invent its cultural stereotypes and identities in order to forge narrative instances that challenge a patriarchal perspective. By assuming the anti-canonical nature of feminine writing as a key element in the continuous redefinition of a literary (trans)national practice, this essay investigates some of the narrative strategies that contemporary Southern Italian women writers have adopted to challenge and transform patriarchal stereotypes attached to the South, as they carve out their own experience of Meridione outside of patriarchal and heteronormative patterns.

The essay analyses in depth which historical and cultural premises lead to a reconceptualization of the Italian South according to a non-normative configuration of Southern, as well as Mediterranean spaces. As it takes into account the perspective of non-canonical narratives such as those offered by contemporary female narrators, the contribution suggests the possibility of a symbolic subversion of a Southern Italian cultural subalternity; this is observed as being the result of the emergence of women writers who manipulate and rewrite creatively their own spatial experiences of the South, thus allowing for a retrieval of marginalised subjectivities, such as those featured in novels by Elena Ferrante in her *Neapolitan Quartet* (2011–2014). Along with a series of theoretical propositions, the essay provides a close reading of *Farewell, Ghosts* (2018), a novel by Sicilian writer Nadia Terranova (1979-), in which the aim is to look at the textual configuration of designed spaces, while considering how the very conceptualization of space tied with gender implies a complexed destabilization of identities and social relations (Massey 1994).

Introduction

In the third volume of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels (2012–2015), the protagonist Elena Greco suddenly realises the global scope of the violence and abuses

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that she has been witnessing since childhood in the Neapolitan *rione*. Throughout the four novels, we read how Elena herself and her friend Lila experience different traumatic situations connected with a dominant patriarchal society that objectifies and marginalises women: "[T]he neighbourhood was connected to the city, the city to Italy, Italy to Europe, Europe to the whole planet. And this is how I see it today: it's not the neighbourhood that's sick, it's not Naples, it's the entire earth" (Ferrante 2014, 28).

It is not by chance that this attempt to undo the North-South binary logic comes from a gendered gaze such as Elena's, whose life experiences in Naples and eventually at the Normale University in Pisa, demonstrate that gender-based violence and injustice may occur in a low-class area of a big Southern Italian city, just as much as among the prestigious intellectual circles of Florence and Milan (or, one may add, in cosmopolitan realities such as New York or New Delhi). What is generally conceived as a clear-cut dichotomy between a backwards South (*Meridione*, or *Mezzogiorno*) and a more advanced, "civilised" North, is in fact being deconstructed by Ferrante. Reconfigured as a place that is "both metaphorical and particular", (de Rogatis 2019, 287) the city of Naples juxtaposes a gendered articulation of the South within a coalescence of archaic and modern, which is envisioned as a "synchronous vertical landscape", covering national and transnational realities (Milkova 2021, 3).

This excerpt from *My Brilliant Friend* partly echoes the words of Olga, Ferrante's protagonist from *The Days of Abandonment* (2002). Olga is a Neapolitan woman who lives in Turin, where she has to cope with the painful end of her marriage, since her husband left her to be with a much younger girlfriend. As it tells of Olga's gradual emancipation and desire for agency, the story focuses on her struggle to come to terms with the collapse of self in relation to violent heteronormative structures. The eventual renegotiation of a new identity, both as a woman and as a mother, will require a temporary embracement of her Neapolitan "ghosts", where Olga, just like Elena, has witnessed to what extent women can become self-destructive. As she reminisces of another woman who many years before, in her native Naples, committed suicide after being left by her husband, Olga thinks that "accents of the south cried in my head, cities that were far apart became a single voice, the blue surface of the sea and the white of the Alps" (Ferrante 2005, 47). The "accents of South" mark here the reverberations of a social and cultural paradigm that oppresses women transversally, no matter whether they come from a Southern or a Northern social environment, or whether they share a more "advanced" or "backwards" cultural heritage. Just like the violence of the *rione* for Elena, the historical oppression on women knows no circumscribed latitude.

Not only do these examples indirectly (but not too much) do away with the North-South dichotomy by suggesting its artificially ideological relativism, but

they also plastically change the symbolic hierarchy sustaining women's subalternity in the South, by giving shape to a narrative of female friendship and transformation, one in which a Southern, peripheral, marginalised space indeed becomes the centre of the world.

Since her debut novel *Troubling Love* (1992), Ferrante's narratives adopt Naples as a "stratified social and spatial geography"; (Milkova 2021, 3) this situates her within a genealogy of twentieth-century Italian writers (e. g. Southern Italian authors such as Leonardo Sciascia, Elio Vittorini, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, or Anna Maria Ortese, but also Northern writers like Cesare Pavese, or Carlo Levi), who have problematized the space of the "South", with its social, historical and cultural categories, in order to encompass both national and extra-national social realities and their struggles (Dainotto 2018, 22–23; Cazzato 2008, 102–115).

The two examples quoted from Ferrante suggest that it is within a gender-specific perspective that Southern spaces experiment an even deeper symbolic subversion, thus offering the possibility of re-interpreting the socio-cultural problematics that have historically characterised them. With an epistemological turn already featured in canonical novels (a line already established by Manzoni and continued by Verga), Ferrante's marginal female protagonists are endowed with a new centrality, as they are retrieved from their originally subaltern, historically silenced dimension, and enter an evolutionary journey (each protagonist, as we know, will evolve in a fairly different way). Lila's and Lenù's diversity is not just one of class; they embody what De Lauretis famously defined the "eccentric" subject, i. e. a non-unitary individual occupying multiple and fractured positions far from the centre of dominant discourses on identity/belonging, nationality, and/or heterosexual normativity. (De Lauretis 1999, 46) Ferrante's choice of privileging a female gaze over the cities, the streets or the houses of Naples, indeed interrogates and possibly subverts well-known gender-based distinctions, which at least since the Italian unification of 1861 have been connected to a North-South dichotomy, where the first one stands for a "male" rationality and modern progress, and the latter marks a "female", *ergo* feeble and irrational, existential paradigm.[1]

It is precisely the subversion of the negative sexualisation of the South and its cultural and social imagery that I intend to explore in this contribution. I am interested in mapping some of the narrative strategies that Southern Italian women writers have adopted to challenge and transform patriarchal stereotypes

1 The gender-based distinction is quite telling if paralleled with the painful process of annexation of the South to the Kingdom of Savoia. Around thirty years after the 1861 Unification, Positivist thinker Alfredo Niceforo would stress how, in his view, Northern people were endowed with a collective conscience and the ability to pursue social organization and discipline, whereas Neapolitans were labelled as a weak, dissolute and "female" people (Niceforo 1898, 293).

attached to the South, as they carve out their own experience of *Meridione* outside of patriarchal and heteronormative patterns. For the purpose of this essay, I will limit myself to a close reading of a novel by Sicilian writer Nadia Terranova (1979–), in which I will attempt to look at the textual configuration of designed spaces, while being aware that the very conceptualization of space tied with gender implies a complex destabilization of identities and social relations (Massey 1994, 5).

My textual analysis is aimed at proposing a wider cultural perspective, aimed at considering the way in which Southern Italian women writers continuously redefine two interconnected forms of *meridionalità* ("Southernness"), by distancing themselves from a literary canon developed after the Italian Unification of 1861. According to a dominant and "naturalized" perspective, Southern spaces have been enclosed within a double-sided Otherness, which affects the individuals who inhabit them: one side is the generic mark of negative difference attributed to the South as a subaltern, different Italy, excluded from progress and modernization (Dickie 1999, 2–3), whereas the other side corresponds to the forms of objectification, control and marginalization that specifically affect women. In the light of this, I believe that the process of negative "Othering" affecting the South also ensues from a series of automatisms between women as a historically marginalised and subaltern social group, and the narratives portraying a timeless, ahistorical South that has been perceived as part of a conquering project aimed at forming the Italian nation.

By looking at narrative reinventions of the South as a "feminine *psychical-corporeal-spatial* landscape" (Milkova 2021, 4, author's italics), the objective is here to investigate the different strategies put in place to connect the often stereotypical representations of a backwards and patriarchal *Meridione* with the presence of female subjectivities who oppose forms of resistance and reinvention to that reality. This approach may reveal that, through both literary imagination and autobiographical experience of a Southern space – one that is, at once, geo-cultural and symbolic –, female gazes may delineate singular Southern identities by telling stories that creatively dismiss a patriarchal perspective. The latter fairly coincides with the Risorgimental patriotic rhetoric that contributed to forge the identity of modern Italy upon the exclusion of alienated groups, thus resulting in a racialized *and* sexualised Southern Question (Re 2010, 3–4; see also Re 2001).

While assuming the impossibility of defining the Italian South in terms of a univocal cultural epistemology, one cannot deny the unbalanced social position of women in the formation of a literary discourse on Italian national identity. Within the context of Southern Italian literature (but bearing effects on the entirety of Italian context), part of this misbalance derives from the prestigious role assigned to a male line of authors, mostly made by canonical Sicilian writers, as

I have argued elsewhere (Todesco 2017, 121–174). In this respect, it is also – yet not only – from a frequently quoted Sicilian genealogy (from Verga and Capuana to De Roberto and Pirandello, from Tomasi di Lampedusa to Sciascia, Consolo and Camilleri), that a paradigmatic image of the South has been forged (Merola 2008; Madrignani 2007). According to a widespread *vulgata*, not only has *Meridione* become a place of stereotypical social and class subalternity, but it has also been adopted as an authentic laboratory of ideas for the formation of an Italian modern identity, one from which the voices of women have often been excluded (Di Gesù 2013, 48–49).

However, numerous examples of Southern-themed narratives confirm that Italian women writers have continuously "gendered" the South.[2] Apart from the global influence of Ferrante's novels, many other narratives have shed a gendered light over the cultural and social debates around the existence of a "Southern question" and its effects on the female condition in contemporary Italy. As they have chosen to thematise the South and its contradictions, numerous novels have redefined Southern women as subjects of history actively responding to the elicitations of feminist historiography and sociology (Scott 1996; Soldani 1999; Ginatempo 1994). A richly transformative tension attached to the South is visible in many contemporary female-authored texts, such as Elsa Morante's *House of Liars* (1949),[3] *Il mare non bagna Napoli* by Anna Maria Ortese (1953),[4] *Althénopis* by Fabrizia Ramondino (1981).[5] More examples may be provided by the historical novels by Sicilian authors Maria Attanasio (*Il falsario di Caltagirone*, 2007) and Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (*La briganta*, 1990),[6] Goliarda Sapienza's posthumous masterpiece *The art of joy* (*L'arte della gioia*, 2008),[7] or the more recent example of Nadia Terranova's novel *Farewell, Ghosts* (*Addio fantasmi*, 2018),[8] to name but a few.

2 Since the end of nineteenth century up until today, especially Sicilian women writers have produced a number of original narratives in which the socially inferior positioning of women becomes the centre of a more general cultural meditation on the female Southern Subaltern subject. See Todesco (2017).

3 *House of Liars*. Trans. Adrienne Foulke. Ed. Andrew Chiappe. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1951.

4 *Neapolitan Chronicles*, Trans. Ann Goldstein and Jenny McPhee. New York: New Vessel Press, 2018. This title was chosen for the American audience, while the British edition came out with the title *Evening Descends Upon the Hills: Stories from Naples*, London: Pushkin Press 2018.

5 *Althénopis*. Trans. Michael Sullivan. Manchester: Carcanet, 1988.

6 *The Woman Outlaw*. Trans. Angela M. Jeannet. New York: Legas, 2004.

7 *The art of joy*. Trans. Ann Milano Appel. New York: Penguin, 2013.

8 *Addio fantasmi*. Turin: Einaudi, 2018; *Farewell, Ghosts*, Trans. Ann Goldstein. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2020.

A great quantity of Southern-themed literary works by women stands for a deeply cultural transformation, in which authors are remapping a different *Meridione*, within the larger context of a globalised and increasingly gendered Mediterranean scenario (Cariello 2011). The very choice of narrating the South by assigning a central position to a gendered gaze operates a form of symbolic decolonization which, by restoring a perspective on female bodies, memories and spaces, provides an alternative epistemology of the South itself. I also reckon that the transformative effect of a gender-based critical analysis on the cultural perception of the South may be observed both in terms of a historicization of creative practices, as well as a conscious-raising redefinition of ontological patterns. Thus, for example, if literary and cultural criticism takes into account how Southern Italian women writers narrate themes such as exile and *nóstos*, or the relationship between mothers and daughters, by situating them in a Southern space, such intersections may integrate, and possibly counter with, previously partial (male) interpretations of those same realities.

As Simone de Beauvoir famously put it, "The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself [...] The Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One" [author's emphasis] (De Beauvoir 1989, xxii–xxiv).[9] With its charge of cultural, socio-economical and ethical implications, the historical "Othering" of the South (just like the construction of the East as "Other" observed by Edward Said) represents a macro-environment in which dichotomies are elaborated, performed and challenged by different social groups. This convergence allows one to look at the South from a postcolonial, as well as from a feminist perspective. A major exemplification is the construction of an epistemological discourse on the South being Italy's "Other" at the aftermath of the Italian Unification in 1861, when the regions of *Meridione* were objectified by the Kingdom of Savoia, for whom the newly conquered areas were dark, uncivilised and feminine spaces to rehabilitate (Dickie 1999). Within such a scenario, the adoption of different nar-

9 Assumed by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) and developed by second-wave feminism, the notion of Otherness benefits from a vast bibliography, which cannot be summarised here, due to its numerous appropriations by a variety of disciplines and by distinct thinkers who have re-read classical Hegelian and Kantian philosophy, from Hannah Arendt to Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, or Gayatri Spivak. The latter further elaborated the concept of "Othering" while re-reading different philosophical and theoretical traditions, such as the Rani of Sirnur (see Spivak 2004, 221–260). In the context of this work, it is useful to connect the concept of Otherness with an investigation of counter-hegemonic cultural practices, as demonstrated by the notion's key role in Postcolonial theories, as well as in Poststructuralist studies. Within the framework of these complexed intersections, the value and productivity of Otherness from a gender perspective is, intuitively, extremely relevant for a comprehensive analysis. For detailed discussions of the Othering of the Italian South, see Derobertis (2012, 157–173) and Lombardi-Diop (2012, 175–190).

rative genres (such as the *memoir* and the historical novel) that thematise the otherness of the South from a female narrative point of view – women being a marginalised group *par excellence* – helps conveying a condition of "double Southernness" (*doppia meridionalità*).

In the second section I will examine textual excerpts by Nadia Terranova, while in the third and final section I will argue for the necessity to insert a literary female Southern gaze in the larger context of a global and local perspective of Mediterranean Studies. My focus will be the centrality of spaces in relation to Ida, protagonist of *Addio, fantasmi* (2018),[10] and their capacity to re-delineate *Meridione* according to gendered bodily and existential perspectives. As I hope to demonstrate, the Southern spatial and experiential dimensions narrated in Terranova's novel ultimately retrieve the fractures of an uneven, irreducible history by providing a different image of the South. The objective is here to advocate for an intersection produced by a literary "female Mediterranean South", one that is able to challenge the North/South divarication, by inscribing identities within a constitutive and imaginative dimension.

The House Ghosts and the Watery Cityscape: Nadia Terranova's Ida

> The crossing: one reason the return was worthwhile.
> (Terranova 2020, 17–18)

Born in Messina in 1978 and resident in Rome already for well over a decade, Nadia Terranova[11] entertains with her native Sicily a productive relationship, whether it is expressed through the choice of spaces that inhabit her narratives,[12]

10 For the purpose of this essay, I will refer to the Italian edition in the body of the text, and to the English edition in the footnotes.

11 This section is partly a re-elaboration of a previous analysis (Todesco 2020, 340–362). However, in the context of this essay, I am examining Terranova's novel as part of a larger and multiform epitomization of Southern spaces specifically connected with a gendered dimension.

12 More generally, the attention of Terranova to the narrative potential of spaces is testified by more recent writings, such as the short story collection *Come una storia d'amore* (2020), where each story symbolises a form of existential "re-appropriation" and reinvention of a different Roman neighbourhood, or *Caravaggio e la ragazza* (2021), in which the few years spent by the great painter in Messina become the pretext for a historical, as well as a sensorial journey into the city.

or it is the result of a historical and cultural acknowledgement towards coeval or antecedent authors.[13]

In the context of this contribution, it is relevant to point out that the epitomization of spaces in Terranova's narratives provide a ground for a renegotiation of the writer's Southern and Sicilian identity, as well as a contingent framework where the embodied subjectivity of her protagonists come to terms with the wounds of the past, especially one related to childhood and adolescence. This is particularly true for both novels *Gli anni al contrario* (2015; "The Backward Years"), as well as for *Addio fantasmi* (2018; *Farewell, Ghosts*, 2020), where the characters are shown as being differently involved in a series of spatial dislocations that take them away from and/or back to the Southern space of Messina, each movement signifying a crucial step of their individual *Bildung*.

At the same time, in the case of *Farewell, Ghosts* – in which the return of the protagonist to her native Messina reshapes an original itinerary of awareness and, possibly, existential closure after a long buried, yet interrupted, mourning – the configuration of topographic and domestic spaces also allows for a female individual agency to be achieved through the physical and existential rediscovery of other gendered "bodies" – those incarnated by the city and the house, which participate in the characterisation of a liminal, unorthodox South.

A first-person narrative, *Farewell, Ghosts* hints at the connection between the internal voice of Ida, and the writer's own family autobiography, as already partly done in her previous novel *The Backward Years*, thus re-proposing a multiple tension with fixed identity categorizations, as well as transfiguring the writer's own family autobiography (Todesco 2020, 347). However, *Farewell, Ghosts* reshapes the spatiality of a geographically determined South – here the city of Messina – around a female body who faces the traumatic events that had originally caused her self-exile from that very space.

From the title itself, *Farewell, Ghosts* is a novel that thematises forms of separation and detachment. The protagonist, Ida Laquidara, is a writer of radio dramas in her thirties who has left Messina over a decade earlier, and now lives with her husband Pietro in Rome. When Ida's mother urges her to return in order to help her supervise the structural renovation of their old apartment and to sort out her personal items, the sudden homecoming makes Ida's fragile

13 Over the past few years, Terranova has been supporting and promoting – both in written and oral form, and often through her social networks – the works of other Sicilian authors, including canonical writers like Leonardo Sciascia and Gesualdo Bufalino, along with lesser known Sicilian female narrators who have hardly entered the canon, such as Goliarda Sapienza and Laura Di Falco, or contemporary novelists who have actively thematised Sicilian space and history from a gendered perspective, e.g. Maria Attanasio and Stefania Auci.

inner equilibrium collapse. The unexpected close contact with her childhood home, filled with objects and memories, as well as with the city streets, awakens a pain that the protagonist has so far attempted to bury, one connected with the mysterious disappearance of her depressed father Sebastiano that occurred twenty-three years earlier.

The novel is divided into three main sections, "The Name", "The Body" and "The Voice", preceded by a brief untitled introductory chapter. Each section is further composed by brief chapters, that intersect Ida's present time with flashbacks from her childhood and adolescence. Some shorter chapters consist of chronological sequences called "Nocturnes", and are specifically dedicated to the dreams that Ida experiences while staying at her family house in Messina. The narration follows the protagonist's inner voice and, except for a few dialogues, is entirely focused on her thoughts, desires, memories, and fears. This also allows the rhythm of the narrative to adhere to Ida's gestures, resulting in a continuous, almost fleshly juxtaposition between her own experience within the surrounding space and the same spaces being described. The reiterated apposition of spaces to the female body is confirmed, for instance, by a passage where Ida meditates on what bidding farewell to Messina has done to her face:

> Quando ero andata via dalla Sicilia, per primo mi era cambiato il naso, si era chiuso sempre di più, con ostilità e disprezzo per quel poco ossigeno impregnato di cemento e smog della capitale; poi era cambiata la pelle, per via dell'acqua calcarea che scendeva dai rubinetti e dello scarico delle auto; da ultima mi era cambiata la schiena, incurvandosi in modo innaturale mentre salivo e scendevo dagli autobus e dai tram. Così da messinese ero diventata romana, e da ragazza ero diventata adulta e moglie (Terranova 2018, 17–18).[14]

The theme of *nóstos* – which Terranova retrieves by drawing a connection with Vittorini's *Conversation in Sicily* (1941) – allows the narrative to thematise the precariousness of domestic spaces in giving a shape to one's individual sense of belonging. A manifest uncertainty of selfhood, along with the violence of the original emigration from home, are equally and powerfully visualised in the novel's opening lines:

14 "When I left Sicily, my nose was the first thing that changed. It had grown more and more congested, hostile and scornful toward the scant oxygen of the capital, saturated with cement and smog; then my skin had changed, because of the chalky water that came out of the faucets and the exhaust from the cars; finally my back had changed, curving unnaturally as I got on and off buses and trams. Thus I had been Messinese and become Roman, had been a girl and become an adult and a wife" (Terranova 2020, 20).

> Una mattina di metà settembre mia madre mi telefonò per avvisarmi che entro qualche giorno sarebbero iniziati i lavori sul tetto di casa nostra. Disse proprio così: nostra. Ma io avevo già da tempo in un'altra città un'altra casa a cui badare, una casa presa in affitto da me e da un'altra persona (Terranova 2018, 5).[15]

Spaces, just like people, reveal themselves as literally infested with the ghosts of absence and grief, and are able to affect the apparent linearity of a person's existence, thus intertwining a resemantization of spaces with a reconfiguration of time. As Sicilian-American writer and essayist Edvige Giunta poetically suggests while describing one of her many Sicilian returns, "the geography of return is spatial and temporal, horizontal and vertical, an excavation site to be uncovered every time" (Giunta 2004, 768). In Terranova's quoted excerpt, the reiterated term "house" stands as a token that intensely differentiates Ida's past and present, as, in a few lines, the novel charts its course around spatial, as well as time precariousness. The refusal of sharing with her mother the possession of the house in Messina is hinted by the repetition of the adjective "another", which suggests Ida's desperate attempt to claim that she has already replaced the original house with a new one, in a choice that ought to be considered final. Nevertheless, the imposed return to that original, yet now repudiated, space challenges the supposed stability of the newer house, by adding a somewhat ironic detail: Ida's and Pietro's house in Rome (which here remains unnamed as "another city") is actually rented, a fact that hints at another form of instability and dispossession.

Ida's return also emblematises a form of trauma, since it means to sneak among the fragments of that first, original, violent fracture she herself decided to create between her own life and the life of her childhood home: "[N]on esisteva più una casa che avrei chiamato nostra, quell'etichetta si era staccato quando ero andata via e negli anni successivi ne avevo ripulito la memoria con accurate violenza" (Terranova 2018, 5).[16] The house of her childhood is no longer there, while the one that her mother urges her to go back to has a falling roof: "aveva cominciato a crollare fin dalla mia nascita, non aveva fatto che sgretolarsi e piovere in

15 "One morning in the middle of September my mother called to tell me that in a few days' work would begin on the roof of our house. She said it just like that: 'our.' But for some time I'd had another house to take care of, in another city, a house rented by me and another person" (Terranova 2020, 7).

16 "The house I would have called ours no longer existed, that label had been removed when I left, and in the following years I had wiped it from my memory with thorough violence" (Terranova 2020, 7).

forma di polvere e calcinacci per tutta la vita che avevo vissuto lì dentro" (Terranova 2018, 5).[17]

The act of "going South" is commonly perceived as charged with a certain level of rituality for every Italian Southerner who has emigrated and temporarily goes back home, and Ida is no exception. The liminal space of her homecoming is inaugurated by a description of the night before the journey to Messina, and a clear-cut dichotomy is textually established between the (apparently) safe space of Rome and the unstable and estranged dimension of the Messina house, treated with reticence and painful dismissal, as seen above. Such dichotomy is, however, fraught by a series of oscillations. Already while packing, Ida's mind arranges what is going to be her movement towards the South: "[A]vrei guardato fuori dal finestrino per il lungo tratto di mare della ferrovia calabrese, fino a Villa San Giovanni, di lì avrei preso il traghetto per Messina [...]" (Terranova 2018, 6).[18]

Right before she goes to the station to catch a train to Sicily, the watery space of Messina invades the false safety of Rome in the form of a dream, thus contradicting the illusory solidity of Ida's marriage:

> Quella notte sognai di annegare. Scaldava il letto il piede di mio marito appoggiato sulla mia caviglia e, a un certo punto, dal tepore sotto il lenzuolo iniziavo a entrare in acqua. Camminavo come se avessi saputo dove andare e l'acqua mi rinfrescava le caviglie, i polpacci, le ginocchia e poi le cosce, i fianchi, la pancia, il seno e le spalle, e ancora il mento e la bocca finché, appena provavo a parlare, sparivo inghiottita da un'onda. [...] Chiamai sottovoce Pietro, mio marito, non perché avessi bisogno di lui ma perché desideravo non escluderlo dal fatto che stavo morendo (Terranova 2018, 6).[19]

As an adult, Ida has sought refuge, as well as a new self-identity in her marriage with Pietro, whose name – derived from *pietra*, "stone", evokes the capacity to consolidate her painful uncertainties: "Allora assieme alla città avevo trovato una

17 "[I]t had begun to fall down when I was born, and had been crumbling, raining down in the form of dust and flaking plaster, for all the life I had lived there" (Terranova 2020, 7).

18 "I would look out the window for the long stretch of sea beside the Calabrian railroad all the way to Villa San Giovanni; from there I would take the ferry to Messina [...]" (Terranova 2020, 8).

19 "That night I dreamed I was drowning. My husband's foot, propped against my ankle, warmed the bed, and at some point I began to move from the warmth under the sheet into the water. I was walking as if I knew where to go, and the water-cooled ankles, calves, knees, and then thighs, hips, belly, breast, and shoulders, and then chin and mouth, until I tried to speak and immediately disappeared, swallowed up by a wave. [...] In a whisper, I called to Pietro, my husband, not because I needed him but because I didn't want to keep from him the fact that I was dying" (Terranova 2020, 8–9).

nuova me stessa, e lui era lì, sempre lì, con una disponibilità che mi commuoveva" (Terranova 2018, 8).[20]

However, their relationship has been constructed upon subtractions and silences, as well as marked by the anonymity of the spaces they both inhabit:

> [A] un certo punto i nostri corpi avevano smesso di funzionare insieme, di incastrarsi nel sonno e nella veglia che lo precede, eravamo diventati respingenti l'uno per l'altra. [...] Il corpo aveva smesso di essere il luogo della comunicazione. [...] [S]tare insieme ogni giorno, prendere insieme ogni decisione, conoscere a memoria l'odore, il sesso, il carattere dell'altro: ecco cos'era il matrimonio. Il resto era un mare *tempestoso e sconosciuto che non valeva la pena attraversare.* [...] Nelle mie finte storie vere mettevo parte del mio dolore e dell'acqua che esondava dal passato, e speravo che la scrittura sarebbe bastata a salvarmi [...]" (Terranova 2018, 8–11, my emphasis).[21]

The mere thought of the Strait of Messina, the waters of which Ida is about to cross, has been able to destabilise her, anticipating a journey that will become a real katabasis into a family "Hades". Through the images of drowning and perilous sea-crossing, the various different forms in which Ida's identity is collapsing get signified by a potent spatial element in the novel, i. e. water, which will recur in the characterization of the house in Messina as a living *locus* of change and renegotiation of grief. In exceeding the weak protection of the anonymous, rented apartment in Rome, the seawater to be crossed – along with its oneiric, deadly counterpart – also signifies the protagonist's dynamic transit between Sicily and the Italian peninsula, as they anticipate Ida's coming to terms with her native city and home. Water, in other words, will trigger an action that Ida has been putting off for far too long. Not surprisingly, the irresistible action of water will recur at the first sights of her own old bedroom: during her first night in Messina, Ida will dream of it as "satura di speranza inutilizzata" (Terranova 2018, 20);[22] the room is a suspended place, and also in reality it presents itself as "ferma nel tempo; pavimento e mura erano occupati dal magma degli oggetti fuoriusciti dallo stanzino sul terrazzo [...] Una camera morta, invasa dai flutti dei ricordi"

20 "So, along with the city, I found a new self, and he was there, always there, and that availability was moving" (Terranova 2020, 10).

21 "At a certain point our bodies had stopped functioning together, stopped fitting together in sleep and the waking that precedes it; we had become shields for one another [...] The body stopped being the place of communication [...] Being together every day, making every decision together, knowing by heart the smell, the sex, the character of the other: that was marriage. The rest was a stormy, unknown sea, and there was no point in crossing it [...] In my fake true stories I put part of my pain and the water that overflowed from the past, and I hope that writing would be enough to save me [...]" (Terranova 2020, 10–13).

22 "[S]aturated with unused hope" (Terranova 2020, 24).

(Terranova 2018, 17).[23] Furthermore, water recurs in the novel as the objective correlative of the unmanageable disappearance of Ida's father, who was clinically depressed and has perhaps drowned himself.

The spatial crossing is also a temporal one, since Ida is returning to her childhood, by moving away from the present of her adulthood. The crossing of the sea is, as in a quasi-mythical tale, supervised by the mother's body, who welcomes Ida at the docks and is similar to a younger version of her own daughter: "[I]l suo corpo sottile si mise in mezzo tra me e l'isola facendomi da ingresso alla città. Notai che crescendo – invecchiando – aveva preso a somigliarmi, neanche fosse lei la figlia; mi sorrise con un'ingenuità che un tempo era stata mia […] (Terranova 2018, 15).[24]

Since the disappearance of the father, Ida and her mother share a lot of silences and hardly understand each other, nor do they wish to make any attempt at the gripping sense of guilt and resentment that they feel towards one another: "[S]e c'era un'arte in cui io e mia madre eravamo diventate brave durante la mia adolescenza, quell'arte era il silenzio" (Terranova 2018, 31).[25]

Their arguments are episodic fights that resemble those of two "esseri eterni che si permettevano il lusso di sprecare il tempo […] Io urlavo e mia madre piangeva e ciascuna metteva in campo l'arma più apocalittica, la rabbia più disgustosa, una bestemmia" (Terranova 2018, 136–137).[26] One of their first exchanges after Ida's arrival from Rome echoes the austere essentiality of a Greek tragedy, while the protagonist's inner monologues accentuate the utterly aphonic dimension of their incommunicability:

> "Hai bruciato il caffè, disse mia madre entrando in cucina […]"
> Pensai: mio padre è sparito ventitre anni fa.
> "Ti avevo preparato la caffettiera da accendere."
> Pensai: è sparito nel nulla e dopo i primi tempi non ne abbiamo più parlato.
> "Avevo messo il biglietto nel beccuccio come faceva la nonna con me."
> Pensai: perché non ne abbiamo più parlato?

23 "The room where I had slept, played, studied had remained fixed over time; floor and walls were occupied by the magma of objects exiled from the shed on the terrace […] A dead room, invaded by waves of memories" (Terranova 2020, 19).
24 "[H]er slender body was placed between me and the island, forming an entrance to the city. I noticed that in growing up – ageing – she had begun to resemble me, as though she were the daughter. She smiled at me with a candor that once had been mine […]" (Terranova 2020, 17).
25 "[I]f there was an art in which my mother and I had become expert during my adolescence, that art was silence" (Terranova 2020, 37).
26 "[W]e fought like eternal beings who could afford the luxury of wasting time […] I shouted and my mother wept and each of us fielded our most destructive weapon, the most repugnant rage, a curse" (Terranova 2020, 151).

> "Sei sveglia da tanto?"
> Pensai: perché non ne hai più parlato? (Terranova 2018, 27).[27]

In *Farewell, Ghosts* spaces and objects take over the characters' agency, or rather lack thereof. Ida's solitary journey is thus accompanied by the major presence of her house, which together with the city, unblocks the state of lethargy caused by the trauma of being the daughter of a missing man. As she herself meditates, "La morte è un punto fermo, mentre la scomparsa è la mancanza di un punto, di qualsiasi segno di interpunzione alla fine delle parole" (Terranova 2018, 25).[28] The house is indeed a co-protagonist of this topographic novel;[29] it is a fulcrum where everything has remained exactly the same as Ida remembers, as if this fixedness were necessary to welcome the return of her father Sebastiano. Similar to his mysteriously disappeared body, the body of the house has remained "unburied" and summons Ida to itself, as soon as the latter arrives (Terranova 2020, 19), by displaying all its clear signs of decay:

> In mezzo a strade dedicate ai miti del mare, via Colapesce e via Fata Morgana, ci aspettava la casa. Non era che una brutta sopraelevazione aggiunta in ritardo su un palazzetto d'epoca, una corona di plastica su una regina vera; ne raccontavano la decadenza i resti di fregi nei balconi sottostanti, un leone dai capelli ondulati e sgretolati, simboli nobiliari stinti e scoloriti, persiane cadenti in legno verde (Terranova 2018, 16).[30]

The house is a living entity, "un appartamento sproporzionato, ricovero escrescente di mobili accatastati in tempi diversi" (Terranova 2018, 32);[31]inside of it, since Sebastiano has disappeared, mother and daughter are two silenced, stranded

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27 "'You burned the coffee,' my mother said, entering the kitchen [...] – I thought: My father disappeared twenty-three years ago. – 'I got the coffee ready so you just had to turn it on.' – I thought: He disappeared into nothing and after the first days we never talked about it. – 'I put a note in the spout the way your grandmother did with me.' – I thought: Why didn't we talk about it anymore? – 'Have you been up long?' – I thought: Why didn't you talk about it anymore?" (Terranova 2020, 32).

28 "Death is a full stop, while disappearance is the absence of a stop, of any punctuation mark at the end of the words" (Terranova 2020, 30).

29 I owe this definition to my brilliant friend and *sodale* Prof. Stiliana Milkova, to whom goes my gratitude for sharing many illuminating considerations on Terranova's novel.

30 "Amid streets dedicated to sea myths, Via Colapesce and Via Fata Morgana, the house awaited us. It was only an ugly extra story added on later to a nineteenth-century building, a plastic crown on a real queen; its decline was recounted in the vestiges of ornaments on the surviving balconies, a lion with undulating, flaking mane, faded and discoloured symbols of nobility, dilapidated green-painted wood shutters" (Terranova 2020, 18).

31 "[A]n apartment out of scale, an excrescence sheltering furniture accumulated at different times" (Terranova 2020, 38).

solitudes, surrounded by a sea of family debris: "Le case dei miei compagni di classe erano così leggere che quando ci entravo mi sembrava si staccassero da terra; [...] mentre io e mia madre, dentro la nostra, camminavamo a fatica, incatenate agli oggetti che non buttavamo. [...] Noi non conservavamo per ricordare, ma per sperare; tutti gli oggetti ricoprivano un ruolo e avviavano un ricatto, e ora sono intorno a me a guardarmi" (Terranova 2018, 19).[32] The blackmailing, exorbitant presence of objects signifies the heaviness of unfinished memories, but it also means that the space of the house inevitably affects the supposed temporal linearity that Ida has wished to give to her own life. Time is, in fact, also stranded, because the grief for Sebastiano's disappearance has not found a proper closure, his missing body has not been properly mourned.

Just like the protagonist, also the body of the house is heavy with unelaborated sorrows that invoke a form of closure. The bags containing all the things that Ida's mother has persistently accumulated contain "cose indistinte, accomunate da una presunzione di utilità [...] Aveva continuato a conservare oggetti per plasmare un avvenire, il mio" (Terranova 2018, 110),[33] yet conversely the accumulation has increased Ida's sense of precariousness and the feeling that her father's coffin remained everywhere. For example, in a chapter called "Le cose che non facciamo" ("The things we don't do"), the protagonist's drawers are overflowing with all the diverse children's clothes and objects that were kept to be used once she would become a mother. This eventually never happened, because Ida grew up seeing her own unhappy mother (who was first forced to live with a depressed companion, and eventually was abandoned by him), and didn't wish to live through the same risky experience: "Alla mia gabbia avevo almeno avuto il coraggio di togliere una sbarra: mio marito non sarebbe stato padre, non dei miei figli. Eppure, neanche questo aveva salvato il nostro matrimonio dal trasformarsi in una creatura zoppa [...] mia madre doveva aver annaspato dentro la gabbia" (Terranova 2018, 86).[34] These objects have been kept without a rational logic, along with Ida's school

32 "My classmates' houses were so light that when I entered I imagined they would lift off from the ground; [...] while my mother and I struggled to walk in ours, chained to the objects we didn't throw away. [...] We saved them not to remember but to hope; all the objects performed a role and launched a threat, and now they're around me, looking at me" (Terranova 2020, 23).

33 "My mother had accumulated an undifferentiated jumble of things [...] She had continued to save objects that would mould a future, mine" (Terranova 2020, 122).

34 "I at least had had the courage to remove one bar from *the cage:* my husband wouldn't be a father, not of my children. And yet not even that had saved our marriage from turning into a lame creature [...] my mother must have floundered in the cage" (Terranova 2020, 97–98).

papers and newspaper clippings. They had all become "buffi e subito antichi, poi tristi e infine inservibili, a breve sarebbero stati grotteschi" (Terranova 2018, 87).[35]

Only their cumbersome manifestation can once more force Ida to deal with the necessity of finding her own personal way of mourning: "Nascita, morte, sparizione, tutto nello stesso cassette, il ciuccio e il lutto, l'infanzia e la vecchiaia, la scuola e i miei meriti, e poi il giorno senza tempo che aveva spezzato la nostra vita, poche righe sulla scomparsa di Sebastiano Laquidara, stimato professore di liceo [...]" (Terranova 2018, 87).[36]

Nevertheless, the same space of the house becomes the first main site where Ida can liberate and literally "drain out" her grief, and ultimately regain possession of the only object which she is not going to let go and has kept all these years, buried in the house: a red iron box containing the traces of her father's voice and name. In a chapter entitled "Leaking" (but originally called *Sfiatare*, a term that contains the word *fiato* – breath – and directly conveys the idea of the air being drained out of a pipe), there is a clear and decisive enfranchisement shared by both Ida and the house, irremediably damaged by the accumulation of humidity through the floors and on the roof terrace. Here, water is opposed to air, by being a suffocating element that prevents the house from breathing. One first "liberation" of air against water occurs when Ida confronts her mother, who has accused her of being selfish, also for not wishing to become a mother. To these accusations, Ida answers "d'un fiato, spavalda come il personaggio di una tragedia greca" (Terranova 2018, 117),[37] saying that she could not possibly give an existence to another life – least of all, to give her father's name to an imaginary baby boy – because "finché il corpo di mio padre non avrà pace non ne avrò io" (Terranova 2018, 117).[38] Already by verbalising her pain, Ida marks the territory of her future actions, both inside the house and through the city, which will provide her the ideal ground for a series of rituals to mourn her father, thus healing her own wounded self.

A second and decisive action consists in draining the water out of the apartments' radiators, which are the same as when Ida's father had lived in the

35 "[F]unny and immediately old, then sad and finally useless; soon they would be grotesque" (Terranova 2020, 98).

36 "Birth, death, disappearance, all in the same drawer, the pacifier and mourning, childhood and old age, school and my merits, and then the day without time that had split our life, a few lines on the disappearance of Sebastiano Laquidara, esteemed high school teacher [...]" (Terranova 2020, 98).

37 "I said all in one breath, bold as a character in a Greek tragedy" (Terranova 2020, 130).

38 "[A]s long as the body of my father has no peace, I won't either" (Terranova 2020, 130).

house (Terranova 2018, 125; Terranova 2020, 139). By taking her father's place, Ida removes the water, acting like a doctor on a fatigued pair of lungs:[39]

> Girai la manopola sul lato sinistro e dopo un breve silenzio ci fu un'esplosione, come quando si stappa una bibita gasata. L'aria compressa delle tubature fece schizzare in alto l'acqua, che dal termosifone colò sulle mie caviglie e sulle dita dei piedi; dovetti richiudere e correre via. Incrociandola in corridoio urlai a mia madre con tutta la voce che avevo: ma cosa hai fatto in questi anni, di cosa ti sei curata, non hai pensato a niente. [...] Uno per uno liberai tutti i termosifoni della casa. [...] Mi parve che le pareti riprendessero il loro respiro regolare e la casa diventasse un corpo dai bronchi liberati e guariti, e me ne tornai a letto (Terranova 2018, 125–126).[40]

Along with the house liberated from some of the "ghosts" caused by Sebastiano's persistent presence/absence, Ida's Sicilian re-appropriation of spaces majorly concerns a personal remapping of the city of her childhood, a process that starts from a persistent use of toponyms, as if the very act of uttering each place name would rebuild it on Ida's reconfigured gendered subjectivity as a woman whose body and mind are divided between the past and the present. The precariousness and indefiniteness of spaces is primarily a corporeal one, as testified by Ida's troublesome dreams, or "Nocturnes", where her body exceeds its own contours, transfiguring into her own father's features: "Mia madre ride sdraiata, voltata su un fianco verso di me, scarmigliata e felice come in foto [...] Mi ha appena abbracciata, mi guarda con gratitudine, non ha il sorriso che si rivolge a una figlia, mia madre non sta ridendo a me, non ha abbracciato me, il mio corpo non sono io: nel sogno io sono il corpo di mio padre" (Terranova 2018, 95).[41]

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39 Quite significantly, once the radiators have been emptied from their watery burden, a smoother and less oppressive communication starts between Ida and her husband Pietro (who has remained in Rome and is worrying about her well-being). She is now able to tell him about the bad dreams that have haunted her since her arrival in Messina, and the distance between them becomes less threatening, as his voice reminds her now of "acqua termale curativa" (Terranova 2018, 145), i. e. a curative thermal water that soothes her sleep.

40 "I turned the knob on the left side and after a brief silence there was an explosion, as when you open a carbonated drink. The compressed air in the pipes made the water shoot up, and it dripped from the radiator onto my ankles and toes; I had to reclose it and run. Meeting my mother in the hall, I shouted at her with all the voice I had: What have you been doing all these years, what have you taken care of, you haven't bothered with anything. [...] One by one I liberated all the radiators in the house. [...] It seemed to me that the walls resumed their normal breathing and the house became a body with freed, healed lungs. I went back to bed" (Terranova 2020, 139–140).

41 "My mother is laughing, lying down, turned on one side toward me, dishevelled and happy as in the photo [...] She has just hugged me, she looks at me gratefully, she doesn't have the smile proper for a daughter, my mother isn't laughing at me, she hasn't hugged me, my body isn't me: in the dream I'm the body of my father" (Terranova 2020, 106).

Parallel to the lack of spatial borders in which Ida's body can escape the tragedy of her family, her own sense of belonging cannot be definite, because the places of childhood have been blocked by a major traumatic event, and by the eventual decision to leave the island:

> Io, se volevo vivere, quel mare dovevo attraversarlo e non fermarmi: il mio posto non era Scilla né Cariddi, e forse non esisteva in nessuna carta geografica [...] Dovevo fuggire, [...] guardare la Sicilia con la distanza del telescopio e la sicurezza dei rifugiati, per poi dimenticarmi e confondermi con i turisti di piazza Navona, [...] Io ero fatta, in ogni atomo, dell'aria della casa di Messina, e per questo motive avrei dovuto lasciarla (Terranova 2018, 140).[42]

Farewell, Ghosts is one of the few contemporary Italian novels – perhaps the only one – in which the city of Messina reacquires a symbolic centrality in reflecting, as well as affecting, the psychic landscape of the characters. Just like Ida has isolated herself from any grief or the least possibility of change, Messina is blocked inside a circular time, which mirrors the circularity of the narration, marked by continuous references to the three main elements: the name, the body and the voice. While these three elements appear more clearly connected with Ida's personal katabasis, they may also guide the reader through the parallel tale of a city and its feminised body. Just like the house, the city of Messina appears at first suffocated with oppressive and worn out remnants of the past; however, towards the end, its persistent presence – made explicit by the toponyms, the presence of the sea breeze, the small and secluded urban corners, along with the "white light of the Strait" – will spatially mirror Ida's inner itinerary:

> Adesso, sulla strada del mare, dovevo scegliere la mia direzione. A sinistra: la litoranea e il museo, ovvero l'acqua e il luogo dove mia madre aveva lavorato per anni. A destra: il duomo e l'imbocco dell'autostrada, ovvero un centro storico ritoccato come un parco giochi e la possibilità di una fuga. [...] Potevo salire verso i quartieri panoramici scegliendo una di quelle strade chiamate torrenti perché in origine la città era attraversata dai fiumi, poi insabbiati per farne arterie che dalla costa si inerpicavano sui colli. Torrente Trapani, Torrente Giostra, Torrente Boccetta...A occhi chiusi sentivo l'odore di acqua dolce bucare l'asfalto, Messina era una città dalle fondamenta fangose (Terranova 2018, 58).[43]

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42 "If I wanted to live, I had to cross that sea and not stop: my place wasn't Scylla or Charybdis and maybe it didn't exist on any map [...] I had to flee, [...] look at Sicily with the distance of a telescope and the assurance of a refugee, and then forget myself and mingle with the tourists of Piazza Navona [...] Every atom of me was made of the air of the house in Messina, and for that reason I would have to leave it" (Terranova 2020, 154–155).

43 "Now, on the street along the sea, I had to choose my direction. To the left: the shore and the museum; that is, the water and the place where my mother had worked for years. To the right: the cathedral and the entrance to the highway; that is, a historic center touched up like an amusement park, and the possibility of flight. [...] I could go up toward the panoramic neighborhoods, choosing

Plunging in Messina means, for Ida, to plunge into a Foucaultian heterotopia, i. e. a counter-site, "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted." (Foucault 1997, 24). Messina has nothing of the supposedly idyllic Sicilian places that crowd the collective imagination. Its "luce petulante" (Terranova 2018, 69),[44] and its streets filled with oxygen and salt (Terranova 2018, 117) have followed Ida everywhere since she was a little girl, and every corner keeps reminding her that her father's name and body are nowhere to be found. Another potent reference to Vittorini's *Conversation in Sicily* echoes in the novel through the infesting presence of Messina's rains that chase Ida's memories of herself as a young fatherless daughter, going back and forth from school: "Quando pioveva, mi pioveva dentro le scarpe. Il nome di mio padre, scomposto in effluvi acquatici, coincideva con il fastidio di calze bagnate, inzuppava i piedi col fango, il filo di Scozia si arrendeva all'apocalisse" (Terranova 2018, 48).[45] In a poetic movement that resembles the fluidity of the dominant element of water, the novel refutes any automatic dichotomy (e. g. water/sun, or humidity/warmth): along with water, also the sunlight spatially operates to adjust Ida's fluid descent into her traumatic memory. While Ida is talking to Nikos – a young Greek man who is taking care of her house renovations –, she notices that, in spite of its beauty, the light over the Strait of Messina is far from benevolent, but rather seems to accompany her suspended state of mind: "Chi non sa niente della Sicilia pensa che la luce porti buonumore e va diffondendo l'equivoco dell'allegria, ma i siciliani la luce la scansano e la subiscono come l'insonnia e la malattia, a meno che non sia una scelta, e nessuno può scegliere la luce tutti i giorni per tutto l'anno. Renderebbe ciechi, invalidi. Anche la luce può essere un nemico" (Terranova 2018, 42).[46]

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one of the streets called *torrente*, because the city had originally been traversed by rivers, which were then silted up to make roads that wound from the coast up into the hills. Torrente Trapani, Torrente Giostra, Torrente Boccetta… With my eyes closed I smelled the odor of fresh water poking a hole up through the asphalt, Messina was a city with a muddy foundation" (Terranova 2020, 66–67).

44 Translated as "impertinent light" (Terranova 2020, 69).

45 "When it rained, it rained in my shoes. My father's name, decomposing into watery exhalations, coincided with the annoyance of wet socks and soaked my feet with mud, fine cotton surrendered to the apocalypse" (Terranova 2020, 54).

46 "People who know nothing about Sicily think that the light brings good humour and spread that misconception about cheerfulness, but Sicilians avoid the light and endure it, like insomnia and illness, unless it's a choice, and no one can choose light every day of the year. It would blind us, disable us. Even light can be an enemy" (Terranova 2020, 48).

Filled with things that, in Ida's perception, need to be recuperated from and/or buried into both individual and collective histories, Messina is also a tired, peripheral and precarious body where spaces appear worn out and full of useless, yet phantasmal details that the inhabitants fail to notice:

> Dev'essere stato dopo il terremoto del 1908 che abbiamo smesso di buttare le cose, incapaci per memoria storica di eliminare il vecchio per fare posto al nuovo; dopo il trauma tutto doveva convivere, accatastarsi, non si poteva demolire niente, solo costruire a dismisura per lo spavento, baracche e palazzine, strade e lampioni: da un giorno all'altro la città c'era e poi non c'era più, e se il disastro era accaduto poteva accadere di nuovo, infinite volte. Allora meglio addestrarsi a tenere insieme, subito tirare su un edificio per fare ombra a quello prima, poi ancora un terzo per togliere la vista a entrambi, e così via fino all'aggrovigliarsi inestricabile dell'implosione architettonica (Terranova 2018, 57–58).[47]

Places such as the *passeggiatammare* (the seaside promenade, written in italics in the text, like many other dialectal terms), or the streets that lead to the house of Ida's once-best friend Sara, are all part of a larger urban microcosm where the protagonist has practiced her survival after Sebastiano's disappearance; and yet, the memories of those spaces formerly inhabited by both father and daughter are scattered through the narrative, creating a dynamic interaction between the past and the present. The *passeggiatammare* embodies the place where Ida has learned to skate (Terranova 2018, 59–60), and not far from there, by the *Fonte dell'Acquario* (a fountain close to the city's aquarium), the now adult Ida seeks refuge and finds the right words to make peace with her father's missing body:

> Il passato era una regione lontana, le cose sono immobili solo nella mia memoria, lo stesso ricordo si ripete mille volte come un nuovo debutto a teatro, mio padre si sveglia alle sei e sedici, spegne la sveglia con un colpo secco e quella sveglia per magia non va più Avanti [...] Mi girai su un fianco. Afferrai dalla tasca l'unico oggetto che avevo portato via da casa: una penna verde e profumata con cui facevo i compiti e scrivevo a Sara appassionate lettere di amicizia. [...] [I]mplorai la pace di un cadavere e scrissi le parole che i veri orfani possono permettersi di irridere mentre i sopravvissuti a una sparizione agognano come la quiete: "Qui

47 "It must have been after the earthquake of 1908 that we stopped throwing things out, historical memory making us incapable of eliminating the old to make room for the new; after the trauma everything had to live together, pile up, we could demolish nothing, only construct to excess out of fear, shacks and apartment buildings, streets and streetlights: overnight the city was there and then it wasn't, and if the disaster had happened it could happen again, infinite times. So it was better to train yourself to hold things together, put up a building right away to cast a shadow on the one before, then a third to take the view away from both, and so on until the architectural implosion became an inextricable tangle" (Terranova 2020, 66).

giace Sebastiano Laquidara, lo piange la figlia Ida." Quando finii di scrivere il necrologio di mio padre, la furia del suo nome si placò (Terranova 2018, 62–63).[48]

The quest for closure comes, once again, from the wish to perform another ritual of water, i. e. swimming, which coincides with a ritual of bodily desire. Swimming is a nostalgic gesture that brings Ida back to a time that cannot return: "E io fui presa da una gran voglia di reagire, rinascere, prendere a pugni la vita, immergermi nel presente fosse anche per risolvere almeno una delle mie storie interrotte. [...] Una nuotata. Lunga, liberatoria, purificatrice" (Terranova 2018, 154).[49] The desire for swimming is, however, postponed by two crucial events that bring the story to its conclusion. These coincide with Ida's dialogues with her friend Sara, and with her new acquaintance, the young Nikos (the son of the foreman who is busy renovating Ida's apartment). Both events are connected with a renegotiation of spaces, and reveal themselves necessary for Ida to finally find the courage to open the iron metal box containing the only valuable object connected with her father's memory, i. e. a cassette with his recorded voice.

The deafened pain felt by Ida gets first destabilised by Sara's own story: the latter refuses to go swimming with her friend and, as soon as Ida tells her how much she has been missing her company and constant support, finds the courage to tell her: "Ti volevo bene e te ne voglio ancora, ma nella nostra amicizia c'eri solo tu. Esiste anche il dolore degli altri, Ida" (Terranova 2018, 160).[50] Sara also had gone through dramatic events – an abortion, a bout with cancer – and she hadn't been able to rely on her friend's support. At the time of her abortion, an already traumatised Ida had visited her at the hospital, and was already endeavouring to detach the body from every risk of emotional connection: "Se succede al corpo non è successo davvero: dovevo aver usato il mio mantra anche quel pomeriggio"

48 "The past was a distant region, things are motionless only in my memory, the same memory repeats countless times like a theatrical début, my father wakes at six-sixteen, flicks off the alarm, and magically that clock doesn't go forward; [...] I turned on my side. I took out of my pocket the only object I had brought from the house: a green pen with which I did my homework and wrote Sara passionate letters of friendship. [...] I begged for the peace of a corpse and wrote the words that real orphans can afford to mock and survivors of a disappearance yearn for like tranquillity: 'Here lies Sebastiano Laquidara, his daughter Ida weeps for him.' When I finished writing my father's obituary, the fury of his name subsided" (Terranova 2020, 71).

49 "And I was seized by a great desire to react, to be born again, to pummel life, immerse myself in the present if only to resolve at least one of my disrupted stories. [...] A swim. Long, liberating, purifying" (Terranova 2020, 170).

50 "I loved you and I still do, but in our friendship there was only you. Other people's suffering exists, too, Ida" (Terranova 2020, 177).

(Terranova 2018, 161).[51] Something very similar has occurred when Ida had reacted to Sebastiano's disappearance, many years earlier: that is the reason why, through the entire novel, his body has to be spatially re-configured by his daughter and her itineraries through Messina.

The two friends have an intense dialogue as Sara drives Ida closer to the city center and away from the seawater. The brief car scene provides a liminal "third space", subtracted from the polarity in which Ida has been trapped for years:

> Un fatto non è un fatto ma uno sguardo è uno sguardo: il suo su di me era stato privilegiato. Che mi piacesse o meno, era stata la nostra vicinanza a produrre il suo distacco. [...] Il dolore di Sara aveva riempito l'abitacolo. Eppure non mi aveva sorpreso, una parte di me sapeva: finché non aveva avuto un dolore tutto suo era stata in grado di tollerare il mio, poi quel qualcosa si era preso lo spazio, buttandomi fuori a calci (Terranova 2018, 160–161, 164).[52]

Now shown with a new angle on the events that have involved not just herself, but an entire family and circle of friends, Ida is learning to say goodbye not just to Sara, but to her own teenage self, while realising that relational dynamics represent a vital part of every grieving process.

Another, conclusive lesson is provided by Nikos, with whom Ida has an intense dialogue in the context of a symbolic place for all Messinese people, i. e. the "House of the *Puparo*" ("Puppeteer"), in the peripheral and decayed neighbourhood of Maregrosso. By showing Ida the life work of the Puparo Cammarata, an anarchic bricklayer who occupied that space to make his own original works of art, the young man manifestly conveys his own desire to achieve an agency of his own, against his own father's expectations:

> Pensai a quanto Cammarata, muratore dalla vita avventurosa, [...] potesse eccitare l'animo di un ragazzo che, appena maggiorenne, ereditava la professione paterna e la confrontava con quella del Puparo [...] E se di giorno lavorava sul tetto della mia casa, adesso era pronto a celebrare quell'esecuzione di arte viva, anarchica, che costituiva un'altra casa, diroccata e disabitata (Terranova 2018, 170–171).[53]

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51 "If it happens to the body it didn't really happen: I must have used my mantra that afternoon" (Terranova 2020, 178).

52 "A fact isn't a fact but a gaze is a gaze: hers on me had been privileged. Whether I liked it or not, it was our closeness that produced her detachment. [...] Sara's suffering had filled the car. And yet it hadn't surprised me. Part of me knew: as long as she didn't have suffering of her own she had been able to tolerate mine, then something had occupied the space, kicking me out" (Terranova 2020, 177–181).

53 "I thought of how much Cammarata, a bricklayer with an adventurous life [...] might excite the mind of a boy who, growing up, had inherited his father's trade and compared it with the Puparo's [...] And if by day he worked on the roof of my house, now he was ready to celebrate that achieve-

Quite significantly, Nikos chooses this peripheral, forgotten city area to tell Ida that he is also secretly grieving the loss of the woman he loved, who died in a tragic motorcycle accident: "I guerrieri del Puparo ci fissavano con il loro miscuglio di magia e seduzione. Ecco cosa voleva mostrarmi Nikos: non un luogo fisico, ma quel luogo terribile che era la sua vita" (Terranova 2018, 174).[54] By allowing other people's tragedies to enter her own, Ida can undo the ghostly presences in her life. While she is letting objects call upon her obsessively, she is also finding the space to exercise her own art of survival: "Dormire non si può, ed è meglio che mi alzi inseguendo una risposta alle voci che mi assillano. 'Sussumere' sarebbe il verbo giusto: prendere su di me le vite degli altri, non sono capace di farlo coi vivi, forse ci riesco con i morti, ma la vera emergenza è pensare ai sopravvissuti" (Terranova 2018, 178).[55]

Unlike Ida, who will keep on guarding and subsuming the memory of the dead, Nikos will eventually die in an accident symmetrical to the one where his beloved lost her life: this event will grant both Ida and her mother a transversal catharsis, as they will take part at Nikos' funeral, indirectly juxtaposed to the missed ceremony they never had after Sebastiano disappeared. A reconstituted dialogue between mother and daughter will thus be one where Ida allows her mother to throw away the useless and cumbersome content of all their wardrobes and drawers in the house: "Metti le mani fra le mie cose, ti do il permesso. Vuoi sapere chi è tua figlia? Ecco l'occasione. Scegli, elimina, *scartafruscia*, *scafulía.* Lo vedi, mi viene pure il dialetto ora che me ne vado. […] La traversata è mia, è la cosa più mia che ho, voglio farla da sola" (Terranova 2018, 194).[56] By re-appropriating the crossing of waters and spaces from her childhood – both a metaphorical and a literal crossing – Ida can now open the iron box of her father's memories, and listen to the cassette where his voice happily sang to her when she was a baby. The katabasis is now complete, as his voice invades Ida's space, giving her

ment of living, anarchic art which constituted another house, ruined and uninhabited" (Terranova 2020, 189).

54 "The Puparo's warriors stared at us, with their mixture of magic and seduction. That was what Nikos wanted to show me: not a physical place but the terrible place that was his life" (Terranova 2020, 192).

55 "Impossible to sleep, and it's better to get up and look for an answer to the voices that assail me. 'Subsume' would be the right verb: take upon myself the lives of others. I'm not capable of doing it with the living, maybe I can succeed with the dead, but what's truly urgent is to think of the survivors" (Terranova 2020, 198).

56 "Go through my stuff, I give you permission. You want to know who your daughter is? Here's your opportunity. Choose, throw away, *scartafruscia*, *scafulía.* You see, now that I'm leaving, dialect comes to me. […] The crossing is mine, it's the thing I have that's most mine – I want to do it alone" (Terranova 2020, 215).

back the right to return to a more aware adulthood, getting rid of the objects but retaining a conscious, bodily memory of the events. As she decides to throw the red iron box into the sea, she finds the most suitable, final resting place for her father's voice in the sea that has accompanied her so far: "Delle vite degli altri non so molto, ma se aprissi uno spiraglio la mia solitudine diventerebbe affollata. [...] Molte sono [le case] che possiamo abitare, una quella che si accende quando sentiamo quella parola, casa. Casa, ripeto fra me, e mi giro verso il continente e Roma che mi aspetta; casa, mi ripeto, ora con lo sguardo all'isola e a Messina che mi dice addio. La mia casa non è nessuna delle due, sta in mezzo a due mari e a due terre. La mia casa è qui, adesso. [...] Rido, e rido. Rido e finisce un'epoca nel rumore di un tuffo, nel mare che si apre e ingoia senza restituire" (Terranova 2018, 195–196).[57]

Gendering a Mediterranean *Meridione*

Arguing on the necessity of retrieving the significance of spatial referents in relation to gender, Doreen Massey suggests

> [the] same gendering operates through the series of dualisms which are linked to time and space. It is time which is aligned with history, progress, civilization, politics and transcendence and coded masculine. And it is the opposites of these things which have, in the tradition of western thought, been coded feminine. The exercise of rescuing space from its position, in this formulation, of stasis, passivity and depoliticization, therefore, connects directly with a wider philosophical debate in which gendering and the construction of gender relations are central (Massey 1994, 6–7).

As the textual analysis on Terranova's novel has hopefully demonstrated, a gendered narration of the *Meridione* spaces also entails the possibility of elucidating a lesser known literary genealogy of women writers in which Southern backwardness and subalternity are being challenged. When it comes to the concept of "South" in the Italian cultural context, the porosity of Mediterranean Studies helps identifying some suitable starting points for an investigation that attempts

57 "I don't know much about the lives of others, but if I opened my solitude just a crack it would become crowded. [...] Many are the houses that we can inhabit, but only one lights up when we hear the word *house. House*, I repeat to myself, and I turn toward the continent and Rome, which awaits me; *house*, I repeat, now with my gaze on the island and Messina, which is saying farewell. My house is neither of the two, it's in the middle of two seas and two lands. My house is here, now. [...] I laugh and laugh. I laugh, and an epoch ends in the sound of a dive, in the sea that opens and swallows up without giving back" (Terranova 2020, 217–218).

to break a series of disciplinary frontiers. As argued by Iain Chambers, to rethink a critique of Italian culture inside and throughout a Mediterranean scope means to consider a constant tension between local and global representational dimensions, as well as between institutional paradigms and unorthodox research:

> To break a persistent mould and consider present-day Italy in its relationship to its historical, cultural, and geopolitical location in the Mediterranean is immediately to run up against a profound native resistance to interdisciplinary and intercultural studies. Yet frontiers, both national and disciplinary, are invariably spurious historical confines [...] To pay attention to these languages, and adopt a more fluid and flexible map, permits the possibility of simultaneously opening up a critical dialogue with both the European and the Mediterranean formation of modern Italy (Chambers 2010, 1).

At the turn of twenty-first century, the Italian *Meridione* is the focus of numerous studies that often cross paths with Postcolonial Theory and Mediterranean Studies, touching different fields, such as sociology, cultural history, anthropology and literary criticism. Already over at least the past four decades, some scholars have adopted a Postcolonial perspective, by reading the Italian South through Said's "Orientalism" (Said 1978; Chambers 2006), by arguing for a South as irredeemably corrupted and inferior (Moe 2002, 156–179), or by advocating for a Southern subalternity to be examined in the context of a critique of a Global South. (Cazzato 2008) Furthermore, contemporary Italian literature that thematises and originates from the South has offered a diversity of angles that have helped constantly redefine the scope of cultural disciplines that look simultaneously at the macro-conceptualizations of Southern identity and geo-cultural observations on space (Rosengarten 1994; Brunetti and Derobertis 2011). Though in many cases they appear strongly indebted to a certain canonical tradition inaugurated by Verga and his *Verismo*, contemporary literary works from Sicily, Campania, Calabria or Sardinia still defy categorizations, and on several occasions transfigure the South not just to claim the status of an existing "otherness", but rather to challenge any rigid division between local and trans-national dimensions, thus contaminating any fixed representations of *Southernness*, or *Italianness* (Brunetti and Derobertis 2011). This is further confirmed by a current of literary criticism originated in the South of Italy (e.g. at the Universities of Naples, Bari or Palermo), where many scholars show an interest in a contaminated gaze on literature, in the name of a "multi-territorial perspective" (Cazzato 2011, 14). In such as context, what is likely to revitalise the place of the Italian South from the perspective of a Mediterranean critique is a continuous dialogue between disciplines that look both at the Mediterranean *and* at the South as non-fixed spatial, historical and culturally complexed cartographies, where narrating a story of Southern "otherness" may help creating

those "counter-cultures of modernity" that find their strength through instability and heterogeneity (Chambers 2006, 10).

As argued by Franco Cassano, the founding father of Southern Thought (Cassano 1996), particularly since the second half of twentieth century, the Mediterranean "is the place where Europe looks onto the South of the world; the counterpart to modernity" (Cassano 2012, 132), yet it also coincides with a specific socio-cultural entity threateningly running counter to the ideal of modernity and neoliberal development pursued by contemporary Western thought. For Cassano, the image of the Mediterranean emerging from the latest decades of socio-economic expansion precisely epitomises "backwardness and resistance to modernization" (Cassano 2012, 132), as well as

> the danger that Italy, and specifically its Southern side, faces because it is rooted in it through its history and geography. In this boorish, but deep-seated stereotype, 'Mediterranean' takes on different and sometimes contradictory meanings that (…) are often casually grouped together under the same, single negative sign (Cassano 2012, 132).

Any critical discourse around the geopolitical unity of the Italian South has undoubtedly to face that negative connotation that was inaugurated by the historical events following Italian unification in 1861, and which is today widely discussed from a perspective that borrows some theoretical tools of Postcolonial theory as it identifies the *Meridione* as the internal "Other" of Italy (Dickie 1996, 19–33; Gribaudi 1996, 72–87; Verdicchio 1997; Conelli 2017). Indeed, the events accompanying the formation of modern Italy saw the ironic paradox of a nation that radically split into two entities, each one involved in oppositional tension with the other, as demonstrated by the proliferation of cultural and literary discourses produced both inside and outside Italy after the 1860s (Moe 2002, 13–26). Furthermore, since at least the 1980s, a significant Italian and international development of a critical discourse around cultural configurations of the South confirms the centrality of a debate that underscores the Mediterraneanness of *Meridione* (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2016, 54–55), so that any investigation of the relationship between Italian socio-historical developments and cultural configurations has to deal with a critical context that is *both* European and Mediterranean, self-directed as well as hetero-directed (Giuliani 2017, 15–28). It is a scenario in which memories, spatial representations, ideologies, legacies and power structures derive from a continuous contamination of ideas (Chambers 2010), but are also constantly fraught by forms of repression and exclusion of an intersectional nature, encompassing class, race and gender (Giuliani 2010, 79–160; Ellena 2010, 125–45; Giuliani 2013, 253–344).

One may state that the ambivalence of the South has much to do with an incongruous Italian position in the larger European context; and yet, as Giuliani convincingly argues, there is something quite specific about Italy's "racialized and racializing constructions of the Self and Other", because they "derive from an idea of national, cultural, historical and biological heritage that manufactures *italianità* ("Italianness"), as both white and Mediterranean, as essentially heterosexual and virile" (Giuliani 2018, 16). If one attempts to look at the history of these areas over the past one-hundred-and-fifty years – since the birth of the Italian nation in 1861 – the *Meridione* confirms its in-between-ness as both a geo-cultural dimension and as symbolic device. The Italian South, in its manifold articulations, should thus be considered within the larger scale of Mediterranean borders that constantly deconstruct, reorganise and re-articulate themselves, according to different, often extremely violent power dynamics. It is a Mediterranean where texts are part of a heterogeneous process by which memories are spatialized and become discourse (Giuliani 2016, 95).

Along with Italian and international Postcolonial and Subaltern Studies, the role of feminist and gender theories that come from non-Western countries has been crucial, particularly in reference to the meditation on the concept of margin as a space of strategic resistance and radical empowering practices. In this respect, the works of Gayatri C. Spivak, bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa have provided a seminal ground for a discussion that intersects criticism of gender and race power structures, by also interrogating Western, white feminisms, including those nourished by influential academic postures (Spivak 1990, 1–16 and 140–145; hooks 1990, 50–57; Anzaldúa 1987, 16–18). Numerous Italian analyses informed by feminist and gender studies have indeed shown an interest in reconfiguring women from the South by looking at mechanisms of Western symbolic and material oppression (Cariello 2011; Ellena 2010). In several cases, such interdisciplinary investigations have looked at *Meridione* within a Mediterranean and/or global perspective, while not always necessarily distinguishing the Italian South in its socio-anthropological specificity. At present, the overall cultural impact of Southern Italian female narrations on the possibility of blurring the North/South dichotomy is rarely being investigated outside of the larger context of the Global South, except in the context of literary analysis (Todesco 2017; de Rogatis 2019; Milkova 2021).

Considering the dramatic events that we have all been witnessing over the past few years, with hundreds of people crossing the sea and/or often losing their lives in the attempt, Mediterranean women's voices, narratives and cultural politics have often been examined by academic scholarship in order to investigate the creative manifestations connected with female migration, exile and/or displacement, as well as the presence of borders and walls, both material and symbolic ones, observed through a gendered perspective (Piccirillo 2018, 85–93; Zacca-

ria 2016, 239–249; Cariello 2012). Although much work is still to be done, the necessity to continuously and simultaneously examine the South from a gendered transnational, as well as a *glocal* perspective remains crucial (Robertson 1992, 175–180), with a larger postcolonial perspective that operates a circular movement, by persistently going beyond its own ambit (Satpathy 2009, xxi).

In the light of these dense junctures, the interconnection between female literary perspectives and Southern Italian cultural and historical identities appears more than ever open to further investigations. The same Cassano, in his most recent edition of *Southern Thought* (2005) draws from feminist thinker and essayist Ida Dominijanni a productive parallelism between the new centrality and ontological autonomy attributed by him to the South, and feminist thought, particularly the suggestions of Italian *pensiero della differenza:*

> Just as female experience is not an inferior and imperfect form of its male counterpart, but rather a different perception of the world that critiques the false neutrality of male dominance, so the South does not simply constitute an imperfect and incomplete stage of development, but rather a different way of seeing that aims at protecting its own autonomy vis-à-vis the developed world while deconstructing its symbolic arrogance.
>
> It goes without saying that this movement does not represent a defense of tradition, just as thinking about difference, which claims the autonomy of the female point of view, does not coincide at all with the idealization of the traditional role of women. In both cases we are not faced with a defense of traditional versus modern society, but with a critique of the false neutrality and universality of dominant cultural models (Cassano 2012, xxxvii–xxxviii; Dominijanni 1996, 24–25).

As millions of readers have confirmed in the case of Ferrante's Neapolitan Quartet, sometimes fictional worlds set in the Italian South have gained so much visibility that the gendered margins of the South have indeed *become* the centre, both on a national and on a global scale. This positioning remains ambivalent, and benefits from such ambivalence, as bell hooks lucidly envisages:

> We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole (hooks 1984, ix).

Like with Ferrante's protagonists Lila and Lenù, each reader has been encouraged to live reality through the eyes of "two subaltern girls and their linguistic and symbolic polyphony" (de Rogatis 2019, 277). Similarly, the voice and body of Ida, along with their corporeal crossings of urban, natural and domestic environments that surround and challenge them, epitomize two examples of female re-semantiza-

tions in which *Meridione* provides a dimension where women's subjectivity can claim for a change, which in the novels is shown as both existential, as well as socio-historical. By staging women's experiences and memories, these narratives stand as literary examples where there may be more room – more *spaces* – for a less monolithic Italian South that creatively re-utilizes a gendered "Otherness".

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