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Abstract: In this paper I examine presences-absences and dis-allowed mobilities in neoliberal Italy through a comparative reading of two apparently unrelated films: Luca Guadagnino’s *Call Me by Your Name* (2018) and Gianfranco Rosi’s *Fuocoammare* (*Fire At Sea*, 2016). My comparative approach is informed by new materialist feminist critiques, drawing primarily from queer feminist, post-colonial, and de-colonial thinkers whose work aims to dismantle the naturalization of differences to make new worlds and unmake existing ones. I will address the (pre)determined narratives of class, gender, sexuality, and race, which are articulated in both works, and relate them to neo-imperialist practices at home and abroad. The paper focuses on the cinematic representations of (im)mobile futures for the two films’ protagonists – Elio (in *Call Me by Your Name*) and Samuele (in *Fuocoammare*) – to address the neoliberal government policies and biopolitical practices of tourism and enforced migration that (re)make Italy today.

Key words: Guadagnino, neo-colonialism, neo-imperialism, queer, Rosi, somatechnics.

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Teenage “Somatechnics”: Classed, Gendered, and Racialised Subjectivities in Luca Guadagnino’s *Call Me by Your Name* and Gianfranco Rosi’s *Fuocoammare*¹

SAMUELE GRASSI

Introduction

International recognition of films by Italian directors over recent years has been welcomed as a means of shaping a “progressive” contemporary image of the country – as opposed to a “regressive,” or “backward” Italy. But just how inclusive *is* this new image of Italian culture? The lack of financial support that cinema has suffered as an industry since the 1980s has led some to speak of it as “a niche industry in its own country.”² As such, the new image being constructed for international audiences is restricted to the vision of this elite “niche.” My engagement with Italian cinema in this paper focusses primarily on issues of representation and how the film industry plays into and builds an image for “modern” Italian culture. My main aim therefore is not to offer a critique of the techniques employed in, or the style and production of film as medium and as art form; I will leave this to the film critics, as experts in this field. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which cinema represents class, gender, sexualities, and race, with certain subjects cast in the limelight, while others are denied full visibility; and in the material effects of this visibility-invisibility dualism in the shaping of “Italy” and “Italian-ness” today.

This paper looks at two recent films by Italian directors, which portray previously marginalised views of Italian life: homosexuality in Luca Guadagnino’s *Call Me by Your Name* (2018); and the migrant “crisis” in Gianfranco Rosi’s *Fuocoammare / Fire at Sea* (2016). In tracing the connections between the two representational landscapes screened in these internationally acclaimed films, my aim is not to discount the important themes their authors try to bring to the attention of national and international audiences, but to explore the impact of selective bias in how Italian culture is portrayed. Guadagnino’s film closes his *Trilogia del desiderio / Desire trilogy – Io sono l’amore / I Am Love* (2009), *A Bigger Splash* (2015), and *Call Me by Your Name* – with a cinematic adaptation of Sephardic Jewish-American writer André Aciman’s 2007 novel of the same title, about a cross-generational homosexual love and a teenager’s negotiating of homosexual desire. Rosi’s *Fuocoammare* charts the (im)possible survival journeys of asylum seekers and refugees across the Mediterranean, saliently depicting the duplicitous nature of its waters: “the door to a dream called Europe for some, but a prelude to tragedy for thousands of others.”³ My analysis will draw from feminist new materialism, queer gender theories, intersectional approaches to class and gender, post-colonial, and de-colonial critical thinking, and attempt to show how in both films the screening/making visible of diversity as a justice call is, however, in tension with the risks of undercutting mis-recognitions as well as past and present silences. This is part of a wider attempt to use somatechnics to interrogate the resilience of colonial legacies that map onto neoliberal spaces and places within and without Italy, the EU, and the US.

¹ Acknowledgments: This essay owes much to the conversations, readings, sensations and affect that Liana Borghi and I have shared through emails, phone conversations and ‘quantum relations’. As I am writing this, Borghi and Clotilde Barbarulli are organising a three-day conference on feminisms and de-coloniality (<http://www.ilgiardinodeiciliegifi.firenze.it/declinare/>). I am grateful to Angela Dawber and Matteo Dutto, for their invaluable suggestions for revisions of the paper, and to the two anonymous reviewers for their stimulating and challenging comments.

² Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema: Spaces*, 4.

³ Proglione, “Introduction,” in *Decolonising the Mediterranean*, vii.

In Elaine Carbonell Laforteza's formulation, somatechnics (from soma, body, and techne, art) offer "a more appropriate and relevant methodology to analyse the bodily negotiations of power that constitute colonising relations."⁴ The body-as-somatheque plays a key role in unpacking the narratives of class, gender, sexuality, and race at work in both films, as shown by the different comings-of-age of their protagonists: 17-year-old American-Italian Elio Perlman in *Call Me by Your Name*; and 12-year-old Samuele Pucillo in *Fuocoammare* – in spite of the latter's role as his "real self."⁵ This starts from the pastoral, uncontaminated Italy in which the lives of both teenagers are set – the small town of Crema and surrounding countryside in Guadagnino's film and the island of Lampedusa in Rosi's. This a-temporal, unrealistic, and as I will show, disembodied rendition of time-space has been picked up by both sympathetic and unsympathetic reviewers of the two films, who have highlighted, for instance, "the superficial charm of picture postcards" of the outdoor shots in *Call Me by Your Name*, and the "romanticized identity of the island and its residents" that is starkly in contrast with the "silent, voiceless, and identity-less bodies" of the refugees and asylum seekers in *Fuocoammare*.⁶

Following Catherine O'Rawe's insight that the new masculinities in Italian cinema contribute "to mark[ing] and reinforce[ing] the limits of [a] gendered terrain," it is possible to view the role played by homosexuality and the homoerotic in Guadagnino's film, and by patriarchal family patterns in Rosi's as confirmations of this visual politics. Elio and Samuele's personal-familial narratives bear "the [in]visible traces left of the effort and labor of marking and delimiting this terrain," where women's lack of agency is reinforced through stereotypes of hospitality and homeliness, as opposed to what one may infer at first.⁷ This visual politics is given further meaning by the fact that Elio and Samuele's embodiments of whiteness are written off from archives of coloniality that constitute the fabric of the Italian nation. This partly serves to mend "the precarious 'whiteness' of Italians," while hinting at "the importance for male characters in cinema of securing that whiteness."⁸ Like O'Rawe, my interest is in "think[ing] productively about race, whiteness, and ethnicity as pervading the representational field in contemporary Italian cinema," even when the focus is directed elsewhere.⁹

This article asks whether the mappings of class, gender, sexuality, and race in both works identify neo-imperialist practices at home and abroad, especially with regard to "social progress" or "backwardness" in the images of Italian society travelling abroad, and whether new contributions to "the decolonisation of knowledge and consciousness" can be opened up by addressing them.¹⁰ What can be found in the un-seen space outside the two directors' video cameras?

Of Dualisms and Flat Ontologies

The relevance of a feminist new materialist approach to the comparative study I am developing is twofold. Replacing inter-action with intra-action to denote the co-constitutive practices and processes or relations-in-the-making, feminist new materialisms provide insight into the epistemological paradigms of Western thought, into why and how we come to know what we do of the world, and of

⁴ Laforteza, *The Somatechnics of Whiteness and Race*, 5.

⁵ My use of quotation marks refers to Rosi's treatment of the real Samuele Pucillo and his family as "fictional" addends to his documentarist shootings of asylum seekers and refugees.

⁶ Brody, "The Empty, Sanitized Intimacy of 'Call Me By Your Name,'" ; Sou, "Fire at Sea (Fuocoammare)."

⁷ O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema*, 8.

⁸ O'Rawe, 9-10; O'Rawe is quoting from Nicola Rheling, *Extra-Ordinary Men: White Heterosexual Masculinity and Contemporary Popular Cinema* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 5.

⁹ O'Rawe, 10.

¹⁰ Zaccaria, "A Breach in the Wall," 40; see also Iain Chambers, "Prefazione," in Luigi Cazzato, *Sguardo inglese e Mediterraneo italiano*, 11. Unless mentioned otherwise, all translations from Italian are my own.

our place in it: “In the intra-active practice of reading, not only texts are made to matter, but ‘world’ is also in the making.”¹¹ In Brigit Mara Kaiser’s conceptualisation, for instance, diffraction as method changes reading into “one form of intra-action with/in” the world.¹²

As opposed to the inter-relationships of subjects and objects, where each of the two is treated as a discrete entity in itself, a feminist new materialist approach sees relationality as no longer the result, but rather as the active and ongoing instability and unpredictability of relations themselves. Applied to comparative reading,

it might change the footing on which texts [or, in this case, films] meet each other: no longer as objects of national (or regional) descent, pre-existing their encounters in a comparison, but as ‘relata’ whose qualities and effects are specified by way of relating while specifying the ‘apparatus’ (the texts, the reading and the reader) at the same time.¹³

Not only does the reliance of feminist new materialist approaches on the kinds of “measurement” and “apparatus” we employ to read phenomena reveal the (questionable) use of certain methods/instruments, or a particular framing (like a director’s video camera) over others. It also allows us to grasp the differences that such choices make and how they matter, showing that we are all implicated as subjects-objects in the (re)making of worlds, the opening, and closing of patterns and possibilities:

a comparative-diffractive reading would be aware of itself as an effect of this specific apparatus (this reader with proficiencies and limits, embedded in these historical, linguistic, political struggles) and of the diffraction patterns that result from the productive passing through one another of two or more elements (the texts, the readers, their linguistic sensitivities, their cultural repertoires).¹⁴

The radical importance of a diffractive approach to comparative reading of cultural texts lies in the intra-action of situated perspectives, affects, embodiments, and “response-ability,” where each one is determined by a point of view-perspective-positioning (here, this applies at least to the film, the viewer, the director as embodied subjectivities, the subject/object of the screening, the frame).¹⁵ In this creative relationship, the singular act of reading (or seeing) changes across multiple locations and contexts, which are themselves intra-acting with one another, producing new meanings and worlds.¹⁶

These insights are of critical importance in interrogating the screening of diversity in both *Call Me by Your Name* and *Fuocoammare*. In contrast to dualism and binary thinking which rely on hierarchical, hegemonic power structures, a flat ontology like new materialism shows the untenability of cause and effect relationships, and insists on a concept of being that exceeds its own boundaries. As Kay Inckle remarks on the transformative pedagogical potential of embodying diversity,

Dualism (like democracy) is integral to the ways in which we conceive and organise our inner and outer worlds and is foundational to positivism and objectivity/objectification [...] [it] privileges separation and rationality over connectedness and feeling, and eschews lived realities, embodied subjectivity,

¹¹ Kaiser, “Worlding Complit,” 256. Kaiser’s approach to diffractive reading relies on Karen Barad’s views of feminism new materialism.

¹²Kaiser, 282.

¹³ Kaiser, 276-277.

¹⁴ Kaiser, 285.

¹⁵ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

¹⁶ Brigit Mara Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele, “Diffraction: Onto-Epistemologies, Quantum Physics and the Critical Humanities,” 165.

desire and affect in favour of abstract, cognitive discourses (Kazan, 2005; Zemblyas, 2007).¹⁷

Guadagnino and Rosi's films elicit an engaged response. However, as I attempt to show, the dualistic frameworks that determine presences-absences and dis-allowed mobilities remain fundamentally in place in both works, in spite of their different themes and genres. From this point of view, neither film succeeds in altering the structural conditions that replicate processes of othering. *Call Me by Your Name* centres on Elio's love-story with 24-year-old Oliver. The white, well-off, gay male subject of homonormativity is reinforced in this film through middle-class narratives of upwardly mobile futures, not least through the silencing of local-national queer histories – or, as Megan Hughes reads it, through the mainstreaming of queer positionalities, “and thus the generation of new margins *within the queer community*.”¹⁸ Elio and Oliver enjoy their sexual encounters as much as their explorations as tourists and as art-lovers, in what seems a neoliberal update of the Grand Tour.¹⁹ Reviewing the film, Andrew Holleran aligns the setting of Guadagnino's film to “the European idyll that many educated Americans – particularly academics – hold in their hearts.”²⁰ References to the Grand Tour and to a “bucolic and premodern” country have also been discussed by the more enthusiastic reviewers, who praised the “elegiac abstractness” of the director's screening of Italy.²¹

Fuocoammare has been celebrated for fostering “new forms of engagement with the ‘other’ and participatory politics,” due to the half of the film which follows asylum seekers and refugees landing on the island of Lampedusa, the work of lifeguards, and of doctor Pietro Bartolo.²² Samuele Pucillo's traditional fulfilment of family expectations is to become a good fisherman. Yet, in fetishizing a rural, modest everyday reality, “disconnected” from that of the migrants and their families Rosi's work leaves unquestioned Samuele's racialised, “*not-so-white*” embodiment (discussed later on).²³ In other words, it suppresses the enduring legacy of internal colonisation and the racialisation of Southern Italians historically as “other” in relation to people from the North of the country (and from Northern Europe). These points have been discussed in some reviews that appeared in Italy; for example, for Mellini and Orlandini the distancing of inhabitants from refugees and asylum seekers establishes “a ‘mute’ dialogue between two (sub/ob)jects-film”; consequently, Rosi's film fails to take into account racism as *constitutive* of the (Italian) nation's fabric.²⁴

The movements in space/place – the choice of setting, directorial strategies of background and foreground – and in time – the assumed “forward” movement offered by progressive and/or socially-minded visual representations – in the two films generate tensions around the current national image of “Italy” and “Italian-ness,” how it is inhabited and represented. Yvette Taylor has delved into the ways subjects shape and are shaped by narratives of movement in space/place and time – the “where” and “when” of social change – from a sociological perspective, and has opined that:

To ‘fit in’ may be thought of as a binding straightjacket, a restriction in getting out and ahead, or it may shore up a sense of comfortable ease and belonging. The ‘fit’ may signal a claim to change and advancement, as against being ‘stuck’ in the past, out of date and out of step. The ‘when’ – as modern and future orientated or traditional and backward – also implies a ‘where,’ in terms of the places created and inhabited in changing times.²⁵

¹⁷ Inckle, “Embodying Diversity,” 162.

¹⁸ Hughes, “Call Me By Your Name.”

¹⁹ See, for instance, Luigi Cazzato, *Sguardo inglese*, 32.

²⁰ Holleran, “First Love,” 26.

²¹ Rocco, “L'idillio dei sensi,” 7.

²² Sandra Ponzanesi, “Of shipwrecks and weddings,” 165.

²³ Giuliani, “Whose Whiteness?” 125.

²⁴ Miguel Mellini and Giuseppe Orlandini, “Fuocoammare o frammenti di un discorso umanitario.”

²⁵ Taylor, *Fitting into Place?*, 1.

The mapping of (im)mobile classed, gendered, sexual, and racialised futures provided in *Call Me by Your Name* and *Fuocoammare* charts the combination of tourism, colonialism, neo-imperialism, and internal colonisation through employing specific measurement-observation apparatuses. These can be summarised as follows:

Elio (and Oliver): Neoliberal tourism (Grand Tour updated); Classed (middle-class), racialised (white); Progressive; (Gay) Tourism as colonialism.

Samuele (and his family): Neoliberal enforced migration; Classed (working class), racialised (white?); Regressive/backward; Internal and external racialisation practices.

The two protagonists (fictional or otherwise) are the dwellers, “‘incomers’ and ‘outsiders’” of two key sites of neoliberal regimentation – tourism and enforced migration. These sites are located within geographies of the local and the global, whereby the former especially “comes to stand in for cosmopolitan potential as well as an anti-cosmopolitan regionalism signified by those who cannot move forward into ‘new times’ and out of ‘old’ places.”²⁶

The visual representations of Elio and Samuele’s lives as teenagers and as (future) citizens prompt a series of questions, such as: Who is entitled to “fit-in” as the envisaged (neoliberal, sexual) tourist, traveller, and/or future citizen able to participate in capitalist consumption, thereby creating *value*? Who gets stuck, unable to move on from where they are? Who is expected to grow up, to build a future, and how (which future), and who is not?

Italy Then and Now

While both films can be applauded for their attempts to portray diversity and highlight aspects of Italian culture that are less often seen, foregrounding one issue causes other issues to recede from view; (re)presenting “inclusivity” performs exclusions on hidden objects and practices of subjection.²⁷ Shifting some elements to the foreground may cause other elements to shift to the background. A lot of shifting has indeed taken place of late in Italy: legislation on sexual equality has shifted, sanctioning civil partnerships; perceptions of immigration have shifted as media and political representatives nourish fears of the racialised other.

Call Me by Your Name and *Fuocoammare* are set in two distinctive moments of contemporary Italian history, marked by economic flourishing or crisis, changes in the social fabric, and paradigmatic cultural shifts that contribute to national and international images, and cultural dis-identifications in complex ways. The plot of Aciman’s novel, set in 1987, alternates between the city of Rome and the Italian Riviera (Liguria); unlike the film, it follows the lives of the two protagonists across a twenty-year timespan.²⁸ In Guadagnino’s rendition, set four years earlier, Oliver, a Jewish-American graduate student visits Archaeology professor Samuel Perlman’s summer house in the countryside surrounding Crema (Lombardy). There, Oliver enjoys the company of the professor’s Italo-American Jewish family and their circle of friends. The film focuses on Elio’s crush on Oliver, and the former’s subsequent discovery of homosexual desire.²⁹ International reviewers have discussed Elio and Oliver’s

²⁶ Taylor, 48.

²⁷ Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*.

²⁸ Aciman, *Call Me by Your Name*.

²⁹ Elio’s possible bi-sexuality (since he has his first sexual experience with Marzia) is not relevant to my discussion in this paper.

relationship in widely divergent terms, for instance, as the (positive) celebration of desire and narcissism, or as a predatory and exploitative sexual affair, in light of the age-gap.³⁰

Historians agree on viewing the 1980s in Italy as a “return to normal” and to political stability after the *anni di piombo* (years of lead) – a sudden change of climate that occurred in tandem with “dynamic changes in the country’s economy, in the habits of its people, in the everyday life of its families.”³¹ Some Italian reviewers have described the setting of the film (1983) as a watershed between the end of the delusional utopias of the 1970s and the cultural and political decadence which would follow.³² Viewers of Guadagnino’s film can recall “the all-conquering Anglo-American economic model”³³ that was a sign of the times, for example, in the clothing, consumption of goods, and musical references that pepper the outdoor scenes. For Paul Ginsborg, the social changes that took place in this period include the emergence of “‘work and spend’ routines, over-concentration on individual and family consumption, the growing privatism of everyday life, the ‘couch potato’ syndrome of the individual ensconced in front of the television.”³⁴ The references to Italian politics in the film are few, and they are usually served as “sides” of the meals prepared by the Perlmans’ Italian maids, whose very presence strengthen the unaddressed gendered nature of power differentials under capitalism, also inscribed in touristic consumption patterns. The two girls who are seduced by Elio and Oliver – Marzia and Chiara – are the witnesses of their trivial struggle against the requirements of heterosexual masculinity. Even the more sympathetic reviewers of the film have highlighted the omnipresent eroticized screening of “skins, muscles, marbles and bronzes” that makes one think of a stereotyped maleness, upheld by references to Greek and Roman sources.³⁵ Elio and Oliver’s homosocial bond as it is presented in the film denies further Marzia and Chiara’s agency. In turn, the bond of the two males becomes “an opportunity to prove themselves against someone they see as an equal. One of the biggest unanswered questions is why Elio and Oliver do not seem to deem women true peers.”³⁶ There is no mention of the early years of HIV in the film, which may be justified by Guadagnino’s change of setting. However, I see *Call Me by Your Name* as refusing to interpellate the queer archive in important ways, in a time of burgeoning activism and associationism with lasting impact like the 1980s in Italy.³⁷

Anna Cento Bull and Adalgisa Giorgio point out that the whole period of the *anni di piombo* (1969-1983) was distinctive for “previously marginalized social groups [that] raised their voices and demanded better representation, in the face of a society with politics which were fundamentally authoritarian and hierarchical.”³⁸ Others have argued that the prominence of changing governments, demography, and patterns of consumption in the scholarship of this period of Italian socio-cultural history has buried the archive of sexual difference.³⁹ Notably, Elena Biagini’s recent historiography of the Italian lesbian movement in the 1970s and 1980s aligns itself with the work of theorists who have

³⁰ See, respectively, Piero Bianchi, “Il desiderio non è una cosa semplice,” *Doppiozero*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/il-desiderio-non-e-una-cosa-semplice>; and Cheyenne Montgomery, “‘Call Me By Your Name’ is a Dishonest, Dangerous Film,” *The Boston Globe*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/01/25/call-your-name-dishonest-dangerous-film/I7urrCBxwZYrfPTT7eycdM/story.html>.

³¹ Ginsborg, “A Blocked Political System, 1980-92,” 137-138; see also Ginsborg, “Italy in the 1980s,” in *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 406-25.

³² Guerini Rocco, “L’idillio dei sensi,” 7.

³³ Ginsborg, “Civil society in contemporary Italy,” 291.

³⁴ Ginsborg, 291.

³⁵ Rocco, “L’idillio dei sensi,” 6.

³⁶ Sward, “*Call Me by Your Name* and the Tragedy of Homoerotic Masculinity.”

³⁷ Ginsborg, “Civil society,” 291.

³⁸ Glynn, *Women, Terrorism, and Trauma in Italian Culture*, 5.

³⁹ Biagini, *L’emersione imprevista*, 11.

questioned the increasing queer neoliberalism in an Italian context, and its erasure of queer non-normative genealogies.⁴⁰ International reviews of the film have used this evidence to hint at the “de-queering” of unruly sexual subjectivities that is at stake in the film, as Megan Hughes argues, through its “repackag[ing] gay love for consumption by mainstream-straight-audiences.”⁴¹ Given the ten-year-long debate on LGBT human rights that saturated the media and TV before the introduction of civil unions (Cirinnà Law, n. 76, May 20, 2016), is it not far-fetched to see how the white, affluent gay male traveler is mobilised in Guadagnino’s film to support the image of a “progressive” Italy, wrapped up in domesticity and economic capital. This confers illegibility to those forms of intimacy, spaces, and subjectivities that remain underserving of the “diversity” label. The opinions of some international reviewers are again illuminating: for Andrew Holleran, the very warm reception of *Call Me By Your Name* denotes the lack of specificity in its treatment of homosexual sexual relationships.⁴² Elsewhere, the film has been seen to promote a message about the universality of love, and this has been interpreted as both beneficial and harmful.⁴³ Furthermore, the film covers up these absences with the mask of “homonationalism” and whitewashing, where even the “whiteness” that Timothée Chalamet (Elio) and Armie Hammer (Oliver) embody in the film ironically betrays the characters’ Jewish heritage, which for Hughes was among the missed opportunities in this film – in this case, the intersections of Jewishness and whiteness.⁴⁴ As claimed by Joseph Pugliese, it is possible to apprehend whiteness as race only through looking at “a cluster of other constitutive determinations [...] that must be brought into focus if [it] is to be understood in its complexity and contradictions.”⁴⁵ These contradictions are very much at stake in the role that male homosexuality plays in *Call Me by Your Name*.

The setting of Rosi’s *Fuocoammare* combines two different islands – the Lampedusa belonging to locals like Samuele, and the one (not) belonging to the migrants and refugees – where the latter are screened both physically and metaphorically.⁴⁶ For Sandra Ponzanesi, this film is a representative of the trend in Italian cinema characterised by “a new visual politics of the borders in Europe that foregrounds encounters and trespassings [...], whose poetic force presents new imaginaries for Europe, where spaces of solidarity and cosmopolitanism can be regained from new subject positions.”⁴⁷ I side with Ponzanesi and other scholars who have welcomed Rosi’s decision to shoot the film as a documentary – specifically, a combination of poetic and reflexive mode, according to Bill Nichols’ influential study in this field.⁴⁸ However, I also want to examine the shortcomings of two stories – Samuele’s and the migrants’ – that are never allowed to enter in dialogue with one another.⁴⁹ In other words, what interests/concerns me here is Rosi’s decision to eschew a questioning of the seemingly unproblematic presentation of “Italian-ness” and/as “whiteness” in the film; for as Annalisa Frisina and Stefania Muresu have aptly put it, both the residents of Lampedusa and the non-white

⁴⁰ See, among others, Federico Zappino, ed., *Il genere tra neoliberalismo e neofondamentalismo* (Verona: ombre corte, 2016).

⁴¹ Hughes, “Call Me By Your Name.”

⁴² Holleran, “First Love,” 28.

⁴³ For Rocco, this “poetic universality” lies in the idea of finding oneself in another as suggested by the oft-quoted line, “Call me by your name and I’ll call you by mine”; “L’idillio dei sensi,” 8.

⁴⁴ Hughes, “Call Me By Your Name.” On issues of homonationalism, heterosexualities, and masks, see Antonia Anna Ferrante, *Pelle queer maschere straight. Il regime di visibilità omonormativo oltre la televisione* (Milano: Mimesis, 2019).

⁴⁵ Pugliese, “Race as Category Crisis,” 152.

⁴⁶ Fofi, “Fuocoammare racconta Lampedusa con pudore e rispetto”; see also Previtali, “Fear Death by Water,” 1-23.

⁴⁷ Ponzanesi, “Of shipwrecks,” 151-152.

⁴⁸ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*. See, among others, Cazzato and Silvestri, *S/Murare il Mediterraneo-Un/Walling the Mediterraneo*.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ponzanesi: “we have little contact with the migrants themselves. They do not speak in the film, we only hear their laments, chants, screams for help via the radar radio, their cries, their excitement during their self-organized football tournaments” (“Of shipwrecks,” 162); I return to this later in this paper.

migrants are ultimately subjected to a process of racialization at the hands of the Italian state.⁵⁰ Does the proximity of the two stories succeed in projecting engagement and participation (see Ponzanesi, in the previous section), or does it contribute, albeit inadvertently, to forgetting the cultural diversity impressed on Italian ground, and the history of internal colonisation in the country?⁵¹

It is useful to look at how film scholars in Italy have viewed this detachment alongside the rise of “participatory documentary cinema” during the last ten years. For Giuseppe Previtali, the lack of any contact between locals and migrants reinforces the modernity/non-modernity dualism (“two voices [that] belong to different spaces or times”) hidden by Rosi’s humanitarian message, and reinforced through his specific use of the video camera: “It is a way of keeping distance that translates, with the elements of filmic grammar, the difficulties of relationships with alterity, an attempt to ‘frame’ it, or give it a shape, or enclose it within comprehensible boundaries.”⁵² Others, such as Frisina and Muresu, have added that this selective decision upholds tokenism and hierarchy in the encounter with racialised others, privileging the filmmaker’s skills at the expense of the film’s political message.⁵³ The recent development of a participatory mode of documentary filmmaking discussed by Frisina and Muresu supports this claim: films that are “made with refugees” and aim at building “a politics of ‘civil distribution,’” including the works of ZabLab, AMM-Archivio Memorie Migranti, and 4CaniPerStrada (all active since the mid-2000s).⁵⁴ Grounded in extensive periods of on site research (such as, in Lampedusa and Sardinia) to let migrants’ and refugees’ voices speak for themselves in an unfiltered (i.e. spontaneous) way, or to give back a name to those who died in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean, participatory documentary sets up a coalitional politics of alliance as the process and result of screening the migrant “crisis.”⁵⁵

Director Rosi spent months living and filming on the island, interviewing locals, including Doctor Bartolo. These interviews offer an invaluable first-hand account of the rescue attempts and deaths at sea of migrants trying to reach the Italian coast in search of a livable future. But Bartolo himself is the only point of contact between this reality and “the minutiae of the lives of the Lampedusa residents,” who in the words of Mellini and Orlandini appear more like a “state-of-nature” community modelled on “Rousseau’s figure of the good savage.”⁵⁶ The timely film provides a close-up of the living, the suffering, and the dead in “one of the many contested frontiers of Europe” that has filled the national and international press.⁵⁷ It centres around the character of Samuele, a 12-year old who loves to spend time on the land, even though he hails from a culture steeped in the sea. His narrative is framed by his desire to fulfil his family expectations and become a good fisherman – though this presumed future is complicated by the fact that he suffers from sea-sickness.

⁵⁰ Frisina and Muresu, “Ten Years of Participatory Cinema,” 6.

⁵¹ Cf. Pugliese’s discussion of the infelicitous stereotypical construction that “‘Africa begins south of Rome’” (“Race as Category Crisis,” 155); see also Paola Zaccaria, “(Trans)Mediterranean Embodied Archived,” *JOMEC Journal* 8 (2015), p.NONE, <http://doi.org/10.18573/j.2015.10035>.

⁵² Previtali, “Fear Death,” 11, 14.

⁵³ Frisina and Muresu, “Ten Years,” 6.

⁵⁴ Frisina and Muresu, 11; among the films the two authors consider, are Andrea Segre, Dagmawi Yimer, and Riccardo Biadene’s *Come un uomo sulla terra / Like a Man on Earth* (2008), Segre and Stefano Liberti’s *Mare chiuso / Closed Sea* (2012), produced by ZabLab; Yimer, Giulio Cederna and Fabrizio Barraco’s *Soltanto il mare / Nothing but the Sea*, 2011), Zakaria Mohamed Ali’s *To Whom it May Concern* (2013), Yimer’s *Va’ Pensiero. Storie ambulanti / Va’ Pensiero. Walking Stories* (2013) and *Asmat-Nomi / Asmat-Names* (2015), produced by AMM-Archivio Memorie Migranti (Archive of Migrant Memories); and Kourouma Hassane Beyla, Lamin Manka and Ali Abdala Hashi’s *Nako-La Terra / Nako-The Land* (2016) and Muresu, Usman Aziz, Toni Khalifa and Sulayman Suwareh’s *Nella stessa barca / On the Same Boat* (2017), produced by 4CaniPerStrada.

⁵⁵ Frisina and Muresu, 8.

⁵⁶ See Ponzanesi, “Of shipwrecks,” 161, for an account of the production phases of Rosi’s film; Ponzanesi, 159; for Mellini and Orlandini, see “Fuocoammare.”

⁵⁷ Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, “Introduction: State of the Union,” 338. See also Frisina and Muresu, “Ten Years,” 6.

In an essay on “Italy’s Postcolonial ‘Question’: Views from the Southern Frontier of Europe” (2015), Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo offer a review of the new epistemologies of the South, such as “*mediterraneità*” (Mediterranean-ness) and “*meridionalità*” (Southernness),” through which artists, activists, and scholars working in and on the Italian South threaten national neoliberal paradigms of both the European and the Italian North.⁵⁸ Their politics of hospitality run counter to the policing of borders demanded by current Italian politicians and the European Union and mobilise “specific counter-modern elements (slowness, hospitality, cultural hybridity, linguistic and ethnic pluralism, etc.) as a response to the violence of what is perceived as Northern capitalist hegemony.”⁵⁹ One example is the digital collage work by Agnese Purgatorio, *Fronte dell’est / The Eastern Front* (2014) discussed by Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, where an artist pictures herself standing among a group of migrants, together with national and international female icons.

Much like *Call Me by Your Name*, Rosi’s film shines a light on diversity, offering a raw picture of the plight of migrants trying to reach Europe. Yet as in Guadagnino’s work, this foregrounding of one issue has the inadvertent impact of banishing other issues to the shadows. Reviewing the film, Gemma Sou summarises this as “a near total erasure of refugees’ voices, personal identities, and histories.”⁶⁰ The kind of politics of hospitality elicited by this work is replaced by the director’s mastery of the video-camera, through which he “mediate[s] his gaze, letting us observe, or peep through, the right eye of Samuele [...] ‘looking with’ and ‘looking through’ conveys the indirect gaze, albeit non-intervening, of the filmmaker.”⁶¹ And yet here, non-obtrusiveness seems to hide the claims for “objectivity” and “fidelity of representation” that historically have grounded the practices of observation from the unmarked positionality of the (white) male subject and his gaze. My attempt to reassess critically Rosi’s project aligns in part with Pugliese’s warning against the repetition in academic studies of “atopicality” and, I would add, visions of whiteness, namely, a “lack of geopolitical location and an indifference to the critical differences of historically situated and discursively embodied subjects.”⁶² These differences fall out of the frame of Rosi’s video-camera, and will structure the analysis of race in the last section.

Previously, I anticipated that the representational domains of *Call Me by Your Name* and *Fuocoammare* are indicative of two sites of neoliberal regimentation – tourism and migration. If tourism is seen as a sign of modernity in our neoliberal present, migration is a proof of the demands that its governmentality and economic orders impose on entire populations. This sets a powerful, but deadly relationship between the two. The body of the tourist and the body of the migrant are the maps of modernity’s reliance on structuring the paths of the accessible and the forbidden, which is one of its constitutive traits, along with the naturalisation of oppression. “We could say,” Paul B. Preciado claims, “that the whole project of modernity has been a project of inscribing political differences on the body, of naturalisation, of the somatisation of political differences,” which is how he defines the *body-as-somatheque*. I return to this concept, in particular, to Preciado’s conceptualisation of the body as a “living historical and cultural archive”; this concept allows us to use Elio and Samuele’s bodies as points of entry into the onto-epistemological regimes of the global and the local, the travelling images

⁵⁸ Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, “Italy’s Postcolonial ‘Question,’” 368, 375. On Italy’s relation to post-coloniality, see among others, the essay by Goffredo Polizzi and Sandra Ponzanesi, “Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory? Intersections in Italian Postcolonial Studies.”

⁵⁹ Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, “Italy’s Postcolonial ‘Question,’” 375.

⁶⁰ Sou, “Fire as Sea,” 2.

⁶¹ Ponzanesi, “Of shipwrecks,” 161. Crucially, Ponzanesi questions whether “the images of the sufferers [can] be portrayed without making a spectacle of them or glorifying them as aesthetic images,” however she draws divergent conclusions from mine about the politics of Rosi’s film.

⁶² Pugliese, “Race,” 150.

of a “contemporary Italy,” undercutting ideas of “progressiveness” as opposed to “backwardness.”⁶³ Inquiring into somatechnics is one possible way through which to interrogate available understandings of subjectivity in relation to power, resistance, (lack of) agency, time, and space/place.

Teenage “Somatechnics”: Class, Gender, and Race in the (Post)colonial Archives

The principles of somatheque combine one’s sense of self as a body and its inscription by power relationships, as well as the body’s own sense of survival (or collapse) under the pressure of institutionalised ways of living. In a pioneering article on “somatechnics,” Pugliese and Susan Stryker claim, “we have never existed except in relation to the techné of symbolic manipulation, divisions of labor, means of shelter and sustenance, and so forth.”⁶⁴ Of particular relevance for my purpose in this article is the fact that focussing on somatechnics helps us comprehend “whiteness as (racial) invisibility (that is, as a category that at once insists on objectifying and rendering its others in racialized terms, even as it effaces its own racial status).”⁶⁵ This manoeuvre is central to the visual economy that separates subjects, objects, and worlds into foreground and background, where the latter’s intelligibility is a sign of it being forbidden from creating a world. A diffractive reading of Elio and Samuele is, thus, useful to engage in practices of seeing and reading “otherwise.”

My analysis of the trajectories of privilege and disadvantage embedded in *Call Me by Your Name* and *Fuocoammare* is also made possible with the help of a feminist framework like the one employed by Paola Zaccaria and the academic-activist network, *Un/Walling the Mediterranean*.⁶⁶ Zaccaria argues for the “centrality of the border” in the acquisition of “Southern border critical thinking,” against the enduring oppression that results from “modernities [which] include exercises of power within and without the Mediterranean, and the dissemination of multiple differences and various forms of violence.”⁶⁷ Her definition of “Mediterraneanization of Transatlantic Studies” is a multi-process pedagogy to develop a de-colonial and de-colonising spirit, which would inform the making of new worlds in times of isolation and subjugation of vulnerable others.⁶⁸ It also makes space for dissident research methods and methodologies, new modes of inhabiting academic and activist (or, academic-activist) environments. This framework is appropriate to grasp the conversations within Western colonial archives that are stimulated by the figure of the white, gay male traveller in *Call me By Your Name*.

Oliver’s arrival at the Perlmans’ is the beginning of a journey to discover artistic and natural beauties, the likes of which have attracted Anglophone and other European sojourners to Italy since the seventeenth century. In his book, aptly titled *L’Italia degli altri* (The Italy of Others, 2013), Mario Fortunato notes how, over a long time-span, and increasingly towards the early twentieth century, this tradition of heterosexual and (very often) homosexual travellers fashioned for themselves an idealistic Italian-ness.⁶⁹ Like these would-be ancestors, both Elio and Oliver are a fitting match for

⁶³ Preciado, “SOMATHEQUE,” interview by María Andueza.

⁶⁴ Pugliese and Stryker, “Introduction,” 2.

⁶⁵ Pugliese and Stryker, 4.

⁶⁶ *Un/Walling the Mediterranean-S/Murare il Mediterraneo: Pratiche locali, nazionali e transfrontaliere di attivismo transculturale, per una politica e poetica dell’ospitalità e mobilità* is a research project begun at the Università degli Studi di Bari “Aldo Moro” in 2009. In addition to Zaccaria, the network includes, in alphabetical order, Giuseppe Campesi, Lorena Carbonara, Marta Cariello, Luigi Cazzato, Rosita B. Maglie, Carmen Pisanello, Filippo Silvestri, Annarita Taronna (retrieved from their website in November, 2018, <https://smuraremediterraneo.wordpress.com>).

⁶⁷ Zaccaria, “A Breach,” 39.

⁶⁸ Zaccaria, “(Trans)MediterrAtlantic,” 5.

⁶⁹ Fortunato, *L’Italia degli altri*, 76.

Guadagnino’s updated Grand Tour, as they are endowed with the material and symbolic resources to “inhabit and rework space on the basis of past dispositions, knowingness, confidences and capitals,” both economic and cultural.⁷⁰ Consequently, “Italy” is re-made through their eyes in many ways, much as when rich young men “indulge[d] their passion, notably classical art and the ‘sodomitical vice,’ in the place that was thought of as synonymous with both: Italy.”⁷¹ The local community in Crema is featured as a seemingly paradisiacal territory full of natural beauties, recalling the narratives about “the feminization of nature through symbols of unspoiled virgin territory, waiting to be transformed and possessed by imperial [no longer solely] heterosexual design.”⁷² As Elio and Oliver roam the countryside, we see them enjoy the kindness of the Cremaschi locals, with their craftsmen’s lives as farmers, artisans, and small shop-owners. We are bound to appreciate these moments that make the two lovers forget about Oliver’s busy life overseas, which is associated with tediousness, but implicitly entails the promises of a career, success, and economic mobility – the same future awaiting Elio.⁷³ Elio and Oliver’s is an Arcadian Italy whose “cognitive boundaries” and borders are reconstructed by outsiders’ stereotyped views of “Italian-ness.”⁷⁴ The ensuing effect of (assumed) authenticity in this rendition of Italy as a “pastoral idyll” was also evidenced in the more positive reviews of the film.⁷⁵ In a crescendo, building up one dream-like vision after another, “Italy” becomes a place frozen in time: forever there, not here – “not in Italy,” says another enthusiastic reviewer – and yet, it is always already available to the skilled (foreign, “global”) consumer, to be loved but also to be reprieved.⁷⁶ This is epitomised when, in the middle of a bike trip, Elio is offered a glass of water at a local’s home and, upon leaving the house, he and Oliver notice an imposing image of Benito Mussolini towering above a woman who is knitting: “That’s Italy,” Elio comments – and on (and off) they go. These kinds of trivial comments are mostly exploited to prove Elio’s literacy in Italian history, which is one of his weapons of seduction towards Oliver, as seen in their flirtatious conversation by a monument commemorating the Battle of the Piave River.

Homoerotic masculinity is the banner uniting Elio and the other lead male characters in the film, Oliver and his father Samuel – a threesome embalmed in their shared passion for art and archaeology, as was also pointed out in the reviews cited previously. Read through this gendered lens, the representation of homosexual desire in *Call Me by Your Name* confirms counter-intuitively what María Lugones has come to define the “light side” of the “colonial/modern gender system.” The Euro-centric paradigm that shaped the practices of colonialism, Lugones argues, was the result of a naturalisation process, in which dualistic understandings of gender and heterosexual patriarchy coalesced to confer to “gender” its intelligibility.⁷⁷ Lugones’ light side “constructs gender and gender relations hegemonically, ordering only the lives of white bourgeois men and women and constituting the modern/colonial meaning of men and women.”⁷⁸ When Oliver returns to the US, Elio is devastated and struggles to make sense of his desire for him. From this moment onwards, Elio’s mother Annella Perlman is made to disappear, cast into the background much in the same way as the

⁷⁰ Taylor, *Fitting into Place?*, 15.

⁷¹ Thomas, “Was George Frideric Handel Gay?,” 173.

⁷² Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 54.

⁷³ See Cazzato, *Sguardo inglese*, 60.

⁷⁴ Croci and Lucarelli, “Introduction,” 253.

⁷⁵ Rocco, “L’idillio dei sensi,” 7.

⁷⁶ Giammei, “Luca Guadagnino. Quest’estate è stata importante,” 42; Cazzato, *Sguardo inglese*, 28.

⁷⁷ Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” 190. Lugones’ theories are drawn mostly from the work of Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (1928-2018) and his conceptualisation of the “coloniality of power” in the post-colonial, decolonial context and projects of South America. For Quijano, coloniality has it that “all control over sex, subjectivity, authority, and labor are articulated around it” (first axis), whereas modernity indicates an empirical model-method, “a way of knowing” (Lugones, 191). Cf. Zaccaria, “(Trans)MediterrAtlantic,” 4.

⁷⁸ Lugones, “Heterosexualism,” 206. Cf. Chambers, “Prefazione,” 11.

other women in the film discussed so far – Marzia and Chiara, the Perlmans’ maids, and the woman under Mussolini’s picture. It could be argued that there are scenes in the film where Annella might be said to have (some) agency, such as the scenes filmed at the Perlmans’ family table, where she spontaneously translates for guests and family members, as Holleran notes, “moving fluently from English to French to Italian.”⁷⁹ Such scenes were celebrated by reviewers, particularly in Italy.⁸⁰ However, this is confuted by a closer inspection of the (not-so-hidden) narratives embedded in the “highly well-read and polyglot international upper-class élite” that she embodies – confirming the classed-gendered assumptions about white bourgeois women referred to by Lugones, above.⁸¹ The remainder of the film centres around Samuel’s confession to his son that he too had fallen in love with a man, before eventually marrying Elio’s mother. We are thus led to infer that Samuel’s mentor-student relationship with Oliver hides his own regret about unfulfilled homosexual desire as a youth. Samuel’s confession has been interpreted in different ways: some Italian and international reviewers who praised the film have argued that this scene strengthens the film’s message of universal love; while others have critically assessed the confession as having the opposite message. For Holleran, these scenes represent either Samuel’s bisexuality, or “the suppression of homosexuality for the purpose of marriage and starting a family – in the case of both Oliver and Elio’s father.”⁸² If anything, this is only part of the point – beyond a (heterosexual?) father’s heartened recognition of his son’s “betrayal of heterosexuality,” this scene actually bolsters the visual politics elicited by the film’s homoerotic narrative, and with it, the problematic role of women. The final scene of the film lends itself to this interpretation, as it also insists on the promises embedded in Elio’s future:



Fig. 1: Elio staring. Still.

Annella’s silhouette is blurred behind Elio’s distressed face in close-up (Fig. 1). Samuel’s approval of Elio’s and Oliver’s affair by now has put a seal on his son’s future life of beauty. From father to son. Elio’s life is going to have the same wondrous qualities as the kind of Italy that he and his father, as well as Oliver, have made for themselves, and we are left wondering about what this self-fashioning entails for the “host country.”

These archetypes of contemporary (hetero- and homosexual) masculinity appear not as remote as their looks and background might suggest from the British travellers of eighteenth-century narratives of the Grand Tour. Within a broader colonial project known as *meridionismo*, which for Luigi Cazzato represents the understanding that informed the building of modern Europe, the Grand Tour created in Southern Europe its “Orient,” a place deemed unable to fulfill the requirements of

⁷⁹ Holleran, “First Love,” 27.

⁸⁰ Rocco, “L’idillio dei sensi,” 8.

⁸¹ Rocco, 8.

⁸² Holleran, “First Love,” 28.

modernity in spite of its extraordinary past.⁸³ Elio and Oliver retain a series of elements from the cultural traits that, in Cazzato’s view, were common to the men in the two phases of the Grand Tour (the last three decades of the eighteenth century and the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars). These include: their gender; their social status as (modern) scions of the aristocratic families; their use of travel as an educational *rite of passage*; their competence with regard to aesthetic taste combined with a romantic passion for nature and landscapes.⁸⁴ It therefore should not come as a surprise that Samuel cites from Michel Montaigne in the speech to his son as the French philosopher played a crucial role in the early Grand Tour.⁸⁵ In common with their historical, real-life predecessors Elio and Oliver also have a belief in the linearity of the future as the site of progress and (economic and social) mobility, which the film reinforces by highlighting Elio’s and Oliver’s presence as the *absence* of gendered, sexual, and racial others.⁸⁶

The male subject of *Call Me by Your Name* thus enters into conversation about current states of social “advancement” and “crisis” in divergent and problematic ways. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, Guadagnino’s film celebrates the (upwardly, geographically) mobile, white traveler, who boosts the local economy and knows how to appreciate Italian art, therefore it contributes to “branding Italy” abroad. This work involves an exercise in whiteness, as Elio, Oliver, and Samuel’s passion for art lends itself to upholding the “roots which the country prefers to describe, naturally and nationalistically, as ‘classical,’ namely Greek and Roman.”⁸⁷ It gives new life to the long-established Anglophone narratives about Italy that the film retrieves from the archives of coloniality and updates for a contemporary, neoliberal setting and audience. This updating includes the celebration of a country that has learned how to “treat its gays well,” as shown by the recent advances in Italian LGBT legislation.⁸⁸ These inter-related aspects can hardly be ignored when one considers the international accolades the film has received.⁸⁹

The elements of homonationalism discernible in *Call Me by Your Name* work against two sexual(ised) figures of contemporaneity: the “bad,” non-normative queer and the migrant. We are led to infer that the “dubious whiteness” of the Italian characters and its echoes in the colonial archives of “italianità” (Italian-ness) is not an issue; but we also have a feeling that these characters never appear as “white” as their US counterparts.⁹⁰ This cinematic effect disregards the “hierarchy of ‘races’ – or ‘ethnicities,’ or ‘colours’ – [...] forged in the 19th and 20th centuries, by virtue of the intertwining of evolutionism and eugenics” that is written in the development of “Italian-ness” in modern, post-Unification Italy, in which Western (foreign) eyes were very much implicated.⁹¹ There is no story to tell about *queer others* and non-affluent, non-touristic (and non-white) incomers – *Call Me by Your Name* typifies the homonormative, white gay explorers. Their affluent mobility is haunted by less welcome routes – there lies the spectre of the migrant and sexual other who threatens Italian and European racial integrity, whose “sexual place in the joint projects of civilizational, familial, societal, and political reproduction are questionable.”⁹²

⁸³ Cazzato, *Sguardo inglese*, 34, 52.

⁸⁴ Cazzato, 103, 119, 129.

⁸⁵ Holleran, “First Love,” 28.

⁸⁶ Cazzato, *Sguardo inglese*.

⁸⁷ Zaccaria, “(Trans)MediterrAtlantic,” 10. Zaccaria is drawing from Pugliese’s notion of “embodied shadow archive” he theorised in 2011.

⁸⁸ Though, of course, we know this not to be the case.

⁸⁹ Reviewing the film for *The Guardian*, Ellen E. Jones for example, praised the film for “[allowing] Elio and Oliver to escape the usually devastating consequences that cinema dishes out to its gay protagonists,” cited in Hughes, “Call Me By Your Name.”

⁹⁰ Giuliani, “Whose Whiteness?,” 125.

⁹¹ Giuliani, 138.

⁹² Weber, *Queer International Relations*, 88.

The articulation of whiteness found in “progressive” screenings of contemporary Italy leads me to discuss the trajectories of class, gender, and race represented in Rosi’s *Fuocoammare* via Samuele’s story. Prompted again by somatechnics, I want to explore the failure to address “whiteness as normative a priori” in Rosi’s mapping of ethnicity, where dualistic views about the modern/non-modern, North/South, local/global, and us/them complicate the film’s message.⁹³

Presences-Absences in the Southern and Migrant Archives

The Mediterranean lies at the intersection of the two topics focused on in this article – tourism and migration – with tourists, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers cast as paradigmatic figurations of the North/South global world order. The neoliberal meets the necro-political: the Mediterranean is one of many contemporary sites epitomising Lugones’ concept of coloniality:

To see the coloniality is to see the powerful reduction of human beings to animals, to inferiors by nature, in a schizoid understanding of reality that dichotomizes the human from nature, the human from the non-human, and thus imposes an ontology and a cosmology that, in its power and constitution, disallows all humanity, all possibility of understanding, all possibility of human communication, to dehumanized beings.⁹⁴

Learning to see this coloniality is learning to sense the difference it makes to think with feminisms, post-colonial, and de-colonial theories. The Mediterranean today is a “problem space” where comfort and suffering live in proximity, and as such it entangles us in any processes of difference-making.⁹⁵ The greatest obstacle in this work is that trying to see the coloniality unsettles the experiences and trajectories of privilege we have learned not to be able to see. Its greatest strength is that we remain vigilant about the costs of the latter, sensing this failure to see as the body-mind-spirit that we are. Another strength is that we can do this work with others, across locales, geographies, and disciplines giving shape to a border-crossing. But as Lugones warns us, “How do we cross without taking over? With whom do we do this work?”⁹⁶ And, for whom do we do it? What happens when we try to see beyond hierarchical dualisms of “silence” and “speech” that constitute the fabrics of our very visions?⁹⁷

In this section, I aim to problematise the alleged politics of hospitality elicited by the critically acclaimed *Fuocoammare*. I look at the travelling images it offers with regard to Italy’s “internal” and “external” others from the viewpoint of the running hierarchies of “Europeanness” and “Italianness” investigated in the work of de-colonial thinkers. These hierarchies are the architecture of three distinct settings in the film: Samuele’s personal and familial space; the migrant’s constrained space; and, the visual and embodied space that separates them. Each space is in tension with the humane purposes of this film, through sidelining the geographies of North/South, of the local/global, and the temporalities of the modern/non-modern, of progress/backwardness of neoliberal modernity.

⁹³ Pugliese and Stryker, “Introduction,” 4.

⁹⁴ Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” 751.

⁹⁵ Hall, *Familiar Stranger*, 144; See Cazzato, *Sguardo inglese*, 52. Here, I am thinking, for example, about Zaccaria’s definition of “Southern border critical thinking” as a “tool to counteract those neo-colonial, neo-obscurantist attempts at transforming the fluid interconnection of sea routes and cultures flowing across sea waters into distinct and fractured identities” (“A Breach in the Wall,” 40).

⁹⁶ Lugones, “Decolonial Feminism,” 755.

⁹⁷ Motsemme, “The Mute Always Speak.”

I have already indicated how, in Rosi’s film, Lampedusa is a split territory where the migrants land for survival, while Samuele struggles with his uncertain generational mandate. This half of the film focuses on Samuele at home with his father and aunt (Zia Maria), attending school, playing slingshot with a friend, having his eye-sight checked and discussing his anxieties with doctor Bartolo. The routine order of Samuele’s domesticity is a working-class bounded space of belonging, in which Rosi’s video camera gazes repeatedly on his aunt preparing meal after meal, making beds, knitting, and attending to Samuele and his father’s habitual needs. For the class-marked “excessively present” bodies of Samuele’s family members, this excessiveness is highlighted further by how class attaches itself to gendered and racialised subjects, seen for example in the director’s characterisation of Samuele’s aunt, or in the three distinct, separate(d), non-communicating spaces of the domestic, the landscape, and the CIE-Centri di identificazione ed espulsione (Centres for Identification and Expulsion).⁹⁸ Rosi’s insistent use of long takes of reproductive labour confirm stereotyped “gendered expectations and realities,” in which “relations of inequality, dependency and disparity, [are] felt generationally as well as across class.”⁹⁹ This aspect was again stressed by some reviewers, such as Mellini and Orlandini who pointed out the ways in which housewives in the film are “scrupulously ‘Orientalised’ or ‘Sicilianised.’”¹⁰⁰ It also seems that this order of domesticity is strategically exploited to idealise the local as “a more ‘authentic’ space, constitutively separate and different from a global space that may be seen at a distance, as the space afar.”¹⁰¹ The “narrative of sacrifice for the future, via a hetero-domesticity”¹⁰² of a Southern Italian home becomes a locus of authenticity isolated from the “space afar,” the space that Rosi keeps beyond the purview of Samuele’s family, which is the delimited territory the migrants are allowed to occupy. Indeed, for most of the film, their space “(re)produce[s] familiar scenes of distressed and desperate groups of black bodies being rescued, cared for, or processed by Italians.”¹⁰³ Other films belonging to the genre of participatory documentary – *Io sto con la sposa* (I’m with the Bride, 2014) for example – offer an alternative spatial imaginary which is the space of the crossing.¹⁰⁴ In contrast, the space of migrants and refugees in Rosi’s film is still the space of borders, walls, and blockages. We see them waiting on the boats, being checked by the security guards before entering the CIE. Their space too is always “afar,” since we never witness “the ‘alarming conditions’ in Lampedusa’s refugee camps,” the policing, violence, and abuse that have been documented.¹⁰⁵ Yet, one cannot deny that they haunt the migrants’ “laments, chants, screams for help via the radar radio, their cries, their excitement during their self-organized football tournaments.”¹⁰⁶ Even in these moments, this presence seems like a series of (disembodied) voices, not only voices with no name, but bodies with neither recognisable/acknowledgeable features, nor a (possible, liveable) space. In Mellini and Orlandini’s provocative words, they are framed as “the new slaves, the ‘drowned’ to represent (s-objects still in the waiting hall of history),” in stark opposition to the assumed humanity of the rescuing personnel.¹⁰⁷

There are many border-islands like Lampedusa across the globe, where tourists from the global North share their presence with the vulnerable bodies inside detention centres. Although in

⁹⁸ Taylor, *Fitting into Place?*, 107, 3.

⁹⁹ Taylor, 91.

¹⁰⁰ Mellini and Orlandini, “Fuocoammare.”

¹⁰¹ Taylor, *Fitting into Place?*, 48.

¹⁰² Taylor, 89.

¹⁰³ Sou, “Fire at Sea,” 2.

¹⁰⁴ Previtali, “Fear Death,” 16.

¹⁰⁵ Pugliese, “Transnational Carceral Archipelagos,” 111; see especially Gabriele Del Grande’s book, *Il Mare di Mezzo al tempo dei respingimenti* (Modena: Infinito edizioni, 2010, quarta ristampa), and Zaccaria’s discussion of Del Grande’s work, in “(Trans)MediterrAtlantic.”

¹⁰⁶ Ponzanesi, “Of shipwrecks,” 162.

¹⁰⁷ Mellini and Orlandini, “Fuocoammare.”

Fuocoammare the paths of tourism are replaced by the actual life of people on the island, we are still left with “two incompatible orders of space-time [which] fold silently, invisibly, one into the other yet never breach their respective borders.”¹⁰⁸ According to Ponzanesi, Samuele’s aunt’s climactic phrase, “Che fuoco a mare che c’è stasera” (What a fire at sea there is tonight) hinting at the allied forces’ airplanes in WWII, is a strategy through which Rosi provides “the *old-world* atmosphere and history of Lampedusa, adding melody to the images of the *barren* and *scrubby* island.”¹⁰⁹ Turned against itself, the phrase recalls to mind the war waged against “terror,” and the nurturing of fears of racialised others; in this, it forecloses the opening of a space that is not demarcated by a fundamental human-cultural separation – an aspect, we have seen, that has raised many a concern over Rosi’s project and the visual politics established by the film. *Fuocoammare* refuses to offer a visual representation of the Lampedusa of “spectacular sunsets, sparkling waters and serviced luxury” that fills the touristic publicity channels.¹¹⁰ Yet in doing so, it risks re-presenting internal colonial stereotypes (see the “old-world atmosphere,” “barren and scrubby island” in Ponzanesi’s comment above) that would have Lampedusa and its people living in a nether land fundamentally alien to the rest of Italy and to Northern Europe. As Pugliese aptly writes:

Regardless of the fact that an island like Lampedusa is referred to, in contemporary histories, as geologically ‘part of Africa’ but culturally Italian (Maps of the World.com, 2009), the South and its islands must be seen as also culturally North African (and Middle Eastern); as I have argued elsewhere, it is only through the enactment of strategies of white historicide that this cultural connection can be severed [Pugliese, 2007]).¹¹¹

Samuele’s “not-so-white” embodiment – i.e. culturally richer than that way in which it is re-presented and re-produced for the “European” and “international,” neo-imperial gaze – is therefore severed from these historical, cultural, and geographical paths, inherited by “modern” Italy. The closing scene in *Fuocoammare* seems to insist on erasing these connections further. Samuele is sitting on the back of a boat, looking distressed as the boat winds its way across the waters.



Fig. 2: Samuele staring. Still.

I see the outward route of the boat, into the open sea (Fig. 2), as hinting at the future-oriented narrative that Samuele is ultimately accorded in spite of his positionality (which is betrayed by Rosi’s refusal

¹⁰⁸ Pugliese, “Transnational Carceral Archipelagos,” 119.

¹⁰⁹ Ponzanesi, “Of shipwrecks,” 160; my emphasis.

¹¹⁰ Pugliese, “Transnational Carceral Archipelagos,” 118.

¹¹¹ Pugliese, 107. Cf. Zaccaria: “Southern Italian archives of subalternity and crossed colonisations [are] expunged from the ‘national’ archives [...] because of their acknowledgment that African and Turkish blood and culture moisten the *bios* and *cultus* of Italy,” (“(Trans)MediterrAtlantic,” p. 10).

to engage with the rich cultural history of places like Lampedusa). In place of the missed opportunity “to find *holes* or at least *breaking points* in the pushback strategies, policies and walls devised and erected by the global order,” Samuele’s life is re-cast within the linear narrative of (future) progress which has constituted the foundations of European coloniality of power and modernity up until today.¹¹²

Fuocoammare is replete with silences, pauses that require the engaged viewer’s empathic identification with the concerns it addresses. In the space of the division between Samuele’s story and that of the migrants, at least some refugees are singing and playing, as in the oft-cited scene of the chant that received a number of accolades. For Giuseppe Previtali, this scene casts a different light onto Rosi’s exploration of the “migration crisis,” offering a powerful counter-narrative to the previously disembodied voices of the migrants and refugees, and their lack of mobility.¹¹³ By contrast, others challenge us to question the visual regime of the scene – that is, to focus “not [on] the characters’ *real life*, but the ‘paternalistic’ signifying frame in which the film builds and delivers their experiences.”¹¹⁴ While Mellini and Orlandini acknowledge the crucial role played by a poignant moment when migrants and refugees voice their oppression, for them, the relevance of the scene is ultimately downplayed by the “domestication of any instinct for rebellion” on the part of the oppressed themselves – an instinct that is lessened in power and efficacy as a result of Rosi’s “*subjective representation*.”¹¹⁵ This neatly encapsulates what I have been referring to as the visual politics of *Fuocoammare*; that is, a specific mode of filmmaking, which portrays “not Lampedusa, but *the* Lampedusa of Rosi.”¹¹⁶ I would add that in *this* Lampedusa, women are the *always-already-absent* racialised, silent others. They are still filmed, with close-ups of their faces presented to the concerned looks of viewers of the film. Were it not for the dualistic underpinnings that structure the work, this silence could be appreciated for its generation of new worlds through “highlight[ing] how silence within a violent everyday can also become a site for reconstituting ‘new’ meanings and [...] a tool of enablement for those oppressed.”¹¹⁷ This is one more possibility that Rosi’s film seems not to contemplate, leaving us with the ever-present, mastery gaze of the (Western, white, male) director, which is “the ‘invasive gaze of those who have historically held the power to interpret both speech and silence of the other’ (Sasaki, 1998: 122).”¹¹⁸ In the end, it is Samuele’s boat that drifts on.

Conclusions

In this comparative reading of Guadagnino’s *Call Me by Your Name* and Rosi’s *Fuocoammare*, I have attempted to look at the somatechnics of class, gender, sexuality, and race that characterise their teenage protagonists – Elio and Samuele – whose (un)marked positionalities bespeak the enduring legacy of dualistic epistemological and ontological frameworks, summarised as affluent/working-class; white/non-white; homonormative/queer; us/them. Drawing from critical work in the fields of anti-oppression and decolonising thought, I have employed a diffractive reading of the two films as a methodological tool that understands “knowledge-practices as mattering here-and-now,” as “tools of meaning-making and analysis” through which to question the future-driven narratives of modernity and coloniality embedded in both films.¹¹⁹ Elio and Samuele do not participate in (re)drawing the

¹¹² Zaccaria, “A Breach in the Wall,” 40; Cazzato, *Sguardo inglese*, 43.

¹¹³ Previtali, “Fear Death,” 15.

¹¹⁴ Mellini and Orlandini, “Fuocoammare.”

¹¹⁵ Mellini and Orlandini.

¹¹⁶ Mellini and Orlandini.

¹¹⁷ Motsemme, “The Mute Always Speak,” 917.

¹¹⁸ Motsemme, 917.

¹¹⁹ Kaiser and Thiele, “Diffraction,” 166.

boundaries of tourism and migration in the “bio-/necropolitical, neoliberal realities of our present.”¹²⁰ Their privileged interlocutor remains the (white, male) subject that sees no threat in staying irredeemably and perilously the same.

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¹²⁰ Kaiser and Thiele, 166.

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