

BOOK REVIEW

Italian Experiences of Trauma through Film and Media

edited by Alberto Baracco and Rosario Pollicino, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022, xiv + 209 pp., £32.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-5275-9784-6.

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Teenage girls used as human shields; people purposely left to die at sea by the thousands; poisonous gases depopulating entire villages; the daily killings of women at the hands of former partners, unrequited suitors or men belonging to their family circle. These are some of the traumatic events mapped out in the volume co-edited by Rosario Pollicino and Alberto Baracco. Completed during the Covid-19 crisis, the book responds to the epidemic of traumatic experiences that have afflicted and shaped Italian communities since the Second World War by drawing attention to the soothing and healing processes inherent in communal solidarity. In its attempt to extend the investigation of traumatic testimony in media other than film, and by embracing a constructivist, dynamic understanding of communities and cultures inspired by the work of Benedict Anderson and Stuart Hall, the volume suggests an interesting functional homology between the operations of trauma and the media, insofar as both can become enabling agents of community-building.

The book comprises nine essays framed by an introduction and a conclusion, written respectively by Pollicino and Baracco, in addition to a short preface, in which Pollicino explains the genesis of the project. Whereas Baracco's conclusion stresses the significance of audiovisual images as a 'privileged instrument of memory and testimony' and promotes the value of a 'technologically-mediated elaboration of traumatic experiences' (p. 211), in the preface and the introduction, Pollicino outlines the two main goals of the volume. Designed as an answer to some of the shortcomings the editors identified in the existing scholarship on trauma, media, and Italy, *Italian Experiences of Trauma* primarily aims at bridging the gap between psychoanalytic research into individual traumatic experiences and the sociological approaches to the collective dimensions of trauma. Secondly, by focusing on subnational and transnational communities, the book seeks to propel a new and more inclusive analysis of contemporary Italian society.

The essays are organised in four thematic sections, with the first two sections concentrating on transnational communities and the latter two zeroing in on subnational social groups. The chapters by Carmen Concilio and Paola Della Valle in the first section of the book explore the connections between trauma and territory. Through the analysis of literary and cinematic works about the experience of foreign soldiers who fought in Italy during the Second World War, their essays detail the formation of transnational bonds by means of an ongoing engagement with the Italian geographic and social landscape.

This supranational perspective extends to the book's second section, dedicated to the trauma of forced migration. To account for the experience of expulsion and dislocation undergone by the *tripolini*, in his essay Pollicino proposes to distinguish the concept of collective trauma from the notion of cultural trauma developed by Jeffrey B. Alexander. Building upon the work of Dana Diminescu, Pollicino suggests that the *tripolini* survive today as a collectivity in the form of an e-diaspora. In the following chapter, Moira Di Mauro-Jackson analyses two recent Italian films that denounce the dehumanising experience of trans-Mediterranean migration. She argues that, while collaborating to redraw concepts of national identity along italoophone rather than ethnic lines, these films are intended for an audience to come, a transnational European 'virtual visual community' of healing (p. 82).

With the book moving from transnational to subnational contexts, a *fil rouge* runs from the second to the third section, as the essays by Fabiana Cecchini, Giovanna Summerfield, and Robin Pickering-Iazzi elaborate on the notion of cumulative trauma, introduced by Di Mauro-Jackson in Chapter 4. Yet, whereas she conceptualises a sequential form of cumulative trauma (pre-migration, migration, and post-migration trauma), the essays of third section – devoted to the traumatic reverberations of murder – bring into the spotlight the cumulative effects of a 'traumatic climate' (p. 132), of the continuous exposure to lingering, ubiquitous, and abrupt acts of violence, within what Pickering-Iazzi calls 'microgeographies of trauma' (p. 131). Looking at audiovisual and literary works which recall the diffuse but pervasive violence of the historical period contentiously labelled as *gli anni di piombo*, Cecchini advocates for a wider consideration of personal experiences in the writing of history. In the following chapter, through a comparative analysis that spans from nineteenth-century accounts of *femminicidio* to contemporary journalistic reports, Summerfield sheds light on the persistence of violence against women in everyday life in Sicily. The particularity of the local context acquires paradigmatic value, as the chapter illustrates the global reach of gender-based killings. Likewise, Pickering-Iazzi positions her analysis of the YouTube video commemorating the murder of Annalisa Durante in the Forcella neighborhood of Naples within the international context of organised crime violence, which the title of her essay identifies as an 'industry of trauma'. From the climate of trauma, the concluding section of the book projects the readers into the trauma of climate. Here, Enrico Cesaretti and Baracco discuss documentaries and essay films that apply an ecocritical perspective to anthropogenic environmental disasters and document the spectral traces they left on local landscapes. Endorsing Reza Nagestani's understanding of 'the "nested" quality of trauma' (p. 152), Cesaretti concentrates on the ghostly survival of past catastrophes within the present, while Baracco's essay investigates the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the vicarious traumatising enabled by cinematic images. The link between landscape, history, and trauma, developed in the first part of the book, thus returns to haunt the concluding section, mirroring the recursivity proper to traumatic temporality itself.

While most of the essays speak to the volume's central preoccupation with the intertwinement of individual and collective trauma, the theorisation of this nexus across the nine chapters might appear uneven, due to the array of scholarly perspectives and methodological approaches that the authors contribute. On the other hand, as they bring into visibility transnational and subnational communities, the collected essays propose a nuanced analysis of contemporary Italian society that problematises conventional discourses about *italianità*, advancing a fresh perspective from which to look at Italian identities in their becoming.