We Are Witnesses, Not Victims. The Affective Politics of Representation in the Struggle against ‘femicide’ in Italy

by

Giovanna Parmigiani

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Giovanna Parmigiani 2015
We Are Witnesses, Not Victims. The Affective Politics of Representation in the Struggle against ‘femicide’ in Italy

Giovanna Parmigiani
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
University of Toronto
2015

Abstract

In this dissertation I focus on the political mobilization of Italian—especially Salentine—feminists around gendered violence and ‘femicide’ (femminicidio). I explore their modes of representation, giving special emphasis to those modes that are inspired by performances and practices of dignity, understood as a privileged ‘battlefield’ in their struggle particularly against ordinary forms of gendered violence. My work contributes to the anthropological debates on the relations between politics and the senses, and to the ones in the Anthropology of Ethics. First, by engaging with the work of Rancière, I read the feminist representational struggle as a form of dissensus —i.e. of sensing and making sense differently. I read it as a political enterprise that aims at widening the available sensorium by changing the practices and performances of seeing and sensing around gendered violence and ‘femicide’ in Italy. Second, since this political activity of the reconfiguration of the sensible has not just aesthetic but also ethical implications, my ethnographic material adds to the current anthropological debates in the Anthropology of Ethics. I show some possible consequences of the quite explicit links between the practice of autopoiesis, the work of art, and political activism that emerged during my fieldwork in the Salento area of Italy. The performative dimensions of performance (Lowell Lewis 2013) are at the center of my ethnographic and anthropological analyses, and these concentrate not only on the illocutionary, but also on the perlocutionary aspects of representations in political activism. My analyses of their role in constructing audiences by affecting the latter’s practices and performances of seeing and sensing, in Rancièrian terms, are elements that could offer a contribution to the current debates in Performance Studies.
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction.................................................................1

Chapter 2 Choosing Salento as an Ethnographic Field: an “India from Here”..................33

Chapter 3 The Gendered Violence of Representation: Stories of Ordinary Sexism in Italy.................................................................53

Chapter 4 Women Before (Women): on Feminist Genealogies and the Need to Be Seen.................................................................87

Chapter 5 The Creation(s) of Femicide.....................................................119

Chapter 6 “Whoever kills a woman, kills me, too”: an Imagined Community of Violated Women. .................................................................155

Chapter 7 Being Witnesses and Not Victims: on the Affective Politics of Representation.................................................................199

Chapter 8 The Politics of Ascesis: Constructions of Modern Feminist Womanhood in Salento Between Ethics and Aesthetics.........................................................240

Chapter 9 A Precariousness of Gazes: Italian Feminists and the Fears of Invisibility.................................................................275

Quoted References..............................................................................296
List of Figures

Figure 1 “Basta lacrime. Il pianto delle donne non cambia il mondo la loro forza si.” 1

Figure 2 “Le donne più forti sono quelle che continuano a sorridere, nonostante le ferite.” 3

Figure 3 Salento. 33

Figure 4 A client testing a tamburreddhu at the stand of the tambourine maker with whom I worked. 43

Figure 5 Galatina. 29th June 2014. 5am. Spontaneous ronde of pizzica. 44

Figure 6 Campidoglio. Installation of Enel Sole. 69

Figure 8 Campidoglio. Installation of Enel Sole. 70

Figure 9 Campidoglio. Installation of Enel Sole. 71

Figure 10 Amnesty Logo. “Stop Violence Against Women.” 74

Figure 11 Authoritative Hand. 75

Figure 12 Authoritative Hand. 76

Figure 13 “Refuse Abuse!” 76

Figure 14 “Stop ‘femicide’.” 77

Figure 15 Protective Hand. 78

Figure 16 Protective Hand. 78

Figure 17 Protective Hand. 79

Figure 18 “No more violence against women.” 79

Figure 19 Protective Hand. 80

Figure 20 “Femicides in Italy, 2012 and 2013.” Source: Eures. 84

Figure 21 “February 13th.” A political statement on the manifestation of SNOQ supported by my informants and circulated on their Facebook profiles. 97

Figure 22 Some of the ‘indignant’ women at the XV Congress of UDI. 101

Figure 23 Cartoon by Pat Carra. “Hundreds of feminists free to conflict!”
"First of all: surviving, in Paestum."

Figure 24 La tuffarice of Paestum.

Figure 25 “The red bow will be the symbol of the protest against ‘femicide’ and violence against women. Let’s share it as a very powerful shout!! I want to see it on all your Facebook walls!"

Figure 26 “UDI - Stop Femminicidio.” Drawn by Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 27 “Welcome Staffetta!” The Anfora. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 28 Anfora on the beach. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 29 Filling the amphora with (silent) words. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 30 Staffetta – Stop-over in Turin. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 31 Anfora in her red suitcase sitting with the seat belt fastened. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 32 Anfora on the altar of a Catholic Church during the celebration of a Mass. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 33 Anfora on a bike during a bike ride. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 34 Anfora in Venice. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 35 Anfora with two members of the Italian Navy. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 36 The amphora in a hospital. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 37 Waiting for the arrival of the amphora in the train station of Rimini. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 38 Two Carabiniere walk with the amphora. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 39 Amphora ritual performed in Sardinia. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 40 The amphora in Bologna. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 41 The ritual of the amphora in a City Hall in Tuscany. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Figure 42 “I am Mine!” 1980.

Figure 43 “Stop with the fear of being raped!” 1980.

Figure 44 Italian women in a parade, making triangles with their hands and fingers.
Figure 45 Demonstration against femicide.

Figure 46 “Each act of violence on women is not a private fact. Therefore I say ‘I am Lucia.” UDI of Pesaro, 2013.

Figure 47 Demonstration against femminicidio in Latina-Zapatos Rojos, 2013.

Figure 48 Flash mob of Fratelli di Italia (Brothers of Italy), an Italian right wing party. Bari, 25 November 2013.

Figure 49 Flyer “8 Marzo 1980.”

Figure 50 “Meno Giallo Più Rosa.”

Figure 51 Taurisano, Juventus (the Italian soccer team) club.

Figure 52 Taurisano, Corso.

Figure 53 Taurisano, Police Department.

Figure 54 “Stop femicide. NO to violence against women. ‘Femicide’ concerns all of civil society. It concerns you as well.”

Figure 55 “It was the cork of the sparkling wine.”

A campaign of the Presidenza of the Consiglio dei Ministri 2008.

Figure 56 “STOP FEMICIDE.”

Figure 57 “Certain men get crazy for blue eyes and pulpy lips.”

Figure 58 “Shut up, you idiot.” Campaign from Intervita.

Figure 59 “Silence kills dignity.”

Figure 60 “Elimina tutte le tracce.” Advertisements for Clendy rags.

Figure 61 DNA Donna flyer.

Figure 62 Pupazza- Maipiuclandestine, 1 March 2014.

Figure 63 Via Crucis. “I want a cultural mediator.”

Figure 64 “No more tears. Women’s weeping does not change the world; rather, their strength does.”

Figure 65 DNA Donna activists.
Figure 66 “Friendly Images. Campaign promoted by UDI for contrasting everywhere the advertising and the stereotypes that offend women. IF YOU OFFEND US, IT IS UNFAIR.”

Figure 67 Poster of Perduto Amore.

Figure 68 Installation Alma de Tierra by Lucia Sabato.

Figure 69 Flyer for Disanimate by DNA Donna.

Figure 70 Flyer for the event Noi & Eve by Evaluna Lecce.
Chapter 1
Introduction

Obtaining a sede (headquarters) was not an easy task for DNA Donna, a start-up counseling center dedicated to countering violence against women based in Soleto, a town in the province of Lecce, in the Salento area in the southeast of Italy. After participating in person in the first steps of the establishment of the association, at a distance, and through constant updates (via Skype) from friends who are part of it, I followed the bureaucratic practices that led to this achievement. It was the result of a long, patient, and stressful negotiation between the members of the association and the municipality of Soleto. It took roughly seven months, and it was the result of much work, including the preparation of documents, management of public relations, and handling of power struggles with local authorities. I waited until the moment my informants told me the keys to the offices were finally in their possession (news that was relayed to me almost in real time through a Whatsapp text message from Italy to the U.S.) before rejoicing: DNA Donna finally had its own offices! This represented a huge acknowledgement of the value of the project, and of the esteem the members were able to

1“No more tears. Women’s weeping does not change the world; rather, their strength does.”
elicit among local institutional authorities. I could not wait to receive the promised Skype call with all the details of the final moments of the office hand-over. Finally, the call came in, and I was able to talk with one of my friends, whose joyful and proud face popped up on my computer screen. We were both so happy about this news that we promised each other we would celebrate together at one of our favorite Galatina restaurants the following summer. Before my friend started to brief me about the handover of the keys, she said: “Look at this! I'm sending you a picture. I want to ask Lena to make a poster of this. I absolutely want to hang this on the walls of the sede. It needs to be the first thing to be put on those walls.” The image my friend sent me was the one with which I opened this introduction: a handwritten note that said: “No more tears. Women’s weeping does not change the world; rather, their strength does.”

The ideological and political disparagement of women’s weeping was not an infrequent element in my fieldwork with Salentine feminists, which I had begun three years before. Among other manifestations of this attitude, in the fall of 2013 I had noticed a picture as part of the exhibition *Alma de Tierra* in Taurisano (see below), organized in recognition of the International Day Against Violence Against Women. In this image, a woman from Taurisano holds a piece of paper that says, “The strongest WOMEN are those who keep smiling in spite of the wounds.”
In spite of what I perceived as the lack of novelty of this feminist point of view on the connections between women and weeping, I found my friend’s comments quite remarkable. Those precise words she deemed not only relevant, but so central to the ethos of the organization that she wanted to frame them as representative of this new counseling center whose focus was countering violence against women.

In what follows, I argue that the no-weeping (or smiling) trope has a (metonymic) central role in the ethics and aesthetics of representation of women as non-victims, which is a central enterprise for my informants. It arises from and depends on local understandings, practices, and feelings about gender proficiencies, and about notions and performances of dignity.
In this dissertation I will focus on the political mobilization of Italian —especially Salentine— feminists around gendered violence and ‘femicide’ (femminicidio). I explore their modes of representation, giving special emphasis to those inspired by performances and practices of dignity understood as a privileged battlefield in their struggle particularly against ordinary forms of gendered violence. My work contributes to the anthropological debates on the relations between politics and the senses, and to the ones in the Anthropology of Ethics. First, by engaging with the work of Rancière, I will read the feminist representational struggle as a form of disensus —i.e. of sensing and making sense differently. I will read it as a political enterprise that aims at widening the available sensorium by changing the practices and performances of seeing and sensing around gendered violence and ‘femicide’ in Italy. Second, since this political activity of the reconfiguration of the sensible has not just aesthetic but also ethical implications, my ethnographic material adds to the current anthropological debates in the Anthropology of Ethics. I will show some possible consequences of the quite explicit links between the practice of autoopoiesis, the work of art, and political activism that emerged during my fieldwork in the Salento area of Italy. The performative dimensions of performance (Lewis 2013) are at the center of my ethnographic and anthropological analyses, and these concentrate not just on the illocutionary, but also on the perlocutionary aspects of representations in political activism. My analyses of their role in constructing audiences by affecting the latter’s practices and performances of seeing and sensing, in Rancièrian terms, are elements that could offer a contribution to the current debates in Performance Studies.

Locating violence

While it is doubtless true that women in Italy today, and particularly non-Italian women in Italy, experience structural, symbolic, and physical aggression (see below), these aspects of violence are not specifically the ones that inform the lives of my informants, my ethnography, and my anthropological reflections. The women I met in Italy, like most women, certainly suffer from the effects of widespread sexism (see for example Guano 2007, Plesset 2006, Passerini 1996, and Molé 2012), of precariousness and unemployment (see for example Molé 2012, Muehlebach 2012, and Fantoni 2007), and
from an economic gender gap. They are indeed the objects of forms of gendered violence, discrimination, and sexual assaults. Nonetheless, in their everyday lives violence typically takes on other connotations. Similar to what Pesmen (2000) claimed of the “Russian soul,” I found that what the women I met call sexed violence—that is to say the violence perpetrated by one gender on the other [sic] —was in fact a “deceptive lexical item: not just a notion, image, or entity but” something that involved “an aesthetics, a way of feeling about and being in the world, a shifting focus and repertoire of discourses, rituals, beliefs, and practices more and less available” to them (9, my emphasis). I encountered violence, its phantoms (Aretxaga 2003) and phantasmatic dimensions (Navaro-Yashin 2012) as elements that could “dominate a speech act, performance, work of art, or image without... being present.”² They could “lurk in other terms, in a tone of a voice, in a gesture, expression, or pause” (Pesmen 2000,12).

This does not mean that violence is not a concrete experience for my informants: on the contrary, violence, the possibility of violence, and the ways one reacts to them do have tangible and important roles in the lives of the feminist women I met. They can be affective, emotional, practical, aesthetic, and ethical. Mostly, though, these roles tend to be framed beyond an understanding of violence in terms of physical and psychological trauma (for a comparison, see Fassin and Rechtman 2009).³ As I will illustrate in this dissertation, violence-as-suffering does affect my informants, but suffering is just a part of what gendered violence means and does in their lives. Violence against women, and

² While Aretxaga and Navaro-Yashin use different terms to refer to the role of fantasy in their fields, both ‘phantoms’ and ‘the phantasmtatic’ respectively imply a conceptualization that merges material and fictional aspects. As Navaro-Yashin puts it: “The phantasmtatic has an object quality, and vice versa. As argued by Begoña Aretxaga, the fictional and the real are not distinct; one does not precede, antecede, or determine the other. Together they constitute a kernel” (Navaro-Yashin 2012, 757-760).

³ The point made by Fassin and Rechtman in *Empire of Trauma* (2009) is significant to my research in as much it depicts dominant understandings of the relationship between violence, trauma, and victimhood that I argue are valid, generally speaking, in the Italian context as well (see also Giordano 2014, De Luna 2011, and Gribaldi 2014). Their claims are useful, I argue, in describing the context for understanding the affective, representational, political, and symbolical re-significations that structure my informants’ lives, and my dissertation. The women I worked with contest precisely the widespread understanding of the relations between victimhood (specifically its association with womanhood in the Italian context), violence, and trauma by re-imagining womanhood and its relationship with violence through the figure of the witness. The latter also takes on different nuances in this context, in comparison to the one spelled out in *The Empire of Trauma* and in Fassin (2008).
the ways one reacts to it, are extremely important to the women I met, in shaping their lives. They do so by setting their political agendas, by influencing discourses and practices around women’s activism and its political goals, by structuring the ways in which the women think about themselves, and by informing practices, performances, and representations of specific inflections of what I call modern feminist womanhood. In my ethnographic experience, in other words, I could witness and experience forms, somehow unexpected, of what Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004, 1) call the “productive” and “reproductive” dimensions of violence.

The discovery early on in my fieldwork that informants narrated and felt violence in their lives and discourses not only and primarily as an existential experience—i.e. as a traumatic condition of suffering that was the result of certain particular acts or relationships—came as a surprise to me. Even more surprising, and also somewhat unsettling, was acknowledging the power that my informants were giving to violence. The latter emerged clearly as a decisive dimension in their attempts to define what being a woman is and is not in contemporary Italy. As women, the circumstance of being potential objects of violence, and, systematically, also objects of representational violence became the kernel around which my informants started to think about themselves. This produced what I call an imagined community of (potentially) violated women. The latter, I claim, started to appear in Italy around the issues of violence against women and femicide particularly since 2011, and set the stage for the emergence of a new women’s question. In short, it happened after more than twenty years of silence from the Italian women’s movement in the aftermath of their legal achievements during the 1970s and early 1980s.

In other words, if violence is not primarily framed as something to which women are subjected, then it is something that is considered as structuring, in a fundamental, almost ontological manner, their particular ways of being in the world. In this framework, how one reacts to (and not just deals with) violence plays a central role in the ethical and aesthetic axiologies (i.e. systems of values) of my informants.

My particular ethnographic encounters led me to frame violence in ways that do not completely overlap with those that have been commonly used in the last two decades of
anthropological literature on this topic. Although some scholars have not hesitated to mention the possible problems of using violence as an anthropological analytical tool (see Jeganathan 1997), many others have been feeling the urge to put violence at the center of their ethnographic accounts and anthropological analyses. Heuristically, since often the two dimensions are imbricated, as some of the literature on violence shows (see, for example, Taussig 1986, Sluka ed. 2000, and the literature on state terror), one can divide the scholarly production into two broad areas. On the one hand, some scholars have tried to make sense of specific traumatic events or troubled areas. On the other hand there are academics who have instead focused on more structural (see, for example, Farmer 2003, Farmer and Haun 2010) or symbolic (see Bourdieu and Wacquant in Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004) types of violence (see, for example, several contributions in Das et al. 1997, 2000, 2001, and Scheper-Hughes 1993). Among other topics, in this latter corpus of research, researchers investigated the violent dimensions of illness, disease, bureaucracy, media images, and the state, and showed how “[s]ocial suffering results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems” (Das et al. 2000, ix). Within this perspective, “personal problems” are inextricably linked to

---


5 If on the one hand, as Whitehead (2004a, 5) argues, violence has always been a part of ethnographic analyses, as embedded (for example) in kin relations, religious rituals, and relationships between groups (see e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1965 [1937], Turner 1967, Gluckman 1955, Bloch 1986, 1992), it is by the end of the last century that it became a specific filter used in order to understand and describe certain particular and global realities. See also Hinton 2012 on a historical perspective on violence and morality.

6 As Sluka (2000) points out, normally the violence enacted by the state is called terror while anti-state violence is called terrorism.

7 Examples include the Cambodian genocide (see e.g. Hinton 1998, 2009), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see for example Allen 2013, 2014), the Rwandan genocide (see, for example, De Lame 2005 and Eltringham 2004), the violence in Northern Ireland (see, for example, Feldman 1991 and Aretxaga 1997) or the Partition between India and Pakistan (see, for example, Das 1990, 2006).

8 In this respect, the three books edited by Das and Kleinman et al. — Social Suffering (1997), Violence and Subjectivity (2000), and Remaking a World (2001) — represent milestones in the anthropological understanding of violence. In Violence and Subjectivity the authors show eloquently “how subjectivity — the felt interior experience of the person that includes his or her positions in a field of relational power — is produced through the experience of violence and the manner in which global flows involving images, capital, and people become entangled with local logics in identity formation.” Within this perspective, “the processes through which violence is actualized — in the sense that it is both produced and consumed” become central (2).
“societal problems” (ix): “if suffering is a social experience” (ix), then violence can be found within the structure of society as part of our ordinary lives.9

This latter corpus of research is important for my ethnography, in particular in order to understand the role of potential violence in my informants’ lives. The acknowledgement of the dynamics and effects of structural and symbolic violence—the latter being “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant in Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 272) — helps redefine not just the loci where violence can be found, but also the times defined and redefined by violence (see Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, Hermez (2012) on the anticipation of violence, Carr 2009, and Molé 2010). As Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois point out, “posing a violence continuum comprised of a multitude of ‘small wars and invisible genocides’” (19) that go beyond specific states of exception and comprise both times of war and peace “allows us to see the capacity and the willingness —if not enthusiasm— of ordinary people, the practical technicians of the social consensus, to enforce genocidal-like crimes against categories of rubbish people” (20). In my ethnographic experience, the emergence of an imagined community of potentially violated women did precisely this: it created an understanding of gendered violence within a continuum that has ‘femicide’ as its extreme manifestation.

Within such a framework, the initiatives that aim at fighting against gendered violence (whether carried out by institutions, or by other women’s groups) became central in my informants’ political practice. The discursive and semiotic aspects of anti-violence campaigns are seen as pivotal in their struggle against patriarchy.10 In this respect, the way violence is understood by my informants resonates with Hartman’s reading of the language on slaves’ rights in Scenes of Subjection (1997).11 Hartman’s argument speaks to my ethnographic material in as much it points out that there are forms of “domination

9 It reveals the interpersonal grounds of suffering, too (ix). See also Al-Mohammad (2012) on intercorporeality, and Hermez (2012).
10 In this dissertation I will use the term ‘patriarchy’ in the sense used by my informants, which I explain below.
11 In this book, the author aims at inquiring into “the ways that the recognition of humanity and individuality acted to tether, bind, and oppress,” by focusing on “the encroachment of power that takes place through notions of reform, consent, and protection” behind declarations of “slave humanity” (5).
enabled by the recognition of humanity, licensed by the invocation of rights, and justified by the grounds of liberty and freedom” (6).

In sum, I am certainly interested in the forms and incidence of violent behaviors against women in contemporary Italy, and in the cultural constructions and genealogies of what is considered as violent in this particular area of the world, as Whitehead (2004b) suggests. The main focus of my interest, though, revolves around violence against women conceptualized primarily as a cluster of discursive and affective elements and formations inflected in rhetorical and representational terms. These inhabit my informants’ everyday lives (Foucault 2010 [1972]; on Foucault and feminism see for example McNay 1992): what violence against women does, and how, is at the center of my ethnography. In particular, I will analyze how violence—its possibility, and the struggle against it—became battlefields in struggles of and for representation. This representational struggle plays an important role in directing and shaping the lives of the women I met, as well as this dissertation. My interpretive move does not aim to deny the personal and collective experiences of violence that my informants and women in Italy suffer: I do not question the reality of these dimensions (both in the women’s narratives, and in the statistical data available). My ethnographic encounters, instead, revealed how “[v]iolence is a slippery concept—nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive” (Schep-Hughes and Bourgois, 1), and how, as a discursive device “interfused” (Das et al. 1997, ix) with affective overtones, it shapes the personal and political lives of the Italian women I met.

Women and ‘Patriarchy’

The emergence of public concerns around femminicidio in Italy in the past three years has had many consequences. On the one hand, for example, it opened up new possibilities to recognize nationally the presence and effects of gendered violence in contemporary Italy. Yet on the other hand, public stands to counter violence against women started to be seen as re-structuring and reinforcing images of womanhood that, according to my informants, support ‘patriarchal’ values and imaginaries. This also happened when anti-violence messages were subsumed and spread by other women’s groups. It is precisely in this
context, where compliance with and resistance to ‘patriarchy’ blend (see, for a parallel, Mankekar 1999 and El-Kholy 2002), that I read the existential and political lives of the feminists with whom I worked, and the representational struggle that informs both my ethnographic experience and this dissertation. If the overall claim of this dissertation is, to paraphrase Navaro-Yashin (2002) and Mankekar (1999), that hegemony and resistance are imbricated phenomena, I will concentrate on discourses, practices, and affects that the feminists with whom I worked mobilize in order to react to the shape-shifting features of patriarchy. In particular, I will focus on the imagination and representation of new possibilities of being a woman in contemporary Italy, possibilities constructed in contrast to commonsensical representations of women-as-victims that my informants identify as ‘patriarchal.’ I consider the representation of being a woman, which is a practice both in the sense of work and labor (see for example Lambek 2010, and chapter 8), as an important form of political activism engaged by my informants.

The feminisms I encountered in Italy differ considerably from the ones I encountered and studied previously in the United Kingdom and afterwards in North America. The Italian activists I met adhere to what is called pensiero della differenza sessuale (the thought of sexual difference). In spite of the multiracial Italian context, Italian feminism is not intersectional, and it rests on an unproblematic conflation between sex and gender. I found the latter elements quite challenging, especially at the beginning of my fieldwork. Trained in gender studies within other feminist traditions, at first I strived to find a common language and ideological framework in order to talk about women’s issues, and I struggled to follow definitions of woman that I found problematic (see, for example,

---

12 El-Kholy wrote in 2002, that “[i]t is well established that power and resistance are not autonomous but are intermeshed and continuously shape each other” (22).
13 It is worth noting upfront that among the women I met both off-line and on-line, these complex clusters around violence are not unambiguous, and that they produce ambivalent results. For example, they do not seem to acknowledge consciously both our “exposure to violence and our complicity in it” (Butler 2004, 19).
14 The word intersectionality is hardly known among the feminists with whom I worked. The multiracial Italian context so far has not seemed to challenge the political agenda of Italian feminists who do not explicitly measure themselves according to multiple, different positionalities. This lack of intersectionality concerns different women: from migrants to transsexuals, from transgendered to differently abled (diversamente abili) persons. The only dimension that might be taken into account currently by the Italian feminisms I encountered is the economic. The precarious workers are starting to raise their voices within the Italian feminist movement (see below).
Rosa, below). The activists with whom I worked defined women primarily by their biological sex. For them, woman as a political subject is the result of some specific positionalities: those of white, Italian, middle-class, middle-aged, educated women. Though I personally find them restrictive, these are nonetheless the definitions I use in the descriptions of my informants’ points of view in this dissertation. In spite of the limits of such definitions of woman, my ethnographic research shows that the Salentine activists, through their aesthetic and ethical practices that I narrate in this dissertation, are moving towards an opening up of the categories of womanhood, in particular in their focus on becoming (see below, especially chapter 8).

The thought of sexual difference is conceived of as a practical philosophy, “a philosophy of those who think through a modification of themselves” (Muraro quoted by Scarparo 2005, 40), a philosophy that is not primarily founded on the “identification and vindication of women’s rights” but rather on the “activation of female subjectivity in order produce socio-symbolic change” (Scarparo 2005, 37). Its object of thought “is not the social condition of women, nor the identity, and much less the essence of women. Its subject is a sexed singularity that considers her/himself the other, and [considers] reality outside the prescribed and prescriptive definitions of sexual identity that the symbolic order transmits to us” (Dominijanni 2005, 27-28). For the activists I met, woman is primarily a sexed person who considers herself as other within a given symbolic order. The latter, which my informants call ‘patriarchy,’ is characterized by phallogocentrism, and is understood to be historically exclusionary of women’s subjectivities. According to the Italian feminists —influenced by Luce Irigaray and by the Psych&Po French feminism (see for example Bono and Kemp 1991,12)—the symbolic dimension of Western society is characterized by phallogocentrism. What are defined as subject, citizen, and human being, and the language used to define them, are each intrinsically masculine. In Carla Lonzi’s words “[t]he feminine problem is the relationship of any woman —deprived as she is of power, of history, of culture, of a role of her own—to any man: his power, his history, his culture, his absolute role” (from Sputiamo su Hegel, in

\[\text{15} \text{ The Italian feminists I met generally do not distinguish between sex and gender.}\]
\[\text{16} \text{‘Patriarchy,’ as I will show in this dissertation, has many aspects and dimensions.}\]
Bono and Kemp 1991, 40). The philosophers of the *Pensiero della Differenza Sessuale*, so influential for the activists with whom I worked, consider sexual difference (taken mostly a-critically to be biologically determined) as being the “stronger and most basic characteristic of humanity” (Muraro 2012, 62). In order to pursue their political activity, it is this practical philosophy of difference, rather than equality, to which Italian feminists adhere. According to them, equality with men should not be the goal of feminism. “The world of equality is the world of legalized oppression and one-dimensionality,” where “[e]quality between the sexes is merely a mask with which woman’s inferiority is disguised” (Lonzi quoted in Bono and Kemp 1991, 41-42). What is meant by woman’s equality “is usually her right to share in the exercise of power within society, once it is accepted that she is possessed of the same abilities as man”; therefore, “existing as a woman does not imply participation in male power, but calls into question the very concept of power. It is in order to avoid this attack that we are now granted inclusion in the form of equality” (41).

The reconfiguration of the symbolic order coincides to a certain extent with the pursuit of difference for philosophers of the thought of sexual difference. Among the latter, I find Braidotti’s re-thinking of sexual difference within a postmodern perspective the most pertinent to describe the political activity of constructing womanhood that I encountered in my fieldwork. Braidotti (2003, 45) writes that:

The quest for a point of exit from phallogocentric definitions of Woman requires a strategy of working-through the images and representations that the (masculine) knowing subject has created of Woman as Other. (…) It amounts to a collective re-possession of the images and representations of Woman such as they have been coded in language, culture, science, knowledge and discourse and consequently internalized in the heart, mind, body and lived experience of women. A feminist who wishes to repossess and re-invest images and representations of Woman is really dealing with fragments and figments of the phallogocentric imaginary. Irigaray argues that this imaginary needs to be reppossessed by women precisely because it is loaded with phallogocentric assumptions that reduce Woman to unrepresentability.
In this more recent inflection of the thought of sexual difference, the subject of feminism “is not Woman as the complementary and specular other of man but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject who has taken her distance from the institution of femininity” (Braidotti 2002,11). It is “a subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the Other, a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis” (12). Braidotti, in her attempt to reconcile Irigaray's thought of sexual difference with poststructuralist philosophies (in particular, with Deleuze: see for example Braidotti 1996, 2002, 2003, and 2005), offers a contemporary, postmodern understanding of Woman. This subject, rooted in sexual difference but open to becoming, and determined to repossess ‘patriarchal’ imaginaries, is the one that I address and narrate in this dissertation.

One of the main examples of this being subjects-in-process lies in my informants' peculiar way of understanding political change. The feminists I met, women who uphold a radical understanding of the relationships between the political and the personal, indeed aim at changing the performances of seeing and sensing around womanhood and gendered violence. Yet they are less concerned with the actual effects of their representations on their publics than with the power of the representations themselves in transforming their own lives from within. The ethical and the aesthetic dimensions of their political activism are therefore more focused on their own becoming than in catering to actual or imagined publics. This element is particularly evident in the difference that exists between the performance of bella figura (see, in particular, Plesset 2006, Nardini 1999, Pipyrou 2014) and what my informants refer to with the expression fare come se (doing as if). While bella figura caters to the expectations of their audience and publics, following clear and shared behaviors and norms, fare come se does not. Performances and practices of fare come se exist in a space of desire, and enact something that it is not there, yet (see chapter 8). Performing as if has consequences both on the subjects who perform and on their publics: through performances of fare come se that are linked to modern feminist womanhood, my informants both discover themselves for what they are not yet (and cannot foresee before the performances take place), and create dissensus.
The Affective Politics of Representation

“As we all know, representations are not innocent, transparent, or true. They do not simply reflect reality: they help constitute it. (...) Each society is itself a complex system of representations. And each society tells stories about itself—about its origin, challenges, and destiny” (Taylor 1997, 21). This is why, for the women I met, the field of representation is paramount in what they call their struggle against ‘patriarchy’—and, in particular, against its violent inflections.

What I refer to as representations\(^\text{17}\) are ascribable to different types of performances and practices,\(^\text{18}\) ubiquitous in the personal and political lives of the women with whom I worked: from attention to the poetics of (modern feminist) womanhood to the choice of particular images for a flyer, from crafting a collective paper for a meeting to performing a flash mob, from creating a political campaign to cultivating their Facebook profiles.\(^\text{19}\) Since the personal is political in a very radical way for the feminists I met in Salento, their representations blur the distinction between special events and ordinary lives. If

---

\(^{17}\) I understand representations in my ethnographic field as “material symbols” (see, for example, Herzfeld 2005a and 2005b) that play with what Herzfeld would call “practical essentialisms”—i.e. the “pragmatic reification of people as representatives of fixed categories” (2005a)—available both locally (see in particular chapter 8), and nationally (see, for example, chapter 6). In this respect I agree with Herzfeld that “social life consists of processes of reification and essentialism as well as challenges to these processes” (2005a). It is within such an understanding of social life that I situate my informants’ discourses and practices and this dissertation. I will try to describe and to understand how the women with whom I worked try to challenge “practical essentialisms” (and to build new ones) by challenging current axiologies (systems of value) around women’s role in society, and I will try to illustrate some of the possible consequences. See also Herzfeld 2004.

\(^{18}\) In this dissertation, I will also refer to practices of performances, i.e. the cluster of activities that connect the everyday life of my informants to the performance of spectacles during special events. This dimension is an important one since, for example, it informs their practices, it contributes to the construction of their subjectivities, and it structures their perception of time (constructed, for example, around the anticipation of a spectacle, and remembered through references to these special events).

\(^{19}\) While words and metaphors around vision are privileged tropes in the lives and discourses of my informants, I do not want to claim the supremacy of vision over other senses, or neglect that their lives—and my ethnographic practice—are multi-sensory experiences. If I stress the visual dimension of representation in this dissertation over other sensorial dimensions it is because this has a conscious and special place in my informants’ lives. In spite of the centrality of representing themselves in front of the others in their personal and political lives, my informants’ sporadic theorizations about this aspect of their practices do not merge in shared narratives on these topics. Representations are certainly a contested field for the women I met, who are aware of this dimension of their political activism, but do not address it in the terms I will present here in this dissertation. I am reading this element and interpreting it, as Geertz (1973a, 452) and Lambek (2014) famously put it, “over the shoulders” of my informants
there is no widespread agreement among Performance Studies scholars on what performances actually are, and, especially, on what they are not (see for example Korom 2013, Palmer and Jankowiak 1996, Kolankiewicz 2008, and Schechner 2003), in this dissertation I will maintain the (weak) theoretical distinction between special events and ordinary life. This choice is motivated by the will to respect the intellectual history of this field of research that, almost unanimously, recognizes Turner (with his works on rituals and theatre; see for example 1969 and 1986) and Goffman (with his attention to ordinary interactions and framing; see for example 1959, 1971, and 1979) as two of the founders of the discipline. I find this choice heuristically useful because it allows me to engage with different types of literature, and to trace connections between authors and works that might offer a contribution to various types of debates — that is to say different scholarly genealogies. In this dissertation, for example, performance studies meet visual anthropology (see, for example, Fleetwood 2011) and textual analyses corroborate sensory approaches. In this respect, having interiorized what Herzfeld has argued for the visual in anthropology — that, far being a specific feature of just a branch of the discipline, issues around visualities are part of the experience of ethnography in general (2011, 314) — I consider representation, in line with its etymology, as an umbrella-term to refer to what is literally placed before something or someone. This choice works

---

20 The English term representation (like its Italian equivalent rappresentazione) derives from the Latin verb repraesentare, where re is an intensifying prefix and praeantare, a word that means, literally, placing before. It comprises both temporal and spatial dimensions, as the English words present (versus past and future; in Italian: presente), and presence (in Italian: presenza) show. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, representation means “something that stands for something else.” It is not a coincidence, then, that the word present (in Italian: presente) is used also as a synonym of gift: it is something that it is given, and implies both a giver and a receiver. Representing, in other words, implies a mediation, a relation between a body or an object and something else (for example, an idea, another person, aspects of oneself) in which the former offer themselves as a function of the latter. The boundaries between the former and the latter are blurred — as the oxymoronic visual grammar I will analyze and discuss in the following chapters shows. Representation, though, is often associated with fiction in both its meanings of creation and falsity: an aspect that is consistent with my informants’ uneasiness around the issue of visibility (see below). On the one hand, representations are felt and considered as loci for the imagination of new possibilities of being women, on the other, they feel the anxiety of being perceived as false and inauthentic. Not surprisingly, some of the Salentine women I met consider the term performance as a sort of insult (see, for example, chapter 4, on the performance of the F9 group in Paestum) if used in relation to their political activities: to them it implies a debasement of their political authority. It is also not a coincidence that Milena, an informant of mine, elaborated a distinction between pretending (fare finta) and doing as if (fare come se; see chapter 8), where the second expression refers to a political praxis, while the former does not. It is worth noting that Webb Keane claims that the nature of representation includes its being both “action and objectification” (1997, xv). Moreover, he interestingly points out that the meaning of representation includes both the aspects of depiction and of delegation (7).
against a hyper-fragmentation of anthropology in its sub-fields, and as a statement in support of the multi-sensorial engagement inherent to ethnographic practice (see, for example, Faeta 2011, Grasseni 2011,29, and Stoller 1997, 1989).

This understanding of representation informs the choice of my ethnographic material for this dissertation as well. In the present work I will assemble different pieces of evidence: from data stemming from observant participation to spectacles, from narratives from interviews to advertisement, from texts to artistic installations. The need to grounding my research on a *collectanea* of different types of evidence is, on the one hand, the result of the attempt to grasp and analyze some of the complexities of the interconnections between different levels of representation that are pivotal to the lives and political practice of my informants. On the other hand, it better translates the status of my anthropological field in Salento. What happens there is also traversed, interconnected, and shaped by what happens on the Internet and through other media. The latter impacts the lives, practices, and thoughts of my informants through the ubiquity of technological devices that accompany them in their everyday lives (see below).

If representations are widely present in my informants’ political activism, and the preparation, practice, and performance of them take much of their (offline and online) time and energies, their success depends, at least partially, on the readings of their — actual or *imagined* — audiences and publics. The latter aspect is something they are not in total control of, and represents a source of anxiety for them (see, for example, Keane 1997, and chapter 9).

In the book *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, Fleetwood considers “how the markings and iteration of blackness are manifested through a deliberate performance of visibility that begs us to consider the constructed nature of visuality” (2011, 20). Her approach to performance, rooted in everyday interactions as well as in special events, stresses its being an embodied practice that, “along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing” (19). Such an approach, Fleetwood continues, calls us to reconsider “the spaces where performance studies and visual studies meet” as particularly productive “for the possibilities that combined they afford to interpretation” (21). In this dissertation I follow her lead in considering that
“[b]oth visual studies and performance studies, while focusing on artistic and cultural production …emphasize the importance of the location of the interpreter or audience to make sense of the meaning of a given cultural event, process, or object.” (21) In my ethnography, audiences, imagined audiences, and practices and performances of audiencing and spectatorship play a key role (see, for example, Rose 2012, Putnam Hughes 2011, and Warner 2002).

While I will consider my informants both as producers and recipients of representations, my primary focus is on production. Therefore, my discussions on spectatorship will be centered on imagined audiences rather than on actual and contextual ones. Besides analyzing my informants’ audiencing behaviors vis-à-vis dominant representations of gendered violence and of various campaigns against it, then, I will consider their construction of imagined audiences. In particular, I will focus on the techniques they put into play in order to challenge, change, and transform the practices and performances of seeing, reading, and sensing feminist womanhood among their imagined or actual audiences or publics (or, following Warner 2002, their efforts to create counter-publics).

One of the claims of this dissertation is that the representations constructed and engaged by (some of) the women activists I met are performative. If the adjective performative immediately brings to mind the influential intellectual heritage of Austin (notably, see in particular Butler 1991, 1997, Tambiah 1985, Herzfeld 2005a, and Rappaport 1999), it is not its relation to illocutionary utterances (see Austin 1962) that I will stress in my analyses of my informants’ productive enterprises. While the parallels between this aspect of language analysis and the performances of the women I worked with is indeed

---

21 A more detailed ethnography on reception of feminist representations could be a further direction in my research, one beyond this dissertation project. In the present work, while I recognize that “the failure of the performative is for Butler precisely the site of the political agency of subjects” (Mills 2003, 268), I do not equate conduct with efficacy. In other words, I do not fall in line with Mill’s critiques (2003, 269-270) of Butler. Instead, on the basis of my ethnographic fieldwork I explicitly recognize a difference between intentions, performances, and their effects.

22 On the relationships between audiences and publics see, for example, Livingstone 2005.

23 Joel Robbins point out that “[a]lthough he does not adopt the terminology of perlocution, Rappaport’s most novel contribution to the performative theory of ritual is to take not only the illocutionary (performative) but also the perlocutionary functions of ritual seriously” (2001, 594).
useful (for example, in their doing things with their representations, and in reading themselves beyond the distinction between truth and falseness, as in their doing as if), it is what Cavell understands in Austin’s work as the perlocutionary quality of passionate utterances that will be the main focus of my considerations. The attention given by the philosopher Cavell (see, for example, Cavell and Goodman 2005, Munday 2009, 2010, and Lambek 2010) to the work of Austin concentrated, among other aspects, on the perlocutionary elements of speech. In his analyses of the latter, passionate utterances and the realm of the everyday play a central role. Cavell notably defines the illocutionary and perlocutionary statements as follows: the former refers to what is done with words, and the latter to what is done by words (see also Butler 1997). Perlocutionary utterances affect interlocutors, and, by virtue of this element (that is negotiated in the interactions, and does not pertain to the structure of language) are bearers of moral dimensions. Cavell’s observations on perlocutionary utterances can be relevant to illuminate the dynamics of what I call the oxymoronic representations of my informants, and this is why I propose to extend these linguistic categories to the realm of representations.24 I claim that just as passionate utterances influence the interlocutor, the same applies to the particular representations that I call oxymoronic, and that I will address below. The effectiveness of these perlocutionary devices, I will show, is consistent with Cavell’s analyses, context-dependent, and negotiated with the spectators.25

The women from Salento I met, by virtue of their status as witnesses aim to alter commonsensical performances of seeing and feeling in relation to sexed violence and to

---

24 The extension of linguistic categories to the realm of the visual, in this case, resonates well with the latter’s attention, for example, to practices of audiencing. Notably, Butler (1997) addresses the role of perlocutionary utterances in the politics of the performative, especially in relation to the analysis of the linguistic dimensions—in particular of hate speech. Here, I will extend the perlocutionary elements to the broader, extra-linguistic realm of representations, and consider it in relation to affects and as a political strategy understood by their protagonists as resistance.

25 On the general claim that performances affect both actors and audiences see, for example, Kratz 1994.
the status of women in the Italian society and to do so *also* through these oxymoronic (or contrastive) representations.  

The attention to the connections between doing (and studying) politics, my informants’ sensorial engagements, and the representational dimensions they construct is an important element of this dissertation. I hope this ethnography will contribute to the debates in political anthropology in analyzing the domain of representations as a privileged battleground for political activism *within a Rancièrian perspective* —i.e. with particular attention to the aesthetic (both sensory and artistic), ethical, and affective dimensions of these struggles (on sensible politics see McLagan and McKee eds. 2012). I do not use the war metaphor casually in this context: the women I worked with think about themselves, quite literally, as she-warriors, and about art as an arsenal of weapons.

In talking about neo-nationalism in Europe, Ulf Hannerz (2006, 278) claims that:

> [w]hat anthropologists can do with this kind of politics is to deal not least with its communicative forms, its spectacles—spontaneous but very often also staged—and with audience response to them. Political anthropology here becomes an anthropology of the senses, an anthropology of emotion, an anthropology of the body, at the same time as it may retain many of the concerns and skills it has already cultivated. Not least does it have to be a media anthropology.

Rancière is among the scholars interested in the connections and tensions between the political and the emotional, between power relations and sensory/aesthetic experiences.  

Rancière (2004b, 10) suggests that:

---

26 One caveat: in spite of my frequent use of the word aim, I do not want to claim that my informants’ attitudes are the result of conscious political plans and strategies. The women I worked with indeed perceive and reflect over certain issues (such as wanting to be, and to represent themselves as, witnesses and not victims), but their isolated reflections do not result in any specific and detailed theory of action. My use of terms such as aim and want, then, needs to be read within a holistic approach: in doing so, I am trying to locate one’s will beyond a distinction between mind and body.

Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows (or does not allow) some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking.

This partition of the sensible that might also be referred to as regimes of perceptions (Panagia 2009, 7), is what is generally called common sense. The aim of politics, as well as of art, is a reconfiguration of the sensible. By sensible Rancière understands both what makes sense and what can be sensed (Panagia 2009, 3). Following a definition of aesthetics that encompasses both the original and the current meanings, Rancière develops a philosophy that puts the aesthetic and sensory experiences at the center of political action. In particular, his understanding of democracy lies in the phenomenon of dissensus (in Latin, sensing differently). Dissensus is the moment in which the experiences “of those who have no part”—those who are not recognized by the dominant, and are not included in the political “distribution of the sensible”—are inscribed in society (Rancière 1999, 123). In other words, dissensus (which includes both cognitive and affective dimensions) is intrinsically political in as much it challenges common sense by broadening the sensorium at a given time and space.

In a 2009 book, Panagia explored the possibility of putting the philosophy of Rancière in conversation with the recent philosophical investigations on affects. The affective turn (see, for example, Thrift 2004, 2008) has recently given new vitality to the field of the

---

28 While I was writing this dissertation, I found that Christopher Dole had used a Rancièrian approach in his book Healing Secular Life (2012). Inspired by the French philosopher, he argued that "Turkey’s project of secularism works to shape the horizons of the sensible, in terms of both what is available to perception and what is deemed possible in a given set of conditions." In other words, he claimed "secularism not simply as a political doctrine regarding the relationship between religion and political authority, but as a social force concerned with the organization of sensibilities, sentiment, and possibilities" (8). While I share with him the belief in the usefulness of framing politics within a Rancièrian perspective in anthropology, my reading of the French philosopher is reinforced by Panagia’s work on affects. Moreover, my ethnographic material concentrates in particular on dynamics of resistance to patriarchy: while I do not deny that the latter carries out a reconfiguration of the sensible according to its agenda, I nonetheless aim to show how the feminists I met take the sensory field as the battlefield for their struggle against these hegemonic constraints.
study of the sensory. Following the lead of Deleuze and Guattari, who developed their theories within a Spinozian approach to the study of the body, emotions, and cognition, some scholars started using the term affect in order to challenge sociological and anthropological interpretations that stressed dualism, linearity, and directionality over a more rhizomatic approach to the study of society (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

In an often-quoted article, Brian Massumi distinguishes between affect and emotion. He defines the former as intensity (2002, 7) and the latter as “qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning” (2007, 88). Following Mazzarella, I believe that affect should not be considered “so much a radical site of otherness to be policed or preserved but rather a necessary moment of any institutional practice with aspirations to public efficacy” (2009, 298). In fact, “[a]ny social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective”—that is, it has to speak both of Massumi’s languages concurrently: intensity as well as qualification, mimetic resonance as well as propositional plausibility (299). This position is consistent with that of Panagia, who believes that “political life is

---


30 One of the central challenges for research posed by this Spinozian perspective of the affects, then, resides in the fact that the affects straddle these two divides: between the mind and body, and between actions and passions. The affects pose a problematic correspondence across each of the divides: between the mind's power to think and the body's power to act, and between the power to act and the power to be affected” (Clough and Halley 2007, xi).

It is worth noting that good ethnographers have been acknowledging the role of affects for a long time—though without putting them at the center of their attention. Victor Turner, for example, in his Forest of Symbols, while addressing the polarization of meanings of ritual symbols, acknowledges the existence of both an ideological and a sensory pole of meaning (which, of course, differently from the current scholars of affects, remains the principal dimension of his analyses). “At the sensory pole are concentrated those significata that may be expected to arouse desires and feelings... The sensory, emotional significata tend to be “gross”...taking no account of detail or the precise qualities of emotion” (1967, 28. My emphasis).

31 Mazzarella’s understanding of affect differs from Massumi’s: according to the former, a “radical binarization of conceptual mediation and affective immediacy is not only analytically untenable but also a contingent feature of Modern European philosophy” (2009, 294). In other words, Mazzarella argues in favor of an acknowledgement in (political) anthropology of a rhizomatic articulation of the different dimensions at play in the emotional lives of persons and groups that takes into consideration the pre-discursive—and not pre-social—aspects of emotions (Mazzarella 2009).
fundamentally a perceptual enterprise” (2009, 5). It is precisely his use of the Affect Theory that is more relevant for my research.

In his book Panagia examines the “ways in which sensation interrupts common sense” (2009, 2). By sensation he means something very close to the notion of affect (see below), that is to say “the heterology of impulses that register on our bodies without determining a body's nature or residing in any one organ of perception...an experience of unrepresentability in that a sensation occurs without having to rely on a recognizable shape, outline, or identity to determine its value” (2).

The story of the legitimization of the word femminicidio, of the world that it depicts, and of the political struggle around representations of women that I have witnessed, I claim, fits well within such an approach. The same can be said about the ways the women I met aim at contrasting the commonsensical understandings of their status and roles vis-à-vis hegemonic ‘patriarchal’ discourses that define who women are or should be in contemporary Italy. Giving ethnographic substance to the interesting intuitions of Panagia, these exemplify the role of dissensus —as a complement to dis-agreement— in political action, understood precisely as a reconfiguration of the sensible.

Between the ethical and the aesthetic: a dialogue with the Anthropology of Ethics

Since 2011, the emergence of an incommensurable (Povinelli 2006, Dave 2011) brought forward by the introduction of the word femminicidio and the world vision it conveys, has created a new women’s question in Italy. The re-negotiation of (some) feminist positions within such a framework is currently defined by the attempt to disrupt the commonsensical perception of what violence against women is and of who are the perpetrators, the witnesses, and the victims of that violence. This happens often in contrast with the dominant interpretations that tend to naturalize the relationship between women and victims. In other words, the discursive and affective construction of femminicidio provided a new understanding of the world —i.e. creating what I call an imagined community of (potentially) violated women, who re-interpret (see Lambek 2014) their lives within a continuum of violence of which femminicidio is its extreme
manifestation. The women with whom I worked see potentialities and possible faults in this new framework. In order to challenge the latter, they engage representational struggles by organizing disagreement and by generating and promoting dissensus — i.e. through the reconfiguration of representations of women conceived not as victims but as witnesses, and of practices and performances of seeing and sensing, in Rancièrian terms. This dimension is particularly relevant in both the lives and the political practices of the Salentine feminist women I met. My informants consider pivotal to their being feminist women what Rancière might call the reconfiguration of the sensible: a project that they pursue mainly through the representational struggle that I have presented above. This involves not only artistic objects, and the language and the images used to portray women, but also particular poetics of (modern and feminist) womanhood, inspired by performances and practices of dignity. The latter, in their relationships as witnesses, work as multivalent symbols in this framework: dignity is not, merely, something given to every single person for the fact of being human. Dignity, especially in its emotional implications (see, for a comparison Mahmood 2001a on fear and 2001b on ishtiya/shyness) is something that also needs to be cultivated, performed, and, eventually, acknowledged by others. It is something that happens in between the sensory and the aesthetic, the personal and the social. In Salento, women adopt dignity in a way that resonates with certain dimensions of the local traditional notion of honor as a measure of social worth, and, at the same time, as a reference point of a wider discourse on human rights. In my ethnographic field it is a way, I claim, to practice and perform modern feminist womanhood.

In a context where the personal and the political are so tightly connected, the latter is of particular importance. Artistic performances, the cultivation of doing as if, and of

---

32 While in this dissertation I choose to present and describe in their own terms the activism of the Italian feminists with whom I worked, the discourses and practices around victims and victimization resonate with some of the issues that, especially since the 1990s, characterize the North American feminist debates. The choice of not presenting the Italian situation explicitly in dialogue with the North American one is motivated by the need to avoid the possibility of understanding the former (more recent) within a narrative set by the developments of the latter. On the feminist debates around victims and victimization see, for example, Stringer 2014, Wolf 1993, Roiphe 1993, Lamb 1991, Van Dijk 1999, hooks 1986, Sommers 1994, McLear 1998, Cole 1999, Faulkne and MacDonald 2009, and Kapur 2002.
dignity, become privileged locales of the (bodily) imagination of new subjectivities for my informants (see, for example, Braidotti 2002, 2003, 2005).

Some of the women activists I met embody quite straightforwardly the connections between aesthetic practices, ethical labor, art (understood as something that offers weapons to fight patriarchy), and political activism. They attempt to create new publics able to acknowledge them, and to change the performances and practices of seeing and sensing of their audiences. I suggest that these elements offer interesting insights in relation not only to the aesthetic implications of their political activism, but also to the ethical dimensions, in a way that resonates with the contemporary debates in the Anthropology of Ethics. For some of the women I worked with, the political activity of the reconfiguration of the sensible has not just aesthetic but also ethical implications. My informants’ peculiar ways of linking aesthetic work (and labor) and the construction of (new) subjectivities in their political activism can be read in relation to recent works of anthropologists who are interested in the ethical realm (see, for example, Mahmood 2005, Lambek ed., 2010, and Dave 2011, 2012). In particular, I am referring to anthropologists who adopt an Aristotelian perspective. Within this trend, the work of Foucault on ascesis informs some. Following the lead of the French philosopher, who, in his late work defines ethics as a work of art (see also Faubion 2001), Halperin, for example, proposes to that queer identities in Foucault’s work epitomize the human condition in general. Following this argument, what Foucault writes in relation to homosexuals could be valid for everybody: “it’s up to us to advance into a homosexual ascesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent (I don’t say discover) a manner of being

---

33 It is worth noting that, if creating new audiences can trigger new performances of seeing and sensing in the public, it can also be the other way round. Kapchan (2008) and Munoz (2000), for example, seem to offer examples of the reverse dynamics: in the first case, audiences are constructed on the basis of a shared literacy of listening, and in the second, according to certain ways of feeling (a community of affect). See also McLagan 2012.

34 In this case as well I am reluctant to isolate the Anthropology of Ethics as a sub-discipline of anthropology since I believe that the ethical is embedded in practice and cannot possibly be analyzed independently.

35 On the different approaches to the anthropological study of ethics see, for example, Lambek 2010, Faubion 2011, and Zigon 2008.


37 Lambek claims that the Foucauldian auto-poiësis could be combined with Arendt’s understanding of action through the adoption of Nehamas’s understanding of ethics as the “art of living” (2010, 16).
that is still improbable” (Foucault in Rabinow ed.1997, 137). Ascessis—understood both as a poiesis and practice— is a political, ethical and aesthetic enterprise. In my ethnographic field, it is embedded in my informants’ poetics of modern feminist womanhood, which are enacted through artistic engagements, performances of practices of dignity, and the cultivation of doing as if. In other words, ascesis takes the contours of engaging with representations of (modern) feminist womanhood, and of portraying women as witnesses, rather than as victims, vis-à-vis common (dominant) understandings of the relationships between women and gendered violence. By doing so, my informants set their political activism within the realm of becoming, rather than in that of being (see also, for example, Dave 2011, 2014, and Lambek 2014). In other words, they build their ethical/aesthetic/political enterprises around the representations of the women they want to be rather than of the women they actually are.

The ethical dimension of performing (modern) feminist womanhood permeates the everyday lives of the women I met. We see this, for example, in their attempts to represent themselves as degne (worthy, dignified) in their specific local communities, or as worthy within feminist circles. Their performance of feminist womanhood changes according to their (imagined or actual) publics, and it is informed by what I see as a missionary intent. As a part of the representational struggle discussed above, many of my informants explicitly aim to show other women new possibilities of being in contemporary Italy, outside ‘patriarchal’ constraints, and to possibly convince them to do

---

38 Halperin’s comments on Foucault’s words are consistent with how some of my informants think about representation—an approach epitomized, in particular, by those who gravitate around the experience of S/oggett/E (see chapter 7): “[h]ence, to cultivate oneself…is not to explore or experience some given self, conceived as a determinate private realm, a space of personal interiority, but instead to use one’s relation to oneself as a potential resource with which to construct new modalities of subjective agency and new styles of personal life that may enable one to resist or even to escape one’s social and psychological determinations” (Halperin 1995,76).

39 Interestingly, according to some of the anthropologists that choose an Aristotelian approach for the study of ethics, the creative potential of ascesis stems from its being at the same time poiesis and praxis. Michael Lambek, in particular, stressed the connections between ethics and practice by referring to an Aristotelian distinction of the forms of human activity (poiesis, praxis, and theoria) emended through the work of Arendt (1998[1958]). Within the realm of poiesis (making), the latter distinguishes work from labor. The former refers to the production of finished products, the latter to that of continuous life-reproducing activities (Lambek 2010). The consequences of this intellectual move are paramount: as Lambek points out: “[t]he Arendtian category of labor both undermines any clear distinction between production and action (aesthetics and ethics) and locates itself firmly in the sphere of the ordinary” (15).
the same. In this respect, they seem to parallel the features of renovated humanity — by presenting themselves as out-and-out exempla\textsuperscript{40} — that emerge as significant elements in conversion narratives in the anthropological literature on Christianity (see also chapter 4, and chapter 8).\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, significantly, by focusing on the women they want to become rather than on the women they actually are, the activists with whom I worked are deeply teleological: they set their political action in the realm of what is not yet or, as I will suggest in the Conclusion, in an alternative time.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

In **chapter 2**, “Choosing Salento as an ethnographic field: an “India from here”,” I present my ethnographic field and the fieldwork I conducted. I argue that contemporary Salento is both a “niche and an arena” for anthropological research. Salento is a **hyper-place** (see, for example, Palumbo 2003, 2006) relevant for contemporary anthropology, not just for its historical role within the intellectual history of the field. Its particular status is indissolubly linked to meta-reflections on the role of the discipline itself and provides an interesting example of the imbrication of the anthropologists and of their scholarly productions in their ethnographic fields.

In **chapter 3**, “The Gendered Violence of Representation: Stories of Ordinary Sexism in Italy,” I provide some contextual, yet essential, information on the general climate around the emergence of gendered violence and femminicidio (and their creations) in Italy. I found it unavoidable to offer a depiction of the Italian socio-political panorama of the years of berlusconismo— that is to say the dominant ideology that characterized the best part of the 20 years in which Italy had as a Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi— and to present some data on gendered violence in Italy. The chapter unfolds around some examples of ordinary representations of women, and I will show how and why these are

\textsuperscript{40} With the term *exempla*, plural of *exemplum*, I refer explicitly to a literary genre that was popular in the Middle Ages especially in relation to the lives of saints, and that was used in sermons and predication with a moralizing intent. It offered examples of behavior that the audience was expected to emulate. The reference to the Christian religious tradition is not accidental.

\textsuperscript{41} I do not consider this dissertation as the place in which to examine these possible connections in depth. Yet they might represent an interesting extension of my current research.
perceived as violent by the feminist visualities I have been “schooled” in (see for example Grasseni 2007, 2011).

In chapter 4, “Women Before (Women): On Feminist Genealogies And The Need To Be Seen,” I describe the context of my analyses, re-tracing, starting from my ethnographic experience in different Italian feminist settings, some aspects of the history of Italian feminisms and of UDI in particular. I argue that the issues around visibility, acknowledgement, recognition, and representation are central for these activists, who frame their political activism within the thought of sexual difference.

In chapter 5, “The Creation(s) Of Gendered Violence And Femminicidio,” I focus on the emergence of gendered violence and ‘femicide’ as matters of social concern in Italy, and on their generative dimensions. In particular, I analyze the role of the Staffetta delle Donne Contro la Violenza sulle Donne of UDI in this process. I argue that the Staffetta catalyzed and generated dissensus, by promoting and acting a reconfiguration of the sensible in Ranciérian terms: a reconfiguration of both what makes sense and of what can be sensed (Panagia 2009,3) around the topics of femminicidio and violence against women in Italy. It did so by introducing a new word (femminicidio) and, with it, a new world that offered a novel narrative on sexed violence.

In chapter 6, “‘Whoever Kills A Woman, Kills Me, Too’: An Imagined Community of Violated Women,” I focus on the development of a new women’s question in Italy around the issues of gendered violence and ‘femicide’ I explain how, as a result of the emergence of the word femminicidio and of the world visions that it conveyed, the cluster of available discourses and affects around violence started to re-shape both how women think about themselves and their being political subjects. This process, I claim, produced the appearance, on the Italian social and political scenes, of what I have called an imagined community of (potentially) violated women. In this context, femminicidio represents a tragic (yet epitomizing) extreme of a continuum of violence that helps to re-describe and reformulate other more symbolic and structural types of violence, and women’s reactions to them. As a result of these processes, Italian women returned into the squares, and started to choose the domain of representation as an important dimension
of their political activism. The dominant representations and self-representations of women in Italy today revolve around the connections between women and victims, vis-à-vis gendered violence: the linguistic and visual grammars of victimhood are ubiquitously used in the media and in campaigns against gendered violence, and, as I will show in this chapter, are often naturalized.

In chapter 7, “Being Witnesses, Not Victims: On The Affective Politics of Representation,” I elaborate on the distinctions (peculiar to my ethnographic field) between being victims and/or witnesses. By doing so through some ethnographic examples, I show the importance of the visual and linguistic dimensions of representation as a political battlefield for the Italian feminist women with whom I have worked. By engaging with representations, some of my informants aim to imagine new possibilities of being women in contrast with the ‘patriarchal’ understandings of women-as-victims. In their intentions, and vis-à-vis their imagined publics, these representations intend to trigger what I have called, following Cavell’s interpretations of Austin, perlocutionary effects. In other words, they want to change the practices and performances of vision, of sensing, and of interpreting women’s roles and possibilities in contemporary Italian society. The renovated subjectivities enacted by these representations —sometimes oxymoronic, and constructed around ambiguity— aim to widen the sensorium and commonsensical perceptions, in Rancièrean terms, in relation to women. The ethical and the aesthetic dimensions are intermingled, and offer examples of practices of dissensus.

In chapter 8, “The Politics Of Ascesis: Constructions Of Modern Feminist Womanhood In Salento. Between Ethics And Aesthetics,” I focus on a particular aspect of the performances and practices of (modern) feminist womanhood that I encountered: their being centered not only on the women they are, but on those they want to become. To that end, I offer an interpretation of the struggle of/for representation as a locus where the aesthetic and the ethical intermingle. By analyzing ethnographic examples that stem from the ordinary life of my Salentine informants, I show how the representational struggle is contingent, and varies considerably depending on women’s actual or imagined publics. In other words, it takes different manifestations in relation to local, online, and general (imagined) audiences, but also in reference to one’s own gaze. In this sense, the
representational struggle my informants engage is a sensuous enterprise, one that puts imagination — understood with Andriolo (2006) as “embodied minding”— at the center of their political praxis. Practicing and performing modern feminist womanhood is inflected in different ways. I will address three aspects: artistic representations, doing as if, and performances and practices of dignity. They are perlocutionary enterprises: becoming witnesses, in this sense, represents a moral and aesthetic imperative (see Carla, chapter 7), aimed at promoting dissensus through the endorsement of different performances of seeing and sensing in their (imagined or actual) publics (including themselves). As regards being a witness, dignity works as a multivalent symbol in this framework: people adopt it in a way that resonates with certain dimensions of the traditional notion of honor, as a measure of social worth, and, at the same time, as a reference point in the wider discourse on human rights. Both these aspects are put at the service of performances of modern feminist womanhood.

In chapter 9, Conclusions, “A Precariousness of Gazes: Italian Feminists And The Fears Of Invisibility,” I will start from an ethnographic episode linked to (the absence of) tarantismo in my ethnographic experience with the feminists with whom I worked. This particular aspect of my fieldwork, I claim, is relevant in order to present some of the ambivalences that characterize the Salentine activists’ political practice, and to depict possible further directions of my research.

Unless otherwise stated, all the translations from Italian are mine.

With the exception of public figures, all the names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms. When I use the present tense in describing my informants’ practices, beliefs, and behaviors I do not mean to use it as an ethnographic present. Instead, this choice rests on the fact that, during and after the writing of this dissertation, these behaviors, beliefs, and practices continue to be part of my informants’ lives.
Chapter 2
Choosing Salento as an Ethnographic Field: an “India From Here”

In this chapter I present the ethnographic field of this dissertation both historically and geographically.\(^\text{42}\) I argue that Salento is a hyper-place, and therefore important to study from an anthropological point of view. I mention the role of Salento in the history of Italian anthropology in particular, showing why it makes for an interesting place to study gendered violence and women’s political activism. Salento today represents a peculiar mix of making/doing tradition and modernity, where high rates of violence against women and of structural gendered violence coexist with a specific reformist political culture. Gendered violence, especially in its structural elements, is perceived as linked to peculiar understandings of tradition by the feminists I worked with, who likewise participate in its construction. By engaging with the work of Italian anthropologists, I consider the role of tradition in contemporary Salento as constructed locally in relation to the anthropological literature on the area, as well as in reference to the reformist political agenda of my informants. More specifically in relation to my research, similarly to what it has been argued for the anthropological literature on tarantismo, I consider the role of generalist anthropological literature on the so-called Mediterranean (variously criticized in anthropology) in particular around the honor and shame complex, and its role in

---

\(^{42}\) Salento is, historically, a multicultural area: inhabited by Messapi, a pre-Roman population, it was conquered by the Romans. Later, and for centuries, it operated as a central junction in the relationships between Byzantium and the Orient. It was conquered by the Normans, by the Svevis, and by France and Spain before being included in the territory of Italy after its unification in 1861. This land, for centuries referred to as Terra d’Otranto (Land of Otranto, a town in the province of Lecce), is fairly close to the Balkans. The Apulian people gained visibility in the international media during the 1990s for their geographical —and affective— proximity to these troubled areas of the world. On the occasion of the first migrations of mostly illegal immigrants from Albania reaching the Italian shores, in search of a better life (such as the one they could watch on Italian TV shows), the people of Apulia were unexpectedly able to face this humanitarian emergency. Because Italy and Europe, to a certain extent, were unprepared at that time in particular for these immigration waves (see for example King and Mai 2004, Zinn 1996, King 2008), the people of Apulia and its territorial administrators took charge of the emergency and mobilized local networks in order to provide shelter and first-aid to the thousands of migrants who kept reaching their shores. These collective efforts clashed with the harsh formal responses of the Italian government and touched the hearts of millions of (not just Italian) TV viewers, in particular on the occasion of the arrival of the ship Vlora with its 15,000 passengers at the port of Bari in August 1991.
shaping social expectations on womanhood in contemporary Salento. The construction of what is traditional in terms of gendered performances and poetics is an unavoidable reference point in the political activism of the women with whom I worked. This context is the one in which the feminist activists I met live and forge their political activism through practices and performances of modern feminist womanhood that aim at challenging commonsensical notions and expectations on women. Moreover, they represent core elements of the representational struggle I describe in this dissertation. These performances are constructed postitionally and contextually, sometimes in relation to and sometimes against the features I present in this chapter.

Fig. 3. Salento

The Fieldwork

I arrived in Salento for the first time on September, 1st 2011, and started to follow the women of UDI Macare Salento in my first week of fieldwork, during the Scuola della Differenza. The latter, a weeklong conference on Italian feminisms organized by the Università del Salento, connected me to different Italian feminist groups.

Macare, in the local dialect, is one word for witches—of the town of Soleto, in particular, that is known as the town of the macare in Salento. This reputation depends on the legend that narrates that the impressive bell-tower of Soleto was constructed in one night
by an army of demons and witches, orchestrated by the alchemist Matteo Tafuri.\(^{43}\)

Macare, though, are not just symbolic presences in Salento. During my stay, I found out that many persons refer to macare, and that these are generally understood as some type of curandera or as persons who have remedies for lu ’nfàscinu, a local version of the evil-eye. Although people do not speak about macare easily, I met an old woman in the Grecìa Salentina (Martano) who was referred to as “a woman who practices ‘the art’” (i.e. magic). I witnessed her performing a specific ritual with water, oil, and salt in order to release a friend from ’nfàscinu. Being able to witness such a ritual today is a privilege, since the few traditional macare still alive seem to choose to be protected by secrecy and not to advertise their activities.\(^{44}\)

In such a context, it is not a coincidence that the feminist activists I met chose to call themselves macare. They did so in order to signal a precise desire to be represented and perceived as disruptive of societal values and order, as (marginal) examples of different ways of being women, and, at the same time, as bearers of particular arts and qualities. Traditional macare/witches are, similarly to the macare/feminists, queer subjects: this being different women, pursued also through the arts and well rooted in the history of their territory, is at the center of the political lives of the activists with whom I worked.

\(^{43}\) That of Matteo Tafuri, an Apulian well-known alchemist who lived between the XV and the XVI centuries, is a story of medicine and Inquisition. Well known beyond Apulia, he studied in Paris and Spain before returning to his birth town, Soleto, and living the last years of his life facing accusations of magic and sorcery. It is worth noting that in my current inquiries on macare in Salento I found out that many persons refer to different elements or aspects of magic when they speak of macare — whose popular depiction differs from the one of the well-known legend of the witches of Benevento (a town in Campania, depicted by a legend as the locus of huge gatherings of demon-lovers witches). The presence of different understandings of the status and the roles of macare is supported also by the (unpublished) interviews gathered by a local intellectual, Francesco Manni, who kindly shared his material with me.

\(^{44}\) I intend to continue this research on macaria (the Salentine term for the art of the macare). I know of at least another two women who are referred to as macare, and I am planning to try to meet them during my next stay in Salento. Moreover, I also found out that some people in Salento are currently referring to a neo-macaria, and that they organize celebrations and lectures. Interestingly, this neo-macaria seems associated, at least from my outsider’s point of view, to peculiar understandings of pizzica and of (neo)tarantismo. I participated in a celebration of the summer solstice in June 2014 in a field close to the Madonna della Serra, an old church located between Ruffano and Supersano. The ritual included the presence of a circle of women, of a fire, and of some tamburreddhi (typical Salentine tambourines). It was conducted by a middle-aged woman who defines herself as “having been a tarantata” I know that at least another four public (although not very advertised) celebrations of the solstice were organized, on that occasion, in Salento.
The *macare* have been very generous with me since my first arrival in Salento, and have been extremely important in my research. When I started my fieldwork, fifteen women, more or less, were actively part of that group. Their age ranged from 20 to 60 years old, and they were all white, educated, middle-class women. Some of them worked or studied, some did not. Among those who worked, only a minority had a full-time job. Most of the *macare, at that time, struggled with precariousness, no differently than many other women (and men) in Italy. Some of them were interested in heterosexual relations, others in homosexual ones. Some were oriented to both. Nobody, though, used or recognized herself in the term lesbian. With a few exceptions the same also applies to other *UDI* women with whom I have worked. According to most of them, sexual orientation is not a political dimension of their activism. In spite of the fact that there are, in Italy, politically active groups of lesbian-feminists and of queer activists, terms such as queer, lesbian, heterosexual, and bisexual are largely missing from the vocabulary of my informants — both personally and politically.

However, eroticism — understood freely and independent of identity, sexual orientation, normative practices, and objects — is part of their political agenda. Following Carla Lonzi’s distinction between clitoral women and vaginal women (1974), autoerotism, more than sexual relations, is a key political practice and a matter of political speculation for the activists with whom I worked. Moreover, I was able to witness frequent reflections on the erotic dimensions of women’s relations, understood as a wide experiential field. The latter comprise — but are not reduced to or defined primarily by — sexual intercourse. This is evident, for example, in my informants’ theorizations of *erotico diffuso* (diffused eroticism) as a dimension of women’s relations (independent of sexual orientations). As the collective *Femministe Nove* (see below) puts it: “We consider eroticism something broader than sexual intercourse. The eroticisms of our bodies want to flow in freedom. Let’s open the space and the imagination to an expanded eroticism, that touches all the places that our body touches.” This eroticism does not depend on fixed binarisms, and it is defined as “expanded sexuality.”  

45 https://femministenove.wordpress.com/manifestofemministenove/
The *macare* represent the core of my ethnographic research in this dissertation, which, nonetheless, gathers data from other sources as well. These include other ethnographic contexts, and other materials found on the Internet or on other media. The latter materials contribute in shaping the everyday context in which the Salentine activists act and to which they react. Their everyday experiences are indissolubly interconnected with the local and national representations of women that I will consider in this dissertation. What happens in Paestum, Rome, on the Web, and in other media, for example, is indissolubly connected and constitutive of the lives of the Salentine activists I have followed.

I did participant observation by joining the *macare* in their everyday activities. At the time, this included the start-up of a feminist bookstore in Lecce (*Evaluna Lecce*). There, between books, cigarettes, and coffees, I got to know and appreciate them. They taught me a substantial part of what I know about Italian feminisms, their jargon, and their practices. They allowed me to see them, and schooled me, patiently, in their visualities and perceptions: something for which I am deeply honored and grateful. All of them shared with me narratives about their lives and their past, which I reciprocated; some of them also shared with me many hours and energies, allowing me to collect their life histories.

Following the *macare* I arrived in an historical Italian feminist group (see below) called *UDI* (Union of the Women in Italy) at an important moment of its history: before their XV Congress. This represented a turning point for the association. I followed the *macare* from the last moments of the pre-congress period through the Congress, on the occasion of the *autoconvocazioni* (self-convocations) of *UDI*, and during the mourning period following the congress. During those weeks I met other *UDI* women from other parts of Italy, who expanded my horizons in terms of Italian feminisms and feminist practices. In the aftermath of the XV Congress, Pina Nuzzo (a woman from Salento, a reference point for my informants, and the former national delegate of *UDI*) was not re-elected, and first created the group *Udichesiamo*, and then *Laboratorio Donnae* (see chapter 4), that I started following. The *macare* joined her in her transition from being a national delegate of *UDI* to engaging political activism outside the association in which she had served for decades —and I did, as well. I attended their meetings in person, when possible, and I followed their work at a distance, through the activities of their blogs and of their
Facebook pages. Mostly, though, I kept in contact with some of my informants on a regular basis, especially through Skype, emails, Whatsapp messages, and Facebook. I joined the *macare* in their trips to Bologna and Rome: travelling, living, and sharing time and space with them. These precious moments included an eight-hour trip in a small car with five other women (one of us travelled in the trunk with the luggage), sleeping on the floor of tiny rooms with them (with way too few pillows and mattresses), and ‘borrowing’ a cart from a store for the feminist cause. Mostly, they involved memorable moments of women’s sociality: in front of the Ionian or the Adriatic seas with wine and *frise*, or just accomplishing everyday chores.  

As often happens to anthropologists, the small group of people I started following in September 2011 rapidly grew by including acquaintances, friends, and families, as well as the acquaintances, friends, and families of families, friends and acquaintances, in what is usually called a snowball reaction. During my stay in the Salento area of Italy (more than twelve months in total, at different periods) I was able to connect with many persons: some men but mostly, women. Some of them were engaged formally in women’s politics, thought of themselves as feminists, and belonged to different women’s groups working in the area, or outside Salento. Some of them did not take the term feminist to be an identity marker for themselves, but they instead worked or volunteered in structures such as women’s shelters (I did some participant observation in two of them in the province of Lecce), or in associations with the aim of promoting the well-being of women (both in Apulia and in other regions of Italy). Some other women did not think of themselves as feminists at all (feminism being a term they hardly knew) and were not involved in any type of women’s politics or association. I was able to conduct (open-ended) interviews and photo elicited interviews, both offline and online, with many women. I also had the chance to live in an informant’s house with her husband, two daughters, mother, father, brother, two dogs, two chickens, and a rooster for more than three months. The magnitude of their generosity is only rivaled by the amount of insight on the everyday life in Salento that I received from that experience.

---

46 *Frisa* is a bread typical of Salento.
47 The feminists I worked with strongly believe in *separatismo*, i.e. they not only do not want to involve men in their political activism, they do not even want to share space with men.
From September 2011 to March 2012, in July, August, and November 2013, and, again, for other ten weeks in 2014, I did participant observation in person in Salento. For the rest of the time, I constantly kept in touch with my informants in various Internet-based ways: from Facebook to Skype, from email to blogs. My exchanges with some of them were very intense in the periods I spent in North America: I heard from some of them daily, I talked with others weekly or monthly. This allowed me to cultivate my connections with some of my informants (who also became my friends), to remain up to date on what was happening in Salento and in their lives, and to discuss with them their positionings vis-à-vis the changing Italian cultural climate, especially in reference to violence against women and femminicidio. As I will explain below, I had the chance to witness the gradual legitimation of the emergency of femminicidio within the Italian public opinion: from being an unknown word and phenomenon to making it to the front pages of newspapers.

Along with the Salento-based online and offline fieldwork, I have daily monitored what is happening online within Italian feminist circles. By following my informants from Salento, I got in contact with other feminists in other parts of Italy, and I started cultivating those connections mainly through Facebook. The Internet space is a very important dimension of contemporary feminist political activism in Italy, and an important field for my research. While I tended not to intervene directly on Facebook, for example by openly commenting on the posts, statuses, and images uploaded by the feminists I worked with online (see, for example, chapter 8), I realized I could not avoid participating to some extent in their online activities; if my ethnography was to be successful, I had to be trusted. I accepted every tag (even the ones I did not agree with), and used the like feature as a way to communicate my support for their cause. Occasionally, I shared some links or posts (mostly, as a way to give audience to their initiatives). I also used, thoughtfully and contextually, at times, Facebook’s privacy settings in order to put a distance between their online activities and my other Facebook friends.

Given the situation that I have described, the multiple fields, and the disparity of practices, it will be evident that applying (or not) the adjective feminist in order to describe the experiences of the individual women I met became theoretically challenging.
On the one hand, adopting a too strict definition of feminist woman would erase from the picture other, more nuanced, experiences. On the other hand, dismissing the possibility of using this adjective at all would be disrespectful of the context of my research. In order to overcome these problems, I decided to distinguish between feminist women and women (in general) in my dissertation: with the former I mean those who problematize the representations and roles of women in their society, and who want to challenge and change the current status quo — according to their own personal paths, idiosyncrasies, and reference points. This definition of feminism is quite loose, and certainly would not find the approval of my more radical informants. Being feminist does not imply belonging either to the left or to the right, it is neither an exclusive feature of members of feminist associations, nor a characteristic that could be applied solely to intellectuals or educated women. Is it worth noting that many of the persons involved in what I will consider as feminist activism may be indifferent to the use (or lack thereof) of this word for describing their political engagement. While applying such a loose definition of being feminist might be theoretically weak, I nonetheless believe that it is heuristically useful in order to include the complexity of experiences linked to the emergence of a new women’s question in Italy in my analyses. The latter, that I followed at a distance, started to appear on the Italian scene in the early months of 2011.

By contrast, the term ‘women’ signifies two different elements in my dissertation. If used contrastively, it refers to individuals who are not feminists, i.e. it indicates women who do not problematize their status in Italian society. They might do so, but for them this does not translate into the attempt to challenge and change the ‘patriarchal’ system. Normally, they prefer to try to find their own compromises with the situations they are facing, occasionally expressing a certain uneasiness with being associated with feminism. When the term women is used alone, instead, following the emic representation of my informants, informed by the thought of sexual difference (see above), it refers to female subjects.
Salento and Gendered Violence

Salento today represents a peculiar mix of high rates of gendered violence and a reformist political culture. This helps characterize the Peninsula Salentina as a geographical region with a vibrant social climate, one particularly favorable to my research.

According to the Eures Institute, in 2013 Apulia ranked third among the Italian regions in relation to the numbers of ‘femicides’ (fifteen deaths), with a 50% increase in comparison to the data of 2012 (ten deaths). Moreover, the same source indicates that Bari, the administrative center of Apulia, is also third in the 2013 ranking of the most violent Italian cities, especially against women (eight cases of ‘femicide’ in 2013, two in 2012). Additionally, if femminicidio represents the extreme manifestation of gendered violence, other more structural types of violence against women can be found in Apulia in significant numbers, meaning at rates above the national average. In November 2013, for example, the Region Apulia published a document called *Recenti Dinamiche del Lavoro Femminile in Puglia* (Recent Dynamics of Women’s Employment in Apulia). By combining various data, especially from Istat (The Italian National Statistic Institute) and Eures institutes, this report showed how, despite some achievements, women’s employment rates were significantly lower than the national average in 2012 (34.7% vs 41.3%), and significantly lower than men’s rates. This data is relevant especially if read together with the rates of women’s unemployment (18.7% vs the national average of 11.9%), and of women’s inactivity in Apulia, i.e. of women who do not work nor look for employment (61.7%, compared to the national women’s average of 46.5% and vs the rate of men’s inactivity in Apulia of 31%). Furthermore, according the blog femminismo rivoluzionario (22 April 2014): “A recent analysis by Ipres shows that the situation of...

---

48 http://www.eures.it/il-femminicidio-in-italia-nellultimo-decennio/
49 Ufficio Statistico della Regione Puglia, Focus Novembre 2013. Recent dinamiche del mercato del lavoro femminile in Puglia.
50 http://femminismorivoluzionario.blogspot.it/2014/04/in-puglia-aumentano-le-dimissioni-per.html
employed women worsened, and [that] Apulia is a trailblazer in the South, in this regard. The maternity resignations doubled between 2009 and 2013 (666 vs 1098).”

The official data on sexual harassment and gendered violence that does not result in ‘femicides’ is still difficult to gather, in Apulia as elsewhere in Italy. Nonetheless, in 2008 Istat highlighted slightly higher rates of episodes of domestic violence reported by Apulian respondents (3.1%, based on data from 2006) in comparison to the national average. The Istat document explains this data by stating that “the differences are quite small, but [they] might indicate a relatively new and wider willingness of women from the South to perceive [specific behaviors] as violent and to report the violence they undergo in domestic settings” (2008, 26). This latter point was influential in my choice of Salento as a fieldwork site for my research, a choice further strengthened by the peculiar Apulian contemporary socio-political environment, and by Salento’s historical past in relation to women’s activism.

In spite of the political past of Apulia—oriented towards center (Democrazia Cristiana) and right-wing governments—Nichi Vendola, a far-left politician, was elected as the Governor of Apulia in 2005. He was later re-elected for a second mandate in 2010. The presence of a far-left politician at the head of a region with more than four million residents is of particular relevance, especially if read vis-à-vis the Italian political situation of the last two decades. In a country that, overall, has been politically influenced by Silvio Berlusconi’s politics (see for example chapter 3, as well as Ginsborg 2003, Tuccari and Bongiovanni 2004, Molé 2013, and Herzfeld 2008) and by the center-right parties for the last twenty years, the fact that Puglia elected a far-left politician as its Governor twice in a row speaks to its uniqueness. Besides having been Apulia’s Governor for 10 years (until 2015), Nichi Vendola was the President of the far-left party Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (Left, Ecology, and Freedom, referred to henceforth as SEL). He defines himself as being Catholic and Communist: something that challenges the

51 The Ipres, i.e. the Apulian Institute of Economic and Social Research, publishes data on Apulia on the website http://www.ipres.it.
52 http://www3.istat.it/dati/catalogo/20091012_00/Inf_08_07_violenza_contro_donne_2006.pdf
more recent conservative developments of Italian Catholicisms. He was very active in the party Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refounding RC) until 2009, and started to represent, among Italian public opinion, with either positive or negative connotations, the anti-Berlusconi. This is partially the result of a certain tendency of the Italian Left of defining itself, somehow unsuccessfully, in distinction to the former Italian Prime Minister and his entourage, and partially the result of Vendola’s life choices. In a country where newspapers and TV programs indulge in detailed descriptions of the macho skills of Berlusconi, where the Catholic heritage and the presence of the Vatican is so influential in everyday life, and in a political environment where obtaining a legal abortion seems almost impossible, being a public man who loves men represents a nonconformist political stance.

Right from the beginning of the first mandate, Vendola’s policies gave priority to dealing with gendered violence and women’s politics with, for example, a “Program Against Violence” and a “Plan for Social Policies,” allocating financial resources on projects that emphasize the fight against gendered violence as a political objective. The efforts of both Vendola’s administrations, in relation to gendered violence and ‘femicide,’ resulted in the


55 Although abortion is legal in Italy (Law 194), it is widely acknowledged that the current Italian bureaucratic apparatus that should guarantee this legal right to women is often able to dissuade women from interrupting their pregnancies. Besides the fact that the overwhelming majority of physicians employed in public hospitals are objectors and do not perform abortions, in certain regions just one hospital in six is able to provide the possibility of meeting a physician who is not an objector. See, for example, http://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/2013/10/14/news/io-e-il-mio-aborto-impossibile-1.137446, http://www.galileonet.it/articles/4fdaf0d272b7ab4370000003, http://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/13_settembre_4/aborto-medici-obiettori-coscienza-ospedali-legge-2222898889738.shtml.

56 Italy does not legally recognize same-sex unions. Moreover, in addition to widespread sexism, Italy shows high levels of homophobia. See, for example, http://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2014/07/28/news/omofobia-la-mappa-dell-odio-in-europa-e-l-italia-e-il-paese-che-discrimina-di-piu-1.174696. In spite of the presence of a LGBT film festival in Lecce, of a very active branch of the association Agedo (“Association of parents and friends of homosexuals”), and of various active LGBT groups, Salento and Apulia still cannot be defined as queer-friendly areas. See, for example, http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2008/11/28/la-puglia-ancora-tropp-omofobica.html; http://associazionelea.org; http://agedolecce.blogspot.it
2014 enactment of an innovative regional law (#29, Norme per la prevenzione e il contrasto della violenza di genere, il sostegno alle vittime, la promozione della libertà e dell'autodeterminazione delle donne). In addition to this important achievement, the Apulian territory witnessed the emergence of different local initiatives in support of women, also as a result of the passionate and restless activity of Apulia’s Consigliera di Parità (Counsellor of Equality), Serenella Molendini. If the commitment of the Vendola administration to women’s causes was excellent in comparison to other national and regional initiatives, it is worth remembering that women’s activism is historically well established in Apulia. In spite of widespread sexism and gendered violence, the feminist movement has been present and active in this region since the 1950s. Moreover, Salento is well known for its tabacchine (women tobacco workers) who unionized at the beginning of the twentieth century and fought important battles for their working rights. Notably, Salentine people tend to cite the 1935 revolt of Tricase, which occurred under Mussolini’s rule: the women protestors, who were demonstrating against the decision to close the tobacco factory where they

58 http://www.pariopportunita.regione.puglia.it/contro-la-violenza-sulle-donne-e-minorihttp://www.pariopportunita.regione.puglia.it/chi-siamo. For example, in 2014 the Apulian region decided to bring a civil action in the criminal proceedings in a case of ‘femicide.’ and to create a Regional watchdog against violence against women. See, for example, http://www.spaziosociale.it/articolo.asp?id_art=1921; http://www.regione.puglia.it/web/packages/progetti/pugliasociale/daphne/4_Report_TP.pdf http://www.consparitapuglia.it/newsite/consigliera. “The Regional Counsellor of Equality is nominated, with a decree of the Minister of Work and Social Policies, together with the Minister of Equal Opportunities, after a designation by the Region…[and] needs to have specific competences and long-standing experience in: women’s employment, equality, equal opportunities, and job market policies” While the Consigliere are present in every Italian region, not all of them take their mandate with the same zeal as Serenella Molendini.

59 UD, first of all, was present in the region. More recently, though, Apulia in general, and Salento in particular, witnessed the establishment of a Women’s House and various other feminist and queer-feminist groups.

60 See, for example, Trono and Pesare 2013, Santoro and Torsello ed. 2002, Santoro ed. 2010. See also http://www.rassegna.it/articoli/2013/05/6/99995/e-morta-cristina-conchiglia-guido-le-lotte-delle-tabacchine; http://www.inmondadori.it/Tabacco-tabacchine-memoria-na/eai978888176368/ Salento’s economy was linked for centuries and until fairly recently to agriculture and to the presence of latifundia: large landed estates owned by a landlord, often worked by a large quantity of (often underpaid) peasants. Traces of this economic history can still be found in the local language and social structure. It is not uncommon to meet people who refer to the parcel of land they own and cultivate—mostly as a leisure activity—as fundu (a term in the Salentino dialect clearly linked to the term latifondo). The cultivation and handling of tobacco, in particular, played an important economic and political role in this area until last century; as Santoro and Torsello point out, in fact, “an endemic class conflict between the rich owners …and the masses of peasants and female workers (operaie tabacchine) also developed around the tobacco economy” (2005, 28. On the cultivation of tobacco in Salento see also Barletta 1994).
were employed were shot by the police. The revolt ended with several injured people, and five deaths. This latter event plays a considerable role in the collective memory of the Salentine I met, and especially of feminists, who tend to define themselves and their “presence in the world” (see, for example, de Martino 1976[1961])—that is, their belonging in a geographical history—in reference to examples of proto-feminism in which the tabacchine have a special role.

Another reference point worth mentioning in this proto-feminist Salentine genealogy is that of the witches: macare in the local dialect.62 As I explained above, it is not without significance that the feminist activists of UDI with whom I worked decided to call themselves Macare. Besides gesturing to the queerness of their being feminist women in the Salentine context, this choice signals a link with a particular local genealogy that is able to reinforce their sense of presence in the world (see for example De Martino 1981[1948], and e.g. Pandolfi 1990, Saunders 1995).

In sum, as my focus on gendered violence and women’s activism showed, Salento today is a “concentric joint of times and spaces” (Pizza 2015, 179-180), a “place of places”, an “unstable social and political space that produces and reproduces further spaces of aggregation and contrasts” (Palumbo 2006, 46). Echoing Palumbo’s words, Salento today is an iperluogo.

**Salento as an Iperluogo (Hyper-Place)**

28/29 June, 2014. Galatina, Salento (Italy). Festival of St. Peter and St. Paul. Two women with long, loose hair, dressed in white gowns, re-enact the arrival of the tarantate

62 I found that Salento has at least three dialectal terms to refer to witches: macare, sciare, and masciare. They are all local variations, and I do not know if they express a difference in referents. Back in 2011 when I asked the feminist group UDI-macare what the difference was between macare and sciare, they told me that sciare were good witches and macare naughty ones. While the ethical distinction between the two was and still is— not clear to me (yet), I understood it was meant to mark a difference in the use of the imaginary of the witches between the feminists of UDI-macare and another (ideologically and politically different) group of feminist women who founded a community of women for women in a mansion in Salento close to Otranto called Le Sciare. http://www.alvearelesciare.org http://27esimaora.corriere.it/articolo/dal-salento-al-naviglio-arrivano-le-sciare-un-posto-per-donne-dove-inventare-chiacchierare/ For folk-theories on macare, see also Codacci-Pisanelli 2009.
for their yearly appointment with ‘the Saint’ at the chapel of St. Paul. While local musicians play tunes of the traditional pizzica tarantata, these women (and one man) interpret the dance of liberation that some Salentine women, for centuries and up until the 1990s, had performed in order to be healed from a malaise believed to be connected to the bite of tarantula spiders. All of this, organized in collaboration with UNESCO, happens in front of crowds of tourists and locals who, in attempts to record the event with cameras and smartphones, try to find their way through the stands of souvenirs that pack the main square of Galatina.63

One of my feminist friends and I had spent the previous night at the roving stand of a tambourine maker, helping him sell CDs of pizzica pizzica and his hand-made tamburreddhi to local musicians and tourists. The night started with a concert of local musicians and groups who played reinterpretations of the traditional pizzica pizzica music, and ended at 6 am with spontaneous ronde (circles) of dance.

Fig. 4. A client testing a tamburreddhu at the stand of the Salentine tambourine maker with whom I worked.

63 http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwyR3JTkTos
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1kZ_uRcuAM
The festival of St. Peter and St. Paul in Galatina is one of the most important attractions of contemporary Salento, for tourists and locals alike. It is also an “anthropological tourism” destination (Apolito 2007, 13-14) that has developed in this area in the past fifteen years, in particular after the establishment of the yearly event called Notte della Taranta (Night of the Tarantula Spider. See for example Lüdtke 2011, Pizza 2015, and below). As Apolito points out, making explicit reference to Salento and tarantismo, famously studied by de Martino in his La terra del Rimorso (1961. See also Pizza 2015), with this “anthropological tourism” Salento welcomes mostly young students who took anthropology courses at their home universities. They gather in local musical and social events variously connected with local traditions, and their presence, linked to a “symbolic market,” “is not limited to passive fruition” but generates “forms of participation that sometimes trigger debates, tensions, contestations, refashioning, instabilities, movements” (Apolito 2007, 13).

Pizzica is the soundscape (Schafer 1980, Tacchi 2002, Samuels et al. 2010. See also Pizza 2015,192-193) of contemporary Salento, and its ubiquity is also involved in processes of “making/doing local” as well as of “being local” (Apolito 2007) that happen in dialogue with different actors: local, national, and global (see also Pizza 2015). As
Apolito claims, “talking/making local today is almost always a dialogical practice oriented to the global… the work of definition of traditions is not just local (…) The agents are multiplied, and not all of them belong in a linear and direct way to the community that reconstructs its past to the advantage of its present” (2007, 15).

Making/doing local, in Salento as elsewhere, today, is also imbricated in processes of patrimonializzazione (patrimonialization), which have cultural, social, and economic implications. Patrimonialization, in contemporary Italy, is not just linked to material objects but, following UNESCO’s definition of intangible cultural heritage, is extended to immaterial objects such as local gastronomic traditions and, in this case, tarantismo and pizzica music. For this reason Italian anthropologists read some local phenomena as examples of merci-patrimonializzazione (a neologism that merges the words commercialization and patrimonialization), that is to say, “the construction of local cultural specificities in terms of patrimonial goods” (Palumbo quoted in Pizza 2015, 106 n.6). An important example of this, in the Salentine context, is the Notte della Taranta. Melpignano, one of the municipalities of the Grecìa salentina, is known today for hosting the musical event known as “The Night of the Tarantula Spider” every August since 1999 (see for example Lüdtke 2011, Blackstone 2009, Pizza 1999, 2004, 2015). Broadcast both on TV and on the Web, this event is preceded by smaller ones organized throughout

---

64 On patrimonializzazione see, for example, Palumbo 2003, 2009, Pizza 2015, Apolito 2007, Badii 2012.
66 http://www.lanottedellataranta.it
During the final concert of the Notte della Taranta, local musicians perform variations of the traditional pizzica music, often featuring national and international guests. At the turn of the twenty-first centuries, though, tarantismo—which was beginning to be understood locally as either a fiction or as a synonym for cultural backwardness—was reframed and re-constructed in a new socio-economical and temporal perspective (Lüdtke 2011, 17): when the old tarantismo eclipsed, new tarantismi thus emerged (39, see also Nacci 2001, 2004, Pizza 1999, 2004, 2015). These phenomena revolve around the ancestral origins of the pizzica, the “musical DNA of the Salentinians” (Lüdtke 2011, 33), around a fairly recent development of Salento as a preferred tourist destination, and around local re-framings of both the phenomenon of tarantismo and of its anthropological and historical analyses. The latter are key elements of these contemporary processes of “making/doing local” (and often

67 The Griko dialect is taught in schools, today, in the Union of the Municipalities of the Grecia Salentina (Unione dei comuni della Grecia Salentina), a consortium founded in 2000 as a result of Legislative Decree 267/2000. The Unione comprises the municipalities of Calimera, Castrignano dei Greci, Corigliano d’Otranto, Martano, Martignano, Melpignano, Soleto, Sternatia, and Zollino, and was established after the recognition of Griko as a “historical minority language” (Law 482/1999) by the Italian state. In spite of the cultural policies of valorization of this neo-Greek dialect, supported also by Regional Law 5/2012 entitled “Norms for the promotion and tutelage of minority languages in Apulia”, the younger generations do not seem to be mastering this language. Griko is not used in everyday conversations, and often people's proficiency does extend so far as to include a thorough understanding of the traditional stornelli and liturgical songs (see Costa 2011, Bosio and Longhini 2007). On more than one occasion, for example, I asked some of my informants from the area to help me understand the words of popular traditional songs such as Kali Nifta, without success. On Griko in Southern Italy, especially in Calabria, see e.g. Pipyrou 2012, 2014b.

While standard Italian is the official language of Salento and the use of Griko is not widespread, the local dialect (Salentino) is ubiquitous among older and younger generations, both in urban and rural settings, regardless of the social status and class of the speaker. As a Northern Italian born at the border with Switzerland, I found that the use of regional dialect was much more prominent in Salento than in the area where I come from. In the province of Varese, a city of Lombardy 50 km north of Milan, the dialect (a local version of Western Lombardy’s, and therefore different from Salento’s) coexists with standard Italian, but is mostly used by elders, and in non-urban areas. In Salento, by contrast, the situation is quite different. As a newcomer to Salento in 2011, though, everybody addressed me in standard Italian. Gradually, over the years, especially during my stays in Soleto, the Salentino dialect became dominant in our conversations, especially during informal interactions with my informants. When addressed in dialect, I still tend to reply in a version of standard Italian interspersed with some dialectal forms/words, and syntax.

In addition to standard Italian, the Salentino dialect, and Griko, a fourth language is also spoken in the Salento area. The latter is linked to the non-migratory Roma community that is thought to have lived in some areas of Salento since the 1700s. This language, in my experience, is currently spoken more than Griko, especially among elders. Unlike the neo-Greek dialect, though, it is not considered a “historical minority language,” neither by the Italian state nor by the Region of Apulia. This latter element might be read together with some of the discriminatory attitudes, widespread in Italy at a popular level, against Roma communities (See for example Sigona 2005, Marinaro 2003. On issues about immigration in general in Italy, see for example Angel-Ajani 2000, Ambrosini 2013, Barberis and Boccagni 2014).
making/doing traditional), in contemporary Salento and, to a certain extent, they can have a role in the merci-patrimonializzazione of pizzica and tarantismo. As Pizza points out, in fact, “Tarantismo today is a wide field of actions, representations and practices, conveyed first of all by anthropological rhetorics, both academic and local, by scientific and political and cultural debates that weave together an analysis of tarantismo objectified as an historical phenomenon, and by incorporating a lived tarantismo as an identity trait, as an ‘origin’” (Pizza 2015, 197). In other words, now as well as in the past, tarantismo is a “rhetoric field” (Pizza 2015, 82), and Salento is indissolubly linked with its being a ‘place’ in Western anthropological and intellectual histories: “an India from here” (Pizza 2015, 201-202, 214). As Pizza notes, Salento is more than a ‘place of memory’ of (especially) Italian ethnographic tradition, and it represents “more than a historical site of production of exoticism internal to Italy, las Indias de por acà of the missionaries”.

Following de Martino’s legacy, by following Salento’s cultural, economic, and political production as an exotic place within the West, it gives to ethnographers the “possibility of doing anthropology at home” (2015, 190).68

In this contemporary rhetorical field, the anthropological classics work as a “graft of contemporary practices on the log of historical tarantismo” that operates inside an “actual ‘local academy’ that includes an intellectuality made of artists, scholars, journalists, professors of the local University” (Pizza 2015, 75). As Pizza points out, in such a context, maybe more than elsewhere, the anthropologist actively participates in the local construction of the field (2015, 179). The ethnographer’s engagement, in fact, is not “just emotional or dialogic”, but it is:

[a] total implication in the network of forces and powers that weaves him to the variously positioned subject on the scene and pushes him to question the discourse and practices of his own [academic] discipline….Reading the local dynamics without taking into account this

68 “These reflections can allow us to look at tarantismo today, as well as its historical form, as a classic place of Western thought that identifies itself with the political, ideological, and moral will of constructing exoticisms within the West” (Pizza 2015, 179).
concentric joint of times and spaces would be a mistake, maybe a forgivable one for what pertains to the past (Pizza 2015, 179-180).

It may be forgivable for what pertains to the past, but not to the present. According to the Italian anthropologist, in fact, opposing tradition and modernity is an untenable enterprise today, since our world is “overfilled with mediations and mediators between the local, the national, and the global” (180).

The “concentric joint of time and spaces” that characterizes contemporary Salento, I argue, allows for its conception as a “hyper-place.” The latter is a notion developed by the Italian anthropologist Berardino Palumbo over the last twenty years. Following his elaborations on this concept, a hyper-place can be described as a “narrative place” (Palumbo, 45), a “social space hyper-narrated by centuries of multiple, both internal and external, writings” that, in line with different narrative genres, tend “to signal different and recurrent topoi,” such as its origins, political rifts, religious disputes, artistic beauties, historiographies, and its “particular genius loci” (45-46). A hyper-place signals “the composite, articulated, stratified character of a social space”: it is a “place of places” (46), an “unstable social and political space that produces and reproduces further spaces of aggregation and contrasts” (46). It is a space continuously created and narrated, that generates “the continuous hyper-production of levels, internal lines of solidarity/conflict and external levels, now also transnational and reciprocally encapsulated, of further aggregation/division.” The hyper-place is a “total space of senses (social, political, emotional)” (46), where “history-memory is incorporated in gestures and actions governed by metaleptic poetics that subvert spatial and temporal linearity. A space that lives and constructs itself within a regime of historicity that differs from the presentism that lies under the historiographic and statist notion of ‘place of memory’” (Palumbo 2006, 47). It is a place, in other words, where objects and signs of the past, together with poetics, practices, and techniques of the body, are continuously manipulated and reinterpreted in an “endless production of sense” (Badii 2012, 9). In this Salentine hyper-place bodies are subjects/objects —(s)oggetti. They are places where dynamics of the past and of the present are inscribed, reinvented, and put into action in different directions, at
a local and a global level. Together with artistic and cultural objects, through for example *pizzica* and *tarantismo*, they become *patrimonio*. Bearers of intangible heritage, they are at the same time “niche and arena” — where the local, national, and the global interfuse. As Palumbo points out, in fact, “an anthropological study of *patrimonio* leads one inevitably to ask questions on the existing close relationships between the construction of cultural objects and that of subjects, and collective identities—and on the broader discursive orders (phenomenological, affective, symbolic, political and economical) within which similar relationships take shape” (2003, 22-23).

Salento is therefore an anthropological place, relevant for contemporary anthropology not just for its historical role within the intellectual history of the field. Its particular status — its being both “niche and arena” — is indissolubly linked to meta-reflections on the role of the discipline itself and of anthropologists. In fact, what contemporary studies on Salento show is the power and durable effects of processes of exoticization internal to the West— both the result of the actions of locals and anthropologists —and of the unavoidable implications of the ethnographer in the social environment she studies (see Schneider 1998).

**The Making/Doing of Traditional Values: Honor and Shame Revisited**

Anthropological concepts have a complex social life in local contexts: here [in Salento] they contribute, sometimes in a decisive way, to the activation of cultural practices, facilitating their incorporation and naturalization to the point of making them able to interact independently with the same discourses that generated them, to the point of representing

---

69 *Patrimonio* is to be understood as a “transcultural ‘ideascape’ and a cultural and political terrain that defines itself as a new field of negotiation and global dialogue, similarly to what happens for rights.”


71 Pietro Clemente

themselves as their opponents. Therefore, for the same fact that anthropology had an historical central role in the production of objects and cultural differences, it happens that the book, the article, the conference, the documentaries, and the CDs produced by anthropologists and ethnomusicologists, are read, judged, and debated not only by the academic community, but also by part of the communities that live in the different sites involved by the ethnographic enquiries, both those conducted over the last century and, even the more so, the contemporary ones (Pizza 2015, 181).

This point is also stressed by Apolito (2007, 15), who also emphasizes how:

Contexts are made of social practices, and the latter today involve a broad reach of social actors. If the image of the classical popular traditions depict unaware ‘bearers.’ with whom the scholar possibly dialogued from the ‘outside,’ the field that concerns them today is way more complex and multi-stranded. First of all, because the actors are numerous, second, because they are self-aware. Subjects, and not objects, of gazes (…) [t]oday, the folkloric (demologico) field comprises active bearers of traditions who can manipulate them consciously, protect or exploit them, transform or crystallize them.

If this can be claimed for tarantismo, I argue that a similar analysis could apply to other aspects of making/doing locality and tradition in contemporary Salento. In particular, as it emerges from my ethnography, an analogous point on the manipulation, exploitation, and crystallization of tradition through anthropological literature could be made for what pertains to the so-called honor and shame complex in so-called Mediterranean societies.

If it is possible to talk about honor and shame in Salento today, I agree with Herzfeld (1980) that this needs to be done by addressing and describing the local specificity of these notions and of the practices associated with these terms. Today, though, differently from the 1980s when Herzfeld’s criticisms were formulated, these local understandings and practices are not to be considered as ‘remains’ of the past, but, maybe paradoxically, precisely as products of local readings and popularization of the much criticized (by
Herzfeld and others) Mediterraneist anthropology. Similarly to what Pizza claims on the local reception of de Martino and the development of tarantismi (2015), I argue that the social life of anthropological writings also had an important role in the making of the local and of tradition in relation to the honor and shame complex. Ethnographically I noticed that the local contemporary adoptions of the notions of honor and shame can be considered as dependent on a local reception of the popularization of works on the Mediterranean societies, belonging to which is often understood as an identity marker.  

In other words, the majority of the people I met share a fictional idea of traditional Salentini values constructed around self-stereotyping notions and practices of honor and shame. The latter are not defined in detail and are, to my understanding, influenced by a generally accepted, loose, and uncritical understanding of versions of onore and vergogna as inflicted in the generalist Mediterraneist literature. The people I met often talk about shame and, mostly, about dignity and orgoglio (pride), but the word honor is not used, in general, if not in reference to an unspecified past (that of tradition). In fact, I encountered it used in reference to something located in the present on just one occasion, and indirectly. I was told by a relative of the Soleto family which hosts me during my stays in Salento, that zia ‘Nnetta, who was 90 years old two years ago, had not spoken for more than a month to her unmarried grand-daughter who got pregnant. Since her pregnancy was “un disonore” (a dishonor) for the family, the young mother-to-be was told by the old Catholic lady “’mbarcalu ‘stu piccinnu” (in dialect, “get rid of this baby”).

It is my claim that, in spite of the distance that my interlocutors tend to put between this fictional ‘traditional past’ and the ‘modern present,’ elements of what they refer to as traditional sets of values, aesthetics, and social expectations are still present in the ordinary lives of the Salentini today. They coexist with other options that are available and acceptable, at least to certain extents (the degree of which my feminist women constantly challenge). Obviously, their uses are positional and contextual. This

---

72 This reception of the Mediterranean as an identity marker is widespread in contemporary Salento. See also Ben-Yehoyada 2011, Herzfeld 2005b. On Meridianism see Pizza 2015, 200-210.

73 This episode is particularly interesting if read together with the issues around conscientious objection and abortion, and the debates around the status of fetuses in the pro-life movement that I will mention in my thesis.
coexistence is particularly evident in relation to women and weeping, for example, something that I address in my dissertation on more than one occasion.

My uses of honor (in relation to dignity) and of shame in describing the practices of feminist womanhood that I encountered in Salento need to be understood within such a complex understanding of this complex—the reality of which is less important (though nonetheless factual in my ethnographic experience; see Herzfeld 1998) than the effects it has in the lives of the persons I describe.

This is a necessary condition in order for feminists specifically and women more generally to be able to pursue their political goals, and for generating dissenus by affecting their publics’ performances of seeing and sensing in relation to women in contemporary Italy. Paradoxically, then, by subsuming traditional behaviors and attitudes associated with men, they want both to be recognized as socially worthy —through an aesthetics of honor— and to offer an example of modern feminist womanhood.

In this chapter I described my ethnographic field, Salento, I presented the informants I worked with, and the methodologies I used in order to gather information. I argued that Salento is a hyper-place, and therefore important to study from an anthropological point of view. By describing its peculiarities in terms of the construction of tradition and modernity, and by depicting its role in the history of anthropological thought, I showed why it makes for an interesting place to study gendered violence and women’s political activism today.
Chapter 3
The Gendered Violence of Representation: Stories of Ordinary Sexism in Italy

In this chapter I will present the current (2014) data on gendered violence in Italy as a contested field—one around which political belongings, ideological interpretations, and specific visualities and feelings conflict. If for some feminists such as those of the group *Se Non Ora Quando* (see below, and chapter 4) finding the right side in these debates is a fairly easy task, for most of the women with whom I worked, the simplistic ways in which ‘femicide’ and gendered violence in Italy are framed within these debates can in themselves be considered to be forms of gendered violence: specifically, of representational violence against women. In order to better explain the latter, I will move my argument from a few, particularly illustrative, examples of the ordinariness of representational violence against women. I will start by describing an ordinary political performance by Silvio Berlusconi—an example of the affective sexualisation of publics that is part of a certain Italian political rhetoric. I will continue by narrating the events and reactions around the former Prime Minister’s more recent sexual scandal, and I will end by offering a feminist reading of the recent Anti-Femicide Law, and of an installation against violence against women promoted by the energy company *Enel* in 2013. In addition to providing important contextual information necessary to understand some of the key events and the social climate from which this dissertation unfolds, these examples will offer some insights on its main topic: how (and, possibly, why) the struggle against gendered violence and ‘femicide’ in Italy primarily takes the form of a representational struggle—and of a struggle of and over different visualities—for the women with whom I worked. It is primarily against this representational violence, endorsed by both non-feminist and feminist exponents, that their political activism unfolds. Their battle of (and for) representation includes practices and performances of modern feminist womanhood and of (every-day) dignity. It aims to challenge this ordinary but particular type violence, and to change the performances and practices of seeing and sensing women (differently) among their (imagined or actual) publics.
Italian Berlusconism(s): Two Stories of Ordinary Political Sexism in Italy

1. It’s Saturday evening. I am at home in Massachusetts. I open my Facebook account and I go through the Italian news. There is a link to the Il Fatto Quotidiano webpage. I click on it. The title of the article is: “Berlusconi and the secretary: “Do you come? How many times? Can you turn around?”

I read through the article, and I open the YouTube video linked to it. It had been uploaded with the title “Berlusconi grandioso con la sua ironia a Mirano” (Berlusconi was grand with his irony in Mirano). I start watching. The video was shot in Mirano (Italy) on February 9th, 2013, two weeks before the national elections, when Silvio Berlusconi ran as the leader of the right-wing coalition.

In the video, former Prime Minister Berlusconi, in the middle of his electoral campaign, is attending a convention of Green Power, an Italian enterprise that works with alternative sources of energy. On the stage there are Angela Bruno —a woman who works for Green Power as a salesperson (and not as a secretary as the misleading title suggested), the three main shareholders of the enterprise (men), and Silvio Berlusconi. The room is crowded. A sketch is taking place on the stage: Angela Bruno is pretending to sell Berlusconi a contract with Green Power. Berlusconi stands at the center of the stage, leaning on the lectern with one arm, and touching the woman’s arm with the other hand. He is standing sideways, looking both at the woman and at the audience: the room is crowded. Angela has a pen in her right hand. She wears a very short teal dress, with a low-cut neckline, covered by a long-sleeved knee-long blue cardigan sweater, open in the front.

---

74 The Daily Fact is an Italian newspaper, the first and only one financed without the use of public funds.
Silvio Berlusconi: Then, I think I understood this: you’ve ‘come’.

(Allora, mi sembra di aver capito questo: ’Lei viene.’)

Angela Bruno: I come. For free, we pl... hahaha

(Io vengo a costo zero, Le mont.... hahah )

Angela giggles, the audience is clapping and laughing. There is a five-second pause. The person who shot the video pans over the audience. A blond woman with a pearl necklace is laughing loudly, and so are the persons around her. Berlusconi is laughing as well; the three shareholders on the stage at first do not realize what is happening, and then they start smiling.

Angela Bruno continues: For free, we’ll place two systems for you...(she giggles and adjusts her cardigan in order to cover her left breast).

(Le mon...haha a costo zero Le montiamo due impianti...)

The audience is laughing and clapping.

Berlusconi: Sorry, if I may say so, I did not quite understand. You ‘come’?

(Scusi, mi consenta, ma non ho capito molto bene. Lei viene?)

The audience continues to laugh loudly, and will do so until the end of the sketch. Berlusconi keeps having or looking for physical contact with the arm of the woman during the entire recording. He flirts both with the woman and with the audience during

76 During the sketch, Berlusconi addresses Angela Bruno with the Lei (formal) form. All the verbs are conjugated in the formal form.
77 At the time of writing, the YouTube video originally linked to the Il Fatto Quotidiano webpage has been erased. The transcription of the performance was done by analyzing this video: http://www.melty.it/silvio-berlusconi-ma-lei-viene-ennesimo-siparietto-a-sfondo-sessuale-a109055.html, shot and posted by another web-user. Since this second video, in the meantime, has been removed as well, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMIz8NJc_A&feature=youtu.behttp://www.dailymotion.com/video/xxtira_berlusconi-lei-viene-a-angelo-bruno-di-green-power_news.
78 It could also be understood as “I will place,” that later becomes a “we will place.” It is interesting to note that, as Berlusconi became more insistent with his intrusive personal questions, Angela started answering with a first person plural, meaning “we, the company Green Power.”
his performance. The woman giggles, maybe embarrassed, adjusts her cardigan sweater again over her left breast and looks at Berlusconi, at the audience, and at the three shareholders in turn. She moves her hands nervously.

Angela Bruno: Ha ha.

(Hahha)

Berlusconi: You come!

(Lei viene!)

Angela Bruno: Ha ha yes! (looking at the audience)

(Hahha sì)

Berlusconi: But, excuse me, just once?

(Ma, scusi, una volta sola?)

Angela Bruno: No.

The woman turns towards the three shareholders of the company for which she works. The men are laughing. She turns towards Berlusconi, again, and adds: There are two systems! [to be installed]

(Sono due gli impianti!)

The audience keeps laughing, Berlusconi laughs as well.

Berlusconi: How many times do you come?

(Quante volte viene?)

Angela Bruno: We can place two systems plus some LED. Each time (one of the shareholders in the back prompts Angela this time) a visit. We can also place an electrical bicycle …we can...

(Possiamo mettere due impianti più i LED...Più visita per ogni volta, possiamo anche
mettere la bicicletta elettrica...possiamo...

Berlusconi (interrupting the woman): How many times, then?

(Quante volte, quindi?)

Angela Bruno: “Three, four, five...it depends on the needs...hahaha”

(Tre, quattro, cinque... dipende dalle esigenze hahaha)

Berlusconi: How much time apart?

(Con che distanza temporale?)

Berlusconi, in a much lower voice: One visit from the other?

(...una visita dall' altra?)

Angela Bruno: It depends on our technicians.

(Dipende dai nostri tecnici).

Berlusconi: All right, I think that overall this is a good offer.

(Va bene, mi sembra che sia tutto sommato un'offerta conveniente).

Angela Bruno: Great! We like that!

(Ottime! Ci piace!)

Berlusconi: Do you want to turn around once again?

(Si vuole girare ancora un'altra volta?)

Angela Bruno: That way?

(Di là?)

She points towards her back. Angela Bruno turns around, smiles, and waves hello to someone in that direction. The audience claps.
Berlusconi: Yes, that way.

(Si, di là!)

Berlusconi boldly examines her behind, then turns towards the audience and says, nodding: Yes, it is a good offer!

(Si, è un’offerta conveniente!)

I could not believe my eyes. Did this really happen? Berlusconi! Again!

If the possibility of the occurrence of such a public political spectacle is interesting, the reception of it is particularly so. I followed the reactions to this public exchange between Berlusconi and Bruno: I read the comments of journalists and readers of the main Italian online newspapers, I checked some feminist blogs and the webpages linked on those blogs, I watched the YouTube videos of the event, and I followed the tweets of #quantevolteviene and #AngelaBruno on Twitter.

On the one hand, as expected, Berlusconi’s supporters highlighted the amusing aspect of the former Prime Minister’s humor; on the other hand, especially among the supporters of Berlusconi’s political rivals, the gag was not perceived as an extemporary gag, directed personally to Mrs. Bruno. His behaviors, instead, were widely perceived as directed against women in general, and deemed detrimental to women’s dignity. The exchange that took place on the stage, in front of local and national audiences, was considered as an improper display of power by Berlusconi, based on sexist assumptions about the roles and representations of women. If such an interpretation of the event is plausible (although not univocal) what surprised me the most, though, was that, among critics of Berlusconi — among those who expressed concern or were irritated by the former Prime Minister’s

80 http://georgiamada.wordpress.com/2013/02/19/angela-bruno-e-litalia-fabbrichetta-di-famiglia-di-berlusconi/
81 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=No7OYwoluy
attitude— many did not come to the defense of Angela Bruno.\textsuperscript{82} On the contrary, she was very much criticized for her behavior on stage, which rapidly became the main issue at stake vis-à-vis Green Power’s event. According to some of the commentators, mostly women, she was culpable of not having reacted clearly as indignant on stage, inferring that a delayed indignant reaction, such as the one Bruno offered in the aftermath of the event, is not acceptable and, \textit{per se}, suspicious.\textsuperscript{83} Among other faults, Bruno apparently was blameworthy for having smiled,\textsuperscript{84} for having picked a sexy dress for the occasion,\textsuperscript{85} and for not having punched Berlusconi in the face (\textit{et similia}).\textsuperscript{86} Moreover, Mrs Bruno was accused (and, especially, ridiculed) for making too many TV appearances, for being emotional (too angry), and for capitalizing on Berlusconi’s performance in order to gain money and publicity.

Paolo Monti, a reader of \textit{Il Fatto Quotidiano}, for example, summarizes these points as follows: “If the lady had answered in kind, in spite of following him in his squalid comedy of a prurient older person, she maybe would have risked something, but she would have gained a lot in terms of dignity … for her lack of courage, she became an accomplice, poor thing (\textit{poveraccia}).”\textsuperscript{87}

Angela Bruno, in order to respond to the judgmental comments her performance with

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{82}{Interestingly one can hardly find comments that understand Berlusconi’s performance within other frameworks: e.g. in terms of it being an episode of sexual harassment against a specific person, Angela Bruno, as an act that potentially is against the law, or in terms of economic disparity (a different performance by Angela Bruno on stage might have put her job at risk).}
\footnote{83}{http://www.huffingtonpost.it/angela-mauro/green-power-tutti-insultano-berlusconi-ma-parliamo-di lei_b_2661973.html. For example, brunella mainardi @brumainardi, on March 1\textsuperscript{st} writes: the new job of \#Angela Bruno is the delayed special indignant (woman) (\textit{Il nuovo lavoro di \#AngelaBruno : l’indignata speciale a scoppio ritardato}. A pun with \textit{inviata speciale}, the Italian rendering of specialist reporter); http://www.liberoquotidiano.it/mobile/articolo.jsp?id=1195670#.UTSo6BksJUN;}
\footnote{84}{E.g., on Twitter, silvia nucini wrote on February 18\textsuperscript{th}; Lady \#howmanytimesdoyoucome says that this is the Italy that she does not want anymore. I wish! If only she had started by not laughing in the first place (\textit{La signora \#quantevolteviene dice che questa è l’Italia che non vuole più. Magari, avesse cominciato a non ridere lei per prima}).}
\footnote{85}{http://www.huffingtonpost.it/giuliana-proietti/il-caso-angela-bruno-dietrologie-fantasie-e-predizioni_b_2713458.html.\textsuperscript{86} For example, Paola Concia, a PD former member of the Parliament and LGBT activist, commented on twitter as follows: \#quantevolteviene? I agree [on that] she is a \#poothyng since she did not give a headshot to \#Berlusconi. We need to question her [and not him] (\textit{concordo la \#poveraccia è lei che non ha dato una “capocciata” a \#Berlusconi. È su di lei che bisogna interrogarsi}).}
\footnote{87}{See comments at: http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/02/10/berlusconi-e-segretaria-lei-viene-e-quante volte-vuol-girarsi/494878/}
\end{footnotes}
Berlusconi elicted, offered clarifications and revisions, conveyed through performances and “interpretations” (in the sense used in Lambek 2014) of dignity and indignation. They appeared both in the press and on TV in the aftermath of the Green Power event. On February 18th, 2013, for example, the Green Power sales woman participated in the political talk-show Piazza Pulita, hosted by Corrado Formigli.\(^88\) One minute and fifty-five seconds into her interview, she said: “Nobody may take the liberty of telling me these kind of things. … I’ve worked my whole life in order to create a reputation and a dignity with the persons that are around me and with everything. Do I have to allow it to be destroyed in this way? Are we kidding?\(^89\)

The competing (negative) representations of Bruno’s behaviors on stage and her attempts to exculpate herself from the accusation of conniving with Berlusconi by showing with words, gestures, and emotions her dignity and indignation are of particular importance to this dissertation. She claimed that Berlusconi attempted to destroy her dignity (something she had worked a lot to gain) and that she was determined not to allow him to do so. In any case, Bruno’s performance of indignation, of anger, of strength of character, and ultimately, of dignity, seemed to have ambivalent effects. If they resulted in the acknowledgement of “her great dignity” by some commentators, they also resonated differently (namely, as something risible or blameable), for her “poor timing,” to many viewers and Internet users.

In sum, women’s dignity appeared to be the issue around which Italians evaluated both Berlusconi’s political performance and Angela Bruno’s one. Its offence was evoked in relation to the former Prime Minister’s spectacle, while its presence was questioned, evaluated, and discussed in relation to Green Power’s employee. As a result, the latter, whose behavior did not quite mesh with many viewers’ expectations of what sort of behavior was appropriate for women in such circumstances, underwent two different yet powerful expressions of representational violence: Berlusconi’s sexism, and the one resulting from the attitude of what he, and his entourage, refer to as the moralism of the

\(^{88}\)http://www.la7.it/piazzapulita/pvideo-stream?id=i668409

\(^{89}\)Eventually, Berlusconi paid lip service, and, on February 19\(^{th}\), 2013, offered his apologies, via radio, as a guest of the Radio105 show 105 friends.
Italian Left wing.

2. Silvio Berlusconi is a well-known figure of recent Italian political history. He was Italy’s Prime Minister four times, and his party governed Italy for the most of the last 20 years. He was the leader of the right wing party *Forza Italia* (Onward, Italy! FI) until 2009, and, since then, he has been the head of *Il Popolo delle Libertà* (the People of Liberties, PdL). Berlusconi is a billionaire, and his personal and financial interests range from the soccer team *Milan* to the holding company *Fininvest S.p.A.*, from the multimedia production company *Mediaset S.p.A.* to the famous publishing house *Mondadori*.

Berlusconi's last legislature came to an end prematurely, in late 2011, as a result of a number of events, including his latest sexual scandal brought to the attention of the Italian media a year before that. Silvio Berlusconi had been the protagonist of another sexual scandal back in 2009. At that time he had been a protagonist of the declarations of the Apulian escort Patrizia D'Addario, and Berlusconi's presence at the coming of age party of the Neapolitan girl Noemi Letizia allegedly resulted in the former Prime Minister’s divorce from his now ex-wife Veronica Lario. Two years later, the new scandal had to do not only with Berlusconi’s sexual mores; it now also had legal implications. The billionaire was accused of having paid an under-aged Moroccan woman, Karima el Mahroug (aka *Ruby Rubacuori*, meaning heart stealer) for sexual services. He was also accused of exploitation of minors for prostitution and of abuse of office. Two men from among his entourage—the journalist Emilio Fede and the talent scout Lele Mora—and the former Lombardy Regional Council Member for the PdL Nicole Minetti, were involved in this scandal, too. In the attempt to protect the 17-year-old Moroccan woman, who was found by the police of Milan without legal documents or

---

91 Berlusconi was handed a guilty verdict from the Court of First Instance in 2013, and sentenced to 7 years of prison, with a ban from public office. He was subsequently acquitted by the Court of Second Instance in 2014. The Italian juridical system has three *gradi di giudizio* (literally, degrees of judgment), which implies that three courts can be involved in a trial: the trial court (Court of First Instance), the appeal court (Court of Second Instance), and the Supreme Court. The sentence needs to be enforced after the third grade trial-scheduled, in this case, for 2015. See e.g. [http://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/personaggi/11654063/Ruby-Silvio-Berlusconi--assist.html](http://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/personaggi/11654063/Ruby-Silvio-Berlusconi--assist.html)
visas, Berlusconi called the police station directly, allegedly asking them to release her, bypassing the standard Italian legal procedures. He then claimed, with an explanation that apparently convinced the majority of the Italian Parliament, that he did so since, at that time, he thought that el Mahroug was the niece/granddaughter (*nipote*) of Egyptian President Mubarak.\(^2\) The facts presented in el Mahroug’s version seem to be different, though: she claims she had been asked by Berlusconi to pretend to be linked to the Mubarak family.\(^3\) Legal accusations and verifications aside, Rubygate did not remain an isolated case, and deeply affected Italian public opinion: according to some very detailed phone interceptions of the court of Milan, that somehow reached the newsrooms of the main Italian newspapers, and according to some interviews that appeared in the Italian media, Berlusconi regularly organized *bunga-bunga* parties in his private residences.\(^4\) It is not clear what the term *bunga-bunga* actually means. The aforementioned Noemi Letizia, in an interview to the *Il Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, published on April 29th, 2009 (more than one year before the beginning of Rubygate), might shed some light on this.\(^5\) The interviewer asked the young woman to quote her favorite among Berlusconi's jokes, and she answered as follows:

> There are two ministers of the Prodi\(^6\) government that go to Africa, and on a deserted island they get caught by an indigenous tribe. The chief of the tribe asks to the first: “Do you want to die or *bunga-bunga*?”

---

\(^2\) On February 3, 2011 the Italian Chamber of Deputies voted in favor (314 votes vs 302 votes) of an appeal to the Italian Court of Appeal regarding Berlusconi's allegations in “Rubygate.” The Italian Parliament voted in favor of the conflict of attribution, in order to subtract the case from the Court of Milan, considered hostile to Berlusconi. The justification of the request was based on the belief that with his phone call to the Milan police station, Berlusconi acted in the interest of the Country, since the Prime Minister was convinced that Karima el Mahroug was part of the Mubarak family. The Italian Constitutional Court did not accept the appeal.

\(^3\) The version of the facts presented by Karima el Mahroug seems to be different. She seems to have said to the magistrates that Berlusconi asked her to pretend to be the niece/granddaughter of the former Egyptian president. [http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/ruby-inchieste/ruby-come-nacque-la-storia-di-mubarak/62401/61117](http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/ruby-inchieste/ruby-come-nacque-la-storia-di-mubarak/62401/61117)

\(^4\) [http://www.ilsalvagente.it/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=9431](http://www.ilsalvagente.it/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=9431)


\(^6\) A main figure of the Italian left-wing coalition, principal political opponent of Berlusconi.
Minister chooses *bunga-bunga*. He gets raped. The second prisoner, asked to choose between the same options, doesn't hesitate and answers: “I want to die!” And the chief of the tribe answers: “First *bunga-bunga*, then death.”

Racist stereotyping and rituals of punitive sexual violence are not the only possible origins of the term *bunga-bunga* that appear in the call-transcripts of the young guests of Berlusconi's after-dinner parties, and in the transcriptions of el Mahroug's declarations to the magistrates. According to the Moroccan woman, *bunga-bunga* is an “African ritual” [sic!] that involves sexual activities with the “most available” women, aimed at provoking “corporal pleasures” in Berlusconi. Apparently, el Mahroug was told by the former Prime Minister that he had learned this ritual from his visits with General M. Qaddafi, former dictator of Lybia. Finally, Began, an actress who describes herself as “deeply in love” with Berlusconi, claims that *bunga-bunga* is a nickname the President gave to her, who “thinks of herself a little bit as a monkey.”

Regardless of the etymology of the term, it appears that, during these *bunga-bunga* parties, Berlusconi and a couple of male friends used to eat dinner, then enjoy post-dinner gatherings with many young women (often 30 or more), many of whom admitted they had or were said to have received money in exchange for sexual favors, sexy exhibitions, or simply for their presence (roughly in the order of $1,500 to $50,000 per session, which apparently could last more than one night). While Berlusconi keeps referring to

---


85 http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/ruby-inchieste/ruby-il-bunga-bunga-e-l-harem/62407/61123
Karima el Mahroug appears to have given many inconsistent statements, especially after the first few days of media exposure. According to one of Ruby's statements, President Berlusconi told her to pretend to be mad, and to tell lies, and he would always be present and would give her anything she wanted.

86 http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/caso-ruby-bunga-bunga/ruby-ecco-le-intervetazioni-6/60166/59030

87 http://www.corriere.it/politica/10_ottobre_28/bunga-bunga-berlusconi-ruby_b7c597ce-e267-11df-8440-00144f02aabc.shtml

88 http://tg24.sky.it/tg24/cronaca/2011/01/19/sabina_began_caso_ruby_ape_regina_silvio_berlusconi_bunga_bunga_presunti_festini_ad_arcore.html
these parties as gallant dinners, and to the women as friends or girls in need that he benevolently helped, the details that emerged around Berlusconi’s parties deeply impacted Italian public opinion. The 131 women that appeared to have been involved in the bunga-bunga parties, at different levels, were and maybe are still economically supported by Berlusconi.\footnote{For example, according to the gossip magazine Oggi. http://www.oggi.it/gossip/personaggi/2011/12/23/guerra-berardi-polanco-faggioli-che-fine-hanno-fatto-le-olgettine/. Regardless of the reliability of gossip magazines, these type of claims were the ones that most affected Italian public opinion on Rubygate.} Allegedly the former Prime Minister allowed and still allows some to live for free in some apartments in his buildings of via dell' Olgettina in Milan, cars, jewels, and monthly stipends —around $4,000 per month, according to some: more than twice as much the average monthly salary for a full time job in Italy (when available).\footnote{Often the women who participated in Berlusconi's parties are referred to in the media, as 'le Olgettas' — the little Olgettas — from the name of the street where some of them live.} The sum of money Berlusconi gave each of these girls, some of them called as witnesses in his trial, easily exceeded two hundred thousand dollars.\footnote{http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/06/15/caso-ruby-berlusconi-continua-a-pagare-la-testimone-alessandra-sorcinelli/118270/}

Many Italians commented upon the details of Berlusconi's sexual exploits with great admiration and some envy as the details emerged from phone interception transcripts and publication in newspapers. The money, power, and beautiful women that surrounded Berlusconi were a confirmation of, rather than a challenge to, his success as a businessman and as a politician. Berlusconi was someone to emulate rather than to reprimand: for example, “Who could have resisted all that 'pussy'?” is a comment that I overheard while sipping an espresso in a casual bar of Varese, my hometown, a few months after the phone transcripts were published.

Besides the hard-core supporters of Berlusconi, many PdL women engaged in a public defense of their leader. According to them, the problem of the various feminisms and of the leftists was their moralismo (moralizing attitude). They were described as sad, as lacking a joie de vivre, sense of humor, and sexual freedom. Because of those lacks, they could not understand that they should take lessons from Berlusconi rather than stigmatize his behaviors. In online forums, TV shows, and in right-wing newspapers such as Il
*Giornale* and *Libero*, men and women of Berlusconi’s political persuasion approved Berlusconi's behaviors and accused their communist opponents of *moralismo*. In particular among the leftist women, Berlusconi’s supporters picked on the women who gathered around the movement *Se Non Ora Quando* (see below), that emerged, in the public political and social arena, mainly as an indignant reaction to Rubygate. Since they considered Berlusconi's public and private behavior to be sexist and in conflict with women’s dignity, they were accused of being ugly and sad moralists, lacking a sense of humor. 104

This episode of recent Italian political history is pivotal for this dissertation: its implications, in terms of the emergence of a new women’s question in Italy vis-à-vis gendered violence and *femminicidio*, are paramount. Rubygate was able to trigger important responses in Italian public opinion. Indeed, a new women’s activism grew around it, an audience interested in the conditions of women in Italian society matured, and wider discourses around women’s issues developed. If claims in support of women’s dignity were at the center of appeals and reflections in the aftermath of the publication of Berlusconi’s private phone calls, the discourse moved rapidly in Italian social, political, and media arenas in directions that explicitly included issues around violence against women.

While many Italians felt that women collectively disparaged in the incident with Angela Bruno, the wider public perceived the event to be a humorous gag. 105 Similarly, the criticisms leveled against Bruno often took the form of attempts to ridicule her. Moreover, such criticisms accused moralist feminists of the Left of lacking a sense of humor. All these references to humor illustrate well one of the aspects of the relationship between politics and spectacles that characterizes contemporary Italy, and exemplifies one dimension of the representational violence I am addressing in this chapter. If the tendency to link politics and spectacle can be envisaged in the past—as,

---

104 According to some of these exponents, they should be considered as skillful entrepreneurs.
105 Obviously this is not the sole reaction that Berlusconi’s gag triggered, as, for example, the subsequent Internet and televised debates about the event show. Nonetheless, it was the reaction the former Prime Minister hoped to trigger in his public: in this, and other circumstances. See e.g. Molé 2013.
for example, in the Italian Commedia dell’Arte—during the ‘age’ of Berlusconi (see, for example, Molé 2013, Herzfeld 2008, Ginsborg 2004, Zizek 2009), this link now has specific connotations in contemporary Italy. Molé (2013), for example, is among the scholars of Italy who pointed out this important element. In her article “Trusted Puppets, Tarnished Politicians” she concentrates on a peculiar feature of the political figure of Berlusconi: that of being a joke-teller. She claims that “The kind of humor disseminated by Berlusconi…relies on a cynical national audience: it stems from a distrustful citizenry that finds amorality in politics to be dismally normal” (290). It is not, then, that electors in Italy do not grasp the contradictions in the person of Berlusconi, says Molé. Rather, “Italians do have the ability to discern a political ruse, yet this backhandedness may be both widely expected and perceived as funny” (291). I agree with Molé’s analysis of the cynical gaze of the Italian spectators, and with the emphasis she puts on the links between politics and spectacle in contemporary Italy. As the Bruno affair shows, this is the (perceived) dominant gaze in Italy —against which, though, the feminists with whom I worked are fighting. Nonetheless, the feminist activists I met sometimes use spectacles and performances (i.e. representations), including humor, as forms of political practice, while they are determined not to be associated with party politics. Since they are aware of the general lack of trust in institutional politics in Italy confirmed by Molé, they do not want to be perceived as part of it, and framed, by the wider public, according to the categories generally applied to Italian politicians. Since one of their aims is proselytizing about women’s constraints and possibilities, they want to promote dissensus by questioning the representations of women available in the Italian context. Through oxymoronic performances and spectacles, and as bearers of an affective agency (see below) — i.e. of affective resonances and registers that interplay in networks of social

106 Recently, this term has been variously criticized in anthropology. While I decided to use it, I am aware that the connections between agency and intentionality (Ortner 2006, Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, Donzelli and Fasulo 2007, Laidlaw 2002, Emirbayer and Mishe 1998, Laidlaw 2010), and hegemony and resistance (Mankekar 1999, Navaro-Yashin 2002) are not unproblematic. While I do not use the concept of agency as part of a functionalist argument, and I argue in favor of the complexity of social life and recognize the enmeshment of hegemony and resistance, I do believe agency is still a heuristically meaningful concept for anthropological analyses. Besides, in the particular case of my ethnographic material, it is an emic category. Here, I will treat artistic objects as social actors. While the reading of objects as social agents is well established in anthropology (see e.g. Gell 1998, and Appadurai 1986), in this context I am particularly indebted to the Actor Network Theory (ANT; see for example Latour 1993, 2005, Law and Hassard 1999, Strathern 1996, Gad and Jensen 2010, Gray and Gibson 2013). In particular,
actors—they aim to trigger different performances of seeing (see chapter 7 and 8) in their audiences, in contrast with dominant ones. The cynical gaze described by Molé (2013; on cynicism see also Zizek 1989, Sloterdijk et al. 1984, Navaro-Yashin 2002, and Weiss 2014), while widespread, is nonetheless only one of the possible options for Italians (Molé 2013) vis-à-vis Italian politics—and certainly not my informants’ response. As my dissertation shows, the construction of new subjectivities linked to feminist womanhood conveys precisely the attempt of constructing of new publics, and new performances of vision vis-à-vis politics among their audiences.

The two aforementioned examples share some similarities in terms of representational violence as well, at least from my informants’ points of view. On the one hand, my informants understood Berlusconi’s behavior as sexist, and his public displays of power as unacceptable. Men and women understood women, collectively, to be belittled by the images and representations that emerged from his (frequent) behaviors. His sexism was seen as patriarchal, and exalted by his public role. On the other hand, anti-Berlusconi reactions, too, posed important problems in relation to women’s representations in as much they tended to smooth over the differences between women’s behaviors, practices, and desires. If, on the one hand, women’s dignity appeared generally to be evoked as a human condition, on the other hand it was inflected in and associated with some particular (prescriptive) gendered behaviors.

**Not in My Name** and **Enel Sole**: The Representational Violence of Anti-Violence Initiatives

The approval, in October 2013, by the Italian government, of a Decreto Legge against Femminicidio—the Law Against Femicide (#119 of 2013) — could be seen both as representing an opportunity to overcome some cultural issues around violence against

---

I follow Gad and Jensen’s position (2010) that considers ANT Theory as a postplural attitude, or a non-humanist disposition (Jensen 2004), that considers the “multiplicity”, “fractionality”, and “complexity” of relations and effects involving the relationships between human and non–human actors (Gad and Jensen 2010). It is worth noting, with Gray and Gibson, that within such an approach, “actors themselves are defined by their relationships, or are co-constituted with other actors, objects, and institutions” (2013, 85).
women, and as evidence of the fragmentation of the Italian juridical system around gendered violence (see below).\(^{107}\) This law came after, and complemented, the Anti-Stalking Law (#38 of 2009) approved in 2009.\(^{108}\) In spite of its intentions, though, and of the important media effects that the Law Against Femicide generated, many feminists criticized and contested it vigorously, deeming many aspects of the law as detrimental to women’s causes.\(^{109}\) First of all, they read the approval and the structure of this law as being an advertisement for the new government. This interpretation was strengthened by the fact that this specific law was approved in the form of a legislative decree that comprised, in addition to the articles that aim at preventing and hindering violence against women, as a so-called package of security reforms. This political move was perceived as an example of the notorious Italian slynness, in particular in relation to the fact that this package included the legalization of some stricter measures in order to contrast anti-TAV activism — measures that were approved by exploiting the urgency of the anti-femicide law.\(^{110}\) Moreover, and most importantly, some feminist women criticized Law 93/2013 (see below) since it presents women as weak subjects (soggetto debole), and it is characterized by a security trait (impronta securitaria) that favors police control (controllo poliziesco) over women’s bodies. In particular, the aspect contested by the feminists (some of whom started a collection of signatures against this law entitled Not in My Name) is the negation, (allegedly) prescribed by Law 93/2013, of the right to


\(^{108}\) Legge 23 April 2009, n. 38 “Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 23 febbraio 2009, n.11, recante misure urgenti in materia di sicurezza pubblica e di contrasto alla violenza sessuale, nonchè in tema di atti persecutori.” Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 95 del 24th April 2009. Interestingly, this law, which passed as a law decree, included norms regulating immigration in Italy, too. In particular, it introduced the institution of (unarmed) surveillance patrols and stricter rules on how long non-documented immigrants could stay in Italy.


\(^{110}\) The NO-TAV movement contests the project of building a high-speed rail from Turin to Lyon, since it is believed it will negatively affect the ecological systems of the Alpine valleys that it would cross, representing a threat to the human, animal, and plant populations of those areas. This radical activism has been strongly opposed by the Italian government for at least the last 10 years.
rescind the charge, once a woman has filed one, at a police station.\textsuperscript{111}

Paradoxically, then, feminists understood the anti-femicide law itself to \textit{represent a form of violence against women}. As I will show in the following example, this was not an isolated case in reference to initiatives allegedly in support of women’s causes.

Fig. 6\textsuperscript{112}.

\textsuperscript{111} http://paestum2012.wordpress.com/2013/10/08/decreto-femminicidio-non-in-mio-nome/
It is worth mentioning that I had the chance to discuss the text of this law, a month after its passing, with an attorney who works for some women’s shelters in the province of Lecce. On that occasion, rather than focusing on the security packet of the legislative decree (the use of which is very common in Italy), or on the obligation to file actions against perpetrators of violence (that she denied exists), she stressed the importance of the law’s introduction against \textit{femminicidio} and of its measure of admonition (\textit{misura dell’ammonimento})—an improvement in comparison to the law 38/2009. While embracing a perspective that understands her role and those of her colleagues who work in and for women’s shelters in creating interpretations of the existing laws that could support women’s self-determination, she pointed out that this measure, from a lawyer’s point of view, could offer more possibilities in this direction. In her opinion, Law 119/2013 might not be perfect, but it is still an improvement on the Anti-Stalking Law, which, in any case, was helpful in the struggle against gendered violence in Italy. http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2013-06-10/femminicidio-mattanza-quotidiana-aumentano-144153.shtml?uuid=AbjgMj3H

\textsuperscript{112} http://www.enel.it/enelsole/it-IT/. News and events section, visited for the last time on August 14,\textsuperscript{th} 2014.
Fig. 7\textsuperscript{113}.

\textsuperscript{113}http://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/femminicidio_campidoglio_giornata_contro_violenza_donne_cattoi/notizie/369829.shtml
Rome, November 25th, 2013. Campidoglio – Capitoline Hill. Headquarters of the Municipality of Rome. The company ENEL Sole places 20 projectors powered by a 30 kW generator with the purpose of illuminating the symbol of the city of Rome with the (English) words "Stop Violence Against Women" on the International Day Against Violence Against Women. In order to “visually enhance the perception of such an important issue,” the electric company decided to project two “representative images” on a red background — the color, the press release claims, of that special day. These images, as appears clearly in the pictures above, include an open hand and the text: STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. The mission of Enel Sole, a power company which is part of the ENEL group (of which the Italian state is the main share holder) is to “illuminate cities, towns and their distinctive features with efficiency and quality by means of planning, carrying out and managing the systems and services that increase the

114 http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/11/25/foto/il_campidoglio_si_tinge_di_rosso_per_dire_no_al_fe mminicidio-71934001/1/#1
wellbeing of the persons who live there.\textsuperscript{117} Through this initiative, the company claimed to restate that Enel continuously operates “in respect of people’s dignity, their diversity” and that it rejects “any kind of violence,” and “supports the mass media and Internet campaigns of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, and the Council for the Social Policies and Equal Opportunities of the Municipality of Rome.” The Campidoglio installation represents well the rhetorical and visually dominant codes (see for example Hall 1980) linked to the struggle against gendered violence and femminicidio in contemporary Italy.\textsuperscript{118} Its importance is linked to the messages clarified by two different levels of visual and semiotic analysis that correspond to different visualities, i.e. ways of seeing (see for example Berger 1972, Mirzoeff 2006), around violence against women in contemporary Italy that I have encountered during my fieldwork. As Sturken and Cartwright (2009) point out, what is important is not just the image itself but how it is seen by specific audiences who look in particular ways. On the one hand, one cannot deny the visual power of this impressive installation: the bright red color vibrates in the Roman November night, grabbing the attention of those who are passing by. The image is certainly eye-catching. For those who can read and understand English, the words are unambiguous. Without any doubt, such a public and institutional political stance against gendered violence would have been difficult to find, and even to imagine, in Italy just two years earlier, when I started my fieldwork. Since 2011 the public relevance of femminicidio (the Italian term for ‘femicide’) has changed considerably.\textsuperscript{119} From being a topic debated mostly within Italian feminist circles, violence against women gradually started to appear in the media, and to make its way into the Italian public scene. As I will claim in the rest of the dissertation, using Dave’s pun (2011), the appearance of femminicidio in the media represented the emergence of an

\textsuperscript{117} http://www.enel.it/enelsole/en-GB/azienda/mission/
\textsuperscript{118} Normally translated as ‘femicide,’ according to the Italian Encyclopedia Treccani, femminicidio refers to “the —direct or indirect, physical or moral— killing of women and of their social roles.” In Italian feminist circles femminicidio is indissolubly connected with ‘patriarchy,’ and, often, with a gendered involvement (i.e. of men) in the acts of violence against women. http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/femminicidio_(Neologismi)/
emergency. In such a reading of the installation, the fact that *Enel Sole* decided to take this political position in such a *visible* way is indeed an important element *per se*, a feature of the public relevance that the struggle against gendered violence is increasingly playing out as a matter of public interest in contemporary Italian society. On the other hand, a closer analysis of some of the visual and semiotic contents of this installation, informed by my acquaintance with the visualities of the feminist women I met during my fieldwork can add other relevant dimensions to this issue, at least for the sake of this dissertation. While, as I mentioned, the institutional attention to *femminicidio* and the visual impact of the *Campidoglio* installation is questioned, here, a more attentive look at this installation, understood as a representation of the struggle against gendered violence, cannot avoid raising different questions on the messages that *Enel’s* initiative conveys, and on its political efficacy in opposing violence against women in Italy. First it is worth noting that the image projected on the *Campidoglio* palace appears to be an example of remediation (see, for example, Edwards 2012, Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 60): a graphic rearrangement, a visual quotation, of the famous logo of the SVAW campaign of Amnesty International: 120

120 Stop Violence Against Women.
The text and the presence of an open hand are an obvious citation of this image. Although Enel placed the text on the right, and the open hand on the left, the fonts and the size of the texts seem identical (i.e. the fonts of the word Stop are bigger than the ones used for violence in both cases). Yet the proportions between the size of the text and that of the hand differ: in the *Campidoglio* installation the size of the hand is not as big in comparison to the text as it appears in the Amnesty logo. The most eye-catching difference in the two images, though, is linked to the silhouettes and shapes of the hands: the one in the *Campidoglio* installation materializes as a traced contour, and not as a stain of color.\(^{122}\)

The first question that this installation raises to my gaze, a gaze “schooled” (see Grasseni 2007, 2011. See also Ronzon 2011) in particular Italian feminist circles, especially in the Salento area of Italy, is: Who is the imagined audience of this installation, from the point of view of its creators? Such a question, important *per se* in every visual and semiotic analysis, is particularly relevant in this case since the text, through which *Enel Sole* conveys the explanation of the installation, is written in English: an interesting choice

\(^{121}\) http://amnesty-volunteer.org/usa/stlouis/category/action-item/page/4/.
\(^{122}\) If the filter used in this dissertation stresses the role of the visual in my field, it is worth noting that metaphors and practices related to touching are ubiquitous in my field as well, and represent a possible further direction of research.
given the fact that few Italians can read and understand this language today, especially among the older generations. Another, perhaps more important, question raised by my schooled gaze is linked to the meaning of the open hand. The latter element, according to my informants, is the more unsettling aspect of the installation. The juxtaposition of an open hand with the words STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, certainly, is meant to resonate with the authoritative gesture linked to traffic regulations, such as the image of an open hand that appears at some pedestrian crossings. As the Amnesty International campaign and the following images show, this indexical use of the open hand is currently widely employed in representations of the struggle against gendered violence, in Italy and abroad.

Fig. 10

---

123 It appears, then, that tourists, foreigners, and more educated Italians might have been the main targets of this campaign. If this is the case, this element confirms the false perception that violence against women in Italy today is perpetrated mostly by foreigners and immigrants. The use of the English language, though, appears to be at odds with the general perception that violence against women is something linked with the lack of education and with traditional values—i.e. with backwardness.

Since I wanted to check the reception of this installation I used these images in interviews based on photo elicitation methodology (See, for example, Harper 2002). This collection of data, while not statistically relevant, helped give me a sense of the messages the Campidoglio image conveyed. Elder persons and less educated ones were not sure about the content of these images, and tried to guess what the installation was about.

124 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedestrian_crossing
Fig. 11\textsuperscript{125}.

Fig. 12\textsuperscript{126}.

\textsuperscript{125} http://pinkroma.it/fondo/giornata-mondiale-contro-violenza-donne-125-uccise-ogni-anno/

\textsuperscript{126} http://www.pianetadonna.it/societa/diritto/giornata-contro-la-violenza-sulle-donne-25-novembre.html
If this is the shared and dominant (indexical) meaning of an open hand to which the *Enel Sole* installation is gesturing, an even closer look at the shape and spatial disposition of the hand in the *Campidoglio* installation reveals some interesting dissonances between the use of that particular open hand, and the condemnation of gendered violence. At least this is what Italian feminist women with whom I worked mentioned. First, in this image the fingers appear to be slightly distanced: they are thin, possibly consistent with a stereotypical female hand. This, at least, is what emerged frequently during the photo-elicited interviews I conducted on this *Campidoglio* installation. Moreover, the hand appears to be slightly rotated: it is not vertical and perpendicular to the base of the image. In reference to the point of view of the observer, it seems to originate from a lower position in comparison to that of the viewer. In other words, aesthetically the hand in the *Enel Sole* campaign seems to be (or, at least, is perceived by my informants as) a visual quotation of *these* types of images, rather ubiquitous in relation to the public representation of violence against women in Italy:

---

Fig. 14.128

Fig. 15.129

128 http://www.corriereuniv.it/cms/2010/01/per-un-mondo-inrosa/
129 http://www.studenti.it/superiori/scuola/concorso_solaris.php
Fig. 16\textsuperscript{130}.  

Fig. 17 No more violence against women\textsuperscript{131}.

\begin{small}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} \url{http://iltirreno.gelocal.it/livorno/cronaca/2011/06/16/news/stop-alla-violenza-sulle-donne-parte-il-primo-corso-di-autodifesa-1.2539876}
\item \textsuperscript{131} \url{http://www.molassanaboerofemminile.it/25-novembre-Giornata-internazionale-contro-la-violenza-sulle-donne.htm}
\end{itemize}
\end{small}
In sum, according to the way of seeing that I learned during my fieldwork with Italian feminists, it seems that the open hand in the *Enel Sole* installation does not have an authoritative function, but a *protective* one.\(^{133}\)

The interpretation of the open hand as a protective gesture introduces some questions from my informants’ points of view and ways of seeing: whose voice is saying “stop violence against women,” to whom, and what are the social effects of this appeal? For the feminists with whom I worked, the semantic visual field to which the image of *this* open hand gestures is consistent with specific and widespread commonsensical (see Rancière, quoted below) understandings of women in Italian society, mobilized also in connection with the recent issues around *femminicidio*: namely, with the naturalization of women as victims. These understandings, that the activists I met during my fieldwork are trying to challenge, are considered to be re-inscriptions of the conditions that lead to violence against women in the first place. To *these representations* of women as objects of tutelage, and as beings in need of protection, my informants strongly react. The commonsensical interpretations of the roles and places of women conveyed in many campaigns against gendered violence are believed to be at odds with their attempt to be and to represent themselves as self-determined, agentive subjects —i.e. as witnesses, and not as victims. What *they see* in this installation is not primarily an appeal in support of women’s causes, but instead a promotional advertisement for the energy company *Enel Sole*. Therefore, the rhetorical and visual representation of the struggle against


\(^{133}\) Such an understanding of the position of the hand is informed by my personal acquaintance with the visual world of my informants, and it is confirmed by most of the persons I interviewed about this particular image —men and women, feminists and not feminists. Clearly, it resonates with the images I just showed.
femminicidio is not perceived as functional pertaining to women’s empowerment but only to the company’s promotional interests. For the women I met, the struggle against femminicidio has been developing into something that helps to sell products or services of one type or another in contemporary Italy: this is why my informants often understand the representations of femminicidio as a battlefield for their representational struggle.

**Gendered Violence in Italy: Some (Contested) Data**

It happens to be that in this current year, 2013, 128 women have been killed so far. This data is not mine, I take it from la Repubblica [i.e. the most important center-left Italian newspaper], the newspaper considered to be the continuation of the Gospel of Eugenio [Scalfari, the founder of La Repubblica], lately engaged in conversing with Pope Bergoglio, having abandoned his direct [conversations] with God, in whom he does not believe, but with whom he is on first name terms as if he [God] were his brother in law. (…)128 massacred women are too many, overall, but in relation to the 60 millions Italian citizens, statistically speaking, they are very few…if these are the numbers of the females [fallen] victims of the males, we are within the Continental average.(…) In fact, the EU did not fine us, so far, because we kill more women than those we are expected to in Brussels, [which is] notoriously strict with us.(…) It goes without saying that we are against violence, but we are against it when it is practiced over what, in another epoch, was referred to as the weak sex [sesso debole], as well as when it is practiced over men, over elders, and over children. *Whoever suffers [from violence] is worthy of pity and protection. Normally bullies persecute the weakest [living] beings. And ‘weak’ are not just the girls or the former-girls* (my emphasis).134

---

These are the (at times sarcastic) words of Vittorio Feltri, the editor of the right-wing newspaper *Il Giornale* (owned by the Berlusconi family), and delivered on the occasion of the 2013 International Day Against Violence Against Women. He defines *femminicidio* as ‘trendy,’ and, for the sake of this dissertation, provides a good starting point in order to present the different narratives and political performances that currently characterize Italian debates on ‘femicide’ and gendered violence in Italy. As this brief excerpt shows, the one around gendered violence and ‘femicide’ is currently a contested field in Italian social and political scenes — and the debates tend to be quite animated.

On the one hand, the emergence of these themes, in the media and in Italian public opinion, as a national problem *created* these issues as facts (see Herzfeld 1998, 2008, and chapter 5) vis-à-vis which politicians and intellectuals, in particular, are required to have an opinion. On the other hand, these opinions are far from unanimous, and tend to align themselves with preexistent party-politics divides.

In the absence of a national research organization on gendered violence and ‘femicide’ in Italy, gathering data on these topics requires juxtaposing the results of different sources: some of them national, and some international. According to the Global Gender Gap 2011 report, for example, a well established international parameter filed by the World Economic Forum, Italy ranked 74th: a poor result for a country that is among the founding members of the European Union.¹³⁵ This datum, mainly economical, might be better understood if read together with other international reports, such as the UN’s CEDAW (The Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) shadow report. According to the last shadow report (2011) on Italy,

> The government formal approach to gender equality makes it impossible to adopt comprehensive and long term strategy to combat structural discrimination against gender and sexual orientation-based discrimination. (...) Machismo attitudes are widely tolerated. The mass media and the political debate have reinforced them through frequent sexual references, stereotyped expressions and a degrading representation of the body and

---

the role of women in society [sic].

These remarks have been confirmed in the report of the UN’s Human Rights Council on the visit of Special Rapporteur, Rashida Manjoo, to Italy in 2012. The effects of gender discrimination and of high levels of tolerance for male chauvinism in Italian society can be observed in many aspects of women’s lives today: from the difference in salaries to the representation of women in TV and in the media, from the percentage of unemployment among women vis-à-vis men (almost 50% of women in Italy do not work) to the 2007 Istat data on violence against women. According to the latter, published by the Italian National Institute of Statistics, more than one million women in Italy in 2006 had been victims of male violence, which in 90% of the cases failed to be reported. In particular, the constant increase in the numbers of ‘femicides’—i.e. the murder of women by men for reasons of gender—in Italy in the past 10 years seems particularly worrisome. According to a study of the Casa delle Donne per non Subire Violenza of Bologna, in 2010 there were 127 ‘femicides’—20 more than in 2009, and 43 more than in 2005. In 2011, allegedly, the number of victims of ‘femicide’ was 129, and 124 in 2012. According to the same source, currently one of the few organizations that keeps track of the number of victims, the 2013 data, the last available, totals 134 victims, and 86 attempts.

137 Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences on her mission to Italy (15–26 January 2012), GE.12-14254, United Nations.
139 See for example Lorella Zanardo’s documentary Il Corpo delle Donne. http://www.ilcorpodelledonne.net/
141 http://dati.istat.it/
142 http://www.casadonne.it/cms/images/pdf/pubblicazioni/materiali/femminicidio_2010.pdf The study was based on the information published by national and local press. The numbers are just indicative, since there’s a grey area, represented, for example by sex workers and illegal immigrants, that is not easy to access. Nonetheless, the numbers outlined in this study are worrisome.
143 http://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/03/05/news/femminicidi_124_le_donne_uccise
According to the aforementioned sources, some of the problems that Italian women face when involved in violence against them are cultural, others are more directly linked to the structure of the Italian juridical system. The laws on abortion (in 1974) and divorce (in 1970; see Molé 2013, 84, Plesset 2006) together with the abolition of honor killings in 1981, and the reinterpretation of sexual violence as a crime against the person (and not against the state) in 1996 are some examples of important achievements around women's rights in Italy. Nonetheless, as the CEDAW shadow report (2011) points out, and the Report of the UN's Special Rapporteur for the Human Right Council (2012) confirms, these improvements still fail to coalesce into an organic legal corpus of norms. The existence of an integrated system of laws on these matters could provide protection to women victims of violence and related situations (CEDAW, General Recommendation 19). According to the CEDAW report,

The Italian legal system still lacks a regulatory definition of gender

---

144 http://www.eures.it. While not reported in the diagram, Apulia is at the third place in the ranking of ‘femicides’ in 2013.
violence. (...) The lack of a definition of ‘gender violence’ reflects a
general lack of awareness, which has also been reported in Institutions, of
the common origin of all forms of violence committed against women
because they are women, intended as the violation of the fundamental
rights of women because they are women. This lack of awareness has
determined the different legislative and juridical treatment of different
forms of gender violence, and consequently the unequal protection
between the women who are victims of sexual violence, domestic
violence, female genital mutilation or sexual harassment in the workplace
[sic](General Recommendation I:2).

In spite of their wide circulation, in Italy, in the absence of a national watchdog on
‘femicide’ and gendered violence, the numbers and interpretations I have so far presented
are contested data. There is no common agreement among the various representatives
involved in these issues on the numbers, the methodologies of data collection, or the
statistical analyses of these data. While some refer to these numbers in support of the
presence of a national problem around ‘femicides’ and gendered violence, others refer to
the same data in order to question the reality of violence against women and the

[w]hile the absolute figure [of homicides in Italy] was declining,… the
decrease was way sharper [among men]…[and therefore] the incidence of
murders of women, that in the past was around 10-15%, [instead]
increased to 25% more or less. But the numbers [of murdered women] are
not increasing: they are decreasing, at least if one gives more importance
to the data from Istat [i.e the Italian National Statistic Institute] rather than
from those of Casa delle Donne, and Telefono Rosa [i.e. Pink line against
women violence].
The divide between those who support or reject the existence of ‘femicide’ as a societal problem is not the only rift in relation to the perception of gendered violence and ‘femicide’ in Italy. As emerges clearly from Feltri’s words, even among those who recognize gendered violence as a minor (though nonetheless important) issue, talking about gendered violence becomes the pretext for voicing political rivalries and polemicizing with political competitors. It is around the ambivalences linked to the emergence of gendered violence and ‘femicides’ as facts, the use of those topics as pretexts for other political goals, and around the (transversal) framing of women as victims in need of protection that my informants’ activism unfolds. According to the activists I worked with, as the previous examples show, there can also be violence, according to the activists I worked with, in anti-violence political stances.146

In this chapter I offered some examples of the animated debates around gendered violence and ‘femicide’ in Italy, and of the social climate in which the emergence of a ‘new’ women’s question in Italy appeared (see chapter 4). These events are decisive for understanding the mobilization of the feminist grass-root movement, Se Non Ora Quando, that represented an indisputable reference point in my informants’ personal and political lives, and for the developments of their political activity, during my fieldwork. As I will explain in the next chapter, the importance of this group in creating an audience able to acknowledge the presence of a new women’s question in Italy cannot be underestimated. This audience, I claim, was later able to recognize and legitimate the word femminicidio in the Italian public arena. For my informants, though, the SNOQ movement was also responsible for the construction of an image of womanhood that is detrimental to women’s causes: an image they want to challenge representationally.

Chapter 4

Women Before (Women): On Feminist Genealogies and the Need to be Seen

In this chapter, I will sketch the historical dimensions of Italian feminisms in the background, as a circumstantial yet fundamental frame in order to give prominence to contemporary developments, in particular as they unfolded in my ethnographic experiences. I will narrate them filtered through a particular lens: that of the issues around visibility, which will represent the fil rouge of the different sections below.\textsuperscript{147} The metaphor of vision brings together multiple dimensions relevant to my informants’ lives, both at a personal and a political level, posing questions about who sees what, how and, ultimately, why. My narration will unfold as a braid with three plaited threads: UDI and the lives of the women I met, the Italian feminist movements in general, and the Italian social and political contexts.\textsuperscript{148}

Karstic Rivers

\textit{The feminine participation in the collective movements does not have a linear trend: it proceeds with alternate phases, between claimed presences}

\textsuperscript{147} While I agree with the fact that recognition is a significant dimension of political movements in general (see, for example, Hobson ed. 2003), in depicting the Italian context through the lens of visibility I intend to focus on collateral dimensions of the need for recognition such as the construction/ addressing of particular audiences, the choice of being visible or invisible, and the need to intercept certain gazes and not others. On the emergence of this theme, see, for example, the video recordings of the Italian feminists’ meetings of Paestum 2012 and 2013 on Youtube:

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C09bAQjEE_k
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHGtdtf19W8
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBFZ9m9P5Lk
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBFZ9m9P5Lk
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1k2fqgKZIU
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkehYHoq74Q
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQt4SEJwI1c
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CRZf-aZv7Q

\textsuperscript{148} For the sake of space, I cannot address the specificity of single Italian feminist movements such as the lesbian-feminist traditions, recently founded queer groups, and the feminisms that chose not to engage with the thought of sexual difference (see below). Without underestimating their importance and their contributions, I feel confident in stating that they are not representative of the majority of the feminist debates in Italy.
and silences; an **appearing** and a **disappearing** that resembles more a ‘karstic’ river than the flowing, sometimes slow and sometimes turbulent, of a river under the light of the sun (Sega 2005).

The metaphor of the karstic river is used frequently and ubiquitously among Italian feminists in order to interpret and narrate the history of Italian feminist movements.\(^{149}\) It responds to the need to find a shared, unanimous historical narrative that comes to terms with the diversification and the divergences between the specific experiences of the different feminisms that have been developing in Italy since the beginning of the last century. This need to think about Italian feminisms within a common and reconciliatory historical framework (see the Conclusions) stems also from the need to fight against the absence (sometimes actual, but mainly constructed by the hegemonic historical ‘patriarchal’ narratives) of the acknowledgement of the role of women in important moments of Italian history, such as the *Resistenza* — i.e. the Resistance movement, that fought against fascism during the Italian Civil War (1943-1945).\(^{150}\)

Interestingly, though, the semantic axis of the karstic metaphor seems to fail in its goal: the *choice* (and not only the imperative) to be invisible risks (partially, at least) compliance with the ‘patriarchal’ narratives that want to hide women from history.

It is my claim that the adoption of this metaphor, in which the image of the karstic river limits its action by circumscribing a specific role for women *within* ubiquitous ‘patriarchal’ narratives rather than breaking with them *tout court*, has an ambivalence that is at the core of contemporary Italian feminist debates (see Conclusions).\(^{151}\) The ubiquity of this metaphor, which I encountered many times during my fieldwork, describes my ethnographic experience well. In different ways, the issues of visibility, invisibility, and representations emerged as key components of my informants’ personal and political lives.

\(^{149}\) According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, Karst is “an irregular limestone region with sink holes, underground streams, and caverns.” Geographically, it refers to the “limestone plateau northeast of the Istrian Peninsula in Western Slovenia extending into Eastern Italy.” [http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/karst?show=0&t=1389370436](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/karst?show=0&t=1389370436)

\(^{150}\) As Sega points out, for example, the construction of the collective memory around antifascism stresses how men did the *Resistenza*, while women just contributed to it.

\(^{151}\) I use ambivalence as a descriptive term, not an axiological one.
Becoming Invisible as a Choice. The Legacy of *UDI* and the Thought of Sexual Difference: Pulling Back from the Squares.

*UDI* (see, for example, Plesset 2006, Michetti et al. 1984, Rodano 2010) is the oldest Italian feminist movement, and the one around which most of the women I met at the beginning of my fieldwork gravitated. It was founded in 1944, during the Second World War, with the name of *Unione delle Donne Italiane* (Union of Italian Women), and, during the 1970s and 1980s, was well known for its pro-divorce and abortion rights campaigns. More recently, in order to explicitly recognize immigrants —i.e. non native women who live in Italy— as part of the movement, its acronym changed to *Unione delle donne in Italia* (Union of the women in Italy). In spite of its long history and ubiquitous presence throughout Italy, I confess I had not heard a single word about *UDI* until I met Eugenia and Laura in September 2011 at an annual meeting on the thought of sexual difference (see below) in Lecce. While this is certainly an oversight on my part, it is nonetheless true that I went successfully through the training required for a degree in Literature and Philosophy at one of the most progressive and leftist Italian Universities (*Università Statale di Milano*), before moving abroad, without hearing a single word about *UDI* or about Italian feminisms. The first time I heard about a specific Italian feminist tradition I was in Canada, in a graduate course at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Toronto.

This remark is not accidental, and is consistent with the surprised reaction of my friends and acquaintances concerning the existence of a feminist tradition in Italy. When I spoke about the topic of my research “among feminists in Apulia” to my Italian friends and acquaintances, nearly all of them replied with bewilderment: “Are there feminists in Italy? Today?” These few observations help to depict the status of the acknowledgement of a women’s question among public opinion in Italy in 2011 at the beginning of my fieldwork. Until then, for my generation —people who were born between the late ’70s and the early ’80s—, feminist voices, analyses, and discourses had been invisible until very recently, since they did not have any place in the media, in history textbooks, or in university courses. Why is this so? I have often posed this question to the feminists I
meet, especially to the ones who belong to the older generation, to those who physically
took to the streets in the ’70s, and were actively involved in the successful pro-divorce
and pro-abortion campaigns. Mostly, they indulged in the narration of anecdotes, in the
description of the practices they used in order to reach as many women as possible —
such as giornale parlato (spoken newspaper) or riunioni di quartiere (neighborhood
meetings) — depicting, with nostalgia and pride, a period, a context, end even a youth
that are not anymore. As for the answer to my why, I was not able to gather verbal
responses that differed very much from the routine ones. As explained to me once by one
of the women I met in Milan at the Milan Women’s Bookstore (Libreria delle Donne di
Milano), an historical locus of the production of Italian feminisms, explained to me that
Italian women in the 1980s “decided to stay out of the squares” and “to change societies
from within, starting with their own lives.” It is widely noted that, in spite of the legal
accomplishments of the Italian women movements during the 1970s an 1980s, the vast
majority of the Italian feminist movements, after 20 years of intense political
commitment around the legislation on divorce and abortion, chose to continue their
political activities in the private rather than in the public sphere, and disappeared from
public space by the beginning of the 1990s (see, for example, Plesset 2006; Bono and
Kemp 1991). Public protests have been substituted mainly by the practice of self-
awareness (autocoscienza) in small groups, and by activity in women’s shelters
throughout Italy. The radical interpretation of the personal as a political adage that
considers the personal as the locus for the transformation of the public is nonetheless just

---

152 The laws on abortion (1974) and divorce (1970, see, for example, Molé 2012, 84) together with the
abolition of honor crime in 1981, and the 1996 reinterpretation of sexual violence as a crime against the
person — and not against the state — are some examples of important achievements around women's rights
in Italy.

153 Those who share a radical interpretation of the personal is political adage believe that social change
depends on specific political practices, such as the practice of self-awareness (pratica dell' autocoscienza,
see for example Dominijanni 2005, 26, Bono and Kemp 1991), the practice of entrustment (affidamento
see e.g. Dominijanni 2005, 37, Bono and Kemp 1991), the practice of starting from oneself (pratica del
partire da sé) and the practice of relations between women (see for example Scarparo 2005, 40–41). In
particular, among the latter four practices, that of relations between women is especially valued for its
personal and political implications. Women's political practices and relations happen primarily around the
acknowledgement of disparità (disparity, see below) among women. While I could not find evidence in
support of the first two, the last three political practices were part of the everyday experience of the UDI
women I met in the field. In particular, I found the practice of starting from oneself to be a key feature of
practicing feminism among the UDI feminists I met. This feature is linked to two of the most important —
and yet controversial — aspects of the political practice of UDI: its separatismo (women’s separatism), and
its autonomy from party politics (see below).
a (partial) justification.\textsuperscript{154} While it is often evoked in order to explain the disappearance of feminists from the public scene, and while it is consistent with the teachings of the \textit{Pensiero della Differenza Sessuale} (thought of sexual difference) —so influential on Italian feminisms— it narrates only part of the story.\textsuperscript{155}

During my ethnography I observed a subtext in action that informs feminist discussions, one that revolves precisely around matters of visibility. In particular, there are two aspects, sometimes intertwined, that seem to inflame the spirits of the women participating in the current debates: the issues around the need to be visible in the public political arena, and those stemming from the need to be acknowledged (\textit{riconosciute}) by other generations of feminists.\textsuperscript{156} These aspects, that have both political and personal implications, will be narrated in the rest of the chapter by referring to two specific and, I claim, paradigmatic cases, interpolated in my ethnographic accounts: the emergence of the \textit{Se Non Ora Quando} women’s movement, and of the feminist collective \textit{F9}. An analysis of the \textit{appearance}, both in the sense of emergence and in that of external configuration, of these two movements will help show how the problems of visibility are differently inflected, in relation to various (imagined) publics and counter publics (see, for example, Warner 2002).

\textbf{Where Are You, Girls?}

While the birth of \textit{UDI} was linked to antifascism and to the Communist Party, in 1982, somehow anticipating the crisis of ideologies yet to come, the women of the organization decided to change the structure of their institution, voting for a separation from the Italian Communist Party (\textit{PCI}) and from any direct link to party politics. This was a brave choice on the part of one of the most important Italian feminist groups of the time —as

\textsuperscript{154} An important contribution on the historical unfolding of the relationships between public and private is Warner 2002. See also chapter 7 on Facebook as a political platform for the women with whom I worked. Significantly, my informants distinguish between the personal and the private, claiming that the personal, but not the private, is political.


\textsuperscript{156} Following Giordano 2014 I will distinguish in the rest of this dissertation between acknowledgment and recognition, arguing that my informants seek both.
brave as it was unpopular. I had the chance to discuss this topic with some of the women that took part in that XI Congress. Many of them personally paid, both concretely and symbolically, the price of this choice. The women I interviewed told me that, by virtue of their activity within UDI before the 1982 Congress, many of the group’s members used to be functionaries of the party, and received a salary from PCI. Earning an income, for a woman, especially in that period, was a sign of emancipation and, for a feminist, all the more so a political stance. When the women of UDI voted for its autonomy from the PCI, this ideological choice of freedom resulted in the loss of economic independence for many of them. By losing their salary, they found themselves to be dependent on other sources of income, often, paradoxically, on their spouses’ ones. Therefore, if, at the ideological level, the adoption of a way of doing politics independent from the parties was somehow an imaginative and innovative choice for that time, this same choice often also resulted, at a personal level, in a regression to traditional relational and economical patterns between men and women (or between women and women). Ironically, these were the same ones the feminist activists of UDI were trying to problematize and dismantle. This regression is often perceived and narrated simply as apparent. As an informant of mine told me, “the place of liberty set by the choice of the XI Congress did force some of us to re-negotiate our relationships with our partners, but this did not take our dignity away.”

Interpretations of the XI Congress aside, the retreat to space outside party politics coincided, temporally and de facto, with the disappearance of UDI from the public scene. This is why, not surprisingly, almost 30 years after the XI Congress, in 2011, after a decade of regained political leadership within the feminist national scene, the problems of visibility and of the relationships with party politics collided. The trigger of old and new problems, not just within UDI, was the emergence of a new women’s question in Italy linked to the *Se Non Ora Quando* (If Not Now, When? Henceforth SNOQ) movement. On February 13th, 2011 allegedly one million protestors, mostly women, took

---

157 October, 2013.

158 During that decade UDI promoted three national campaigns: 50e50 *Ovunque si Decide* — i.e. a collection of signatures for a proposal of Law on women representation in the institutions, *Staffetta di Donne contro la Violenza sulle Donne*, a year-long relay against violence against women, and *Immagini Amiche*, a contest for images and ads empowering women. See below.
to the streets in more than 250 cities, in Italy and abroad, in order to protest against “the
model of man-woman relations exhibited by one of the highest state authorities” that
“deeply affects” Italy’s “lifestyles and culture, justifying detrimental behavior to
women’s dignity and to the institutions themselves.” The demonstration that gathered
around this grass-root movement, named after Primo Levi’s well-known novel, was
meant to be politically inclusive, and involved women from different contexts and
ideological positions. It was the first time in 30 years that Italian women were visible on
the streets in such numbers. What triggered this massive reaction, and its media coverage,
were some recent events related to the Prime Minister at the time, Silvio Berlusconi, and
what has since then been called Rubygate (see Chapter 3).

Criminal accusations aside, the non-criminal aspects of Berlusconi’s leisure activities had
a great impact on Italian public opinion, drawing attention to layers of conflation between
crime and immorality, misconduct and sin, that deserve further examination. In the
aftermath of the emergence of Berlusconi’s sexual scandal around el Mahroug and the
bunga bunga parties, Concita de Gregorio, the Director, at the time, of l’Unità (the left-
wing newspaper founded by Antonio Gramsci) proposed a collection of signatures. This
appeal, that would have merged, later, into the Se Non Ora Quando manifestation, said:

I am sure, I know it with certainty, that the majority of Italian women are
not in line for the bunga bunga. I am sure that conscious prostitution is the
choice, if it’s a choice under these circumstances, of a minimal minority. I
am addressing therefore the others, all the other women. This is the time to
answer strongly: where are you, girls? Mothers, grandmothers, daughters,
nieces, where are you? Right-wing or left-wing, poor or rich, Northern or
Southern women, daughters of a time that other women, before you, made
rich with possibilities, equal and free, where are you? It’s time to say:
now, that’s enough!160

159 Se non ora quando, 13/02/2011- Manifesto
160 http://www.unita.it/firmedonne/
De Gregorio’s contribution to the birth of *Se Non Ora Quando* cannot be underestimated. Her work helped to mobilize persons, giving voice to, and shaping the attitude of, some sectors of public opinion vis-à-vis the former Prime Minister’s sexual scandals. By doing so, I claim, she not only gathered women and affects circulating around Berlusconi and the role of women in Italian society, she also helped to construct a (counter) public, an audience for the emergence of a new women’s question in Italy. In other words, the references to the “other women,” to an old-style *familismo* (kinship-centered ideology), and to ‘patriarchal’ values (see Ottonelli 2011) that are evident in her appeal, were not at all an idiosyncratic take on Berlusconi’s scandals. They were shared by —and, at the same time, triggered in— her readers, the founders of *SNOQ*, and other illustrious intellectuals and political authorities. By underlining these elements, the *Se Non Ora Quando* movement was able, on the one hand, as Ottonelli argues, to mobilize a particular (although generic) political subject (i.e. the “other women” of De Gregorio’s appeal); and on the other hand I claim that this movement, with the complicity of *l’Unità* and of other newspapers such as *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, succeeded in creating an audience and a public capable of seeing and recognizing this newly crafted political subject, and the presence of a women’s question in Italy, that was neglected or just absent, until then, in public opinion.

The ability to mobilize the feelings, affects, and thoughts of many Italians and to construct both a political subject and its audience relied also on the fact that, in spite of its being a new movement, *SNOQ*’s ideology did not attempt to introduce a radical change in the frameworks used in order to interpret reality and contemporary events. In addition to the construction of real women as non-prostitutes, and to the reference to strong kinship-oriented sets of values —both aspects that gesture towards the Catholic origins of

---

161 Such as Pierluigi Bersani, the leader, at that time, of *Partito Democratico* —PD, the biggest Italian left-wing party— who, on February 4th, 2011 declared: “We, males, will be with the women that will take to the streets on the 13th, if nothing else because we know our wives, our partners, our friends, our daughters. Because we respect them as persons and we don’t accept their being considered as goods to sell and over which to exercise the male-chauvinist domain.” See [http://www.unita.it/italia/bersani-donne-non-sono-merce-applausi-1.270112](http://www.unita.it/italia/bersani-donne-non-sono-merce-applausi-1.270112)

162 It needs to be pointed out here that the position of *Il Fatto Quotidiano* was clearly anti-Berlusconian, and not specifically in support women’s causes. See, for example, the controversy between Massimo Fini, a journalist of the *Fatto*, and various feminist groups, and the resulting introduction of the section *Donne di Fatto* on the Internet version of that newspaper.
such a conception of the honorability, or dignity, of women (see chapters 5 and 7) — there was another element that characterized women’s mobilization on February 13th, 2011 (Ottonelli 2011, 54-71). This element, ubiquitous in the debates and political discussions during that period of recent Italian political history, can be referred to as the ethics of sacrifice (see also chapters 5 and 7). According to many women, clearly influenced by Italy’s Catholic past (and present), sacrifice is the feature that defines “true Italian women” (Ottonelli 2011, 22-47). This element emerges powerfully in the speech that Giulia Bongiorno, a lawyer and, at that time, a member of the Parliament in the PdL’s ranks (a center-right party), gave on the occasion of the February 13th demonstration, but even the more so, as Ottonelli points out, in the letter Bongiorno sent to the newspaper La Repubblica on January 21st, 2011. Commenting upon the so-called Rubygate, she pointed out, while defending the right of self-determination for everybody, that Berlusconi’s personal life was not irrelevant on the political level.

Berlusconi, with his words and behaviors, inflicted a wound upon all Italian women: to the women who study and work (often making inadequate money or, as in the case of stay-at-home women, without making any money at all), to all of us who are struggling day after day; to the women who, in order to get prominent positions, not only did not come to certain parties, but, if anything, had to turn down the possibility to see friends; to those, who, in spite of looking for shortcuts, walked through the path of commitment and sacrifice with dignity. (…) Upon each one of them – in the moment when women are picked and ‘rewarded’ not on the base of merit but on the basis of something else that has nothing to do with professionalism, commitment, intelligence—was poured out the uselessness of her sacrifice.163

The audience constructed by SNOQ has, since then, been playing an important role both in the construction of an imagined community of (potentially violated) women, and in that of women as new political subjects, around ‘femicide’ and gendered violence.

163http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2011/01/21/news/noi_donne_calpestate_non_possiamo_tacere-11473950/?ref=HRER3-1
According to Ottonelli, who seems to agree at least partially on this point with the criticisms the demonstration on the 13th of February received from PdL women (see Prologue), the Se Non Ora Quando movement gave voice to what Ottonelli called moralist feminism. The philosopher (2011, 10) defines this type of feminism as:

[a] cultural and political position that, in the name of the freedom of women and of their “dignity,” takes a fundamentally censorious attitude, in reference to men but also, and above all, to women themselves. According to this type of feminism, women’s freedom must happen through an intimate transformation of all the members of society, that could lead each one to understand what are the real values, the true good, the true use of one’s own body, of one’s own sexuality and one’s own talents. In doing so, it entreats a horizon of symbols and values essentially conservative and it imposes examples of life and society that are nothing more than a laical reinterpretation of kinship, religious, and traditionalist myths.

In other words, by addressing Berlusconi’s scandals in terms of family values and of an ethics of sacrifice, the neo-feminists of Se Non Ora Quando started conceptualizing Berlusconi's private habits as something wrong that needed to be changed. The former Prime Minister's wrongness, significantly, did not rest on legal bases, but on conscientious ones (on conscience see, for example, Weiss 2014). Interestingly, his private conduct and habits, more than the crimes of which he was accused, were seen as detrimental to women’s dignity, and were understood as being politically unacceptable. In this respect, although within a laical and not religious perspective (though with indisputable Catholic inflexions) Berlusconi’s sins— i.e. immoral acts— became a matter public interest. This reading of Berlusconi’s behaviors left women’s claims open to accusations of moralismo (moralism). These accusations, similar in form but not identical in terms of content and implications, came both from supporters of Berlusconi and from certain, generally leftist, feminist groups or intellectuals —of which Ottonelli is an example. Besides the declaration that UDI would not participate as a group in the
demonstration on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of February (that I will discuss below), some radical feminist movements managed to sustain and to give some visibility to sex workers within the \textit{Se Non Ora Quando} protests by participating in the demonstrations with a red umbrella. As a result, paradoxically, as Ottonelli points out, the \textit{Olgettine} (this is what the journalists named the girls who participated in Berlusconi’s \textit{bunga bunga} parties) became completely outcast: they were neither the “other women” of De Gregorio’s appeal, nor regular sex workers.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure20.png}
\caption{February, 13\textsuperscript{th}. A political statement on the demonstration of \textit{SNOQ} supported by my informants, and circulated on their Facebook profiles.}
\end{figure}

\textit{‘La visibilità che vogliamo’}—The visibility that we want. On Empowering and Disempowering Gazes.

As I mentioned before, the presence of the \textit{Se Non Ora Quando} movement in the media was unprecedented, and gave great visibility to women’s groups for the first time in many years. It constructed a new political subject as well as a new public able to acknowledge the presence of a women’s question in Italy. This visibility, though, did not initiate a dialogue on women’s rights, or on Italy’s poor scores in the Global Gender Gap report (its 80\textsuperscript{th}, in 2012). Both among leftist and right wing journalists and intellectuals the

\footnote{http://www.lesignorinedival.com/search?updated-max=2012-03-21T05%3A58%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=4#PageNo=5}
movement was framed as a possibility or as an attempt to delegitimize Berlusconi politically. In other words, by catching the feminist wave, politicians of the left and right (and the national press which is highly dependent on, and influenced by, political parties) attempted to use it to accomplish their political goals — i.e. Berlusconi’s de-legitimation—, which were, according to the feminists with whom I worked, only nominally in the interests of women.

There is no need to underline how this latter element, for many UDI women, and for those who share their view on the relationship between women’s politics and institutional ones, clashed with the choice of non-partisanship discussed above. Nonetheless, SNOQ represented a ‘reappearance’ of the karstic river that provided an answer to the anxiety around visibility that many feminist women sought. Many committees bloomed spontaneously throughout Italy. While for many women this occasion was their first experience with women’s politics, many activists found that the visibility of a women’s question in the media, even though not framed properly, was indeed something that could be exploited in order to make their voices audible, and their bodies visible. It was an occasion they did not want to pass up. This latter position, present also among some UDI activists, conflicted ideologically with the political stance expressed by the group’s national board. Pina Nuzzo, the national delegate of UDI at that time, wrote in an official notice that UDI would not participate as a group in the demonstration on the 13th of February. At the individual level, every woman could decide, obviously, if she wanted to take to the streets or not.

The reasons for the lack of formal and public support for the Se Non Ora Quando demonstrations centered on the anti-governmental purposes of the movement (which clashed with the decisions of the XI Congress), and on the arguable understanding of “women’s self-determination present in the SNOQ’s appeal.” In the document noidell’udi, noi con le donne (we-who-are-from-UDI, we who are with women. Nuzzo 2011a), a very long public notice meant to be a preparatory document for the XV Congress, Nuzzo, after recognizing the rift that her position would create within UDI, writes: “We do not want to play a game where the point of contention is different from us, even if it exploits —as usual— women’s bodies.” The problem, according to Nuzzo’s
understanding, is a problem both of *visibility*, and of *audiences*.

A demonstration, today, is launched from the Internet. For its success, as well as for its failure, its re-launch on TVs and in newspapers is central. In practice, the relationship with power is decisive. (...) In our society, if the media do not talk about you, it seems that you do not exist. A feeling women know well, since they have been fighting against it through feminism, was projected on TVs and in newspapers (...): they avoid making their own existence dependent upon the gaze of the other. This principle is valid in life as well as in politics, practicing it requires a strong self-awareness (*senso di sé*), and authoritativeness (*titolarità*) about one’s own ideas, actions, and words. Not allowing the gaze of the other to define yourself means disempowering it.165

In an email addressed to all the women of *UDI*, Pina Nuzzo (Nuzzo 2011b) further explained her position, consistent with the post-1982 political orientations of the group:

> We cannot give up our identity in order to present a blurred feminine gender, indignant and anonymous. (...) We never underestimated the importance of exposing ourselves in the squares... Every single time, though, we needed to acknowledge the fact that [institutional] politics do not listen to what women say through women’s associations because they do not acknowledge the political aspect of the movement organized by women. Not even the media, of which we asked, several times, to narrate the actions of a civil society that is committed every day in changing an

---

165 While I am aware of the fact that the topic of gazes has been extremely influential for many psychologically-informed scholarly productions — such as those of (and in the legacy of) Lacan and Irigaray — I chose not to address in this dissertation gazes from these particular points of view, and not to engage primarily with this particular scholarly tradition. While the latter could also be potentially useful in framing my ethnographic context, I chose to stress other dimensions of gazes, and to engage in dialogue with other scholarly genealogies. Moreover, I choose to talk about gazes as this word is widely employed by my informants: i.e. my use of it provides evidence of the ways they understand perception, rather than describing what perception is about. I agree with Crary that attention “[i]s much more than a question of the gaze, of looking, of the subject only as a spectator,” and that the “problem of perception” needs to be “extracted from an easy equation with questions of visuality” (2001, 2). See also, on “vision as a metonym for perception, cognition, and aspiration” McLagan and McKee (2012, 22).
absurd cultural ‘one-way’ (a sesso unico\textsuperscript{166}) model recognize this. Therefore, it is unbearable that the insistent pleas [of the media], once again, leverage an alleged silence [of women] that does not concern us, since we have never been silent. They just silenced us! As we claimed and re-claimed several times.

The lack of UDI’s support for the SNOQ’s demonstration, though, did not result in an open internal political debate on the role of women’s movements and of UDI in the contemporary Italian political arena. Nuzzo's political claims around the Se Non Ora Quando demonstration, instead, catalyzed emotions, affects, and thoughts that resonated with old, ill-concealed anxieties around visibility. Nuzzo's position resulted in huge disputes within UDI that I personally witnessed during my fieldwork, and, eventually, prevented her re-election.

In October 2011 I went to Bologna for the UDI XV Meeting with the macare. For many reasons, this meeting represented a controversial moment in the history of UDI. The two main pressure groups within the association —which ultimately coalesced around different ways to understand the relationship of party politics and the problem of visibility that emerged with the Se Non Ora Quando demonstration — had a harsh and not completely politically correct confrontation that concerned the present and the future of UDI, and its presence in the Italian political scene. On the last day of the meeting, some women (mostly young and supportive of Nuzzo's positions) decided to perform a flash mob in order to protest against the non-democratic ways in which the meeting, according to them, was being administered. Each protestor silently entered the meeting room holding a piece of paper claiming her indignation (along with the personal associative number that vouched for her membership in UDI).\textsuperscript{167} After a couple of minutes of silence, the protestors went out of the room. While I did not have any role in organizing the flash mob, I participated in it, together with the Salento UDI women with whom I was traveling. The fact that I — a newly arrived ethnographer and newly

\textsuperscript{166} Nuzzo makes a pun here, conflating the expression senso unico (one way) with sesso unico (the only one sex, i.e. the male, which colonizes the symbolic and material aspects of women’s lives).

\textsuperscript{167} It held the words “I am indignant.”
affiliated member of _UDI_ and of the _macare_— decided to _mettere la faccia_ (literally to put my own face, meaning to commit) in this protest was very meaningful to my informants. I had the chance to talk at length with them about this event in the post-meeting days with them. During those occasions, I realized that what triggered the flash mob was a strong reaction (that they defined as emotional) to the feelings of not being considered, seen, interpellated, and, ultimately, acknowledged and recognized as worthy or dignified (see chapter 8) by the women who were leading the XV Meeting. In this respect, it is worth noting that some of the women who neither performed nor supported the flash mob during the Congress yelled at us that we, the protestors, were not worthy, dignified (_non degne_) enough to be part of _UDI_. Since, according to my informants, this challenge to the flash-mobbers' own dignity was not coming from men or a 'patriarchal' environment, but from feminists of their same group, the XV Meeting was really an overwhelming and disorienting experience for the Salentine _UDI_ women with whom I was travelling.

Fig. 21. Some of the 'indignant' women at the XV Congress of UDI.

On the basis of my participant observation, the fact that these women chose not to speak out but to perform a _silent_ flash mob in this circumstances is extremely significant. Being able to publicly show and dialectically to express one's disagreement with another woman is a highly valued practice among Italian feminists and among _UDI_ women.
Confliggere (conflicting) is considered an important moment of the practice of relations. Confliggere, though, presupposes the mutual recognition of the other’s value.¹⁶⁸

According to Putino (1987), a Neapolitan feminist philosopher very influential among the women I met:

Arguing between women is fighting a war. In order to fight this war one needs to have a deep sense of one’s own and of the other’s dignity (…) There are many ways to discourage a war meeting between two women; one of these is to impoverish (immiserire) the other at a level where all that happens there is stripped down by another instance, determined elsewhere. (…) It does not remain but one she-warrior, the other is a woman of the army: she is a woman who fights without having in her hands the reason for her fighting. Her destiny is not linked to the necessity of something shared, it does not belong to the word of the encounter, it is held by other threads.¹⁶⁹

War, though, does not happen just between two individuals. In order for this conflict to happen without feeling “impoverished,” one needs to have a public able to recognize women’s dignity. This aspect of confliggere leads me right into another dimension of visibility that informs the ‘subtext in action’ that I was mentioning before: the need to be seen and recognized among different feminist generations. Or, to use my informants’ jargon, they need to “weave weavings.”

Tessiture (Weavings)

Carmen is a woman in her thirties who lives at her parents’ house in Manfredonia, since her working situation does not allow her to rent a place herself. She nervously touched her bright red hair while Pina Nuzzo introduced the works of the 4th Laboratorio Donnae

¹⁶⁸ See Angela Putino, below.
¹⁶⁹ http://www.libreriadelladonna.it/_oldsite/news/articoli/sottosopra87.htm
(Workshop Donnae). We were in the North of Apulia, some 350 km away from Salento, and the women’s association to which Carmen belongs was hosting the meeting. She had been busy preparing the conference room, dealing with the hotel, arranging the meals for the group, and giving directions to those who came from other parts of Italy and were not acquainted with the town. She was visibly nervous and tense, but she had greeted me very warmly when I arrived: with a long, affectionate hug, two kisses, and a bright, open smile. That was probably the second time we had met in person, though. I had had dinner with her and other friends two years before in Lecce, at Elisabetta’s apartment. We laughed about this upon my arrival, commenting how, strangely perhaps, we were experiencing closeness by virtue of our Internet connection.

Laboratorio Donnae (Donnae Lab) is primarily an online platform that works mainly through a blog and a Facebook page, on which women from various parts of Italy and from various political backgrounds, interact throughout the year. Those, together with our own Facebook pages, have been the spaces where Carmen and I ‘built’ our connection — by sharing statuses, articles, pictures, music, comments, and likes. Donnae Lab was founded by Pina Nuzzo in 2012. As Nuzzo puts it: in the Internet, “the ‘friendships’ and the ‘sharings’ re-define, de facto, the contours of a political geography that it is not ascribable to ‘territory’ anymore.” If the Internet is one of the loci of the political, today, in Italy, Nuzzo claims, it does not replace the meetings in presence (in presenza), though. For this reason the donne tend to organize two or three self-supported two-days meetings per year, which are prepared for and greatly anticipated by most of the women I met, myself included. Donnae Lab, then, in the words of its founder, is “a permanent workshop devoted to research on the thought and representation that women give to themselves in politics, where we may focus on our lives outside given and pre-established readings.” “It is called donne,” Nuzzo continues, “a word that does not exist in Italian vocabulary because it evokes the Latin origin of donna (Italian for woman), “that derives from domina, the syncopated form of domina, which means lady. It includes both

170 http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/about/. The 4th meeting was held in Manfredonia on November 16th and 17th, 2013.
172 http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/about/
the singular and the plural. Periodically the *donnae* will meet to think and to make projects together (emphasis in the original).”

One of the first accomplishments of the *Laboratorio Donne* has been thinking about a new way of understanding feminism that has been referred to as *femminismo molecolare* (molecular feminism), which describes and fits well with the feminist practices that the *Donnae Lab*, with its online vocation, is currently building. This neologism — where, as Nuzzo claims, “molecular it is not a synonym of fragmentation”— originated from the realization that:

Women’s centrality (*protagonismo*) walks through unconventional paths and it is not ascribable anymore to a single belonging. Feminism, today more than yesterday, cannot be represented as a monolith; [*feminism*] has always been constituted by a multiplicity of practices and representations. Today it has become, so to speak, molecular — also because of the Web. *Laboratorio donnae* took this to be a new fact, unavoidable in politics. This means re-reading the attempts, also in the recent past, to start unitary political projects, projects that join. Periodically, women’s politics return to the idea that being many and united makes us stronger, more visible, more contractual. ‘*All together,*’ though, does not work on the basis of organizational models and does not work with partisan politics.

Enza Miceli, a woman who gravitates toward *Laboratorio Donnae*, elaborates this latter point as follows:

> [e]ach one of us is the terminal of many other relations, from these we get the necessary strength that drives us to think about new forms and new projects. This allowed me to overcome the feeling of being a lost particle, and to think of myself as a unique particle, taking the liberty of thinking

---


174 [http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/2013/06/03/femminismo-molecolare/](http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/2013/06/03/femminismo-molecolare/), see also [http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/2013/06/10/una-femminista-molecolare/](http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/2013/06/10/una-femminista-molecolare/)

175 It is worth mentioning that *protagonismo* also has a derogatory meaning in Italian, which could be translated as attention-seeking attitude.

176 [http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/2013/06/03/femminismo-molecolare/](http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/2013/06/03/femminismo-molecolare/)
about a project that is mine by involving others. May I say that I feel like a molecular feminist?\footnote{http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/2013/06/10/una-femminista-molecolare/}

This approach to feminist practices, in other words, relies on the acknowledgement, somehow upstream in the Italian panorama, that “[t]here is not a way to be a feminist, but there are the many women that we become thanks to feminism.”\footnote{Pina Nuzzo, http://laboratoriodonnae.wordpress.com/2012/09/27/partire-da-se-abbiiamo-detto/} Women who “are the terminal of an infinite number of relations, that can be one’s own political group, her co-workers, the women whom one meets at the gym, or in front of the school of her children.”

Each woman is part of a tessitura (weaving), as the women of Lab Donnæ used to say:

I never liked the word “net” used in order to give the sense of a more collective dimension of our politics, it is overused, and it hints of ways of speaking that bother me: to get trapped in a web, to fall into a web, the spider’s web…We from Laboratorio Donnæ preferred to imagine a weaving of relations, of gestures, to which each one of us contributes in the ways she can.\footnote{Facebook: Donnæ Lab 3/11/2013}

For the women of Laboratorio Donnæ, the word tessitura is central. It evokes an activity traditionally undertaken with skill and prowess by women, and gestures towards a connection with ‘history’ that the women with whom I worked need to trace. Moreover, by concentrating on the role of each thread in composing the final product, this metaphor underlines a commonality, in space and time, of projects and goals.\footnote{The molecular dimension stressed by this way of understanding feminism, and the commonality, in space and time, among different generations of feminists, gestures towards the creations of new feminist spaces and practices that could mend the current rift between feminist generations that I describe below.} The latter aspect can be found also in another keyword for the feminists I met: genealogy. Both of these words, as will be evident in this dissertation, rest on the desire and need to be seen, acknowledged and recognized by others.
A Gaze That Doesn't Fade, a Gaze That Supports You, and That Authorizes You To Be

Carmen’s turn arrived: she needed to address her experience within the association and the Laboratorio Donnae, and to explain to us her personal interpretation of what molecolare means. Mostly, though, and not at all surprisingly, she ended up offering a narrative of her life. The plot of this story did not sound entirely unfamiliar.\(^\text{181}\) She started by reading a text in which she spoke about the route (viaggio) that brought her there, at the 4\(^{\text{th}}\) Laboratorio Donnae. She was born in Manfredonia, the town of Northern Apulia that was hosting the event, but apparently spent most of her years trying to escape from there. She studied in another part of Italy, and even lived in another country for a period. When she came back, probably because of a plan that ended up not working as expected, she felt at a loss. Eventually, she found out that:

Only when you have the senso di sé can you truly decide where you want to stay. Otherwise, you just make a series of “smart escapes” that make you wander, without knowing what your political desire is, and if you ever had one. The escapes bring you to failure. So I decided to return here to understand why I always demonized my land of origin. I sensed that my ‘problem’ did not have to be sought in a territory that was hostile to me, but in the fact that I felt I had to find my place on a horizon that was already given, already written by others, with dynamics that I did not know, and that were alien to my way of feeling life and politics.\(^\text{182}\)

In order to be able to find a horizon not already given, Carmen added, she needed to confront herself with a genealogy —a key word in Italian feminist jargon.\(^\text{183}\) Carmen said: “I did not have the words.” “I was looking for a gaze (sguardo) that would acknowledge me (che mi riconoscesse), and that would give me authority (che mi

---

\(^{181}\) See Ammirati et al. 2013, 37-56.

\(^{182}\) This text is a written rearrangement by the author of the one she read during the meeting.

\(^{183}\) See, for example, Ammirati et al. 2013.
The genealogy gave me the words to name things. A language where I could recognize myself.

This narrative was shared, and re-narrated, by Giulia of Manfredonia, another woman in her thirties. I had met her, as well, two years before.

By being away from Manfredonia, I re-took possession of myself. Before, I could not stay here and I used to criticize my land and I did not know that, instead, everything began with myself. Putting physical distance between myself and my city would not have changed things. It was me: I was distant from myself. (…) Once you get awareness of yourself (coscienza di te), you find yourself, you naturally find the energy and the courage to stay and do (agire) in any place and to return to the place from where you fled … you start to understand that the desire to put down roots it is not so different from that of the women who came before you, starting from the closest. You understand you are in a genealogy that needs to be seen, acknowledged, also when the women who are part of it do not look at you, and do not listen to you.184

The fact that every woman is a mirror for other women, as an informant told me once, seems to be at the core of this interpretation of the genealogical relationships among women.185 The similarity and the otherness that the metaphor of the mirror evokes is what allowed Carmen and Giulia to find their own horizon within the relational and political fabric (tessuto) in Manfredonia, and within the Laboratorio Donnae. The feminist reflections on the relationship to one’s mother, informed by the reading of Irigaray (see, for example, 1985a, 1985b; see also Burke 1994), and received through the intellectual legacy of Luisa Muraro (see, for example, 1988, 1991, 2013), are central for most of the women I met. Within these, the genealogical dimension has a special role. According to Muraro, the genealogy among women is double: one is “based on

---

184 This text is a written rearrangement by the author of the one she read during the meeting.
185 See also Ammirati et al. 2013, 74-75. Clearly the metaphor of the mirror resonates with the work of Irigaray.
procreation,” and the other rests on the word, which is something that has to do, first and foremost, with the acknowledgement of “having a history” through the women that “left a mark in history” (1994, 322-325; see also the Conclusions). “The first 'genealogical' practice of feminism,” Muraro continues, consists “precisely in learning about the women who have affected either our biographical or historical past” (322). This, according to Muraro, is what distinguishes the feminist practices of the '60s and '70s from those of her generation. During those two decades, sisterhood was the main framework by which to understand relationships between women. This framework defined even the relationships between mothers and daughters. Conversely, Muraro claims that she and her generation had “experienced the power for change in the practice of genealogical relation,” where the “maternal symbolic” is put into action (324, 330).

I listened to Giulia and Carmen’s stories with empathy, but also with a sense of estrangement. Their words did not resonate with me, they did not give me words to describe my life — though similar to theirs, in many respects, i.e. that of an emigrated Italian woman of their age, who defines herself as being feminist. Their narrative did not help me in redefining my horizon. To be honest, I had a hard time understanding the linguistic referents of their feminist jargon, for example expressions such as senso di sé, a gaze that acknowledges and authorizes, and political desire. I could understand the words, the existential semantic field, perhaps, but not completely what precisely they were referring to. While I was listening to Carmen and Giulia and looking at the audience in order to understand, from their faces and comments, the reception of the words of the two women (which I would describe as one of empathic approval), my mind was going to the anthropological literature on conversion narratives that I had read in my Anthropology of Religion classes years before. While fulfilling the task of being the photographer of the meeting by walking from one side to the other of the conference room taking pictures, I kept thinking about the work of Harding (1987), Saunders (1995),

186 Some older informants told me, with a hint of sarcasm, that right after Muraro started to conceive and present her ideas on the maternal symbolic and on the importance of genealogies, the biological mothers of feminist women — who, until then, had endorsed the never like my mother slogan — started to appear in feminist meetings.
and Stromberg (1993), and on how, at the end, Carmen and Giulia’s stories could be framed within similar approaches. *Mutatis mutandis*, the narratives I was hearing in Manfredonia, *de facto*, could be considered as *conversion* narratives.\(^{187}\) I had the impression that, similarly to their religious counterparts, Giulia and Carmen’s stories were not just telling about an experience, but that they were also constructing it, by narrating it to a public that they wanted to affect. Moreover, they used a specific jargon, a language that was as closed as the religious one, and shared by those who belonged to those feminist circles. This language, not fully accessible even to a (non-insider) Italian native speaker like me, was shaping their personal events into somehow conventional narratives: that was not the only time I heard about returning to the place of origin, and about finding oneself through an encounter with a genealogy.\(^{188}\)

Anthropological resonances aside, the importance of genealogies for the feminists I met is great. For some, it responds to the need to find a meaning in their positions and actions within a broader intellectual and political history, for others it takes more of an existential dimension, and represents a relational *tessitura* with specific persons and encounters, an especially important resource in the current times defined by a widespread sense of precariousness (see chapter 6). Nonetheless, their adhering to the women as mirrors for women narrative revealed a certain need for reciprocity and, together with this, the problem of its negation that I also found in other ethnographic dimensions of my research.

**Affect and Conflict: Sensibili Guerriere / Sensitive She-Warriors**

Lavinia comes from Rome. A woman in her early thirties, she had been invited by Nuzzo to Manfredonia to talk about her experience at DWF (*DonnaWomanFemme*, a historical Italian Feminist Journal), and about her political experience. That was not the first time that she had participated at the *Lab Donnae* meetings, although she does not define herself as belonging to it. This time, she came with two friends and fellow members of

---

\(^{187}\) I also found similar narratives in *contro versa*, and in the personal experiences of different women.  
\(^{188}\) It is worth noting that genealogies, in their work of inclusion, are also exclusionary.
the Collettivo Femministe Nove (F9, from now on), a collective that only very recently had started and that had already made the news within Italian feminist circles (see below). This is why we all were waiting, with anticipation, for their presence — and not just because, due to the notorious Italian traffic, they arrived late at the meeting. Lavinia started by thanking Pina Nuzzo, and by stating the “importance of acknowledgement between women,” in particular of different generations. This represented one of the main topics around which she articulated her narrative: from the open editorial staff (redazione aperta) of DWF to her experience with the collettivo Diversamente Occupate, and her take on the events in Paestum (see below).\(^{189}\) That was not the first time I realized that the relationship between generations of feminists was framed both as an identity marker and as a source of tension in feminist circles. Two years before, at the beginning of my fieldwork, this had emerged very powerfully in the 2011 Scuola della Differenza (School of Difference) that I had attended in Lecce.\(^{190}\) It was during this yearly feminist meeting, also sponsored by the University of Salento, that I heard, for the first time, Muraro, Cigarini, and other influential historical protagonists of Italian feminisms, and that I witnessed an ill-concealed tension between generations of feminists. While attending the meetings in the beautiful conference room of the Convent of the Saint Benedict Nuns of Lecce, I noticed that the distinction between older and younger feminists appeared to be ubiquitous in the words of most of the speakers, dividing the Italian feminist arena into two, undoubtedly fictional, generational factions. Within such a framework, conflict was praised and re-asserted as a key feminist practice: one that, apparently, the young generations did not master well enough, according to some of the older speakers. Being educated in gender studies within British and North American academia, this was my first contact with the thought of sexual difference, and, I admit, it was a complex experience. I had a hard time, for example, figuring out the meanings of words and expressions within Italian feminist jargon, and overcoming the sense of estrangement that the widespread and grounding belief in the true existence of two sexes was giving me. Moreover, the

\(^{189}\) [http://diversamenteoccupate.blogspot.it/](http://diversamenteoccupate.blogspot.it/)

\(^{190}\) I noticed this generational aspect also, for example, in the meetings of UDI, in the meetings organized by the women related to La Casa delle Donne of Lecce, in the recordings of the Paestum 2012 and 2013 conventions, and in various comments online (on Facebook, Forums, and blogs).
lack of reference to any notion of gender was puzzling to me, and I struggled with finding the right words — i.e. understandable by my interlocutors — to talk about my experience as a woman, and as a feminist.\footnote{To my surprise, I found that Butler was not well-known and, in my opinion, generally misunderstood, and I realized that the readings of Foucault that I had encountered in North American academia were quite different from his reception in Italy, at least in that context.} Such an external point of view, though, allowed me to notice some elements that in the rest of my fieldwork proved to be central to contemporary Italian feminism: the ubiquity of the warlike metaphors, and the affects circulating around the generational divide. If, on the one hand, I could not completely grasp the implication of this understanding of conflict between women and its rhetorical praise, on the other hand it was clear to me that this feminist practice had something to do with power differentials, and with the public acknowledgement of one’s dignity (see chapter 8). In the attempt to better understand what was happening around me, I exploited a week of lunch breaks and happy hours in order to meet women, and to talk about what I was struggling with. These non-institutional moments of the School were privileged points of observation. Besides allowing me to collect individual, and much more complex, takes on the status of the art of the generational divide, the more relaxed atmosphere allowed for the expression of some of the emotional dimensions of the conflict that was restrained during general assemblies. While during public meetings disagreements appeared to occur mainly on intellectual or existential levels — and the ability of not showing apprehension or wariness was considered as performatively effective, and as proof of centratura (a term that, in the feminist jargon, means being centered, well-balanced, self-aware) —, more private settings allowed for the affective aspects of the conflict to emerge. Anger and sorrow definitively appeared to be blurred emotions, and the how the others make me feel sort of statements seemed to overcome the what they say ones, both among younger and older women. In other words, I started hypothesizing that the generational divide was more a matter of dissensus (see Introduction and, for example, Rancière 1999, 2000, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, Panagia 2009), than of disagreement. Three years later, and with many more feminist meetings and circles behind me, my perception of the conflict between generations is more nuanced, but I still find it a meaningful framework in order to understand the state of the art of the
situation in Italy. From what I have noticed so far, older and younger women share two important elements: the need and desire to be recognized/acknowledged by the others, and a sort of dissatisfaction with the responses of the others to their expectations.\textsuperscript{192} The older women yearn to be acknowledged as reference points, and the younger to be approved of, and authorized by historical feminists. To a certain extent, though, this need seems not to be fulfilled, and still, quite literally, takes the scene of many of the current debates.

Diving in Paestum

Fig. 22. Cartoon by Pat Carra. “Hundreds of feminists free to conflict! ‘First of all: surviving in Paestum.’”\textsuperscript{193}

Paestum is a town in the region Campania, well known for its archeological remains from the Greek and Roman periods. In 1976, more than 1,000 women met there in what,

\textsuperscript{192} There are, of course, exceptions that do not fit into this schematic interpretation. Lab Donnae and the feminist groups that, at a certain point of their route, ceased to want to be acknowledged by the others and did not answer to the call of the Paestum meeting, are just two examples. Nonetheless, in the registrations for the sessions of the 2012 and 2013 meetings in Paestum, it appears that the problems generated by the generational divide and by the lack of riconoscimento (acknowledgement/acknowledgment) are still taking space and airtime at contemporary Italian feminist debates.

\textsuperscript{193} \url{http://georgiamada.wordpress.com/2012/10/05/paestum-un-salto-femminista-dal-1976-al-2012/}. The pun concerns the title of the feminist meeting in Paestum Primum: vivere (first of all: living).
until a couple of years ago, was considered the last convention of feminists in Italy. In 2012, 36 years after the last convention, some women decided that the historical moment for a new national meeting had arrived. As Dominijanni puts it “[t]he idea of a national meeting of radical feminism had been accruing for a while, as a counter-melody to the egalitarian, claiming, and moralizing tendency that the discourse around women (and, sometimes, of the women) does not cease to have on the mainstream political and media scene.” The title of the 2012 edition was Primum vivere anche nella crisi (First of all: living, also within the crisis), a title, in Latin and Italian, that tried to link the ancient past evoked by the setting, the 1976 feminist meeting, and the economic crisis that shapes the lives of many Italians today. Interestingly, the logo of the meeting was a female diver: a modification of a local ancient painting. The symbol of the diver was meant to underline, and somehow build, a connection between the past and the future.

---

For a comparison between the description of the 1976 and 2012 events on the same newspaper, see Il Manifesto, 36 years later http://georgiamada.wordpress.com/2012/10/05/paestum-un-salto-femminista-dal-1976-al-2012/
196 http://paestum2012.wordpress.com/2012/10/04/rassegna-stampa-ida-dominijanni-il-manifesto3-10-2012/
197 This phrase is probably inspired by the well-known aphorism, popularly attributed to Aristotle. Primum vivere, deinde philosophari — first, living, then, doing philosophy. This motto is consistent with the ubiquitous belief among the feminist circles I attended that practices, more than theory, should inform feminist political activism, and with the urgent need to concentrate on one’s own primary needs in this period of economic instability and precariousness (see, for example, Molé 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013; Muehlebach 2012).
198 This is the original painting: http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomba_del_tuffatore.
199 This element confirms the need for reconciliation with history discussed above in relation to the karstic metaphor. See also the Conclusions.
This meeting was meant to represent, in the words of Melandri, a place where she hoped that:

[t]he women who will participate will have the pleasure of meeting again, see each other again, and also to meet women that they do not know, and, most of all, [they will have] the willingness to listen to each other, the desire to rejoin paths that, through the years, got separated, in the attempt to find moments of sharing or also of openly conflicting. I give to conflict a vital meaning, extraordinary for [bringing forth] changes.  

The dialogue/conflict between generations was something taken into account, even anticipated, in the words of the promoters of the meeting. One could even find jokes circulating on the Web before the gathering, such as the one I put at the beginning of this paragraph (made by the same person who created the logo of the event).

The 2012 Paestum meeting was organized around work in larger sessions as well as around nine smaller workshops on different aspects of women’s politics. Many younger feminists attended Workshop #9, moderated by Muraro (see above), in which the participants discussed “economy, work, and struggle.” As Clara, one of the activists who participated in that particular workshop and who later became a member of the F9
collective, told me one night in Rome, in the women’s bookstore and sex-shop where I
interviewed her, “we saw each other and recognized/acknowledged each other” (ci siamo
viste e ci siamo riconosciute). One of the aspects that emerged during that workshop, in
the words of Muraro as well as according to what some of the women who participated
said in the sessions, was the mutual recognition not of authority, as Muraro’s intellectual
legacy would have suggested, but of subjectivity. 203 This need to re-frame the
relationships between Muraro, what she represents in terms of genealogies, and of
‘authority’ within the Pensiero della Differenza, and the younger women, is not just a
linguistic issue. As I understand it, it is an attempt to re-assess the terms in which
disparità (disparity) is perceived and lived. Italian women's political practices and
relations have so far been happening primarily around the acknowledgement of disparità
(disparity) among women. Solidarity among women is “precious, but it is not enough,”
since women need “diversified and strong relations...into which differences enter into
play as enrichment and no longer as a threat” (Libreria delle Donne di Milano, quoted in
Bono and Kemp 1991,120. See also on affidamento —entrustment— Cicioni 1989). The
construction of these transformative relations is possible, according to Italian feminists,
only when a woman recognizes that another woman has something extra (un 'di più'), a
skill which the former does not possess. This acknowledgement of disparity is both an
antidote to “the rule of male society according to which...all women are definitely equal”
(Libreria delle Donne di Milano, in Bono and Kemp 1991,121). It is also the fundamental
premise of transformative relations204 (such as entrustment) —i.e. relations that change
society while changing oneself. Disparità, then, is often understood within a perspective
influenced by Muraro’s Symbolical Order of the Mother (1991), for whom authority and
power are not synonyms (see for example 1994). What distinguishes the former from the
latter is its relational quality, its necessity of mediation: relations and mediations that,

203 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBFZRm9P5Lk (Paestum 2012, plenum#3) see from around minute
of the video. See also Muraro https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwO51e0urSE.
204 I had the chance to discuss this issue with some older feminist women. It is clear that Muraro’s
reflections on the authority of the mother, and on disparity, also had the effect of “regulating,” of “putting
order into relationships between women” that apparently until then had been difficult to manage (Lucia,
July 2013).
clearly, the younger generations do not acknowledge in the practices of the older ones. Nonetheless, the desire to be recognized still guides the actions of many younger feminists, who do not choose to dispense with the older generations approval and authorization, but are quite willing to obtain them. It is from this perspective that I propose to interpret the experience of the Collettivo Femministe Nove (F9).

Non siamo ereditiere, siamo precarie! We are not heiresses; we are precarious [workers]!

According to Clara, in the aftermath of Paestum 2012, fifteen women who had attended Workshop #9 and who, at that time, predominantly lived in or around Rome, decided to meet and to produce a Manifesto, written with the practice of collective writing. They founded a collettivo d’azione (collective of action) named Collettivo Femministe Nove. With this experience behind them — an experience that was “tough and painful,” in the words of Clara— they went to the 2013 Paestum meeting, which was entitled Libera Ergo Sum (in Latin: I am free, hence I am). During the first session, the F9 took the stage and performed a flash mob. Two of them read some paragraphs of their Manifesto, a woman of the group appeared to be directing the applause of the audience with a red fan, and the others held a banner saying Stato di eccitazione permanente (Permanent status of excitation/arousal). Here are some parts of the text they read:

We are Femministe Nove. We are not heiresses, we are precarious [workers](...)We think about feminism as our possible revolution. And we cannot give it back to what has already been said and to what has already been told. Feminism is a becoming, not a ‘must be.’ Self-determination is a never-ending struggle. (...) We recognize for ourselves the founding value of our genealogies in feminist thought and practices. We do not want to

---

205 Nove means both the number nine—that of the workshop where all those women recognized each other—and new in ancient Italian.
206 This title is obviously a modification of the famous Cartesian “cogito ergo sum.”
207 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1k2fjgKZIU, around 59 minutes into this video.
experience a confrontation between feminist generations, neither in an asymmetry of power and authority, nor in the envy of the epic of a dawning season. We want to start from our lives, from the present that we have in common, in order to build practices of reciprocal empowerment, of liberation from material and symbolic oppression. Self-determination and freedom do not coincide yet. (...) We are historical feminists: the present time dreads us. We want to act to change it. Each one is responsible of her indifference… We feel part of that political generation that does not want to pay the price for the crisis, but that does not have the power to avoid it. (...) Let’s do it this way: nobody speaks on behalf of others, of sex, and of the power that she acts on the other without having talked about herself. Nobody should talk about relation if she is not really willing to expose herself.  

The position of the F9 is somehow representative of a common feeling among many women I met, who share with them both the need to be protagonists of their feminist change, and to be recognized by the older generations. Fulfilling either one of these needs alone would not be enough for them. A recognition/acknowledgement without starting from themselves, or a political struggle without recognition by historical feminists, would not be satisfying options.

It is clear that in the current Italian feminist debates the issues of the asymmetry of power and authority play an important role, and it is not at all a coincidence that much of the debate that followed the performance of the Femministe Nove in Paestum revolved around the fact that the collective took the stage, and that the activists presented themselves as a group (although the names of each member of the Collettivo F9 was mentioned at the end of the reading of their Manifesto). 209 By talking with my informants among and beyond the F9 group, by going through the videos of the sessions of the 2013 Paestum meetings, the blogs, the Facebook exchanges between feminists, and the press

208 http://femministenove.wordpress.com/
209 http://feminileplurale.wordpress.com/2013/10/12/paestum-2013-femministe-nove/
reviews after the meeting, I found that the performance of the F9 generated a rift in the Italian feminist community. This separation can be described as one between those who acknowledged the flash mob as a political statement and those who, instead, considered it as a mere performance of women who were showing off. It is precisely in the fissures, at different levels, between desiring to be seen and recognized and showing off, that the current Italian feminist debates are unfolding, today. Within these fissures, the issues around 'representation' are central.

The aim of this chapter was to describe the context wherein the clusters of discourses, practices, performances, affects and representations around 'femicide' and gendered violence were generated and are operating. I portrayed the current state of the art of the Italian feminist scene. Starting from my participant observation in different feminist settings and from my ethnographic data, I offered a personal re-reading of the historical and contemporary frameworks in which Italian feminist movements work — especially of UDI, a group that has been quite influential in Italy since the end of the last World War. In my rendering, I used the lens of visibility in order to illustrate the background on which my research takes place. I have shown that the cluster of metaphors around the issues on visibility is active both at a public and at a personal level. The re-elaborations of the margins of this, as Warner points out (2002, 60-63), is (also) one of the goals of feminist thought.
Chapter 5

The Creation(s) of Gendered Violence And 

Femminicidio

I address gendered violence in this dissertation not primarily in its more physical and traumatic dimensions, but in its *generative* ones. It is the effects that its emergence as a commensurable dimension of the lives of Italian women and as a matter of interest for the general public provoked in the lives of my informants specifically and in Italian women’s activism generally that I am interested in describing. To these ends, in this chapter I first narrate the affective and aesthetic responses I encountered in Salento among the women with whom I worked. Here I include the changes in my own performances of seeing, as one “schooled” in my informants’ visualities (Grasseni 2007, 2011), and in my sensing as regards gendered violence. Second, I focus on the presence and importance of gendered violence and *femminicidio* among other Italian women’s groups, offline and online. When I started my fieldwork I was surprised to find that though violence was such an important dimension of Italian feminist activism it was completely absent from the national media. Over the last three years the situation has changed, and gendered violence and *femminicidio* (together with the visions of and visualities on the world that they convey) started to emerge as a national problem. In 2007 Guano wrote that “It would be inaccurate to claim that Italian women have no consciousness of the abuses and injustices that they suffer,” yet that “most of the scattered stories of exploitation and violence that women tell each other fail to coalesce into a conscious, collective narrative of gender oppression and inequality” (2007, 57). Even if this appeared to be the case before 2007, since then Italian and especially feminist women (and men) have started to move in an opposite direction, and this move is increasingly opening up new spaces for debates in Italian public opinion. I claim that first the *Staffetta*, second the online and offline re-launch of issues around *femminicidio* by various feminist circles and bloggers, and third, Concita De Gregorio and the *Se Non Ora Quando* movement, are three steps in the construction of both feminist and non-feminist audiences. These, I argue, provided an ideal public for the emergence of a new women’s question in Italy. Whereas I addressed Concita De Gregorio
and the *Se Non Ora Quando* movement in the first chapter, in this fifth chapter I will discuss the first two, concentrating in particular on the first one. The *Staffetta*, I claim, and its amphora in particular, by mobilizing people's affects and representations had a prominent political role in creating *dissensus* around gendered violence in Italy.

**Tracing Violence: Eugenia**

Eugenia is a woman in her thirties. She lives with her parents in a small town a few kilometers away from Lecce. She has been living there since she was born, although she spent some time in the North during her college years. She graduated a few years ago and, at the time I met her in 2011, she was not working. Apparently, she never had the chance to work continuously since she completed her MA. When I met her, she was enrolled in a computer-programming course—one of the many specialization courses she attended since her graduation—that she seemed to enjoy very much. She was single at that time and willing to share with me information about her recent (and, to me, I must confess, somewhat uneventful) personal life.²¹⁰ Our chats included a fair amount of picture browsing and comment-reading on Facebook, and discussion on the romantic pasts of common acquaintances and of women whom she knew but whom I did not. Mostly, our conversations on her romantic life seemed to me to have the performative effect of distancing her personal history and narrative from the failing emotional lives of other women. It was a way of allowing me to become acquainted with her by finding out what she thinks she is not, or what she does not want to be.

One night, early in our relationship, Eugenia drove me home. I was sitting in her car in front of my apartment. It was late for me as I was not yet acquainted with Salentine daily routines. I felt I was stuck in that car, and I kept thinking about how before leaving home I had promised my three-year-old son that I would be back in time to put him to bed and

---

²¹⁰ This remark, which is situated at the very beginning of my fieldwork before I was schooled in the visualities and practices of my informants, is not intended to be judgmental but to express the *difference in the perception* of relationships that characterized that initial period of fieldwork. Similarly, when later I refer to the different perceptions of the *repartition of time* between Eugenia and me, I am not judging the value of her time in reference to mine. I am only describing some of the elements that, in spite of my being a native ethnographer I needed to learn and get adjusted to in the field: the interpretation of time and relationships are examples of some of the adjustments I needed to process.
that it was already way past his regular bedtime. For Eugenia, though, immersed in Salentine habits, it was early (just late afternoon), so she felt that it was perfectly appropriate to indulge in conversation and to give voice to the flow of her thoughts. “Giovanna, you don’t know how many girls around here think that jealousy is a sign of “true” love. I know many girls who justify and even look for a jealous, violent man.” This sentence came out of the blue, without—or so it seemed to me—any connection with the previous one. Retrospectively, I think that the connection was very clear: we were talking about feminism. Feminism is a strong motivational element and identity marker in Eugenia’s life, and a pretty unusual one for Italian women, especially of her age.

When we talked about feminism, Eugenia loved quoting her grandmother who, given her poor origins and lack of education (a very frequent feature in Italian women of her age and economic class), could be defined as a feminist (femminista) in all but name.

Apparently, having heard the word femminista for the first time from Eugenia, the old woman had asked her: “What is this being femminista about?” Eugenia claims to have answered: “Being femminista is fighting for the dignity of women, nonna (grandma)!” At this point the old woman apparently replied, with a bit of disillusionment: “Oooh, I see. So I have been femminista for my whole life without knowing it!” Dignity, violence, and (the absence of) intimate relationships: all seemed to be at the core of Eugenia’s experience of what being a feminist was and what it was not. If, on the one hand, it was obvious that she was looking for romance in her life (and her visits to the beauty salon every other week all year long—a somewhat expensive habit for an unemployed woman—seemed to indicate this), she also appeared to be proud of not being in a situation like those of the many women she talked about: involved in abusive (heterosexual) relationships. If violent relationships were so ubiquitous, she implied, not having one was a feminist marker in a ‘patriarchal’ context, and a way to respect one’s own dignity (see chapter 8). On more than one occasion Eugenia seemed to be particularly sensitive to the topic of women and violence: every time she mentioned something around this subject she became quite emotional. She would lower her voice, incline her head, and move her hands nervously. On one occasion, I recall, she described how she felt physically sick and psychologically unstable as a result of the marital
problems of a person she knew well (a relative, perhaps).

****

It was the beginning of 2012. It was the first time Eugenia and I had met in a couple of months: she had been quite busy with a temporary job and we did not have the chance to see each other or talk at the phone.

“Giovanna, did you hear the news?” she asked me. I did not respond as I was not sure to what she was referring. Given the bodily expressions she was performing, I thought it might be better to wait for her to continue. “Did you hear about that girl who was murdered?” She was referring to one of the many ‘femicides’ that took place in Italy in the first days of 2012. Neither of us knew the murdered woman personally, and the homicide took place in another city, far from Salento. Nonetheless, it appeared clear to me that this news affected her personally — though I confess I did not respond that way myself. Of course I was sorry to hear about another ‘femicide,’ but this news did not have the same effect on me as it did on her: it did not touch me personally. Nonetheless I felt compelled to show concern and I found myself mimicking her body gestures: I frowned, lowered my voice, started to talk slowly, and occasionally I shook my head. I also found myself wondering whether I was being cynical, insensitive, or, even worse, compliant with ‘patriarchal’ hegemonic discourses: Eugenia’s reaction (rather than the news itself) affected me deeply.

Why did our responses to the murder of a woman appear to be so different? What was all this about? I was puzzled: I had seen Eugenia in several circumstances before, and I thought I could recognize when she was worried, angry, stressed, or sad. Her behavior and expressions that day did not easily fit into any of those categories.

****

After a few months of silence, I contacted Eugenia by email. Some personal circumstances had distanced her from the group, and I had not had the chance to meet her in person for a long time. I found Eugenia as I had left her: busy dealing with family
relations, concerned about her life as a woman, and extremely warm and generous in her exchange with me. On that occasion, I asked her what she feels, emotionally and physically, when she hears about a ‘femicide’ or about episodes of violence on women. This is what she answered:

At the beginning it is as if someone gave me a punch in the stomach and my first thought is: “No, it happened again.” Then, I feel I can’t breathe (mi sento mancare l’aria). This reaction comes from the fact that I have suffered from asthma since I was in elementary school. The allergist explained to me that asthma is my mechanism of self-defense against intense emotional shocks. Then goose bumps. I can’t control any of these [reactions]. It is as if my body reacts by itself to the input: “femicide.” This is not something new for me, though, since I’ve always lived in a visceral way the phenomena of violence. When the war in Iraq started, I couldn’t sleep for a week, since I kept thinking about the number of persons that would have been killed by the bombings. However, when a woman is murdered, the feeling is more immediate for me (assimilabile). I don't know if I can explain it properly, but it is as if I feel I’m right next to her and myself a potential victim of a violent man. I imagine her smile that's no longer there, especially when I see her picture. And I feel as if I didn’t do enough to stop it.

Then, Eugenia continued by referring to a recent (2013) dramatic event involving the killing of some persons she knew personally, an event that touched her deeply. She concluded: “[b]efore all this, talking about violence against women, for me, was something that, even so, had not touched me ‘directly.’ Now it is different, it is even more visceral than in the past. Because I have seen with my own eyes the results of this [i.e men’s] sick possessiveness.”

*****
Eugenia’s reactions and words moved me: I found the affective intensity she felt when talking about ‘femicide’ and violence against women almost palpable. I found it overwhelming: the various shades of her affective tones pierced me so deeply that somehow they affected my own perceptions. Specifically, I was no longer sure of what I was really perceiving. I felt confused, but curious to understand what was happening to her—and to myself, too.211

While Eugenia’s sensitivity might be considered exceptional, her reactions to the news of ‘femicides’ and of violence against women did not seem to be, to me, an idiosyncratic behavior at all. While I was in the field I had the chance to notice that every single time a reference to a ‘femicide’ or to episodes of gendered violence became part of a conversation among the women with whom I started working (the macare, first of all) I would register a change in the ambience of the conversation, I witnessed affective and bodily performances that I could not easily understand and frame according to the emotional categories I thought I shared with my informants.212 On those occasions, every single woman of the group in her own way displayed a particular form of affective involvement that achieved the same results: marking and performing a strong discontinuity with the conversation at hand, and a shift in the tones of the communicative verbal and non-verbal exchanges.

As a result, I was always feeling as if I was missing something. On the basis of the long, extensive, and close visits with each member of the macare (in the group and individually, publicly and privately) I can affirm that the performance of these affects, for every single woman of the group, took on specific connotations, bodily performances, and gestures. In other words, the ways I perceived Elisabetta, Marta, Eugenia, and the others reacting to ‘femicides’ and cases of violence against women (enacted or potential) were peculiar in two ways. First, the women of the group performed various mannerisms, each one of them engaging somewhat different behaviors and bodily gestures. Second,
for every single woman of the group these performances differed from the bodily reactions each one of them showed separately in relation to discrete emotions they (and I) recognized such as fear, worry, anxiety, stress, and so on. There was something confusing to me in their behaviors: something I could not pinpoint precisely but that definitively affected me.

My perceptions were somewhat supported by my informants’ own words. When I asked some of them, in private individual conversations, to describe what they felt emotionally and physically in one of those affectively intense circumstances, most of them had some trouble associating their feelings with a discrete emotion. Apparently, there was no single word that could describe their feelings. All of the women—even those who mentioned one specific emotion as being prevalent—tended to describe their feelings by describing their bodily reactions. Elisabetta, for example, claims that when she hears about a ‘femicide,’ she feels “anger with weeping” (rabbia con pianto), whereas when she reads in the newspapers about a ‘femicide’ justified as a “crime of passion” she just feels “angry.” By contrast, Marta describes what she feels when she hears about violence against women as “not really anger” (rabbia), but something like a strong emotion that gets her in the gut (un’emozione molto forte che mi prende nella pancia), or a “tumult in the gut” (un tumulto nella pancia). Lucia feels overwhelmed (mi sento sopraffatta) and tries to control her anger, which manifests itself as a feeling of being smothered (sentirsi soffocare), and feeling she cannot get any air (mi manca l’aria). Veronica claims that she feels “like a powerful hurricane, almost devastating, that can’t find its way to assert its power over that dark shadow that is violence.”213

Violence was a ubiquitous topic among the feminists I met in Salento in 2011. Directly or indirectly, it popped up, often unexpectedly, in both public and private circumstances. Before these debates began to be an everyday presence in the Italian media (as gradually happened over the following couple of years), while I was in Salento I encountered the topic of violence quite frequently. For example, I heard Pina Nuzzo talking about

213 For a comparison, see Ahmed 2004 on the circulation of (affects and) emotions.
violence against women; I witnessed Luisa Muraro, on the occasion of a meeting organized by the feminists of *La Casa delle Donne of Lecce*, speculating on aspects of just violence perpetrated by women; and I watched it act as subtext to a meeting on journalism as civic commitment at a book fair in Campi Salentina. Yet mostly at that time ‘femicide’ and violence popped up out of the blue for me, with aesthetic and emotional connotations, in informal conversations such as the following.

**Rosa**

It was a nice sunny Saturday morning. It was late November, but because of the *scirocco* (a Southern warm wind), the temperature was mild. Rosa, Veronica, and I were in a *Fiat Punto* driving to a beautiful *masseria* (mansion) surrounded by olive trees in Casamassella for a two-day women’s sociality (*socialità femminile*) organized in honor of Carla.

Rosa is a middle-aged lesbian woman who drove to Lecce from another Italian region specifically for this event. Unlike most of the other women engaged in homosexual or and homoemotional relationships (see Kirstoglou 2004) whom I met during my fieldwork, she chooses to define herself as a lesbian. The adoption of this identity marker is probably related to her particular history: unlike the majority of the women I met, she had been politically active in different movements, including groups that were known to be lesbian-feminist. Given the peculiarity of her standpoint, her experience in different sectors of Italian feminisms, and her position on the governing board of *UDI*, I was eager to exploit the car ride to hear her points of view on the Association and on the events of  

---

214 28/02/2012

215 Everyday life in Salento is characterized by references to the winds; almost uniquely, in my experience, by referring to *scirocco* and *tramontana*. Hardly a day passed when random references to these winds were not made. The first one is a hot, humid wind that blows from the southeast and is often blamed for feelings of oppression, irritability, heat, and never-drying laundry. The second one, by contrast, is a dry, cold wind that blows from the north, and according to the people of Salento is responsible for rapid changes in temperature, especially in the winter, but is generally appreciated as a relief from *scirocco*. During the summer months, it is said in Lecce, whoever wants to go to the beach needs to pay attention to the winds and choose beaches accordingly: on the Adriatic Sea if there is *scirocco*, on the Ionian sea if there is *tramontana* wind. A popular saying of the Salento defines it as the land of sun, sea and wind (*Salentu. Lu sule, lu mare, lu jentu*).
its XV Congress in Bologna.\textsuperscript{216} At that time I was curious about who \textit{UDI} women considered to be a woman. I knew that the name of the organization had been changed from \textit{Unione delle donne Italiane} (Union of Italian Women) to \textit{Unione delle donne in Italia} (Union of the Women in Italy) some years earlier explicitly in order to recognize immigrants —i.e. non native women who live in Italy— as part of the movement. However, I also remembered noticing at the Bologna Congress that I had attended in person a month before a striking uniformity in social status, class belonging, and geographical origin among \textit{UDI} women. Moreover, I remembered that, in Bologna, it was strictly forbidden for men, including journalists, to participate or even to sit in the room where the Congress was held. I witnessed some women escorting a male journalist out, and other commenting on the inappropriateness of his presence in the room. By contrast, even if they were not members of \textit{UDI} women could attend the meetings freely. I decided to introduce the topic semi-seriously.

Giovanna: “So, Rosa, I have a question for you, as a member of the governing board of \textit{UDI}. Am I entitled to be a member of \textit{UDI}? You know, I am Italian, but I live in Boston...if \textit{UDI} is the Union of the Women in Italy...well, technically, it might not be possible for me to be a member.” Rosa and Veronica laughed, and both showed me and offered me some reassurance: I could indeed be considered part of \textit{UDI}. I laughed as well, reciprocating their affection. I continued: “Seriously, Rosa. Who is a woman for \textit{UDI}? For example, could a transgendered or a transsexual woman be part of \textit{UDI}?\textsuperscript{217}”

Rosa replied brusquely, almost with irritation: “I would not give a \textit{UDI} membership card to a trans. They were not raised as women, and were not exposed to the violence and to the possibility of violence in the same ways young girls are.”

\textsuperscript{216} The XV Congress of \textit{UDI}, for many reasons, represented a controversial moment in the history of \textit{UDI}: the two main pressure groups in \textit{UDI} had a harsh and not completely politically correct confrontation on some issues regarding the present and the future of the group.

\textsuperscript{217} In formulating this question I paid close and explicit attention to talking about transgendered and transsexual women. This choice, which seems obvious in English, is not in Italian. In everyday language \textit{transessuale} (the difference between “transgendered” and “transsexual” is not perceived by the vast majority of Italians) is preceded almost exclusively by the masculine article \textit{il}, the same as when referring to a male-to-female transsexual. By choosing the feminine indefinite article “\textit{una},” and by adding the word “woman” I obviously wanted to take a particular stand.
I was surprised. Given her political past, I did not expect this answer from her. Although our conversation continued gently and respectfully for the remaining miles of our trip, Rosa proposed that I organize a panel with her to discuss this topic with other UDI women. It never took place. Yet I could not get over the abrupt change of ambience that my question had provoked: from friendly warmth to huffy distance. I thought I had indeed touched a sore spot. I admit it: I felt disturbed by the implications of Rosa’s line of reasoning. It was the first time as an Italian woman that I had heard such a narrative. Didn’t her response marginalize or conceal the experience of violence of other human beings? Wasn’t it a way to give violence additional power: that of defining who I am? How could Rosa not see this? I knew, as Koyama writes in her Transfeminist Manifesto, that “Some feminists, particularly radical lesbian feminists, have accused trans women and men of benefiting from male privilege. Male-to-female transsexuals, they argue, are socialized as boys and are thus given male privilege” (Dicker 2003, 247). What surprised me, though, in the conversation with Rosa, was that this gender privilege was inflected with a language of violence. In Rosa’s reasoning, what makes a woman is not described in terms of lack of some privileges, or of some rights. Not surprisingly, in our conversation in the car that day, Rosa refused to accept my understanding of woman as whoever defines herself as such, regardless of the criteria she uses to define herself. What is interesting to me is that she disagreed with me not primarily in the name of a biological understanding of genders, or on the basis of women's lack of possibilities compared to men (which would have included, among other dimensions, the fact of being exposed to violence). Rosa seemed to be saying that it was violence itself, its possibility, that made women or, at least, an imagined community of women (Anderson 1991. See below). This violence was understood as a particular type of violence, that UDI women rather awkwardly called violenza sessuata. This sexed violence did not seem to be comparable to that to which transgendered and transsexual persons are often tragically exposed.

The ambivalence of constructing women as (potentially) violated women is evident. While on the one hand it liberates new possibilities for some women, on the other hand it exploits the discriminatory violence of language (Butler 2006), that defines whose violence is a meaningful one and whose lives are worth grieving: who “has part,” and
who “has no part,” in Rancière's words. It decides who counts as human and whose lives count as lives (Butler 2004, 20, see also Rancière on humanity as the expression of a lack of politics 1999, 124; 2010, 62-75).

My Words Are My Dress: the Web as a Political Platform

One of the elements that became immediately evident by hanging out with UDI feminists was that a wide part of the information, topics, debates, activities, and agendas with which they involved themselves was established by their engagement with the Internet, mostly blogs and Facebook. As soon as I started meeting more feminists — for example by traveling to Bologna and Rome with my UDI informants, following the UDI Congress and self-convocations (autoconvocazioni) — and becoming their friend on Facebook, I realized that many of these women put lots of daily effort and energy into posting, commenting, linking, liking, discussing, glossing, quoting, sharing, and emailing media concerning women’s issues from a feminist perspective. This practice involves performances and, I claim, is performative of (modern) feminist womanhood in the Italian context (see chapter 8). It was widespread at that time and it is all the more so today. While Facebook seems to be the preferred platform, some of the UDI feminists (sparingly) use Twitter, YouTube, and write on blogs (both personal and collective), sometimes signing the articles with a nickname. Yet most of them appear to be regular followers of a number of webpages and blogs, the consultation of which soon became, and still is, part of my own regular Internet routine. The daily activities of the feminists I met, and of others I did not meet, but that are friends of friends on Facebook, and that I learned to know by virtue of their posts being re-posted, re-commented, re-quoted, and so on, encompass many forms. These comprise signing petitions, organizing

218 The videos posted range from video-recordings of events, to ironic creations, from photo-video narratives of particularly significant experiences, to audio-video letters to their political opponents.

219 The use of Twitter is not as widespread as Facebook. Among the feminist blogs mentioned above, I can cite, for example http://feminismo-a-sud.noblogs.org; http://abbattoirmuri.wordpress.com; http://27esimaora.corriere.it; http://www.ilcorpodelledonne.net; http://comunicazionedigencere.wordpress.com; http://laboratorioidonnae.wordpress.com; http://ritentasaraipufortunato.blogspot.com; http://vitadastreghe.blogspot.com; http://www.zeroviolenzadonne.it
email-bombings against brands that, according to them, for example objectify women for the purpose of selling products, bickering with other feminist groups that make claims different from their own, publicly de-friending acquaintances who appear to have views that in their opinion are detrimental to women’s self-determination, and posting and re-posting viral images such as the following:

Fig. 24. The red bow will be the symbol of the protest against ‘femicide’ and violence against women. Let’s share it as a very powerful shout!! I want to see it on all your Facebook walls!

Interestingly, as soon as I entered this online feminist world (one that became a second, and very important, field of my research and that I have been practicing for more than three years), I noticed that much of the daily exchange of this virtual community of feminists revolved around issues of violence against women, and ‘femicide.’ Sometimes it popped up around the last woman murdered, sometimes around sexual violence, sometimes against the local and national rendering of this type of news by the media, and sometimes against the public use of images of battered women. In any case, the topic of violence was ubiquitous. In the absence of a governmental research institution concerned with violence against women in Italy, there are blogs which count ‘femicides’; these were and are always quoted and posted, re-quoted and re-posted.220 The zeal, time, and passion

put into these online activities surprised me, and still does: these women spend several hours per day Googling, reading, commenting, writing, and posting materials in favor of the feminist cause against violence, and in so doing demonstrate their serious commitment, fond dedication, and enthusiastic eagerness. Facebook is a serious matter: each comment, like, share, or post is meant and felt to be a political statement. Facebook in particular and the Internet in general are considered as a field of/for the representation of feminist womanhood and as a space for challenging the dominant gazes on women and gendered violence (see chapter 8). As one of these very politically committed women wrote on Facebook once: “[i]f I think about Facebook as a public square, I do not put on the first clothes I find for going out. Since I know I can be seen, I dress myself with care. My words are my dress.” In this public square “public declarations are a great responsibility.”  

Pina Nuzzo is even more explicit when she writes on the Facebook page of the Laboratorio Donne: “The ‘friendships’ and the ‘shares’ on the Web re-define the profiles of a political geography that cannot be lead back to ‘territory’. Thus through the written word, some individual women and some groups acquired an ‘authority’ that goes beyond the Web.”

Smartphones, notebooks, netbooks, and other devices of the sort were an almost unavoidable part of my everyday life with the feminists in Salento, too. These technological devices made the connections between the local communities I was working with, and the broader Italian one, quite close. I remember a trip to Bari's IKEA with Carla and Marta. It was a leisure-trip that they had organized for me in order to give me a break from my Leccese routine. The atmosphere was relaxed, but I could not avoid noticing that, while Marta was driving, and I was sitting next to her, Carla, who was seated in the back, spent the whole time (a two-hour drive) on Facebook, telling us about people's comments online, and typing, re-typing, editing, and re-editing her own comments. She carefully weighed every single word. She considered very carefully every

---

221 23 September 2013. This claim is better understood when compared to the role of bella figura (making a good impression) in the Italian context. See for example Nardini 1999, Plesset 2006, Del Negro 2004, Pipyrou 2014.

222 2 November 2013.
hidden allusion or possible reading. It was a matter of image, of being seen, of being appraised: no detail could be left unconsidered. Similarly, the reactions of others to her comments, and to the comments on comments, were treated with great attention and consideration. This practice clearly produced structures of belonging, and contributed to the creation of ethical and aesthetic patterns of modern feminist womanhood (see chapter 8). Two years later, almost daily I continue to talk or chat over Skype and through Whatsapp messages with some of the women I met in Salento: now as then, who wrote, commented, quoted, posted what and when on Facebook is always part of our exchanges.

The affective and aesthetic dimensions of violence against women permeated my days among the Salentine feminist women with whom I worked. Their stories and political activities, though, strongly resonated with what was happening at a more general level in Italy at that time. If this was the situation when I started my fieldwork, in the past three years I have witnessed the progressive shift of this online community from being a self-referential virtual community of feminists to having an impact on Italian media. Moreover, it had an important role in constructing an imagined community of women — specifically of (potentially) violated women — that gradually started to represent women as a political subject vis-à-vis Italian public opinion.

**Femminicidio: The Emergence Of a Word and the Creation of Dissensus**

It was September 2011, and I had just started my fieldwork. I was in Lecce with Eugenia, wanting to get to know better both her and the organization (UDI) to which she belonged. I was strolling with her around *Porta Napoli* when she started talking about the three National Campaigns promoted by *UDI* since 2002: *50E50*, the *Staffetta*, and *Immagini Amiche* (see below). She told me that the first one was a bill about the presence of women on governing boards everywhere, and the third a campaign to promote awareness of the uses of the bodies and images of women on TV and in other media.\(^{223}\) The second —

\(^{223}\) *50E50* was not just a proposal that had to do with quotas, but asked for a more thorough representation of women *ovunque si decide* (in every place where decisions are made).
which Eugenia seemed to consider the most important, the one that exemplified the struggles of the other two campaigns as well—was against sexed violence and *femminicidio*.\(^{224}\) That was the first time I had ever heard the word *femminicidio*, the Italian rendering of the word ‘femicide.’

Technically, *femminicidio* is not a neologism in Italian, as is its South American equivalent *femicidio*.\(^{225}\) It is a word used sparingly in nineteenth-century Italian literature, and it did not appear in legal or everyday language until very recently. Although its use in 2011 was not so widespread, it is currently widely employed in the media to refer to, as I heard my informants putting it on many occasions: “the killing of women by the hand of men for the fact of being women.” *De facto*, it has been included in some of the most respected Italian dictionaries, it is acknowledged by the prestigious *Accademia della Crusca*, and it has become part of the everyday vocabulary of many Italians.\(^{226}\) Moreover, the word *femminicidio*, or *femicidio*,\(^{227}\) appears in the title or the topic of at least seventeen books published between 2012 and 2013,\(^{228}\) in the name of some blogs\(^{229}\) (including the one belonging by Barbara Spinelli), and is the subject of the

---

\(^{224}\) The expression sexed violence is not widespread in the Italian language. It was coined by *UDI*. I am not sure why *UDI* women do not use the expression gendered violence (*violenza di genere*), but they are, in general, not acquainted with the idea of there being a distinction between sex and gender, and even less so with its critiques. In agreement with the thought of sexual difference they consider sexual difference to be a biological and fundamental attribute of being human.

\(^{225}\) http://www.wired.it/play/cultura/2014/10/17/10-parole-consocere-meglio/


\(^{226}\) According to the website of the prestigious *Accademia della Crusca*, *femminicidio* appears for the first time in the dictionary *Devo-Oli* in 2009, in *ZINGARELLI* from 2010, in the *Vocabolario Treccani* online, and in *Neologismi* Treccani in 2012 (as “feminicidio o femicidio”). See http://www.accademiadellacrusca.it/it/lingua-italiana/consulenza-linguistica/domande-risposte/femminicidio-perch-parola. In spite of this official recognition, there are occasional resistances to its adoption such as the following, published in the left wing newspaper *Repubblica*, that caused strong reactions among feminists online http://www.repubblica.it/la-repubblica-delle-idee/societa/2013/12/27/news/care-donne-abolite-la-parola-femminicidio-74585204/ http://www.europaquotidiano.it/2013/06/28/la-crusca-perche-si-dice-femminicidio/.

\(^{227}\) It is enough to go to the amazon.it website and to insert the word *femminicidio* in order to see the number of results. They are partial results, probably, but, nonetheless, relevant for supporting my claim.

\(^{228}\) See for example http://femminicidio.blogspot.com/; http://femicidiocasadonne.wordpress.com/2014/01/24/stop-al-femminicidio/
theatrical piece (and book) Ferite a morte (Wounded to Death),\textsuperscript{230} written and performed by the actress Serena Dandini all over Italy. It was the topic of a reportage book by the well-known TV journalist Riccardo Iacona (2012) and of one of his TV specials,\textsuperscript{231} of the latest book by the two distinguished Italian writers Murgia and Lipperini (2013), the object of a 2012 petition of Se Non Ora Quando,\textsuperscript{232} the concern of a number of articles and blogs on the Internet, and finally, in 2013, of a specific Law (#119 of 2013), known as the Law on Femminicidio\textsuperscript{233} and very much contested by Italian feminists.\textsuperscript{234} The first people who used this term politically, in the Italian context, apparently were the women of UDI.\textsuperscript{235} Pina Nuzzo, the former national delegate of UDI, told me in a private conversation that:

the term femminicidio was taken on politically by UDI during a sit-in in front of the Parliament in June, I think, of 2006, with a banner drawn by me that said Stop Femminicidio.\textsuperscript{236} We wanted to involve the women members of Parliament and to direct the attention of institutions to a killing spree (mattanza)\textsuperscript{237} that seemed, and still seems, unstoppable. From that moment on I always used it, and I re-launched it with the Staffetta in 2008. There are documents that certify the political choice and the references to the South American context...I chose to push through the use of a term that bothered both men and women in order to force them to see, in many murders classified as generic in the statistical data, the violent

\textsuperscript{230} http://www.feriteamorte.it/
\textsuperscript{231} http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-f3293d14-8b95-40c5-b333-957340103241.html
\textsuperscript{232} http://www.ibs.it/ser/serfat.asp?site=libri&xy=femminicidio
\textsuperscript{233} http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/10/15/13G00163/sg Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 14 agosto 2013, n. 93, recante disposizioni urgenti in materia di sicurezza e per il contrasto della violenza di genere, nonché in tema di protezione civile e di commissariamento delle province.
\textsuperscript{234} The contestations came from many feminist groups. Notably, the Paestum 2013 meeting produced a collection of signatures against it entitled Not in My Name. See http://paestum2012.wordpress.com/2013/10/08/decreto-femminicidio-non-in-mio-nome/
\textsuperscript{235} There are some juridical and literary precedents—such as the work of Barbara Spinelli— but they did not become established, and were not used politically on such a wide range as that of UDI and Nuzzo. http://www.europaquotidiano.it/2013/06/28/la-crusca-perche-si-dice-femminicidio/
\textsuperscript{236} See image below.
\textsuperscript{237} Interestingly, the word Pina Nuzzo used, "mattanza," that I translated as killing spree, is a term primarily used in order to designate the harvesting of tuna fish in the Mediterranean Sea.
death (*morte violenta*) of women at the hands of men. In general, they are relatives and kin.  

This linguistic struggle is all the more so an ideological one, as Nuzzo clearly points out. It is also, I would add, a representational one. The choice of introducing a new word was a conscious attempt to make visible a particular interpretation of the world that, in 2006, was *invisible* to many: it was the emergence of an incommensurable (Povinelli 2001, on the relationship between identity, identification, and disidentification see Asselin et al. 2008, 7).  

Stressing the fact that ‘femicide’ is not a synonym for homicide or for uxoricide was indeed a revolution in the commonsensical perception, in Rancièrian terms, of what violence against women is — for women and men alike.  

The story of the process of legitimization of the word *femminicidio*, in this sense, is also the story of its creation, and the steps that describe the endorsement of the term also represent the measures of the passage between the incommensurability of a phenomenon and its recognition by Italian public opinion. It is, to quote Dave's pun again (2011, 656), the “emergence” of an “emergency”: in Dave's ethnography as well, the emergence of a word — lesbian, in that case — coincided with the creation of new possibilities, and of an “affective community of women based on the commonality of their desires” (2010, 598).

If we can trace the origin of the public appearance of this word back to 2006, it is not until 2009 and especially until 2012/2013 that non-UDI and explicitly non-feminist women and men began to embrace and adopt the term *femminicidio*. In this process, the *Staffetta delle Donne contro la Violenza sulle Donne* ( Relay of Women against Violence on Women, *Staffetta* or Relay from here on) played a crucial role, although it might be

---

238 Private conversation via email on 27 April 2013.  
239 In her 2001 article, Povinelli deals with incommensurability. With this term, derived from debates in linguistics and philosophy, she indicates those phenomena that are perceived by the social context in which they are embedded, as radical new worlds: totally other and therefore inconceivable.  
240 While Dave seems to be more interested in the communitarian aspects of this emergence, and of its transition from an imagined community to a face-to-face one (2010, 615), my ethnography is more specifically centered on the cultivation of alternative individualities around the issue of being witnesses rather than victims, and takes more explicitly that of representations as a key component of this enterprise.
considered just as a first step towards the formal and widespread recognition of the word and worlds of *femminicidio*.

**Staffetta Delle Donne Contro la Violenza Sulle Donne**

On November 25th, 2008 UDI commenced a national campaign to prevent violence against women.241 The starting date of the *Staffetta* was symbolic, since the 25th of November is the International Day Against Violence Against Women. The relay opened in Niscemi (Sicily), where a woman named Lorena had been murdered, and ended one year later, on November 25th, 2009, in Brescia (Lombardy), where a woman called Hiina had been slaughtered. During that year, an amphora designed with two handles “in order to be carried by two women”—an aspect that “symbolizes the importance of relations” (Nuzzo 2008) — travelled through Italy. Each city or town that received the amphora welcomed it by organizing public events: from seminars to exhibits, and from shows to public debates.242 People greeted the amphora in many public places: from schools to jails, and from theaters to city halls. The ritual associated with the amphora's tour was characterized by the public delivery of the amphora by two women to two recipient women. In each town or city, every woman who wanted to could put a note with her thoughts, feelings, denunciations, or pictures into the amphora.

The objective of the *Staffetta* was “to say stop sexed violence and *femminicidio*” (Nuzzo 2008), which was defined as “the killing of women by the hands of men,” as a “disease” (each “germ” of which needed to be neutralized), and as the act of a man killing a woman in order to feel “*maschio*” (male, macho. Nuzzo 2008).

---

241 *Staffetta di Donne Contro la Violenza sulle Donne*, in English Relay of Women Against Violence Against Women.  
242 See pictures below.  
For a selection of messages, see below.
In spite of the marginality of publicity about the Relay initiatives in the national press, the *Staffetta* was a great success.\(^{243}\) Hundreds of women witnessed the amphora's progress and left messages in it. I had the chance to analyze 1,854 of these messages: I found poems, letters, prayers, meditations, exhortations, and acknowledgements. Women and men, children and older persons left their messages in (and often for) the amphora. For the first time in Italy violence against women was given a name — sexed violence — and many women felt united in the struggle against it. In many respects, the Relay offered a fundamental contribution to what Dave (2011) would describe as an emergence of an incommensurable (see Povinelli 2001) into the public scene. The passage of the amphora helped create what Guano would define as a "conscious, collective narrative of gender oppression and inequality" (2007, 57). For the first time in Italy, with the *Staffetta*, this word appeared publicly and widely, allowing both for a new language *and* a new grammar for inflecting violence: one that let single experiences of sexed violence to be imagined as transcending the subjective realm. The descriptions of violence against women endorsed by *UDI* accomplished many important tasks. They helped women think about their personal experiences of violence (actual or possible) as sexed violence and within a new narrative that stressed a radical dimension of Italy’s *maschilismo* (machismo) and patriarchy. Moreover, while bringing them into political life, the descriptions de-stigmatized episodes of violence in the lives of individual women.\(^{244}\) *Femminicidio* started to become a filter that sheds light on *other types* and dimensions of sexed violence, a pole on a continuum of violence that began to read other aspects of women’s lives and bodies: from sexual harassment to compulsory beauty, from the

\(^{243}\) The journey of the *Staffetta* caught the attention of the local newspapers, but, overall, not of the national press.

\(^{244}\) In this sense, the *Staffetta* challenges the commonsensical distinctions between public and private. The category of political, in this sense, subsumes both dimensions. See Warner 2002.
exposure of women bodies in the media to economic precariousness (see chapter 6). The **Staffetta** helped accomplish all this, I argue, not just through linguistic means, but also through material, visual and affective resonances.

**Creating Dissensus: the Anfora**

When I met the women of **UDI Macare Salento** in September 2011, they were busy preparing for the XV Congress. The atmosphere was always full of both tension and excitement, and all the questions I asked, in one way or another, were re-directed to this important event for the Association. The three national campaigns were read and explained in light of the internal rifts in the pre-congress meetings (see chapter 4), and portrayed as exceptional proof of the regained political vigor of the Association under the leadership of Pina Nuzzo. I could easily understand their position: the more I knew about the three initiatives (**50E50, Staffetta, and Immagini Amiche**), the more they appeared to me as being politically rich projects — although invisible in the media.

The **Staffetta**, in particular, caught my attention. The first of the aspects that intrigued me the most was that when the women of the group talked about the Relay, they referred to the amphora as if it were a person. To begin with, they did not use the definite article when they talked about the amphora: the amphora was called simply Amphora (**Anfora**, in Italian). Second, they explicitly gave her agency, making her the subject of actions normally performed by living beings. The amphora was not “carried by women,” but “she walked with women,” it was not “brought” to city halls, hospitals, and so on, but “she went” there, “she attended” ceremonies, “she witnessed” events, etc.

\[\text{It is worth noting that in 2013 another term, *femicidio*, started to appear—beyond scientific and juridical texts— in order to refer specifically to the more extreme versions of *femminicidio*, which is treated almost as a synonym of gendered violence. http://www.europaquotidiano.it/2013/06/28/la-crusca-perche-si-dice-femminicidio/. A certain degree of confusion between the term and the need to distinguish, somehow, between the killings of women for being women and other forms of violence is consistent with my analysis of the appearance of an awareness of a continuum of violence that operates on women lives and bodies. This continuum of violence also emerged in the messages left in the amphora that I have analyzed. Although *femminicidio* was the key word of the journey of the Staffetta, the women and men who decided to leave a message in the amphora often chose to address other types of violence of women — especially sexual violence.}\]
Since I was not in Italy in 2008/2009 when the Staffetta took place, at first I thought that this personification of the amphora was an idiosyncratic behavior of the Salentine women with whom I was spending time. It was only when I had the chance to see many pictures of the Relay, to analyze 1,854 messages left in the amphora during that year-long initiative, to read all the documents issued during that year, and to have more specific conversations with the women who, in various ways, had participated in the Staffetta, it was only then that I realized that this was not idiosyncratic behavior at all. Clearly, the amphora had catalyzed special material, symbolic, and affective attentions during the Staffetta. These elements became apparent also when I had the opportunity to comment on the photos of the Relay with my informants. Many women, now as then, explicitly attributed an agency to Anfora during the initiative—a mediating and relational one. As Pina Nuzzo, who is both the creator of the Staffetta and the artist who painted the Amphora with images inspired by the work of the archaeologist Gimbutas on the Mother Goddess (see for example Gimbutas 2006), told me: “Anfora mediated relations between us.”

This process of personification of the amphora—i.e. an artistic object (see Gell 1998)—emerges clearly from the pictures of the Staffetta, as in the ones I enclose below, where, bare or in her red rigid suitcase, Anfora appears, for example, in a car seat with the seat belt fastened, on a bike during a ride organized in her honor, and under the altar during a Catholic Mass.

The messages put in the amphora, too, offer evidence of its prosopopoeia, as, for example, in the following cases:

What is an amphora? A recipient…I am a special amphora instead. Look at me, with a critical eye…the grips are my arms placed on the hips, my mouth is open in order to be able to contain the cries of pain, the protests, the tears of many women… (Sandra B. Ferrara)

---

246 On the importance of the pre-Roman cults of the Mother-Goddess in the Apulia region as examples of proto feminism for the Salentine women I worked with (Nuzzo included), see chapter 8.
Thanks, Amphora, for letting 100-1000-10000 hands of women pass through your arms and for giving us the emotion of a common thought and fight against a crime that devastates the body and the mind of women.

Dear Amphora, I want peace in the world in order to improve the life condition of every woman and girl! I hope that you will be able to donate a good heart to people.

Dear Amphora, give me happiness and nice love songs.

Dear Amphora, I am happy that you [plural] came to protect us.

Dear Amphora, your help and support of the women who were objects of violence is very important. "Do not leave them"!

Dear Amphora, you are very precious and you travel throughout Italy and promise me that the women won’t receive aggressions, pain, and violence anymore.

...Today I know violence and I know I do not like it. Oh my Amphora, help me.

The circulation of affects around the amphora moved me: I heard stories, often narrated with tears in my informants’ eyes, such as that of an UDI woman who wanted, at all costs, to bring the amphora home to show her to an old grandmother who could not participate in the public demonstration of the Staffetta in her territorial area. I was told that an African woman incarcerated in an Italian prison, who received a special permit to spend a day out of jail in order to be able to perform the ritual of the delivery, did not want the (male) mayor of the city to touch the amphora, and refused to give her to him. Moreover, many informants confirmed that several women throughout Italy spontaneously lined up, at the end of the Staffetta’s events, to take a picture with the amphora, and that both the (liminal) time before her arrival and the ritual of the passage were characterized by excitement, a sense of expectation, and euphoria.

The personification of the amphora emerged as a central element of the Relay. This aspect of the Staffetta in particular, I claim, allowed for the elaboration, diffusion, and creation of new political identities and practices. It gathered attention and affects that
represented a means for a new construction of women as political subjects. Its role went beyond that of a symbol: its material presence called for the material effects of being a witness.

**Amphora: The Witness of The *Staffetta***

*Staffetta* means relay in Italian, but it is a word that also resonates with the Italian Civil War, and, in particular, the role of women within it. *Staffetta*, also means a messenger (woman or man) who carries dispatches during a war. In everyday language, *Staffetta* is a word directly associated with *partigiane* women, who had a crucial role in assuring the flowing of communication between different partisan entities spread out over the territories during the Italian *Resistenza*. Some Staffette (women who fought during the Italian Resistance) participated in the *Staffetta* of *UDI* as witnesses to that important period of Italian history.

Batons and women in the Italian civil war may not seem to have much in common, in English. In Italian, though, they share the same name and attribute: that of being *testimone*. *Testimone* is normally translated with the English word witness: this same term is used both in the Italian juridical language and in historiographical accounts. To summarize, then, *testimone*, in Italian, is a baton (and therefore an object, masculine i.e. *il testimone*) in a sport competition, a person who sees an event, and a person who gives testimony in a court. These three meanings were encapsulated in the *Staffetta* that, in its yearlong initiatives against femminicidio and violence against women, adopted the motto *Non più vittime ma testimoni* ([We are] no longer victims, but witnesses). Notably, though, this term was used, during and after the Relay, in reference to the amphora, too. What do *UDI women* mean and do when they refer to *Anfora* as being *La testimone* (feminine) of the *Staffetta*?

The association between the amphora and the word *testimone* appears from the beginning of the Relay in an early note written by *UDI* to the women interested in the *Staffetta*. The “symbol and *testimone*” of the *Staffetta*, the note reads, is “an amphora with two handles.”
By the 8th of March 2009, though, this connection appeared to be sanctioned in a much more explicit and sophisticated way. The UDI branch of Monteverde,247 on the occasion of the International Day of Women 2009, wrote a note entitled “Passa la testimone.” The title, in Italian, is openly a pun: passare il testimone is an idiomatic expression that refers to the moment, in an athletic competition, when one athlete passes the baton to the next. In this sense, the title could be translated as an exhortation: swap the testimone. Here, passa is the imperative form of the verb passare’ understood as swapping. Testimone — the direct object of the sentence—, though, is preceded by the feminine article la, which indicates that the testimone, here, is not a generic baton (il testimone), but the amphora (la testimone).

Yet the title could also be translated and understood in a second way: if passa is taken to be an indicative present tense (third person singular of presente indicativo, an interpretation that is preferable, giving the absence of an exclamation mark) and la testimone as the subject of the verb, the title would be translated as la testimone is passing through/by, since passare, in Italian, also has this (primary) meaning (la testimone —person, feminine). Right from the title, then, the connection between Anfora and her being a witness is made explicit. The text of the public statement, then, by encompassing both the possible meanings of its title, confirms and develops this link.

Since the 25th of November 2008 our witness (la nostra testimone), the ANFORA, following all the events, is pregnant with the messages of women…La testimone narrates her experiences, of how much she liked going into schools, among the female students, in theaters and cultural centers, in jails for women, in institutional places to attend exhibits, debates, literary meetings, movie shows, events with music and dance, and sport competitions. Places and events that with one voice cried: STOP FEMMINICIDIO. (…) La testimone will arrive, although the means of transportation, as well as those of communication, won’t give her a ride,

because she walks on the feet of thousands of women, and she will leave traces of her passing by, because she is held by thousands of firm and delicate hands: [she is a] load that takes charge (un carico che si fa carico). She takes charge of the ordeal that too many women suffered and still suffer. (...) We will bring the messages of the women who will give them (affidare) to this vagabond woman, who is also a sort of sister. (Emphasis in the original)

This text shows that, although the link between the amphora and the person of witness was present right from the beginning of the Staffetta, at a certain point of the Relay, UDI women explicitly started expanding and nurturing the analogy between a personified Anfora, and the act of witnessing. The personification of the amphora—which is considered a woman, a womb that generates and gives birth to relationships between women—suggests that this role was not limited to the meaning of testimone (although in a feminine version) within athletic relays. Other meanings of testimone were superimposed on it. In other words amphora was considered to be like a person who testified for violated women, and who mediated relationships between women.

In Homo Sacer III Agamben addresses the figure of the witness (testimone, in the original Italian text). Starting his analysis by discussing the etymology of the word, as he often does in his books, he shows how testimone combines two Latin words: testis —meaning the third person standing by in a trial or argument—, and superstes —i.e. the person who lived an experience and can testify on it (see also Fassin 2008). By examining these two meanings of the Italian testimone in conversation with other sources, Agamben aims to investigate the role of witnesses in and after Auschwitz. In this book, the Italian scholar acknowledges the fact that there is a core of non-testimoniability in the act of testifying, and he observes that there is something intrinsically missing in the testimonies. In order to illustrate this point, he quotes the famous Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel, who realized that those who survived the camps do not know what the experiences of the

248 Technically, though, analogy is not the exact figure of speech that should be evoked here. Prosopopoeia seems to be the best fit.
persons who died actually were. This is true, according to him, especially in relation to those who were called Muselmann in the camps (31). The latter did not survive to tell their stories. Those whom we call witnesses, according to Agamben, talk by proxy; they “testify about a missing testimony” (32): the experience of persons who cannot speak.249

In the testimony, according to Agamben, two impossibilities of testifying co-exist: the one of the superstes (in Latin, the one that has survived), and the one that the words cannot describe (36, see also Agamben on the “mass-klo/ matisklo” story 34-36). The witness, then, is actively passive (102), in the realization of “the impossibility of bringing together the living and the language…the non-human and the human” (121).

In addressing the personified amphora as a witness, the women of UDI quite effectively seem to refer to both the meanings of testimone spelled out by Agamben. This element is extremely important: the fact that they attributed the action of witnessing to the amphora, an object —a personified object— both confirms and suggests directions for further developments of Agamben’s argument.250 Anfora, first of all, as its creator Pina Nuzzo acknowledges, is a piece of art that mediates relationships (see, for example, Gell 1998). She is the masterpiece of her artistic and political life that, by evoking feminine symbols [sic, personal conversation], is able to speak beyond language. In this sense, she acts as a third party in the relationships between different women, allowing for the communication of thoughts, affects, and political ideas on levels that are not primarily linguistic and verbal. This communication does not happen by means of linguistic registers. The personified amphora, recognized and addressed as a witness, does not speak, does not use language in order to communicate: quite literally persons put (silent) words into her. This

249 Fassin and Rechtman in The Empire of Trauma (2009) make an interesting observation that might apply also to the material I analyze in this dissertation. They argue that “[w]ith the survivors of the camps, testimony to trauma —more even than the testimony of the trauma victim— was gradually recognized as offering the ultimate truth about the human condition.” (76)
250 The prosopopoeia of the amphora —i.e. the personification of this object— by associating its presence with that of a witness, enabled the elaboration and diffusion of new political identities, practices, and representations vis-à-vis gendered violence in contemporary Italy. By offering a particular perspective on what Fassin calls the semantic plurality of being witness (2008), informed by Anfora’s existence as an (artistic) object bearer of affective resonances, I claim that UDI feminists also promoted an understanding of violence beyond trauma, and of witnessing beyond victimhood (Parmigiani 2015. See also Schepers-Hughes 2008).
aspect, which Agamben links to the second meaning of *testimone (superstes)*, allows the amphora to be a witness not only in the sense of being third but also in the sense of talking by proxy, in the stead of the women who were killed by the hands of men and who are not here with us to testify their experience. The women of *UDI* and those who participated in the *Staffetta* somehow recognized the impossibility of testifying through language—and language alone—and relied on a personified object to enact the role of giving testimony for the victims of gendered violence and *femminicidio*. The de-subjectification of the testimony that Agamben describes in his book is given quite a literal and material configuration by transferring agency and the power of narration to the materiality of an object. The communicative registers, here, are non-discursive, and non-linguistic: they are primarily affective.

While the interactions between subjects and objects and the categories of activity and passivity are not the main matters of concern for Agamben’s analyses, his reflections around the theme of the *testimone* gesture towards a complex understanding of these relationships that could be promising for the interpretation of my ethnographic data. In this sense, Agamben’s reflections on the act of witnessing could be complemented, through my ethnographic material on the amphora, with some recent permutations of the Actor Network Theory, as expressed in particular by Navaro-Yashin. In the article “Affective spaces, Melancholic Objects”, and, even more systematically in her 2012 book, Navaro-Yashin argues in support of a reconciliation between Affect Theory and Actor Network Theory (ANT)—as expressed, in particular, in the work of Latour. According to the latter theory, agency can also be attributed to non–human agents (see for example Latour 1993, 2005, Law and Hassard 1999, Strathern 1996, Gad and Jensen 2010, Gray and Gibson 2013), which can also have a role, as Navaro-Yashin claims, in

---

251 However, the amphora/witness did not speak for, but gave voice to a plurality of experiences and positionalities vis-à-vis violence through the silent messages people put in it.

252 It would be interesting reading this in relation, also, to the emotion of shame as addressed by Agamben, who considers it to be the fundamental emotion of being human (see Agamben 1998). See chapter 7.

253 According to Navaro-Yashin, both theories represent a “critique of the “linguistic turn” in the human sciences” (2009, 12).
the “making of politics” (2009, 8).\textsuperscript{254} ANT does not deal only with meanings, and can be considered as a “semiotics of materiality,” since “actor-networks are thoroughly material” (Law and Hassard 1999, 4, Gad and Jensen 2010, 58).\textsuperscript{255} As far as it concerns her ethnographic work, Navaro-Yashin finds that ANT and Affect Theory do not exclude each other, but that they can profitably merge: the ruins on the Cypriot plateau she describes, as well as the people who live around them, seem to trigger, engage, and construct affects relationally (2009, 14). Her view, that she calls affective geography (2012), aims to develop “a perspective that could be called the affect-subjectivity continuum, one that attends to the embroilment of inner and outer worlds, to their codependence and codetermination” (2012), and gestures towards a problematization of interiority as the locus for subjectivity (2012).\textsuperscript{256}

The affective language spoken by a personified amphora, considered as a testimone in the place of the victims of femminicidio, represents an illuminating example of how the different theoretical standpoints that I have so far mentioned can be read together, and of how they can be enriched by pursuing their reciprocal resonances. Each of them, by itself, illuminates just some of the (many) aspects embedded in the role of the amphora in the Staffetta. Together, they gesture towards a better—though certainly not exhaustive—understanding of the Relay.

\textsuperscript{254} The debates around whether ANT is a theory or a method, and on how mechanistic ANT analyses could be, is very alive. On this I follow Gad and Jensen’s position (2010) that considers ANT Theory as a “postplural attitude,” or a non-humanist disposition (Jensen 2004), that considers the “multiplicity,” “fractionality,” and “complexity” of relations and effects involving the relationships between human and non-human actors (Gad and Jensen 2010).

\textsuperscript{255} As Law puts it, ANT “takes the semiotics insight, that of the relationality of entities, the notion that they are produced in relations, and applies this ruthlessly to all materials—and not simply to those that are linguistic” (1999, 4).

More generally, though, “[a]ctor network theory is a ruthless application of semiotics. It tells that entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities. In this scheme of things entities have no inherent qualities: essentialist divisions are thrown on the bonfire of the dualisms. Truth and falsehood. Large and small. Agency and structure. Human and non-human. Before and after. Knowledge and power. Context and content. Materiality and sociality. Activity and passivity. In one way or another all of these divides have been rubbished in work undertaken in the name of actor-network theory” (Law and Hassard 1999, 3). According to Latour, non-humans actors in ANT “have to be … not simply the hapless bearers of symbolic projection” (Latour 2005, 274-275).

\textsuperscript{256} This latter element is also read by Navaro-Yashin as a complement to the approach conveyed in the influential book on violence and subjectivity (Das et al.) that I quoted in the Introduction.
First of all, adopting a Rancièrian perspective in my understanding of politics allows for a reading of the connections between Affect and ANT theories proposed by Navaro-Yashin that better explain the emergence of the incommensurable of femminicidio in the Italian public sphere. In the case of the Staffetta, reading the affective dimension of non-human agents is necessary but not sufficient in order to understand the political relevance of the personification of the amphora. The latter ultimately contributed to the promotion of the emergence of femminicidio, together with the dissensus that it brought forward, as a fundamental category for re-defining women as political subjects (see below) in Italy. Second, the material aspects of this process both confirm and extend Agamben’s understanding of the ontological status of the testimone by suggesting the possibility of an understanding of relations that goes beyond the traditional subject/object dichotomy (although problematized, as in Homo Sacer III). Such an interpretation promotes a reading of violence beyond trauma, and of witnessing beyond victimhood (see Parmigiani 2015, see also Scheper-Hughes 2008).

In sum, I claim that the Staffetta catalyzed and generated dissensus by promoting and acting out a reconfiguration of the sensible in Rancièrian terms: a reconfiguration of both “what makes sense” and “what can be sensed” (Panagia 2009, 3) around the topics of femminicidio and violence against women in Italy. It did so by introducing a new word — femminicidio— and, with it, a new world that offered a novel narrative on sexed violence. This emergence was generated by using not just verbal and linguistic instruments, but also by triggering and circulating affects around these themes through the materiality of an artistic object. It was also the result of the affective resonance that the amphora conveyed and prompted. The affective/bodily dimensions, traditionally recognized in the anthropological literature as a source of knowledge (see for example Boddy 1989, Lambek 1993), took shape, in particular, around the amphora that was personified and considered as a testimone (according to the many meanings that this word has in Italian). In particular, the amphora had the role of the third party in negotiating relations among different women, and of being a witness by proxy to the victims of

257 It is worth mentioning that this reconfiguration is also about who is seen as able to sense what.
‘femicide’ —consistent with Agamen’s analysis of the role of the testimone after Auschwitz. The fact that a personified object such as the amphora could perform the role of testimone during the Staffetta favors an understanding of the political relevance of non-human actors that complements Agammen’s analysis. Such a reading is in agreement with Navaro-Yashin’s attempt at putting together Affect and ANT Theory, and supports the political relevance of affects within a Rancèrian understanding of politics —in this case, triggered by an agentive object— illustrated by Panagia.

In this chapter I situated violence in my ethnographic field by focusing on the generative aspects of the emergence of gendered violence (framed by my informants as a particular type of violence) and ‘femicide’ in contemporary Italy. I showed how it involved particular aesthetic and affective responses in my informants, and how these had political effects. It affected me, the ethnographer, as it changed my practices and performances of seeing vis-à-vis gendered violence. Moreover, it had an impact, more generally, on the feminist community at a national level. I analyzed the role of the Staffetta of UDI in this process and, in particular, of the amphora as a bearer of affective agency that created dissensus, in Rancèrian terms.

Images of the Staffetta:

Fig. 25. UDI- Stop Femminicidio. Drawn by Pina Nuzzo.
Fig. 26. Welcome *Staffetta!* The *Anfora*. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 27. *Anfora* on the beach. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.
Fig. 28. Filling the amphora with (silent) words. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 29. *Staffetta* – Stop-over in Turin. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 30. *Anfora* in her red suitcase sitting with the seat belts fastened. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.
Fig. 31. *Anfora* on the altar of a Catholic Church during the celebration of a Mass. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 32. *Anfora* on a bike during a bike ride. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 33. *Anfora* in Venice. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.
Fig. 34. *Anfora* with two members of the Italian Navy. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 35. The amphora in a hospital. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.
Fig. 36. Waiting for the arrival of the amphora at the train station of Rimini. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 37. Two Carabiniere walk with the amphora. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 38. Amphora ritual performed in Sardinia. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.
Fig. 39. The amphora in Bologna. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.

Fig. 40. The ritual of the amphora at a City Hall in Tuscany. Courtesy of Pina Nuzzo.
Chapter 6
“Whoever Kills a Woman, Kills Me, Too”: an Imagined Community of Violated Women

In this chapter I will concentrate on another element that I claim the issues around gendered violence in Italy generated: the development of an imagined community of violated (or violable) women. I argue that this was the outcome of the identification between the wounded bodies of some women and women’s bodies in general acted out by the Staffetta of UDI through the politics of dissensus that I addressed in the previous chapter. As a result of the emergence of this new women’s question in Italy, women’s lives and bodies started to be understood as placed within a continuum of violence, where femminicidio represents its tragic—yet epitomizing—extreme. This continuum helps to re-describe and reformulate other, more symbolic (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004) and structural (see, for example, Das et al. 1997), types of violence, and women’s reactions to them, in addition to setting new political agendas and modalities of women’s activism. Among the latter, the domain of representation started to be conceived as central: the return to the squares of the women’s movements, and their choice of once again being publicly visible can be read in this perspective.

I claim that the dominant framework used to represent women in Italy today puts women in the role of victims vis-à-vis gendered violence. This language and these images of victimhood dominate the media and political campaigns against sexed violence alike. These representations naturalize the connections between women and victims; the consequences of these associations often go unnoticed. Many Italian women, feminist and not, adhere to these representations today. Sometimes, for example, the precariousness of women’s material bodies resonates with the imaginary and experiences linked to economic precariousness, and the traumatized body, as Molé notices, becomes, “a critical measure of truth” (Molé 2012, see also Petryna 2002) beyond economic precariousness. In other instances the commonsensical acknowledgement of the violability of women’s bodies instead represents something to exploit vis-à-vis personal and social insecurities, or harkens back to more socially acceptable representations of
womanhood informed by Italian Catholic heritage. In this chapter I try to indicate some possible directions one might take in order to understand how and why this happens.

An Imagined Community of (Potentially) Violated Women

Italy, 1980

Fig. 41. 1980. I am Mine! \(^{258}\)

\(^{258}\) http://archiviofoto.unita.it/ricerca.php?key=femminismo&frimg.x=-747&frimg.y=-1624
Fig. 42. 1980. Stop the fear of being raped!

Fig. 43. Italian women in a parade, making triangles with their hands and fingers.
Each act of violence against women is not a private instance. Therefore I say “I am Lucia.”

UDI of Pesaro, 2013.

---

259 This is a viral picture found on the Internet about a demonstration against femminicidio in Italy (2012). This image has been posted and reposted on articles and blogs that were addressing issues linked to ‘femicide’ and violence against women. The origin is unknown. It shows the bodies of women, each with a poster indicating the name, age of victims of femminicidio in Italy in that year, and the name of their killers. http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2013-11-25/una-giornata-dire-stop-femminicidio-25-novembre-ricco-iniziative-tutto-paese-074406.shtml?uuid=ABC1XTf
Fig. 46. Demonstration against femminicidio in Latina- Zapatos Rojos, 2013.

Lucia is a woman in her mid-thirties. A lawyer from Pesaro, she survived an attempt of ‘femicide’ against her (with the use of acid), and she is now an advocate for the cause of femminicidio in Italy. Here I added a picture of UDI women who demonstrated in front of the court of Pesaro in 2013 in support of Lucia, on the occasion of the first hearing for the trial against her alleged aggressors and the instigator of the crime (her former boyfriend, a lawyer and co-worker). On the 25th of November 2013, Italy’s former President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, gave Lucia Annibali the title Cavaliere dell’Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana for facing with “courage, determination, and dignity the serious physical consequences of the despicable aggression she suffered.”
I started this chapter with a brief photographic essay (see, for example, Collier and Collier 1987). I juxtaposed pictures of women’s demonstrations in 1980 and today. While images of women who parade with banners and posters can be found rather easily today, images of women who pretend to be dead or who identify with victims of violence and ‘femicide,’ are not widespread (if they are present at all) in the pictures from 1980. This can mean either that women in the 1970s and 1980s did not demonstrate by playing dead, or that the eyes of the photographers who worked for the media at that time did not record or recognize those images as meaningful. In either case, I consider my point supported by this (lack of) evidence: besides the different objectives of the protests, the slogans, and the ways messages are conveyed, the pictures from the 1980s differ from the contemporary ones. This difference, I claim, demonstrates a change in the political conceptions of women’s bodies that I am analyzing in this dissertation. It is my claim that

with the Staffetta, violence and the potential exposure to it became the kernel around which many Italian women started to conceive of themselves, both existentially and as political subjects.\textsuperscript{262} Some of my informants, as I illustrated previously, for example, certainly did so by thinking about their bodies and their being in the world. However, they are not alone in this process. In other words, differently from the 1970s and 1980s, the bodies of women in Italy today are not, primarily, the political objects of sexual liberation, or of self-determination.\textsuperscript{263} The bodies of women today are violated bodies (corpi violati), traumatized and/or traumatizable.

This reading of the existential precariousness of the condition of women also informs the contemporary frame of the debates around a women’s question in Italy beyond ‘femicide’ and sexed violence.\textsuperscript{264}

The Staffetta, I argue, had an important part in the diffusion of this now widespread attitude. As I explained in the previous chapter, right from the beginning the Relay superimposed the bodies of violated women on all women, which led to the conflation of the violated bodies of some women with women’s bodies in general. It did so by promoting disensus around sexed violence, that, I claim, contributed to the construction of an imagined community (Anderson 1983) of violated (or potentially violated) women. Interestingly, in presenting the Relay to the press, Nuzzo (2008b) wrote:

We want to fight against sexed violence and ‘femicide.’ In order to do so, we want to say WHO we are, without putting a distance between us and

\begin{flushend}
\begin{flushend}

\textsuperscript{262} The Staffetta, in my opinion, through the political choice of considering the amphora as a witness of gendered violence and femicide, also provided an understanding of violence beyond suffering and trauma. It did so by giving Italian women the possibility of thinking about themselves not just as victims but also as witnesses (see Parmigiani 2015). Nonetheless, violence—including its traumatic implications—was indeed promoted by the Relay as an identity marker, and it was a taken on in different ways by different individuals and women’s group. Some of them, as I will illustrate, adopted a more radical understanding of the role of witnesses vs the roles of victims. Others, instead, did not problematize it, and took on the role of victims more uncritically (see below).

\textsuperscript{263} These topics, though, are still relevant to women’s lives, as the constant challenge of Law 194 on abortion shows, for example.

\textsuperscript{264} By making these remarks I do not intend to deny the role of self-determination, a key phrase, for example, during the pro-abortion rights campaigns in the 1970s, in today’s feminist political activism. I nonetheless want to stress the different overtones — clearly marked by the reference to the existential precariousness of women’s bodies — that women’s activism is showing, today, in promoting different types of campaigns or reflections on the women’s question in Italy.
the other’ [women], ‘because we are not alien’ [to violence] or privileged and we do not expect that one woman alone does what all of us can't manage to do: make the violence that we all suffer stop! (far smettere la violenza che tutte subiamo!)

More explicitly, in another press release (2008a), Nuzzo, after describing who is “an abused woman,” and after highlighting the connection between being the object of violence and “having a precarious job,” claims literally: “QUELLA donna siamo NOI,” “WE ALL are THAT woman.” Moreover, in the same document, Nuzzo writes that: “We must first of all talk by saying WE, we don't have to think about ourselves as alien or even privileged, we don't have to be tempted (cadere nella tentazione di) to sensitize the women we meet to make them aware of the violence that they certainly suffer, that we all suffer.”

Besides the visual evidence I included above, there are many other examples of the shift that, I argue, has been characterizing Italian women’s movements in the last three years, opening up a space for a new women’s question in Italy. Also beyond feminist circles, the latter developed around what my informants refer to as sexed violence. In the 2014 campaign maipiùclandestine (never clandestine again), in support of the application of the legge 194 on abortion, for example, the women who promoted it framed the problem of the enforcement of the law as an attempt of 'patriarchy' to violate women’s bodies. They write: “What happens when a woman can decide? It happens that ‘patriarchy’ raises it defenses, forcing a woman through an obstacle course when things go well, [forcing a woman] through via crucis when they go badly.” The warlike metaphors and the reference to the Way of the Cross are eloquent, in this respect, especially when compared to this 1980 flier by UDI. This is how violence and self-determination were inflected then, instead:

265 http://udinizionale.altervista.org
8th of March 1980

We do not want fear, anguish, and terror.

We do not want the oppression and the fury

of the strongest.

We do not believe in the methods of oppression

and authoritarianism.

We do not accept the impunity guaranteed to
he who is guilty.
We won’t let [anybody] take away from us all that
we have conquered
in many years of struggles, individual and collective
conflicts
with the only weapons
of respect for human values,
for human life,
of solidarity and
of our dignity.
For freeing us from any form of oppression
old and new.
For living a peace marked
by our liberation.

In contrast to the 1980 flyer, which is centered on violence, women’s bodies are not represented as potential objects of violence but as loci for liberation, in the maipiùclandestine public note the topic of self-determination around the right to choose one’s own pregnancy is inflected in a language of suffering and of victimhood (see below).

At first, the reading of the personal and political status of Italian women as a potentially violated community affected mainly the feminists. With the emergence of a women’s question nationally, after the Se Non Ora Quando demonstrations, these ideas spilled over to other sectors of Italian society, and to non-feminist women and men. The language of victimhood became dominant in framing gendered violence (also) in the Italian context (see below).
The endorsement of the word *femminicidio*, and the acknowledgement of sexed violence as a meaningful category *beyond feminist circles* contributed to the construction of an imagined community of violated women in many ways. First, by focusing on the extreme manifestations of sexed violence (i.e. ‘femicide’), it triggered affects and reflections on a continuum of violence that is believed to characterize women’s lives, and that started to illuminate other, less visible, structural and symbolic types of violence. In this sense, it became a critical instrument for feminists in order to recognize and understand the different forms that gendered violence take in their lives. Second it generated a renewed interest —after 30 years— in inhabiting squares (see, for example, Castelli 2013), and in promoting public initiatives as forms of political activism. As I explained above, during the 1980s Italian feminist women decided to pull back from the squares. With the exception of a few groups that remained publicly active —yet not visible in the media—even after that period, it was not until the *Se Non Ora Quando* demonstration in 2011 that women’s activism became visible again on a wide scale, and on the streets, through public demonstrations. Since then, public protests, together with online activism, became more and more frequent in Italy. This fuelled the recognition and self-recognition of women as a visible political subject. Third, by affecting the modalities of public protests, it set *representation* as a battlefield for political activism, as I will explain in the next chapter.

**Continuum of Violence**

After the *Staffetta*, and in conjunction with other developments of feminist thought and political practice, Italian feminist circles have been taking up the issue of the status of women in Italian society. They have been concentrating on the issues of sexed violence and femicide in ways that show how the introduction of *femminicidio* in the Italian political arena led to the re-organization of feelings and meanings around womanhood within a continuum of violence that comprises symbolic and structural dimensions as well. All the different shades of violence started to be understood in the light of femicide,

---

267 In their lives and beyond: some Italian feminists described the killing of a female bear (called Daniza), which took place in the Fall of 2014, as ‘femicide.’ [http://www.vice.com/it/read/ora-daniza-razioni-perche-563](http://www.vice.com/it/read/ora-daniza-razioni-perche-563)
considered as the extreme pole of a continuum that feminists had the political and moral responsibility to drive out, expose, deconstruct, and fight—as in the following examples.

Since 2009, the role of the media is one of the aspects of violence that Italian feminists have been connecting to the (alleged) increase in numbers of women killed by men for the fact of being women (for a comparison, see for example Morgan and Bjorket 2006). Many of the activists I met, in addition to other bloggers and journalists, have been very active in pointing out the responsibility of the mainstream press for reproducing and reinforcing the stereotypical (see for example Herzfeld 2005a) “predatory script” (Ferrero Camoletto and Bertone 2012, Camoletto Ferrero and Bertone 2010, Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009, Gilmore 1987). The latter is the cultural sexual script that portrays the ideal virile man as “asserting his masculinity in his homosocial environment by virtue of his sexual activity” (Ferrero Camoletto and Bertone 2012, 434). According to Italian feminists, in this cultural script men are, by nature (active and assertive) hunters, and women are, by nature (passive and vulnerable) prey. In the article Ecco come i media giustificano le violenze di genere (This is How the Media Justify Gender Violence), for instance, published on the blog Un altro genere di comunicazione (another gender/genre of communication), Mary, the author, deconstructs some articles published in local and national newspapers. (S)he shows how the language used in order to narrate the killings of women and the images associated with the news both contribute to creating “sentiments of empathy with the persecutor,” and a debasement of the victims—eroticized or, implicitly, blamed for having shown ambivalent behaviors and for having asked for it.268 Articles such as this one travel extensively on the online feminist circuits: when they do not actually write them, my informants post, re-post, like, and share them, tagging friends and acquaintances who feel compelled to do the same (see chapter 8).

The causes of violence against women have been sought, also, in the widespread understandings and fantasies around romantic love (internalized by women as well), shaped by the same macho predatory script. Since, according to this script, the

---

268 http://comunicazionedigenere.wordpress.com/2012/05/02/analisi-di-come-i-media-giustificano-le-violenze-di-genere/
relationships between men and women are conceived of and framed as those between hunters and prey, romantic love seems to be easily mistaken for a form of captivity, and seduction with the act of taking possession. Within such a framework, the boundaries between conquest and love, violence and affection appear to be blurred. In other words, paradoxically romantic love started to be perceived as a form of symbolic violence. As emerged (see chapter 5) from Eugenia’s remarks and life choices in one of our first exchanges—namely, that women look for violent, jealous men, and that not having a boyfriend is a sign of her being feminist—this aspect is one of the most problematic for the women I met. I found that ideas and practices around romantic love were one of the most unsettling topics in my conversations with feminist activists, in Salento and beyond, as the case of Alessandra shows.

Alessandra seems to struggle with her feminist identity vis-à-vis romantic love. Independent, self-determined, and politically active, Alessandra thinks of herself as extremely confident. Her centratura (internal balance), she used to say, is “rock-like.” Being feminist is an identity marker, for her, and something that makes her unlike other women: a difference she pursues passionately. After getting over a long engagement, and the end of a common-law marriage with a man, she fell in love with a married person. The situation that might be complicated for anyone to deal with, for her was extremely demanding, almost critically so. She was frustrated by the fact that, while the relationship with this married man was not fulfilling in any sense for her, she felt she could not get over it. It took many months of talking and thinking about this topic—online and offline—with me and other friends, but when she finally realized that the ways she wanted to be “seen” and “desired” by him followed a ‘patriarchal’ scheme, she was shocked. Alessandra’s centratura was shaken, and she had some problems in dealing with the fact that she desired to be “passive” in the relationship with him, following flirting schemes, and fashioning herself in order to match his ‘patriarchal’ expectations and imaginary. She really wanted to “be measured” by those (‘patriarchal’) attitudes—the same that she used to say were “caging women,” and the struggle against which was central in her (public) performances of feminist womanhood, and in her political activity.
More generally, there are a number of voices in Italy that have been starting to address the relationships between love and violence. Michela Murgia, a well-known Italian writer, for example, has elaborated on these themes on different occasions. For instance, in commenting on how the Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* treated the Strauss-Kahn case, she wrote: “Also in a respected newspaper such as *Il Corriere della Sera* the notions of sexual abuse and seduction overlap without any concern.” Murgia claims that a specific narrative, which she calls “*narrazione femminicida*” (femicidal narrative), is observable in the Italian media. This type of narrative is as widespread as noxious, “aims at ennobling the reasons of the aggressor,” and is realized by “presenting a chronicle as a fact of popular culture” (*fatto di costume*). Within such a framework, aggressors and murderers of women are said to act, for instance, as “blinded by passion,” as a consequence of “rage,” or as a result of harsh economic conditions (see also, for example, Iacona 2012).

Another aspect of feminist analyses on the impact of the predatory script, which is recognized as a channel for sexed violence and *femminicidio*, stresses how this femicidal narrative seems also to have found its way into Italian legal courts. In this respect, as Murgia points out, the 2013 text of the sentence for the homicide of Melania Rea seems to be an illuminating example of how the predatory script is used within a femicidal narrative.

Salvatore and Melania were husband and wife. At the time of Melania's murder, in April 2011, they had a little daughter called Vittoria who was 18 months old. Salvatore denied any involvement in the death of his wife, but eventually he was judged guilty by the

---

269 The well-known French economist and politician was arrested in New York in 2011 accused of having attempted to rape a hotel maid. His file, though, was set aside later that same year.


271 In her ethnography on women’s shelters in Italy, Plesset (2006), discussing the status of Italian jurisprudence around sexual violence, declares that: “despite the significant changes to the Italian civil and penal codes that have been instituted over the past thirty years, judicial interpretation is slow to change, and many judges continue to rule in accordance with the old legal norms of gender and family” (143) that understand the role of women as subordinate to the role of men and family. See, for example, the notorious 1998 case of the woman in jeans (see, for example, Plesset 2006,142-143; Molé 2012, 132).
Court of First Instance of the murder of Melania, and was sentenced to life in prison.\textsuperscript{272} What is interesting in this case of homicide are the motivations behind the sentence of the judge, a woman. According to the judge, Marina Tommolini, Salvatore murdered Melania as a result of a scatto d’impeto (a twitch of impulse), recreated as follows: The young family was having a walk in the countryside. The little girl was sleeping in the car. Melania went behind a hut to urinate. Salvatore, seeing his semi-naked wife, was allegedly caught by sudden sexual arousal, and wanted to have sexual intercourse with her. According to the reconstruction of the judge, she probably refused, using harsh, “humiliating” words. Salvatore, then, “reacted to the humiliation, provoking the first blows” (Melania was killed by 35 stabs to her body).\textsuperscript{273} The point, here, is not (mainly) assessing who is guilty against whom, as Murgia's comments seem to suggest, but establishing what is thought to be not just possible but likely for the judge, and in Italian public opinion.\textsuperscript{274} The sexual needs of a man, who is considered a hunter by nature, are considered overwhelming: seeing a half-naked urinating woman the judge, who relies on commonsensical understandings of Italian customs, considers to be an erotic provocation, even with a sleeping toddler in the car. A wife who turns her husband down is considered to be a source of humiliation for the man, who — in this Murgia is absolutely convincing — paradoxically, turns out to be the civil victim of this murder: convicted by the law, and acquitted by public opinion.\textsuperscript{275}

The vision of the world that was introduced with the emergence of the word femminicidio started to encompass sexual violence and the treatment of these issues in the media and in courts, but also the representation of the bodies of women (see for example Zanardo) and their economic and work precariousness.\textsuperscript{276} It is interesting to note that, on the occasion of the International Day Against Violence Against Women 2013, a group of women —

\textsuperscript{272} He was given a guilty verdict and sentenced to 30 years in prison by the Court of Second Instance. He filed another appeal, and his case will be judged by the Supreme Court.
\textsuperscript{273} See, for example: http://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/cronaca/articoli/1075599/il-gup-motiva-la-condanna-a-parolisi-melania-uccisa-per-un-rappporto-sessuale-negato.shtml
\textsuperscript{274} http://www.lastampa.it/2013/01/08/cultura/opinioni/editoriali/signora-giudice-ha-scritto-proprio-una-brutta-storia-oc9JJYeK3OMQGACsI5BYI/pagina.html
\textsuperscript{275} http://www.michelamurgia.com/di-diritti/generi/773-parolisi-un-povero-colpevole
\textsuperscript{276} http://www.ilcorposodelledonne.net/
Barbara Romagnoli, Adriana Terzo, and Tiziana Dal Pra—promoted a 24-hour strike (*sciopero*). Women (workers and non-workers, both at home and at the workplace) were asked to refrain from doing what they normally do for 24 hours. This *sciopero* was meant to Stop the Culture of Violence in Italy, inflected in various ways. This strike, for example, was:

A ‘strike’ that demands that the political establishment, the mass media and society as a whole take charge of the daily and relentless killing fury (*furia omicida*) against women that does not show any sign of stopping, not even for a day, since it is the result of a violent and sexist culture (emphasis in the original). and

A ‘strike’ that states an inescapable link between work/care/precariousness/income, that claims that maternity is a choice, that rejects the blackmail of having to sign undated letters of resignation (*dimissioni in bianco*) and that affirms also that the health of women’s bodies is a right that cannot be at the mercy of ideological and instrumental objections” (emphasis in the original).

These types of analyses and initiatives have become very popular in Italy: many women feel interpellated by these topics, and have started organizing public initiatives —often widely covered by national media— throughout Italy. This happened, in particular, for

---

279 http://paestum2012.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/le-parole-che-vogliamo/#more-1966
280 http://paestum2012.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/le-parole-che-vogliamo/#more-1966
the International Day Against Violence Against Women (25th of November), and for initiatives such as One Billion Rising and Zapatos Rojos.281

Back to the Squares

If the Relay was a decisive moment for the legitimization of the word femminicidio, it was not until 2012/2013 that this word, the world it conveyed, and the construction of women’s bodies as violated (or potentially so) prompted people beyond feminist circles to question the commonsensical understanding of the status of women in Italy. As I already mentioned, this official sanction of femminicidio also happened as a result of the developments around the Se Non Ora Quando movement that I discussed in a previous chapter. SNOQ and Concita De Gregorio did not just succeed in bringing forth a women’s question —although inflected in moralistic terms— in Italy, but, notably, they were also able to construct an audience capable of acknowledging it (see above). This public, sensitized on women’s issues, became more receptive to what was already going on (online and offline) in feminist circles, the developments of which I have been witnessing since the beginning of my fieldwork. The attention of the media on women’s issues, then, fuelled a renewed interest for public initiatives. While Italy’s women’s question emerged in connection to concerns around women’s dignity, it rapidly shifted to issues of violence and femicide. All these elements are indeed connected in my ethnographic data. It is not unimportant that in the 2012 edition of the popular Italian singing competition Festival di Sanremo —broadcast on Italian national television and followed by millions of Italians— the One Billion Rising choreography was performed by a group of women, including one of the hosts of the event, the comedian Luciana Littizzetto (on the relationships between humor and spectacle and Italian politics see Molé 2013, and chapter 3).282 Instead, it is a clear sign that femminicidio and violence against women have become a legitimized issue at a popular level, too, in Italy.

282 At its height, more than 11 million spectators followed the festival. http://www.sorrisi.com/2012/02/18/sanremo-2012-11-milioni-e-mezzo-di-spettatori-per-la-serata-dei-duetti/
http://www.onebillionrising.org/
The overwhelming majority of the demonstrations and public initiatives that have taken place since the SNOQ protests, though, have revolved around episodes of violence that involved women injured or killed at the hands of men. In particular, the 25th of November became a reference point for many women and women’s associations. The 25th of November, 2013, for example, has seen a blooming of initiatives against ‘femicide’ and sexed violence organized by women throughout Italy, making the news in national and local newspapers and on TV newscasts. I was in Salento at that time, and I personally attended three public events in the province of Lecce, but I know that many more had been organized. This surprised me, since I clearly remembered that when I was there two years before that date passed almost unnoticed.

In addition to the demonstrations on the 25th of November, the imagined community of violated women emerged and continues to emerge in the unprecedented media coverage of episodes of femminicidio and violence against women, in the various events organized locally on the occasion of the killing or assault of fellow citizens, and in online and offline public debates and initiatives, such as the following.

---

Meno Giallo, Più Rosa. Let’s take back the murder scene. Against sexist culture, let’s take back the places dominated by men.

The town of Sogliano Cavour in the province of Lecce, in February 2014 promoted a campaign condemning violence against women called Meno Giallo, più Rosa. Riprendiamoci la scena del delitto (literally, Less Yellow, More Pink. Let’s take the crime scene back). The title is a pun that exploits the Italian categorization of novels. Gialli, in Italian, is the adjective that refers to thrillers, while rosa is the one that connotes romance novels. The initiative explicitly associates the public spaces customarily associated with men with crime scenes. The aim of the campaign is to encircle with white and pink tape —similar in shape and style to the one used by the Italian police to cordon off murder scenes, but in different colors— the “places with inadequate female presence.” The purpose of this taping is to “realize an out-and-out map of the spaces that women cannot access, and where sexist culture is more deep-rooted” (See Invito).

There are PLACES where SEXIST CULTURE has always expressed itself in a way that did not respect women. Every woman knows them very well. They are the town BARS, the SQUARES which, after a certain hour we prefer not to cross, the STOPS for the [public] means of transportation that are better not to frequent alone. LET’S TAKE BACK all these places, and all the others that are part of your experience. Let’s mark them with this tape, before they again become the SCENE OF THE CRIME (emphasis in the original. From the invitation to this initiative).284

On the one hand, the association between these unfriendly places for women and crime scenes underlines the fact that the absence of women from those places represents their symbolic killing. On the other hand, it clearly plays on an imaginary that associates women and women’s bodies, indiscriminately, with potential victims of murder.

284 See the page of the initiative on Facebook, and www.menogiallopiurosa.com.
In my opinion, this initiative summarizes very well the type of discourses, practices, and affects around sexed violence and ‘femicide’ that are circulating in Italy today and that I have been describing in detail so far. I include some pictures of this initiative below, taken in Taurisano (see chapter 6. The pictures, that I have edited, are courtesy of the Association Donne Insieme).  

![Image of a building with a banner and red tape]

Fig. 50. Taurisano, Juventus (the Italian soccer team) club.

---

285 http://www.piazzasalento.it/particolare-manifestazione-per-la-festa-della-donna-taurisano-24797
286 http://www.piazzasalento.it/particolare-manifestazione-per-la-festa-della-donna-taurisano-24797
Fig. 51. Taurisano, Corso.

Fig. 52. Taurisano, Police Department.
Women-As-Victims

Tonia is one of my Facebook friends. We met in person in Bologna in 2011 and again in Rome in 2012. Since then, I mostly follow her life and activities through Facebook and her blog. She defines herself as “communist, feminist, deeply and irreparably anti-fascist, bitter, prone to anger, and long-winded.” She is a woman in her thirties from Rome. Tonia is very, very active on the Internet: she comments zealously and untiringly on news of women’s matters: in politics, media, blogs, and popular culture. She posts, re-posts, and comments on many items every single day of the year: as I told her once, jokingly, she should be considered my assistant, since she provides a press review on topics related to women every day. She was amused by my remarks.

On March 25th 2014, in a very much liked post on her Facebook diary, she writes: “From what I understood, in order to show that you are against violence against women you either need to get yourself naked or you need to take a picture of yourself while you cry with a black eye.” Her irony and poignant criticism — a characteristic of her Facebook persona — as usual did not go unnoticed. One of her Facebook friends commented:

Tonia, women are defenceless! Women are weak, women cry. If you beat him, you are not a woman, you are a man. If you file against him, you are not a woman, you are an asshole who wants to get him in trouble. Women CRY, THAT’S IT! (…) If women do not cry, they are not in need of help. They don’t need to be assisted and protected, but left alone. They do not cry, therefore, they do not suffer. On the contrary, they deserve it [their suffering], or they like it (emphasis in the original).

This brief exchange gives a sense of some of the issues that are going on inside and outside Italian feminist communities. What Tonia and her Facebook friend are gesturing towards are the dominant visuality — i.e. way of seeing — and representation of (potentially violated) women in contemporary Italy. As I have shown, gendered violence works, for many Italian women, as a way to think about and to understand their being in the world, and as a critical instrument that helps to recognize the sources and forms of this particular type of violence. This new interpretation of their being women has a
representational aspect, too: this precise domain is the terrain of the affective politics that this dissertation wants to narrate.

The current tendency, among Italian women and in campaigns against sexed violence, as Tonia and her friend point out, is to represent women’s conditions through a grammar of victimhood (or of passivity, as objects of others’ gazes). This grammar involves both self-representations and representations of women as ‘victims’: suffering, helpless, in need of tutelage, and of rescue. This choice is by no means an obvious one in the Italian context, since, as I have already pointed out, it differs, for example, from how Italian women dealt with these issues during the 1970s and 1980s, or from how my Salentine informants understand their political goals (see below). This point is supported, visually, by the following images, but it encompasses other dimensions as well: linguistic, for instance, and, in my field, affective and aesthetic (see below).

Fig. 53. Stop femicide. NO to violence against women. ‘Femicide’ concerns the whole of civil society. It concerns you as well.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ http://www.levoltapagina.it/?page_id=2929
Fig. 54. “It was the cork of the sparkling wine.” A campaign of the *Presidenza of the Consiglio dei Ministri* 2008. 288


289 Fig. 55.
Fig. 56 “Certain men go crazy for blue eyes and pulpy lips.”

Fig. 57. Shut up, you idiot. Campaign from Intervita.

http://kiaramente1.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/lei.jpg
This short photographic essay shows that the ubiquity of *femminicidio* in the media in Italy today corresponds to the ubiquity of these types of images of women in relation to gendered violence. Such representations are crammed into newspapers and websites, and are very popular in campaigns that are designed to fight against gendered violence. The effects that they generate, according to the type of audiencing practices of some feminists, including most of the ones I worked with, are counterproductive for women’s causes. According to feminists, they re-inscribe the same ‘patriarchal’ values that women should fight against. According to many of my informants, among other things they offer an over-exposure of victimized women’s bodies, the transformation of sexed violence into spectacles in the media, advertisement, and in the streets, and the exploitation of *femminicidio* as something good to sell with. In reference to the latter element, if the *Enel Sole* campaign that I addressed above could, allegedly, be ascribed to this category of images, from my informants’ point of view there are other, much more emblematic, examples of this tendency in contemporary Italy. Among those, I find the following:

---

292 http://www.ilroma.net/content/il-silenzio-uccide-la-dignità-la-croce-rossa-la-tutela-delle-donne
images particularly interesting for the sake of my argument: they show not only how *femminicidio* (and the struggle against it) is able to attract the attention of the Italian public, today, but also how women are—both directly and indirectly—represented as victims.

Fig. 59.

In March 2013, Clendy, a brand of household products, published the ads I included above. In order to advertise a cleaning rag, the ads showed a picture of the settings and protagonists of two homicides. Two pictures, one slogan: *Elimina tutte le tracce* (It/he/she eliminates all the traces or, as an imperative, Eliminate all the traces!). It is not my purpose to discuss the style, efficacy, or the ethics of this ad. Nonetheless, a few observations are worth consideration. First, among the many possible settings of homicides, Clendy staged a *particular* type of murder: one that involved a man and a woman. Presumably, the same slogan could have worked for other types of homicides: for example, an assassination involving a robbery, a killing of a competitor, the murder of a partner's lover. In all these examples the homicide would have followed a similar pattern: it would have been a homicide for a *reason*—even though a mean and selfish

---

The creators of the ads, though, did not think about these: they needed, probably, to pick a type of homicide that triggered a sort of ambivalent emotional response in the possible buyers. The murderers needed to be portrayed in a way that could make the act deplorable but also somehow understandable, generating sufficient empathy between the potential buyer and the killer in order for the first to buy the cleaning product. Evidently, gendered violence seemed to be their best option: close enough to the possible buyers to generate empathy, and to have them buy the cleaning rag. Since the target of the marketing strategy is wide (everybody has a house, car, garden, etc. to clean), the staging of the homicide did not have to represent something totally distant from the experience of (what is considered) the average Italian. I doubt that, if the homicides staged were performed, for instance, by psychopaths, by desperate migrants, or by greedy thieves, the effectiveness of the ads would have been the same.

Moreover, the glamorous images, the design furniture, the stylish outfit, the predominance of the color white, and the presence of a good amount of light helped to visually depict the killing as an ordinary, open, and even glossy event. The images seemed to imply that this is a clean killing—not gloomy and messy. Clean because of the Clendy’s rag, but also clean because of its platitude. The subtext of the images is offered to the viewer through the shadows. In both cases—in the first image on the upper left, in the other on the right—the shadows portray a shape of an arm with a knife in the act of stabbing (clearly a cinematographic quotation). Second, in spite of both being homicides that involve a man and a woman, the two ads show significant differences in the messages they convey. My claim is that the fact of offering two versions of the ad—one where the perpetrator is a man, and the other where the protagonist is a woman—is not, as the creators claim, informed by an attempt to pursue equality between the sexes. On the contrary, the indirect (and naturalized) associations between murderer and protagonist, and the particular imaginaries linked to the settings of the two homicides, reveal important information about the links between women and victims in how violence is framed in contemporary Italy. At least, this is what I read through a visuality schooled

295 It could be argued that, for the creators of the ads, the audience needed to be interpellated, in the Althusserian sense, by the Clendy’s ad.
296 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5SU9SwCM7s.
in the Italian feminist circles I frequented. In the ad that presents the man as the aggressor, the setting is a bedroom. The woman (the victim) is naked in the bed. The man is sitting on a corner of the bed, with the rag in his hand, with his clothes on, but without his shoes. His shirt is partly undone — something that hints both at a previous moment of intimacy and at his stylish look. All these elements refer, clearly, to a ‘femicide’: the imagined plot is consistent with the predatory script. The man/hunter is holding the rag as if he just powerfully grabbed it, and the woman/victim lies naked and appears to having been murdered during, or after, making love. In the ad that illustrates the woman as the aggressor, instead, the setting is very different. There is a chair and a well-dressed man on the floor. The murderer wears elegant clothes and shoes. She is sitting on the chair holding the rag with one hand, and her mini skirt with the other, in the act of covering her legs. Her hair, neatly tied back from her face, looks slightly ruffled. The setting is ambivalent: in spite of the fact that there is no furniture, the location resembles more that of an office than that of a home, and the violence gestures towards a reaction to the attempt of a sexual assault more than a crime of passion, as the Italian media would call it. This aspect is supported by the fact that the two are dressed, that they wear elegant clothes, and by the absence of a bed and of any other element between the two. The relationship between the protagonists seems more that of one between employer and employee, rather than between lovers. The fact that the legs of the woman are tilted inwards, and that the hand on the skirt aims at covering her legs, hint at the fact of her, possibly, being a victim of mobbing (through sexual harassment). Interestingly, in spite of the apparent equality of the treatment of men and women in these ads, in both cases the woman is portrayed as a victim: of femicide in the first ad, and of harassment, sexed violence, and, possibly, mobbing in the second. It appears that, for the authors of this ad and for their imagined public(s), even when put in the role of the aggressors, women cannot avoid being imagined as victims.
The ads generated very strong public reactions and were eventually removed and modified. Feminists and non-feminist men and women reacted through email bombings, the condemnation of this campaign made the news in important national newspapers, and the Minister for Equal Opportunities at the time, Elsa Fornero, took a public stance against it.  This is not the place to assess whether the campaign, given these strong reactions, was a success or a failure. Whether the campaign was inspired by the success of news of ‘femicides’ in the media in attracting the attention of the public (as the choice of some newspapers to rubricate ‘femicides’ as natural deaths shows) or by the ubiquity of the predatory script, it is clear that femminicidio became able to attract the attention of a wider audience in contemporary Italy. Whether the attention is positive or negative, as in this case, is not so important: it still mobilizes affects, and gives visibility to Clendy’s products, that need to be sold.

In sum, women tend to be represented as victims, not just in many campaigns against ‘femicide,’ but also in the Italian media and public scene: they are defined by their suffering —both physical and emotional. They are depicted as powerless and in need of tutelage and of rescue. These particular aesthetics might aim at triggering feelings of sympathy in the observer: an aspect that tells us, indirectly, something about the type of (imagined) audience to which they are addressed and to the type of visuality they expect to prompt. Its effects, however, could also be detrimental to women’s causes. Nonetheless, if women are represented by using languages and grammars of victimhood, not all of them consider this as a problem: many women do feel and choose to adhere

---

297 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5SU9SwCM7s; http://www.napolitoday.it/cronaca/pubblicita-clendy-nuova-VERSIONE.html. The man and the woman are here represented as victims —not of violence but of a hangover.
299 See, for example, http://www.melty.it/violenza-donne-pubblicita-clendy-e-un-epic-fail-a109849.html
300 See, for example, http://abbattoimuri.wordpress.com/2013/05/03/se-chiamiamo-femminicidio-anche-le-morti-per-malore/
uncritically to these types of representations, and to promote them, as I will show in the rest of this chapter (for a comparison see Samet 2013).302

Precarious Victims

As I stated in the introduction, DNA Donna is a start-up association that has, as a mission, the aim of being a counseling center for women who suffer from violence. It is a mixed association: it includes (nominally) both men and women. It is based in Soleto, in the province of Lecce, and was conceived and put together by a close friend of mine. Trained in women’s politics within UDI, she decided to transfer her knowledge, competence, and network of acquaintances at a local level, and to be personally actively involved in countering violence against women. She started to talk about her ideas in her geographical area and within just a few months managed to put together a team of experts, all based around Soleto: from psychologists to Carabinieri (police), from sexologists to lawyers. By virtue of my close connections to her and most of the team’s founding members, I had the privilege of witnessing for ten weeks in person, but for more than a year at a distance the transformation of DNA Donna. DNA Donna went from being an idea in the mind of my friend to being practically realized, from being a group of motivated neophytes to one formally recognized by the local authorities, and to being assigned public spaces by the municipality of Soleto. Besides spending time with many of the members in formal and informal gatherings, attending specialization seminars with them, participating in their initiatives and demonstrations, and surrendering to their request to put a picture of my face on their flyers, I am constantly briefed, almost every day (through Skype, email, Whatsapp, or Facebook) on the life and events of the association (and on a selection of topics on the lives and events associated with its members).

302 It is not a coincidence that Clendy’s campaigns imagined the woman-aggressor within a sexual harassment/mobbing context: it was intended to trigger empathic reactions from the women-consumers they were addressing with their ad campaign.
Fig. 60. DNA Donna flyer.

On a day in February of 2014 a member of the association called me and told me about a meeting she had just had with a person of the Union. Apparently, DNA Donna had been contacted by the local offices of a national Italian Workers’ Union, which looks after the interests of atypical workers, such as immigrants. They had proposed a partnership with DNA Donna for the management of their Sportello Tutela Donne (help-desk for the tutelage of women). In exchange, they had offered DNA their help and expertise in dealing with contingent cases of mobbing. In narrating the meeting, my friend pointed out that she was sorry I had not been there, since I would have supported their case against the use of tutelage in the name of the help-desk in front of the Union’s employees, bewildered by DNA Donna complaints. According to my friends (I talked about this meeting with another member of the association, too) it was hard to make the Union’s functionaries understand that it was inappropriate and even detrimental for the cause of contrasting violence to use the word tutelage in a service aimed at helping women. According to my informants and friends “women are not ‘impaired’ (inabile), and do not need any ‘tutelage’ for the fact of being women. Minors need tutelage, women, even violated women, do not.” According to them, my presence —i.e. the
presence, in their eyes, of an expert—would have eased their way through the discussion, since it would have basically changed the power structure of the exchange.\textsuperscript{303} 

The indignation of my friends did not affect the Union’s functionaries, and, at present, the name of the service has not changed.

The bewilderment of the Union’s personnel was probably genuine: since they are used to finding their ways through complicated legal and bureaucratic norms in order to take care of the interests of the workers, they had found in the status of victim of mobbing a quite convenient parameter in order to concretely help what were often underprivileged women. The partial overlapping between mobbing and sexual harassment had been the trigger for their decision to create a help-desk for victims of violence, according to my informants of \textit{DNA Donna}. The Union’s functionaries could probably not anticipate that, given the success it had in the former, the paradigm of the victim (see De Luna 2011) could be contested in the latter. As described by Molé in her ethnography, mobbing is, “in its most simplified meaning, psychological and emotional workplace harassment” (2). It emerged in Italy during the 1990s (see for example Molé 2010, 39-40), and it developed into a well-recognized phenomenon to the point that, in 2003, Italy’s INAIL (state health institution) recognized it as a possible cause of work-related illnesses. According to Molé, mobbing is a polymorphous and multivalent phenomenon: among other things, it is a constant threat for workers, a management policy of employers, a cause of illness, and a more legally effective way to prosecute sexual harassment against women. It mobilizes and constructs “practices, images, discourses, fantasies, mechanisms of control, forms of embodied experiences, [and] nodes of affect” (1) that help to redefine

\textsuperscript{303} Obviously, my informants are perfectly able to engage in discussions and to defend their positions. This element, though, unveils some of the power dynamics that I have encountered in Salento, and that I learned to acknowledge and manage throughout my fieldwork. Academic titles do count in Salento, much more than in the part of Italy where I come from (Lombardy). While I am an extremely informal person, and I do not present myself through my titles, I had to deal with the fact that the same fact of being a PhD student with two degrees brought with it some power dimensions that, spontaneously, I would not have chosen to embrace or exploit. They were superimposed on me by the context of my fieldwork, and, I admit, I found myself, on a couple of occasions, in the position of having to display them in order to be taken into consideration in a discussion. I am very sympathetic to my informants’ experiences, and handling the burden of being seen as an intellectual became one of the most challenging aspects of my fieldwork. This element, though, as the present example shows, also became an exchange good that I can use to reciprocate the time and energy that my informants’ have been donating to me and to my research.
biomedical parameters and legal categories as well as the ways Italians think about their being in the world (see, for example, Molé 2010, 2012, 2013; see also, for a comparison with the Finnish context, Funahashi 2013).

The overlapping between mobbing and sexual harassment (for a detailed description of this see, for example, Molé 2013), also favored by the lack of organic unity in Italian law in reference to crimes against women, is of particular importance. I claim that the vision of the world introduced and sanctioned by mobbing influenced certain understandings, practices, and affects enabled by the emergence of femminicidio in the Italian public sphere. According to Molé:

The story of mobbing is a social history of what happens when one form of harassment emerges as something considered ethically superior to another and, in turn, becomes the dominant explanatory model for workplace conflict. Mobbing—moral harassment masquerading as a gender-neutral phenomenon—as become an ethical violation worthy of social support and institutionalization on both state and European levels, its victims worthy of social recognition. But when deploying mobbing as a means to dispute the gendered and sexualized abuses of the labor regime, subjects are called upon to mask their full legal and political subjectivities (Kindle Locations 2456-2459).

Given the success of mobbing in creating worthy victims — vis-à-vis other socially invisible ones — and in becoming an ethically superior form of harassment, it is not surprising that violated women (who suffer, from their point of view, from existential precariousness) often seek to be understood and represented, similarly to mobbed persons, as victims. They describe themselves as powerless, passive, determined by the malevolent agency of others to the point of being physically and emotionally damaged. 304

Precarietà also emerges, with other specific connotations, in certain discourses, affects, and practices around sexed violence in Italy, especially in the media. Here, as well, the traumatized body — i.e. the victimized body that appears in the ads and media, and that

304 For an historical analysis of trauma and its political relevance, see Fassin and Rechtman 2009.
my informants criticize— is understood to be “a critical measure of truth” (Molé 2012, see also Petryna 2002), a way to obtain social recognition, and to negotiate one’s position in the world (see also Fassin 2008, Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

During my fieldwork, I had the chance to do participant observation in a couple of women’s shelters (CAV) in the province of Lecce, and to interview some of their staff members: psychologists, educators, administrators, attorneys, and volunteers. One of the elements that they all pointed out in the interviews was that, since the spread of the word and world of femminicidio took place, they have seen an increase in the numbers of women who ask for their services. While I tended to see this as a positive outcome of media and popular interest in ‘femicide’ —which, from my point of view, was giving a name to something that was not so precisely labelled before— I was surprised to find that this was not the take of the personnel of the CAVs. According to them, the increase in the numbers of women asking for help had to be ascribed to the attempt of more and more women to exploit the condition of victim of violence in order to obtain social privileges such as a better economic treatment in cases of divorce. While this element speaks about the pervasive ‘patriarchal’ ideology that tends to frame self-determined women according to skeptical biases, it also stresses the fact that femminicidio is becoming, as mobbing, an “ethically superior form of harassment” that defines the status “worthy victims” (see also Gribaldo 2014).

The connections between work and existential precariousness that I found in my field are not limited to this example (see also, for example, Fantone 2007, and the special edition on Italian Feminisms of the Journal Feminist Reviews 89). I already mentioned, for example, the Sciopero delle Donne against ‘femicide.’ In that case, the overlaps between work and existential precariousness, between victimhood and existential uncertainty, were evident. References to precariousness in relation to sexed violence and to women’s lives in general also appear elsewhere, for example, in a 2008 public notice written by the National Coordination of UDI: “We suffer a substantial precariousness, that, to the present, keeps the circle of the perpetuation of violence unaltered, an extreme and privileged instrument that functions to maintain a relationship of subordination of the ‘feminine to the masculine’” (Nuzzo 2008). Moreover, the feminist Collettivo Diversamente Occupate (the Differently Occupied Collective, see chapter 4) by putting
precarietà at the centre of their political activism, have often referred to their condition as “precariousness of work and life” (Nuzzo 2011a). 305

The connections between precariousness, victimhood, mobbing, and sexed violence can partially explain the success of the paradigm of victimhood applied to sexed violence in the media, and among certain Italian women —an attitude that, as I introduced above, the feminists I met especially criticize in moral terms. There is at least another element worth mentioning, though, in relation to the acceptance and adoption of the victim paradigm: the Catholic notion of sacrifice and its connection with womanhood.

**Non-Mater Dolorosa: Women, Victims, and Martyrs**

On the first of March 2014, the feminist groups *F9* and *Laboratorio Donnai* (see above) inaugurated the *campagna maipiùclandestine* (never-clandestine-again), a political campaign in support of the application of the Italian law that regulates abortion. After the Spanish government decided to restrict the possibilities for legal abortion (2013), these Italian feminists mobilized in order to protect the Italian law on abortion (*Legge 194*), asking for the “full implementation of the legal victory of 1978.” They write that:

> In our Country…the problem is not the law but its difficult implementation, given the high numbers of physicians who are conscientious objectors – 7 out of 10— in the public health system. Impeding the application of [Law] 194 means putting women in danger, forcing them into a long and painful *via crucis* in search of a structure able to perform abortion or, in the worst cases, into a clandestine abortion. 306

This *via crucis* (i.e. the Christian way of the cross) is the protagonist of their first public

305 See also Contro Versa 2013.
debut, in a rainy afternoon in Rome. On that occasion the activists of the Collettivo F9 performed a *via crucis*, patterned after the popular representations of the Passion of Christ that inhabit churches and Italian outdoor public spaces in the days before the celebration of Easter. It had, as a main character, an object that the activists named *Pupazza* (the female version of puppet, in Italian), that substituted for the cross, normally used in the religious representations. This violet-dressed metallic doll was shaped in a fashion that resembled the infamous hooks used in Italy for clandestine abortions until fairly recently. During the public performance, the *Pupazza* — which someone in the group also referred to, half joking, as “the other woman who all we women are” (*l’altra che siamo noi*) — was carried through the stations of a medical *via crucis*, which re-enacted the obstacles that a self-determined woman who decides to abort her pregnancy often goes through today.

![Pupazza](image)

Fig. 61. *Pupazza- Maipiùclandestine*, March 1st 2014.

---


308 http://27esimaora.corriere.it/articolo/io-decido-mai-piu-clandestine/
A woman on the megaphone narrated the story of the journey of the Pupazza/woman in the attempt to obtain a legal abortion, paralleling the readings of sacred texts during religious viae crucis. One of the activists physically moved the pupazza through the via crucis’ stations, while other women/statues held comic-like posters with the typical “daunting”309 answers that a woman who wants to abort her pregnancy receives in Italian hospitals, doctors’ offices, and pharmacies. These responses hinted at the stations of the religious via crucis, and at the collective answers that believers attending the procession of the cross are required to pronounce in the religious liturgy. Determining whether this performance could be framed as mimetic (Taussig 1992) or as a form of mimicry is not the aim of my analysis, at least for the time being.

Fig. 62. Via Crucis. “I want a cultural mediator.”

Nonetheless, I want to point out how, in this performance, the Pupazza (i.e. a personified object) was meant to represent women, in a symbolic but easily recognizable journey,

309 http://maipiuclandestine.noblogs.org/
that epitomizes the status of victim.\footnote{Clearly, Pupazza inverted the parameters I described in reference to Anfora’s case. See above.} The way that women who seek legal abortion have to go through was superimposed on that of the via dolorosa of Jesus.\footnote{This is not the place to engage with the vast literature about performances of the Passion of Christ in Italian religious history and popular culture. For the sake of my interpretation, here it suffices to mention that performances of religious viae crucis are very common in Italy, and are, directly or indirectly, part of the experience of nearly every boy or girl who is socialized in Italy, even if not Catholic or Christian.} The performance of the F9 Collective for the maipi clandestine campaign clearly characterized the suffering of the Pupazza in relation to the pains of Jesus, whose story is, \textit{par excellence}, that of an innocent victim of human cruelty and disbelief.

In performing the medical \textit{via crucis}, the F9 activists did not aim at transcending the status of victim. On the contrary, the Pupazza was specifically meant to impersonate, represent, and be recognized as a victim by the extemporaneous public of uninformed pedestrians that was walking in Piazza del Popolo at the time of the flash mob.\footnote{This attitude of the maipi clandestine activists in representing women as victims is also evident in the fact that Pupazza, during the performance, was connoted with other types of underprivileged marginality within the Italian context, such as that of migrant women. In this respect, the choice of calling the campaign \textit{maipi clandestine} — a name that one of the campaigners that I have interviewed confirmed was hinting at clandestine abortions — is quite ambivalent. In Italy, \textit{Clandestine} is a term used primarily to refer to illegal female migrants. The promoters of the campaign confirmed that they were aware of this.}

The Pupazza in the medical \textit{via crucis} represented \textit{a special type} of victim, one associated with the killing of an innocent (Christ) for the sake of humanity. This special type of victimhood is connected to a special type of witnessing: that of the martyr.\footnote{Fassin, too, addresses the issue of the witness/martyr. My interpretation, though, different from his — i.e. with an understanding of the latter as the person who testifies without language (2008, 541) — stresses other dimensions of martyrdom. I understand martyrs, consistent with contemporary Catholic teachings that tend to associate them with the figure of Christ, as innocent victims. Certainly, in the history of the Church, martyrs have not been silent.} The latter term — which means witness in Greek (\textit{testimone}, in Italian) — has been adopted by the Catholic Church, over the centuries, as a reference point for sanctity. The latter, it is worth stressing, is inflected in terms of ethical superiority in hagiographic accounts. Martyrs are those Christians who give their lives for the fact that they believe in Christ.

Given that the current debates on the right of abortion in Italy (especially in Rome, due to the presence of the Vatican) are mainly set by the Catholic pro-life movement
(Movimento per la Vita)—which Italian feminists call the no choice movement— it is not surprising that the feminist activists resorted to this type of performance for their political protest. I have to be clear on the fact, though, that these choices were not, by any means, theorized in this way by the F9 women, who did not explicitly recognize this movement (no choice) as their privileged (imagined) audience. This latter point, I believe, might strengthen my argument, since it indicates that the connections between women and victims are so naturalized in Italian society that they go unnoticed even by feminist activists.

In the rendering of the F9, the Pupazza/victim mediates relations, and testifies by proxy for the women who want to be able to abort their pregnancies according to Law 194. In other words, by subsuming the role of the martyr, the F9 activists testify to the moral superiority of women/victims persecuted for their belief in self-determination. This identification between martyrs and self-determined women, performed through the representation of the latter as victims/martyrs, aims to overturn the common understanding fostered by no-choice activists that feminists are “murderers” of fetuses. In this rendering of the medical via crucis, women are associated with Jesus: the victim par excellence in the Italian context. They are not represented as murderers, from the point of view of the no-choice movement—i.e. as actively promoting the right of abortion. The attempt to show the media an image of feminism that breaks with the one pushed by pro-life activists is confirmed by the framing of the via crucis portrayed by F9 women in more than a published interview. On those occasions, spokespersons of the Collective specified, for example, that they, as feminists, are not pro-death, and that they, as well, believe in the “social tutelage of pregnancy” (i.e. the main forte of anti-abortion activists) together with the right of self-determination of women.

---

316 On the incommunicability between the “abortion is a right” and the “abortion is a murder” positions, see for example Muraro http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/riparliamodi-aborto/
The connection between the *Pupazzai* women and the redemptory sacrifice of Christ is not the only dimension implied in the use of the *via crucis* metaphor by the F9 activists. The language of martyrdom, used by these activists in their performance, is also a *gendered* language in the Catholic tradition: in the history of the Catholic Church it is linked to the formal recognition of (women’s) sanctity. It is common knowledge that the overwhelming majority of women-saints canonized by the Vatican belonged to religious groups or died as martyrs (see for example Ciciliot 2010 on this topic in the papacy of John Paul II, and Napolitano and Norget 2011, 255-256). The only exception, in recent times, is Gianna Beretta Molla, a mother of four who decided not to receive treatment for the cancer diagnosed during her last pregnancy, and died to save her child—i.e. she chose her own death instead of having an abortion.\(^{319}\) The *exempla* set by the Catholic saints match with those of the other important protagonist of the popular renderings of *via crucis*: Mary, the mother of Christ, in the particular role of *Mater Dolorosa* (sorrowful mother).\(^{320}\) Again, this is not the place to delve into the popularity of *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* —i.e. the traditional hymn to the Virgin recited on the occasion of the *via crucis*— in the histories of music and arts, nor the place to delve into the overwhelming presence of this particular theme and images in the everyday lives of Italians, through the artistic representations that inhabit Italian public places. Instead, I refer here to the recent analysis by Murgia, in her Ave Mary, of the connections between the construction of Italian womanhood and Mary’s presence in the *via crucis*. Murgia is a famous Italian writer and a progressive politician; feminist and Catholic, she holds an MA in theology. In 2011 she published the book *Ave Mary*. And the Church Invented the Woman with the aim of accessibly addressing the connections between Catholic heritage and the presence of a women’s question in Italy. This book is interesting for my argument since it acknowledges the inevitable confrontations between Italian feminisms and the Catholic

\(^{319}\) It is worth noting that a similar experience, the moving story of Chiara Corbella, has recently caught the attention of Italian Catholics. See for example http://www.tempi.it/blog/spiegare-la-fede-come-metodo-di-conoscenza-in-classe-e-parlare-di-chiara-corbella#.VHPgYYt1QUZ; http://www.tempi.it/chiara-corbella-la-grazia-di-vivere-la-grazia#.VHP7HT1QUZ

\(^{320}\) There are other aspects of the figure of Mary that could be stressed. See, for example, Toibin 2012.
Church. Ave Mary is the attempt to answer the question: “Why does it seem to be so important to cut women off from the public space of representation of death and suffering, unless they inhabit the role of victims?” (2011, 2. My emphasis). In trying to answer this question, Murgia puts together various types of data: from TV shows to Catholic doctrine, from her own personal experience to iconography, from theology to semiotic analyses of advertisement. She claims that the Christian tradition has a central responsibility in the representation of women/victims, and she offers an explanation. Her general argument is not so dissimilar from Marina Warner’s claims (1976) about Mary as a key model —yet an unattainable one— for women. Murgia, though, engages with this general theme in reference to the Italian context, providing interesting insights for better understanding some of the issues I have discussed so far. The aesthetics (and the ethics) of martyrdom, and Mary as Mater Dolorosa, are treated in a special way in Murgia’s book. Both these elements can explain some of the dimensions linked to the representations of women as victims, as sufferers, and their relation with sacrifice. In reference to the latter, Murgia’s claims are analogous to Dubisch’s remarks (1995) on the role of the ethics of sacrifice in defining womanhood among Greek women. She writes:

The same bravery, that in the classic epic led heroes to accomplishing great deeds, most of all in war, in the Christian aesthetics becomes stoic endurance of pain, up to moral excellence: reaching martyrdom without disavowing one’s faith, and without insulting the perpetrator. For centuries martyrs, first of all, became ‘saints’ in the Church: excellent emulators of Christ- who died by violent death- and all gloriously protagonists [of their death] with him” (2011, 30).

This same narrative, Murgia (2011, 45) continues, does not concern women, though. She continues:

[T]he sufferance of Mary, differently from that of Christ, is never personal, but transferred: echo and consequence of that of her Son. It is an

---

321 See for example the website http://www.teologhe.org. There are a few Italian women theologians who are very active in trying to change the Church’s attitudes towards women. For example, in Lecce I have met suor Benedetta Selene Zorzi. See also, for example, Marinella Perroni and Cristina Simonelli.
ancillary pain that aims at evidencing the suffering of the Cross. The representation of Mary as sorrowful…it is not functional to show the pain of the woman Mary, but to maximize the effect of the death of Jesus; when it becomes a representative model for women, this process ends up permanently legitimizing the suffering of females as a forced path towards the sacrificial obliteration of oneself—a process that Catholicism defines with the specific term ‘oblation.’ It gives the sense that the suffering of women—physical or spiritual, deriving from the death of a son or from his birth—does not have any meaning in itself, it does not redeem, and it does not explain why only by suffering an interjected pain, women could hope to obtain the right of consolation.

Murgia’s claims are particularly important to better frame the aesthetics of victimhood that I have presented in this chapter, since she illuminates the connections between victimhood, martyrs, and the pervasive ethics of sacrifice that is connected to womanhood, in Italy. While I do not want to make a functionalist claim of this, I nonetheless see this dimension as being widespread and active in contemporary Italy: it certainly shapes the construction of imagined audiences among the feminist activists with whom I have worked. It is not a coincidence that, in the SNOQ demonstration in 2011, the real women were opposed to Berlusconi’s Olgettine precisely by virtue of the sacrifices that the former tirelessly make every day in comparison to the latter (at home, in their education, in their work, and in their family lives). In this inflection of the so-called femminismo moralista (see above), the moral superiority of the former was argued precisely by referring to sacrifice: a feature of a representation of womanhood that resonated with the available possibilities, acknowledgeable both among women and men.

By virtue of what I have just discussed it is also not surprising that Lucia, who I will present in the next chapter, in her definition of victim, used the term expiate in order to describe the normal condition of women.

While the aim of this analysis of the performance of the F9 Collective is certainly not to address the political effectiveness of their medical via crucis, it is worth noting that Carla, one of my Salentine informants, in a private conversation, voiced her
disappointment in relation to the language used by the first political performance of *maipiùclandestine*. Both the name of the campaign, and the choice of performing a *via crucis*, were considered by her as speaking a language of rear-guard. They were seen, by Carla, as political choices that do not foster new possibilities of identification for women, but that just exploit and reinforce the range of possibilities *already available* in Italy, and manipulated by patriarchy. Carla’s claims exemplify well the relationships between imagination, affects, and feminist womanhood that will be discussed, in more detail, in the next chapters.

In this chapter I presented the development of a new women’s question in Italy that arose around issues of gendered violence and ‘femicide.’ I explained how, as a result of the emergence of the word *femminicidio* and of the world visions it conveyed, the cluster of discourses and affects around violence available started to shape both how women think about themselves and their being as political subjects. This process, I claim, produced the appearance, in the Italian social and political scenes, of what I have called an imagined community of (potentially) violated women.

Within such a framework, *femminicidio* represents a tragic —yet epitomizing— extreme of a continuum of violence that helps to re-describe and reformulate other more symbolic and structural types of violence, and women’s reactions to them. As a result of these processes, Italian women returned to the squares and started to choose the domain of representations as an important dimension of their political activism. The dominant representations and self-representations of women in Italy today revolve around the connections between women and victims, *vis-à-vis* gendered violence: the linguistic and visual grammars of victimhood are ubiquitously used in the media and in campaigns against gendered violence, being often, as I have shown in this chapter, naturalized.
Chapter 7
Being Witnesses, Not Victims: On The Affective Politics Of Representation

In the previous chapter I claimed that, with the emergence of a new women’s question in Italy, the dimension of representation started (or returned) to be an important one for many feminists and women's movements. As I will show in this chapter, this is true for some of my informants as well, especially for those connected with UDI Macare Salento: with the difference that, for them, the realm of representations is considered more as a battlefield than a simple field for political action.

The third of the campaigns promoted by UDI, the 2010 Immagini Amiche, I argue, had a key role in tracing the connections between violence and the realm of representations, and in setting the latter as a political battlefield, by explicitly linking doing politics and engaging the senses.  

With their use of images, words, performances, installations, spectacles, and, variously speaking, of the aesthetic dimensions of their social (online and offline) personas, my informants want to make a statement against the dominant representations of women as victims that I have addressed in the previous chapter. They do so, I claim, in two ways: as audiences of dominant representations, they criticize them vigorously, and support initiatives that question them. In this sense, they are part of a wider trend within contemporary Italian feminisms, although not mainstream, yet. As producers of representations, they try to challenge the commonsensical association between women and victims, especially in relation to gendered violence. These two positions, of course, are enmeshed. Both these fields of intervention rest on the belief that women should be, and be considered as, witnesses and not as victims of what they call sexed violence. This particular point, well-summarized by the Staffetta’s motto “No more victims, but witnesses,” became central in and characteristic of the political activity of the Salentine

322 http://www.unionedonneinitalia.org/stage/campagna/campagna.pdf
women with whom I worked, especially since *femminicidio* started to be so appealing for the Italian media.

As producers of representations, some of the feminists I met aim at changing the practices and performances of seeing and sensing vis-à-vis the relationships between gendered violence and womanhood among their (actual and, especially, *imagined*) audiences. In order to do so, I claim, they proffer what I call oxymoronic representations of women, which are intended to generate affective and cognitive confusion in the observers/spectators. The perlocutionary effects of this confusion might allow for the latter’s repositioning vis-à-vis women and gendered violence.

**No More Tears**

“*Ci murse?*” (Who died?) asked a man from a car that was passing by, in the center of Soleto, while my friend, her husband, and I were loading up the trunk of her car with foldable chairs. “Nobody. It’s for the inauguration of the center,” the funeral director, who had offered to lend his chairs to *DNA Donna* for the event, promptly replied. Since this conversation occurred in dialect, my son, who until then had been spending his time admiring the amount of sarcophagi [sic] gathered in the funeral house, looked at me, puzzled: he did not understand why we were all laughing loudly. We were happy that people were helping us, and amused by the fact that nothing can really be kept confidential in a town of 5,000. In a few hours the *DNA* inauguration event would take place. I had arrived in Soleto a couple of days before in order to give my friends a hand with the preparations. I was sweeping the floor of the headquarters and helping to set up the conference room with the chairs we had borrowed when my friend and Lena came to me. They looked excited. “We have a surprise,” they said, and they showed me these panels, the ones that Lena had prepared for the inauguration of the *sede* (see Introduction):
Fig. 63. “No more tears. Women’s weeping does not change the world; rather, their strength does”

I was excited, too. My friends asked me to join them in putting these pictures up on the entrance walls of the headquarters. It was a very significant moment for them, and I was honored to be invited. It was just the three of us: I let my friends do this together while I took this picture.
Weeping is still considered a proper behavior for a sensitive woman in contemporary Salento. A woman, for example, who weeps during the night procession on the occasion of the rituals that commemorate the death of Christ is thought to be a person who *tene core* (has heart, i.e. good sentiments/good disposition), as I heard people gossiping in Soleto once.

It is worth noting that, similar to other areas of Italy323 (see, for example, De Martino 1975 [1958]) and of Greece, this area of the Salento until recently still had *prefiche* — women who performed ritual lamentations/weeping during funerals.324 Funerals, as the following stories show, are particularly appropriate occasions for grasping the relationships between weeping, being women, virtue, and social expectations in contemporary Salento.

Marta, one of my feminist informants, indignantly narrated the following story to me. We were talking about modern womanhood and she offered this example to locate her own positioning in contrast to what she described as the traditional patriarchal constraints over women. She told me what a woman whom she knows, who had lost her mother and her eight-year-old son in a matter of weeks, had told her during a *cunsulu* (the dialectal form for consolation, a word indicating the practice of visiting the house of a grieving family), a few years ago. During the mother’s funeral, the acquaintance of my friend publicly cried, and her weeping went hand in hand with the unfolding of the Catholic ceremony. During her son’s funeral, instead she felt petrified and could not weep, and told my friend that, on that occasion, she had been scolded by some members of the community for not being able to cry for her son. The woman felt guilty about not being able to cry at her son’s funeral, and this experience put her worthiness as a mother into question.

If weeping at funerals is an expected behavior for women and mothers in particular, there are women, instead, who make of their *not weeping* at funerals a display of ethical superiority. I attended a wake for the cousin of an informant from Soleto in a Catholic

---

323 It is worth noting that this episode happened in the part of Salento called Grecia Salentina.
324 This friend told me that the last time she saw a *prefiche*-like performance during a funeral was in the early years of the twenty-first century in Sternatia, a town in the province of Lecce. This special type of crying was performed by some relatives of the dead.
Church in January 2015. The man’s sudden death at a relatively young age was something quite shocking, even for me: I had met him the year before at a convivial dinner. During the wake, I noticed that the women in the front rows, the closest relatives of the deceased, were not crying. Their manners were composed and they certainly looked sad, but they were not crying. Another woman, though, a member of my informant’s husband’s family, could not keep her tears in. Her family connections with the deceased were indirect: she was there since she was as a relative of the husband of the dead man’s cousin. During the funeral wake, my informant said to me: “Look at her [at her husband’s weeping relative]. They always make dramas (sceneggiate) in that family. The women of my family are orgogliose [proud], instead. It is a matter of dignity. They do not weep at funerals. One can cry only at home. It is a matter of dignity.”

It might be interesting to compare these claims with the following excerpt from my field-notes: while a range of behaviors in relation to being women and weeping is socially accepted, I found that indirectly a sort of natural link between being women and being emotional is still also widely asserted when modern, men-like behaviors are praised.

July 2014. Carlo, the husband of one of my feminist friends from Soleto, and my host during my stays in Salento, returned from the hospital. His mother, a woman in her seventies, had been taken to hospital for a heart attack the night before. I was at home when he arrived, and I immediately greeted him, asking about the old woman’s situation. With a low voice and sad expression, speaking an inter-language (Italian with many expressions in dialect), Carlo told me that he and his sister had just spoken with the doctors. I therefore asked what they said, and he told me: “The doctors said that my mother has un cuore sofferente (a suffering heart).”

Sofferente (literally, suffering) is an expression often used by physicians, within a biomedical frame of reference, in order to describe the organs affected by a pathological condition.

Then Carlo added, with a hint of sadness: “You know, Giovanna, the issue with my brother and my sister… we never saw my mother weeping or crying at home, we did not realize it, but she must have kept all this in for all these years… and now you see… she had a heart attack.” Carlo, who is the oldest of six brothers and sisters, was alluding to
his mentally challenged younger brother, and to the illness (leukemia) that had affected his sister (which had been treated and cured). According to Carlo’s interpretation of the physicians’ words, the heart attack had to be attributed to the worries and concerns that he retrospectively linked to the anxiety and sadness his mother must have experienced for the health conditions of her beloved ones. This emotional pain had affected her heart, understood by Carlo literally and not metaphorically as the locus of sentiments. While he praised her for being brave and proud by keeping her feelings to herself (something that is considered not womanly) and for not wanting to be a burden to the other members of the family, ultimately, since her behavior was not compliant with women’s expected behaviors (women are naturally emotional), that behavior was deemed to have been responsible for her illness.

This is the context in which the women of DNA donna operate. While a certain variability in the performance of womanhood in reference to weeping is tolerated, as I showed, it is the constant explicit challenge, at different levels, of these types of traditional assumptions that characterizes their being feminist. Their choice of posting precisely the “No more tears. Women’s weeping does not change the world; rather, their strength does” on the headquarters’ walls needs to be understood as an attempt to explicitly confront traditional expectations on gender roles, and to signal, to those who visit the center, new possibilities of being women (see also chapter 8).

***

During the inauguration event, my task was to take care of the DNA Donna membership recruitments: I had to receive and register donations, and to take note of the names and personal data of the new members. I sat at a table near the entrance of the conference room, and I was able to attend the speeches and the readings planned for the inauguration from a privileged perspective. The event was a success. The room was full: at least 200 people (men and women) attended the DNA inauguration, a good result for a new women’s shelter in a town of 5,000. About 35 of them decided to make a donation, for a total of about $600. Most of the persons I met at the registration table shared some of their thoughts on the initiative, and on the purpose of the center. They were all nothing but enthusiastic. For a few days after the inauguration people in the town kept talking
about *DNA Donna*: even my trips to the pharmacy were occasions for the pharmacist to talk about it.

One of the elements that caught the attention of the audience the most during the inauguration — according to both my observations and the comments I received while at the registration table — was the reading, accompanied by the music of a harpist, of excerpts of the book *Ferite a morte* (*Wounded to Death*), written by the actress Serena Dandini. This book presents stories of ‘femicide,’ inspired by real events, *from the perspective of the murdered women*. The voices of the narrators in those texts, in other words, are those of the *victims* that become in fiction, quite literally, *witnesses* of their own murders. In the excerpts chosen by my friends of *DNA Donna* for the inauguration, the murdered women, while tactfully hinting at femicidal events, concentrated principally on the description of the circumstances that led to their murders. Instead of insisting on the gruesome details of their assassinations, the characters focused on their (changing) interpretations of the events. In the fiction, their deaths — narrated with surprise, and almost with disbelief — represented turning points in their own understandings of the relationships they had with their killers. The element that emerges in these narratives, and the reason why they were chosen by my informants for the inauguration in the first place, has to do with the ordinary dimensions of these relationships, and with the banality of gendered violence in their own lives. The incredulity and the dismay of the women of the book vis-à-vis their murders revolved mostly around the type of connections and engagements they had with their aggressors: they all seemed to be normal and from a wide range of social backgrounds. This element was central for the *DNA Donna* staff: they wanted the women of the book to speak directly to the audience at the inauguration. They were hoping that the surprise of the murdered women vis-à-vis their own tragic epilogues in the book, and their subsequent *post-mortem* change in the framing of their relationships, could interpellate the people of Soleto who attended the event, and change the way *they* were looking at, feeling, and understanding, gendered violence (see, for a comparison, Butler 1997 and Carr 2009). In other words, the book, and my friends’ utilization of it, represented a firm critique of Italian society, and the recognition that its commonsensical interpretative lenses in relation to gender violence were simply inappropriate. They called for a change — parallel to those narrated by the women in the novel, whose deaths represented a cognitive turning point in their understandings of love,
of relationships with men, and of their lives. I argue that by offering these readings to their public my friends wanted not just to present women in positions that differed from that of the victim (namely, as witnesses), but also, I claim, to promote dissen
sus. They meant to trigger and produce, in Ranciérian terms, a different way of sensing and making sense of women and gendered violence in their public. Their aim was not only to cognitively challenge their audience, but also to interpellate it affectively by avoiding a (very much expected) spectacularization of violence. This political move was performed by playing with the expectations of the public, acquainted with equating women with victims. Apparently, the DNA donna staff succeeded in their intent, at least for part of their audience: many of the spectators were visibly moved by the recital. Some of them had tears in their eyes. In addition, I overheard people commenting on the performances at the end of the inauguration by claiming that violence could happen to any of us, and that probably these stories are much more frequent than they thought.

From Violence to Representation: *Immagini Amiche* and the Power of Imagination

On the 8th of March, 2010 the third of the National Campaigns of *UDI* started. Its name, as I already stated, was *Immagini Amiche* (Friendly Images). In the announcement for this initiative, which was described in the document “8 marzo 2010 SE CI OFFENDI NON VALE” (8th of March, 2010. IF YOU OFFEND US, IT IS UNFAIR),” Pina Nuzzo writes that:

The violent, vulgar images, disrespectful of women’s dignity, do damage to women and to society as a whole. They damage the present and the future that we want because they undermine the basis of a possibility of a respectful and civil coexistence of genders. (…) We want to propose shared, accurate, well-organized political action that starts from the initiative that we already have undertaken, and from others as well, in order to oppose the harmful images and stereotypes of women that are everywhere, not just in commercials. (…) Offensive advertisement is the most visible violation against the feminine gender. (…) The *Staffetta*
showed that women can avoid being subjected to *possono non subire* the misery of violence and can make themselves witnesses (*testimonii*) with initiatives that free our creativity and show the path for a civil co-existence between the genders. Thousands of women participated [in the *Staffetta*], they talked about their experiences of victimhood, they reported an unbearable culture of suppression (*sopraffazione*) in the family, at work, and in politics. A culture made of images. WE WANT IMAGES THAT ARE WOMEN’S FRIENDS. In order to give continuity to the *Staffetta*, we propose to the many women that participated in it, and to all the others who want it, to get involved.

In this text, the ideological connection between violence and the realm of representations, and between the *Staffetta* and *Immagini Amiche*, is spelled out very clearly. Here, *UDI* women explicitly recognize representation as one of the dimensions where gendered violence operates in contemporary Italy. Their political initiative in this phase, though, is still defined by their being *audiences* of these representations. While the ending date of the campaign was set for March 8th, 2011, two initiatives appeared to be central to *Immagini Amiche*. Significantly, both of them took place on the occasion of the International Day Against Violence Against Women on the 25th of November 2010. First, the *Anfora* and the white notebooks, where the women who participated to the Campaign *Immagini Amiche* had to record the virtuous commitments and actions of individuals and of institutions in promoting friendly images, went to the European Parliament. The choice of bringing the amphora of the Relay together with the white notebooks to that important institution was meant to “signify a symbolic continuity with the messages that thousands of women chose to give to the *testimone* of the *Staffetta,*” according to Nuzzo. Second, during a *Café Dèbat* in Rome, the Prize *Immagini Amiche* was announced. *UDI* activists designated a jury of women (in the position of an audience of representations) in order to choose the best ads that promoted a positive image of women. At a table of honor during this presentation sat “the *Anfora* of the *Staffetta di donne contro la violenza sulle donne*, who on her travels collected many messages in which the relationship between the use of images and violence is spelled out. The *Anfora* continues to be
Testimone of a path even longer than that begun with the Staffetta” (Nuzzo and Albani 2010).

promoted by UDI for displaying everywhere the advertising and the stereotypes that offend women. IF YOU OFFEND US, IT IS UNFAIR.

Through the Prize Immagini Amiche, UDI activists, in the role of audience of representations of women in Italy, wanted to negotiate a special place: they wanted their gaze to count, and to be acknowledged as a source of judgment vis-à-vis dominant ones.

The third campaign of UDI, though, did not limit its influence to the reconfiguration of women’s practices as audiences. It also introduced interesting connections between art, imagination, feelings, representations, and political activism, setting the stage for the development, that I witnessed ethnographically, of a connection between producing representations, and political activism. The aim of this political project, I argue, can be framed as an attempt at changing the practices and performances of seeing and sensing:

325 This is the image of the UDI National Campaign Immagini Amiche. According to Nuzzo, the image of a cactus with thorns hints that “facing stereotypes is a ‘prickly’ enterprise” (email October 15th, 2014).
of feminists themselves, first, and of their imagined or actual publics, second. In an email sent to the women of UDI on the 19th of February 2010, Nuzzo explains the motto “if you offend us, it is unfair.” This is a revised quotation of a popular 1976 song by Julio Iglesias Se mi lasci non vale (if you leave me, it is unfair). The former National Delegate explains that:

The song does not say that it is not right, or legal, that she leaves him. It says it is unfair, since he does not want to admit that the mores are changing, and women are not on board with these anymore. (...) [w]omen cannot be represented in a violent mode that might suggest forms of abuse with impunity. (...) We [UDI women] thought, in order to address this topic without triggering priggish (bacchettone) reactions, that the best thing to do would be to do something in a positive way, by supporting those who sell products without necessarily selling us [women]. (...) Feminists have always tried to undermine stereotypes, inventing forms of opposition that are sometimes very creative.

This creative aspect of political practice, according to Nuzzo, opens up questions among women that are “very dangerous for patriarchy,” namely:

[W]hat are our fantasies, our imaginaries, our fantastic world(s)? This is the question that had really impaired men’s power over women. This was the internal repositioning that involved every single woman and a whole generation, until it became a common feeling (sentimento diffuso).

Nuzzo continues:

The billboard that we sense (percepiamo) when we quickly pass through the city on a bus, in a car, or simply because we are always in a hurry, ‘hits’ us because it solicits images—figures that we had already internalized through our culture. (...)With feminism women become aware of the tight connections between the role that was attributed to

---

women [i.e. the role of model for male painters or artists] and the representation of the feminine… We know… that the meanings that we give to things, as well as our way of looking at [certain] behaviors, changes with time: in order to self-determine inrepresentation we have to measure ourselves against the complex system that organizes the genders. A system that involves the affective, private, political, and social sphere(s). A system that we sometimes are subjected to, but in which often we are directly involved, to the point of strengthening it.

The field of representation is starting to become, in this campaign, a domain of possible political action, framed as an out-and-out struggle. Nuzzo points out that:

It is not by chance that cyclically we, women, go back to the representation of genders, since we know that it is crucial if we want to undo the current meanings of signs and symbols and of the imaginary on which the relationship between men and women is still resting. The journeys are necessary and sometimes fierce because only making the conflict explicit could lead us to understand how vital the balance between representations and being representative (rappresentazione e rappresentanza) is.

The figura etymologica in this text it is not just a rhetorical device: it conveys a very important element of how UDI women, and some of the activists I met and followed in Salento, understand the representational struggle against ‘patriarchy.’ For them, representation as a political field is not just the locus for showing alternative possibilities of being women: this enterprise is political as long as it generates rappresentanza for UDI women —i.e. participation in, and sharing of, the administration of the res publica. In other words, to use Cristiana Giordano’s interesting distinction, the feminists I followed do not seek only acknowledgement, i.e. “the political and ethical act of surrendering the desire to know through already established categories and of accepting the challenges of difference and the possibility of not knowing, not understanding, and thus embracing uncertainty” (Giordano 2014,9). They also look for recognition, within
the new political common sense, in Ranciérian terms, that, with their representational struggle, they helped to construct.

Victims And Witnesses

The importance of breaking explicitly with the victim scheme is something my informants share with other Italian feminists, although they do not represent the majority among Italian women’s groups. Some of the feminists that actively participated in the Staffetta, or that have for years been supporting the struggle against ‘femicide,’ like Tonia, who I presented in the previous chapter, have been starting to voice their complaints about the representation of women as victims in the past couple of years. The blogger of www.abbattoimuri.blogpress.com and Michela Murgia are just two examples of this attitude. As audiences of the widespread discourses and images that depict women in victimizing terms, they offer critical understandings and analyses of the dominant gazes on women. By framing these gazes through a distinction between victims and/or witnesses, what my informants (most of them trained in their political activities within UDI) seem to add to these different practices and performances of being audiences are voices of dissatisfaction with the dominant representations of women (including those used by women’s groups). The catchphrase “no more victims, but witnesses” which emerged during the Staffetta is central to their understanding of women, of their being in the world, and of their political actions.

As a matter of fact —counter intuitively, maybe— being (potentially or actually) objects of violence is not a synonym of being victims, according to many of the Salentine women activists I met. If, as the Staffetta makes clear, they claim that women are potential recipients of violence for the mere fact of being women, this does not mean that they imply that women should consider themselves just as victims, or that, necessarily, they should be defined as such. Many of my informants certainly use passivity and

327 On the binary distinction between victim and agent in the Italian context, see for example, Giordano 2014:9 and Gribaldi 2014.
328 http://abbattoimuri.wordpress.com/2014/06/04/del-femminismo-necrofilo-e-la-vittima-come-modello-sociale/
passiveness in order to describe the status of victims, and recognize the injustice of the
violent acts perpetrated against women who are not, by any means, considered
responsible of and for the violence they suffer. Interestingly, though, when I asked some
of them to be more specific in explaining who they thought victims are, I noticed that
they tended to define this condition contrastively —i.e. by referring to what being a
victim is not, and to what being a witness, instead, is. Below, I report two of the answers
I received when I asked the aforementioned question. I claim that these responses
summarize very well the issues at stake.

Women always have to expiate (*espiare*), starting from the fact that they
were born [as women]; therefore, violence, rapes, and other vexations are
included [in the fact of being born as women]. So, declaring oneself as
‘victim’ is perceived as debasing (*sminuente*) the crimes that one suffers
(*si subiscono*)\(^{329}\) and [as being] somehow ‘accomplice’ to the other [i.e. men who inflict violence against women]. Becoming a witness [to the
crimes] means reporting the felony, the executer, and the instigator: patriotism. (…) We all are at risk of violence…the quality of a political
action is given by the ability of the subject to not allow patriarchy to
define her (*di non farsi definire dal patriarcato*) and, at the same time, of
not putting ourselves in a position of superiority in reference to those women who cannot do so (*Lucia*).\(^{330}\)

Being witnesses means being witnesses of violence, in front of the World
[sic] that, otherwise, would not be aware of that [violence]. Generally,
witnesses are different from the victims of a crime. In violence, often, they
are the same person. Giving testimony of certain facts it is not just an act
of courage in first person, but a service to humankind. Similarly…the
witness carries out a public service, in courts. A civil service, for the good
sake of community…because it is the World that is guilty. [It is] The same
World that needs to be saved. [A world] Made, in its insides, of different

\(^{329}\) Here, *Lucia* uses the impersonal formula *si subiscono*.

\(^{330}\) *Lucia*, March 21\(^{st}\) 2014.
things. The function of the witness it is not just pinpointing who is guilty. But it is also to do a service. To humankind… for this reason the function of witness is compulsory by law. If you do not go [to court] to testify, they come to your home to get you, with the Carabinieri [i.e. Italian police]. The person who is accused can choose not to speak. The witness cannot do the same. At the very least, s/he gets [an accusation of] perjury (Rina). 331

In both these answers, as I explained, victims are not characterized well, while witnesses are; the former are described mainly by referring to what they are not: therefore, in relation to the latter. What is clear, though, is that victimhood seems to be the norm, in relation to which new possibilities of being women (i.e. of being testimoni) are imagined. In other words, for both Rina and Lucia, and for other feminists I met in Salento, the status of the victim is taken to be the norm against which the role of the testimone stands out, offering new perspectives for thinking about their own being in the world. According to Rina and Lucia, witnesses testify against ‘patriarchy,’ and, in doing so, they pinpoint it as the ideology that rules the world. Victims, instead, by putting their suffering at the center of their self-perception, re-inscribe the ‘patriarchal’ narrative of women as human beings in need of being controlled and protected. Moreover, witnesses are those who do not concentrate on their own suffering: they are not affected by protagonismo (for a clarifying comparison, see chapter 4, and the reactions to the performance of the F9 in Paestum). Victims, instead, do this, with the result of attracting attention to themselves and of taking it away from the crime. Most important of all, witnesses act ethically, while victims do not — not in the same way, at least. 332

Being victims and/or witnesses, interestingly, then, is described as having moral connotations. According to Lucia, defining oneself as a victim is somehow being

331 Rina, March 20th, 2014.
332 Notably, Foucault distinguished between morality and ethics, the former being a “system of imposed norms” and the latter the “imaginative inventions of alternatives” to the former (Dave 2008: 231-232). Some scholars adopted this distinction on the basis of their particular analyses and ethnographical contexts (see for example Dave 2008, 2012; Halperin 1995, Laidlaw 2001). While I tend to prefer to use the term ethics over morality for the Foucauldian resonances it brings about in this dissertation, I do not consider basing my analyses on the aforementioned distinction. It is worth mentioning that Faubion creatively contributed to this debate on morality/ethics by distinguishing between the ethical and the themitical (in Lambek ed. 2010, Faubion 2011).
accomplice to a crime: it is allowing ‘patriarchy’ to define oneself to the point of feeling that, for the fact of being a woman, one needs to expiate through one’s own sacrifice. For Rina, instead, the witnesses act courageously, but they are also driven by the moral imperative of a civil, collective service to humankind. Remarkably, she points out that witnesses are obliged to testify — by law, and not just morals.

The connections between being victims and/or witnesses, their aesthetic translations, and the realm of the ethical are of particular interest for understanding many of the positions I encountered during my fieldwork in Salento. I claim they are central in order to make sense of the affective and cognitive reactions that, on the one hand, representations of women-as-victims trigger in many of the feminists I met, and that, on the other, performances such as the reading of Ferite a morte (another that I will discuss below) elicit in their audiences. The ethical dimension, so close to the aesthetic one in my research, also embraces everyday performances and poetics of womanhood of my informants: they work together in the construction of what I will call (modern) feminist womanhood (see chapter 8). The importance given to representations of women in images, poetics, and in language, among my informants, relies on the fact that they have a central role in suggesting, and imagining, alternative possibilities of being women. These representative enterprises, laden with ethical and aesthetic connotations, embrace both the dimensions of the everyday, and those of special occasions — a distinction that, as I pointed out in the Introduction, I use heuristically. These initiatives engage different imagined publics and aesthetic dimensions.

While in this dissertation I choose to present and describe on their own terms the activism of the Italian feminists I worked with, the discourses and practices around victims and victimization resonate with some of the issues that, especially since the 1990s, characterize North American feminist debates.\textsuperscript{333} In her book Knowing Victims: Feminism, Agency, and Victim Politics in Neoliberal Times (2014), Rebecca Stringer, for
example, addresses the historical developments of the paradigm of victimization in North American feminism. She claims that:

Since the 1980s, across a wide array of discourses in media, academia, official politics and movement politics, there has been a concerted movement away from the language of victimhood, prompted by the emergence of a surprisingly widely shared critique of the very notion of ‘victim.’ This movement away from the language of victimhood has not meant talk of victimhood has ceased. Rather it has meant that talk of victimhood primarily assumes the form of negative critique of the notion of ‘victim’: the proliferation of discourses in which the notion of victim arises in order to be critiqued, and is generally unseated by ‘agency’ as the trope of legitimacy and preferred analytical choice. Our ways of thinking and talking about victims, victimization and victimhood have been reorganized around the dominance of anti-victim talk (2).

According to Stringer, this happened in connection with “the rise and consolidation of neoliberalism as a hegemonic political form.” She asks herself: “Is it true that the language of victimhood stands immune to polysemy and resignification, and can only hold a single set of meanings – passivity, powerlessness, dependence and innocence?”(6) She argues that “feminism needs to act more strongly as a site of counter-hegemonic victim talk, instead of ceding ground to neoliberal values in the contemporary meaning of victimhood” (8), and ultimately she claims that:

[C]ontrary to their self-presentation, critiques of victim feminism do not move beyond victim politics, and do not affirm women’s agency. Rather than move beyond victim politics, these critiques produce a revised version of victim politics that reflects the victim-blaming structure of neoliberalism’s personal responsibility system. Creating new distinctions between genuine and false victims of gendered suffering, they influentially recast a spectrum of feminist issues – spanning victimization through violence, discrimination and inequality – as individual problems of
personal responsibility, or as social problems to be dealt with by criminal law (Stringer 2014, 20).

The only attempts to challenge these interpretations of victimhood, according to Stringer, come from postcolonial feminist critiques that present agency as “marking empowered feminine whiteness”:

[S]cholarly Western feminist critiques of the notion of ‘victim’ are characterized more strongly by the agency-affirming rhetoric and anti-victim motifs of neoliberal victim theory than by the task of interrogating the racialization (and other intersecting forms of identificatory particularization) of victimhood and agency within and beyond feminist discourse (7).

The Italian feminists with whom I worked, at a first sight seem to adhere to the victim-blaming discourse: for example, they strongly oppose the equation between women and victims, and criticize those who seem to exploit that condition. In spite of these similarities, though, I claim that in the Italian context, especially among the Salentine activists, the disapproval of the victim status takes other connotations. The latter have different implications, possibly relevant for offering an understanding of victimhood beyond “passivity, powerlessness, dependence and innocence” (Stringer 2014, 6). They foster resignification of what agency could mean in relation to victimhood by considering the latter— in its relation with suffering, in particular— in a frame that goes beyond issues of personal responsibility.

One of the important contributions in order to overcome the faults of victimization, according to Stringer, is the one that operates around the framing of victims as survivors:334

The ethos of survivorship steps back from the exercise of judging good and bad victim behaviours and advances instead a non-expert approach that confers authority upon women’s own (examinable, multiple and

334 In her reference to Lyotard’s differend she also mentions the figure of the plaintiff (2014, 67-73).
changing) perspectives on their experience of rape, giving rise to unique and subversive conceptualizations. Survivor discourse makes agency and vulnerability visible amidst the critique of victim-blame (77).

The figure of the survivor is not unambiguous, though, since it does not break both with equating violence and trauma (see for example Fassin 2008) and an understanding of victimhood as a matter of personal responsibility. Today, in fact, the ethos of survivorship can:

[O]perate on behalf of neoliberal victim theory. Where rape crisis feminists actively critique the social construction of victimhood and draw a distinction between self-blame (victim identity) and self-responsibility (survivorship), neoliberal victim theory collapses this distinction, situating the ideal would-be victim as already self-blaming – individually responsible for preventing, resisting, surviving and recovering from all manner of threats to personal safety, psychic stability and economic security (79).

The Italian case I am presenting here, I claim, offers “a different view on the role of the language of victimhood in the politics of emancipation, providing alternatives to the confines, prejudices and contradictions of neoliberal victim theory” (13). It does so, I argue, in three ways. First, by embracing the “we are witnesses and not victims” trope, the Italian feminists I worked with do not erase the dimension of victimhood, but they comprise it in the experience of the witness. This latter position is less prone to being associated with compulsory resilience, and therefore with the moral superiority inherent to the survivor trope. Being witnesses certainly has moral connotations, but these are associated with one’s position in front of the law, and not with discourses that “individualize, psychologize, and pathologize victimhood” (13), as Rina’s words show.
Second, as I showed in narrating the *Staffetta* episode, the feminists I met, by thinking about themselves as witnesses and *not just* as victims of violence, *disarticulate*\(^{335}\) the relationships between victimhood and violence and trauma. Their thinking about themselves as potentially violated does not imply that they consider themselves as victims — that, as Murgia pointed out, is just and needs to be acknowledged as a temporary condition (See chapter 7) and as the example of the Staffetta shows (see chapter 5, and Parmigiani 2015).

Finally, as I will show in more detail in the rest of the chapter, they recognize passivity as a form of agency and represent themselves as objects as a form of being agentive subjects: *Soggette*. They problematize the connections between passivity and victimhood: as victims can be active, and passivity does not need be a synonym of victimhood. This objectification of the body resonates, on the one hand, with Ziarek’s readings of Agamben’s *nuda vita*, namely with a position that stresses:

> [b]oth the political and ontological ambiguity of bare life, which escapes the very distinction between potentiality and actuality, presence and absence, life and death. Such political ambiguity means that bare life cannot function only as the target of sovereign decision, but that it can also be reclaimed for the sake of political transformation by oppositional democratic movements (Ziarek 2012,148. See also Butler 2014,122-123 on Agamben’s notion of bare life).

On the other hand, it is in line with what Butler’s claims about the precarity of bodies in public protests (2012,117-137). According to her, “[p]olitical claims are made by bodies as they appear and act, as they refuse and as they persist under conditions in which that

\(^{335}\) Pizza distinguishes between disarticulation and deconstruction, claiming that the first refers to a “critical decomposition of the ways a category is fabricated that implies its opening in reference to the intellectuals who materially and symbolically produced it”— i.e. “it relates to the intellectuals in all their complexity, considered not only from the mental-cognitive-ideological point of view, but also as bodies which act in a specific social field.” He understands deconstruction, instead, as the “unmasking of a sort of ideological mystification, immanent in the objects, that needs to be deconstructed” (Pizza 2012,17; 2015,125).
fact alone is taken to be an act of delegitimation of the state” (124).\(^{(336)}\) The material, precarious presence of bodies, in fact, can claim “the right to have rights, not as natural law or metaphysical stipulation, but as the persistence of the body against those forces that seek its debilitation or eradication” (ibid.).

In sum, the representational objectification of potentially violated gendered bodies enacted by the activists I met, as I will show below, can be read in line with the aforementioned perspectives: by putting oxymoronic performances on stage at the threshold of being subjects and objects, they suggest, among other things, an understanding of victimhood, agency, and violence that could offer interesting comparative elements also to North American feminist debates.

**Witnesses and Representations: the Perlocutionary Effects of Ambiguity**

a. Souls of the Earth

“A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence”
Susan Sontag, On Photography 1977,16

Taurisano is a small town in the province of Lecce. A friend and I drove there on a late November afternoon. The sky was brightly coloured with the sunset, and the roads were wet, since it had just stopped raining. We were heading towards the conference room where the first of three meetings organized on the occasion of the 25\(^{th}\) of November 2013 was held. Some women of the town had decided to organize *Lost Love*, the first edition of the Festival Against Violence Against Women (*Perduto Amore, Primo Festival Contro la Violenza sulle Donne*), and my friend had been invited by some of the organizers. It was the first time in Taurisano for the two of us, and we wanted to park the car in a central area, close to via Roma, where the meeting was being held. We ended up in the Corso (main street) of Taurisano (see chapter 6, for a picture of what the Corso looks like). While we were looking for a parking spot, we noticed that we were surrounded only by

\(^{(336)}\) This resonates also with de Martino’s observations on *presenza*, the construction of which goes through “the elementary being of the person” (1981,189). See also Butler 2012.
men. No woman was there—walking, drinking coffee at the bar, shopping, or just passing by. We parked the car and walked through the Corso. Men were looking at us with curiosity, but without particular insistence. Yet it was clear to both of us that the absence of women there was not just a coincidence.

While my friend and I were commenting on this awkward situation, she remembered that the women of Taurisano she had met some time before had told her about this particular custom of their town. They had also informed her that a woman they know, a new mom, got in trouble with her husband for strolling with her baby in the Corso during the day while talking on a cell phone. The men who were there at that time apparently informed her husband that she was talking on her mobile—who knows with whom—when she was alone with the baby, and suggested he keep a closer eye on her.

My friend and I were trying to imagine what it would be like for a woman to live in Taurisano today when we ran into the poster of Perduto Amore. On the poster we saw the pictures of eight women from Taurisano (my friend’s acquaintances) who chose this particular way for standing up against violence against women. Marta and I were astonished: given the local customs we had just bumped into, this choice seemed really brave. The courage of these women moved us for another reason, too: just a few months before the Festival (July 2013), Taurisano had made the news for a case of ‘femicide’ that ended with the suicide of the killer. The community was still divided, at the time of the Festival, on the elaboration of their collective mourning. The families involved, apparently all well known in the small town, were still grieving their losses and formulating narratives that could explain, or maybe even justify, the deaths of their beloved members. Taking sides was a difficult task, and promoting an initiative against violence against women risked touching some sensitive spots, as one of the women who organized Perduto Amore told me. She mentioned that it had been tough talking about the Festival to the families involved with the recent case of femminicidio. Yet she added that their pain also needs to be accepted and listened to.
Fig. 66. Poster of *Perduto Amore*

During the Festival Lucia Sabato, one of the organizers of the event presented her photographic exhibit, produced in collaboration with the local association *Flauto Magico*, called *Alma de Tierra*, a Spanish title meaning Soul of the Earth. In this exhibition, twenty-five black-and-white pictures of women from Taurisano were hung from two dark panels. Red gauze (that, according to the artist, symbolized death) and red roses decorated the black walls between the pictures. Each woman in the photos was holding a white piece of paper that reported (silent) words against violence against women: mostly mementos for other women.
For an eye accustomed to Italian cemeteries, very different from North American ones, this installation clearly resonated with those images and imaginaries: the pictures of the women on dark walls, the antiqued photos, and the flowers around the pictures are ubiquitous characteristics of Italian graveyards. Clearly, the photographed bodies of the living women of Taurisano visually resonated with the ones of dead women. Since the latter do not usually hold messages for the living in the cemeteries, the exhibition conveyed an oxymoronic message. It is precisely around the creative juxtaposition of two seemingly opposite conditions—being dead and speaking—that the exhibition was constructed. It was an oxymoronic ambivalence that, I claim, was designed to catalyze

---

337 By “oxymoron” I mean a “figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction.” See http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/oxymoron.

338 Clearly, the personified amphora of the Staffetta was bearing an oxymoronic message, too.
affective resonances and to leave the observer cognitively and affectively disoriented. It was something that aimed to promote *dissensus*.\(^{339}\)

Lucia explained her intentions to me, although using different terms, while sipping a fresh drink at a local bar annexed to a gas station on a very hot summer afternoon a few months later. She believes that, as an artist, she cannot explain with words who women are or should be, nor the violence they go through. The persons of the public, provoked by the artistic production, should “make this effort by themselves, so that they can remember” their conclusions. When I asked her what types of reactions she saw and what type of feedback she received from her audience in Taurisano, she replied, with disappointment, that “the only thing they saw was that their neighbours and acquaintances were the protagonists of the pictures.” In spite of her disappointment, to me that seemed a good starting point.

Soul of the Earth, the title of the exhibition, can be understood in two different ways. Soul (*anima*, in Italian) can allude to an energetic, spiritual essence, and Earth (*Terra*, in Italian) can refer to our planet. In this sense, the installation aims at reminding how women, by virtue of their reproductive bodies, are vital and fundamental for our planet and for life. Or, as one of the pictures of the installation states: “The woman is the soul of the world and gives life to life” (*La donna è l’anima del mondo dà vita alla vita*). In this sense, similar to the amphora-womb (see above), the pictures are considered to be generative. Soul, though, could also be interpreted, more technically, in connection with Catholic teachings, as an essential characteristic of the individual human being: one that outlives her deceased body—often buried in the soil (*terra*, in Italian). This interpretation of *anima* is widespread in Italy. According to this reading, then, the title hints at the presence of a living surplus that outlasts the bodies of the victims of ‘femicide,’ in this case embodied by the living women in the pictures.

\(^{339}\) It is worth mentioning that the concept of intercorporeality traces back to Merleau-Ponty and has been variously employed in performance studies (and beyond). See, for example, Dufrenne 1973, Tamisari 2006, Palmer and Jankoviak 1996, Crossley 1995, Al-Mohammad 2012, Csordas 2008.
This latter reading of the installation, in particular, is consistent with the superimposition of living female bodies onto the ones of the victims of gendered violence suggested and operated by the Staffetta, and described previously. As I explained there, right from the beginning, the Staffetta associated the bodies and lives of the women who suffered from sexed violence and femminicidio with all women on account of their female bodies. This operation, as I have argued above, led to the creation of an imagined community of (potentially) violated women, where female bodies started to be portrayed and understood primarily as loci of potential violence.

In Alma de Tierra, though, the bodies of the women who suffered violence, considered as objects by the predatory script, which killed or violated them, are subsumed and transformed (and not mimicked or impersonated) through the activists’ performances in the installation.  

In this respect, they differ from the pictures I presented in the previous chapter, and from the Pupazza: their function, instead, resembles more that of the amphora. In the Staffetta, this physical and artistic personified object was the witness of/for the dead women —i.e. the element that talked by proxy and without language for them, and that mediated relations. Here, instead, objectified subjects —i.e. pictures of living women— are considered to be testimoni for/of those who died or suffer as a result of sexed violence.

In Lucia Sabato’s exhibition, the objectification of the bodies of the activists at the same time is taken to an extreme and overturns that of the ‘patriarchal’ imagery: the women from Taurisano portrayed in the installation make themselves objects in order to be witnesses. They testify in front of the court of their local (imagined and actual) publics by mobilizing affects and emotions precisely by means of their (oxymoronic) objectified bodies. In this artistic exhibition the pictures of the living women lie at the threshold, i.e. participating while at the same time transcending seemingly opposite conditions: being subjects and objects, being active and passive, being alive and dead, and, I claim, being

---

340 In his well-known book on mimesis, Taussig argues that every representational act is achieved “through the intervention of the mimetic faculty” (1992, 250). I agree with him while noticing that, in this case, the mimetic element is subsumed, transcended, and transformed in something that is meant to challenge commonsensical perceptions of what being a woman is or should be.

341 For a comparison, see Agamben 1998 on shame (see also chapter 7).
witnesses and victims. The women of Taurisano do not indulge in a self-representation that easily fits with the expectations of the observer, accustomed to campaigns and performances against sexed violence that represent women in the position of victims — with black eyes, visible scars, and traces of blood. *Alma de Tierra*’s iconography, instead, is explicitly intended to challenge these expectations: it presents and re-presents Taurisano’s citizens, the same ones the spectators could meet at the grocery store, or at their kids’ schools, or at the gym. This stylistic feature, that entrusts close people to talk by proxy for the (mostly distant) victims of ‘femicide’ that inhabit everyday newspapers, is aimed at unsettling the affective and cognitive parameters of perception of the viewer, and at framing gendered violence as something *not alien to* the community of Taurisano. These allusive images, I claim, sit in a liminal place. In Nuzzo’s terms, the women of Taurisano do not want to allow the gaze of the other to define them. Consistent with the slogan of *Staffetta*, the women of the installation are not victims, but witnesses (*testimoni*).

b. *Disanimate*

---

342 This particular attribute of photography is stressed also by Edwards, who writes that: “photographs, especially in their global consumption, are often of people, thus blurring the distinction between subject and object, photograph and referent in significant ways” (2012, 222).

343 Clearly, this was aimed at giving new instruments to the community of Taurisano in order to process the grieving associated with the death of the two fellow-citizens that occurred some months before.
This poster advertised a public debate promoted on the occasion of the 2013 International Day of Women (March 8th 2013) by the public library of Galatina, a town in the Province of Lecce. The theme of the meeting, organized in collaboration with other local associations, including DNA Donna, was “the body of women in advertising and in the media.” The title of this event, interestingly, was Disanimate: a neologism created by assembling the privative prefix ‘dis’ and the adjective (feminine, plural) animate (animated), understood both in the senses of being alive and of bearers of soul. In English, I would translate this title as deprived of soul/life. A picture of a mannequin, naked and divested of individualized traits, adorns the poster. While it is evident that it is a dressmaker's dummy (a plastic reproduction of a human body), its position is highly unconventional. It is sitting with its legs bent in order to hide its pubic area, its head is turned away from the observer, and its left hand does not hang parallel to the bust, but is anchored to the floor, as if it were supporting the weight of its whole body. The designer of this poster is Sara, a friend of mine. I contacted her immediately after a common friend had told me about the initiative and had shown me the poster. Sara is a professional graphic designer based in Salento, where she was born. She has worked for many feminist campaigns, including the three national campaigns of UDI. She is very sensitive to women’s issues although verbally and behaviorally on more than one occasion she manifested to me a clear uneasiness in recognizing herself as part the Italian feminist panorama. She does not feel as is she is an insider, since she claims she does not fully understand feminist language, she does not like to attend feminist gatherings, and she does not fully comprehend the way issues are framed among the groups of feminists she met. These and other remarks on similar matters were one of the main topics of a four-hour long road-trip we took together, and emerge periodically in our conversations. I had indicated to Sara, via email, that I was interested in knowing a bit more about the poster, and I began our subsequent Skype conversation telling her that, while I really liked the poster of Disanimate, I was curious to know the story behind it: i.e. why she chose that title, and that image, for the Galatina debate. After a bit of embarrassment (she wondered whether I thought that the poster was inappropriate for the topic of the meeting), she patiently retraced with me the steps that led her to produce the poster. She told me that there were some key ideas behind the print for the event, which, like all her works, saw
the light firstly as a result of an “emotional work” and only in a second stance as an effect of a labor limae —i.e. a process of cleaning and styling of the first draft. Her creations always stem from a particular “emotional place,” which is followed by a “rationalization phase.” She indicated the following points regarding Disanimate. “Taking the soul away,” for Sara, means “depriving someone of the relationship between her body and the world.” This idea, she claims, resulted from her engagement with a talk by the philosopher Galimberti she had listened to some time ago. In her opinion, this “deprivation” is what sexist advertisement does with the bodies of women. The mannequin in the poster, while not individualized, counter-intuitively does not give the observer the idea that she is a passive object: this is precisely the reason why Sara chose this image. She wanted to be “evocative” and “ambiguous” at the same time, and constructed the poster by starting from the feelings and emotions that the image of the mannequin triggered in her. These were connected with the feeling of not wanting to be seen as passive, as a victim. While she believes that the problems of violence against women and the oppressive power of ‘patriarchy’ are real for many women, she does not feel these issues as part of her own story, language, and education. On more than one occasion she mentioned that her father, who prematurely passed away, had pushed both his sons and daughters to be able to support themselves, both economically and emotionally and not have to rely on others for their material and spiritual sustenance. As a consequence of her education, she developed a sort of uneasiness in relation to representations and self-representations of women as passive and dependent on men.

Sara’s attempt to challenge these commonsensical ideas of women was remarkable: the picture of the mannequin seems to comply powerfully with this goal. The ambiguity of the image of the poster, explicitly sought by Sara, revolves (again) around the fusion of activity and passivity, and around the affective and intellectual con-fusion that this oxymoronic image could generate in the observer. With the word confusion, as indicated by its etymology, I mean a mingling together that provokes disorientation and lack of understanding. This is what Sara experienced when she chose the image, and this is what she wanted to trigger by using that particular photo to promote the event in Galatina.

As I noticed for the photographic exhibition of Taurisano, which was using this same
stylistic feature, although differently, the affective and cognitive confusion is meant to be produced by means of an oxymoronic representation —i.e. the juxtaposition of seemingly opposite factors. Interestingly, in both these cases the oxymoronic representation revolves around elements that, semiotically, refer to a status of both activity and passivity, to being both persons and objects, to being both victims and witnesses. In other words, the ambiguity sought by Sara is shaped around what I refer to as the two apparently opposite meanings of the term subject (from the Latin subicio, meaning being thrown under): that of being the agentive protagonist of one own’s life, and that of being forced/acted upon (see also Agamben 1998; on action and passion see for example Lambek 2010a, 2007). These two aspects of being subjects resonate with the aforementioned fusion of activity and passivity and, consequentially, in my ethnographic field, with the issue of being (represented as) victims and witnesses that I have addressed above. The mannequin, similar to the pictures of the women from Taurisano and to the amphora, is meant to be a bearer of affective resonances. In Massumi’s words, it is aimed at triggering and circulating unqualified intensities in the observers, promoting, at least in the hopes and expectations of their producers, dissensus. While the picture of the mannequin at a first sight alludes to the objectification of women’s bodies in sexist advertisement, Sara did not intend it to mimic, replicate, or identify with those bodies. It speaks without language for them, by submerging and transforming the overexposed bodies of women. The dressmaker dummy, similarly to the aforementioned representations, is presented as an agentive object. In this case, it is an object that does not offer itself to the gaze of the observer, one that covers its pubic area, and one that bears the weight of its own body. Once again, a personified object performs the role of witness in the attempt to challenge—affectively as well, in Rancièrian terms—the widespread cultural representations of women as victims. The mannequin speaks as a testimone from a liminal (see for example Turner 1969 and Lambek 2007) place, at the threshold between being either subject or object: it is both. This place is liminal inasmuch it goes beyond this distinction, comprising the two meanings of being subjects.

As I pointed out in the Introduction, in this dissertation I use representations in a wider sense as a general term to refer to performances and practices engaged in order to show something through something else. In that light, for heuristic reasons I distinguish
between spectacles and practices, the former being related to special events and the latter to ordinary life. Loosely following Lowell Lewis (2013), I adopt performance as a transversal term in this heuristic division of time, with the intention of stressing the performative aspects of performing. In this respect, performance-as-something-performative can be applied to both special and ordinary circumstances (2013, 31-32) — including the ones related to *Alma de Tierra* and *Disanimate*. The images used in these initiatives, I argue, have a perlocutionary dimension (see Introduction): they perform womanhood in a way that challenges commonsensical representations of women as victims. I claim that, although inflected differently, *Alma de Tierra* and *Disanimate* share a same grammar that offers an alternative, and ambiguous, representation of what being a woman is or should be, in contrast to common representations. In doing so, I argue, they promote *dissensus*. While the illocutionary effect of these images, I believe, emerges in the oxymoronic representations of women around the two meanings of being subject, its perlocutionary qualities, instead, at least indirectly (in the intentions of their producers), generate a “perceptive perturbation” (see Ross 2008, 12): what I called a sense of ambivalence, of confusion in the observers/audience. As is evident in Sara’s words, this ambiguity functions to question affectively and cognitively the commonsensical understandings, in Rancièrian terms, of the status of women. This is why these representations have the perlocutionary effect of promoting *dissensus* (on precarious visualities and Rancière see also Ross 2008).

**Producing Witnesses**

Diana Taylor, in her interesting ethnography *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (1997), offers an analysis of various public spectacles understood as the *loci* of construction of communal identity: from theatrical

---

344 “[S]uch is the precariousness of visuality …in contemporary visual culture: a setting into play of a range of aesthetic strategies that solicit from the spectator a perception that lacks in security. Vision here comes to appear insufficient or is contradicted by other sensorial registers, but it is also meant to be somewhat augmented by new functions of the image screen. Indeed, in the texts comprising this anthology, if precariousness is to be considered as an aesthetic strategy at all, it is precisely because it has a productive side to it: what perception lacks in opticality it gains in complexity and mostly interrelatedness —between senses…between the body, screen place…between bodies, between identification and disidentification” (Ross 2008, 9).
plays to posters and advertisement. Interested in enquiring into the state narratives that link gender construction and nationalism, she claims that “[i]ndividual and state formation take place, in part, in the visual sphere through a complicated play of looks: looking, being looked at, identification, recognition, mimicry.” Taylor conceives her work as an analysis of the “politics of looking”: just looking, dangerous seeing, and percepticide, i.e. what we are denied or trained not to see (prologue). In doing so, she elaborates on the relationships between seeing and witnessing—i.e. between being a spectator and a witness (see also Hartman 1997, 4). In analyzing state representations, Taylor claims that every society has systems of representation that tell stories about themselves, their “origin, challenges, and destiny.” The difference between being part of the audience of these representations and a witness to them is what informs her ethnography. Her analysis, including her use, among other sources, of Felman and Laub’s book Testimony (1992) on the Holocaust, offers useful insights for my own. 345 Taylor, Felman, and Laub agree that witnesses are a special type of spectators, since they want to “impress upon” an audience: 346

To bear witness is to take responsibility for truth…to testify—before a court of law or before the court of history and of the future; to testify before an audience of readers or of spectators—is more than simply to report a fact or an event or to relate what has been lived, recorded, and remembered. Memory is conjured here essentially in order to address another, to impress upon a listener, to appeal to a community. To testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness stand, or to take the position of the witness insofar as the narrative account of the witness is at once engaged in an appeal and bounded by an oath” (Feldman and Laub 1999, 204).

345 These authors directly address the issues of performances of the act of seeing; while they do not, specifically, concentrate on affects and non-discursive elements (dimensions that can complement their analyses), as I do, their work could help one better understand an important aspect of the types of representations I witnessed in Salento.

346 On the act of witnessing, understood as a disciplined presence that opens up new ways of being, see Dave 2014.
The intention to “impress upon” the observer, in my ethnographic materials, is obtained by utilizing the oxymoronic device I described above, and it includes affective resonances. It is this space of uncertainty and of lack of vision—or of “precarious visuality: (Ross 2008)—vis-à-vis the visual representations engaged by the feminists I met that opens the way for novel and unconventional understandings of sexed violence and of what being a women means, or could mean, in contemporary Italy.347

The attempt at changing one’s perceptions of the world and of genders’ relations through aesthetic engagement that I witnessed in Salento resonates well with Mazzarella’s statement that “any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective” (299). Moreover, significantly, it is consistent with a Rancièrian vision of politics, in particular as it is mediated by Panagia’s attention to affects (see Introduction). The senses of confusion, ambivalence, bewilderment, and puzzlement that the oxymoronic representations (are designed to) trigger in their audience are meant to be forms of political activism, pursued by means of particular aesthetic spectacles. The latter aim at widening the common sensorium, and at challenging commonsensical representations of women by expanding the range of affective and cognitive possibilities around what being women should and could be. Moreover, as I will claim in the next chapter, the aforementioned representations are ways to imagine new subjectivities, alternative to those which the status quo promotes.

The failure to decipher what one sees is what characterizes the confusion that I associated with the oxymoronic devices used by some of my informants—at least in the intentions of their producers. In this respect, the spectator of the representations who experiences

347 The issue of failing to decipher visual signs Felman also addresses in her analysis of the film Shoah by Claude Lanzmann (1985) (1992,204-283). She claims that, in the film, the victims, the bystanders, and the perpetrators are defined by different performances of the act of seeing, all of them characterized by their failure to decipher visual signs. The victims do not understand, the by-standers overlook, and the perpetrators do not want to see. The Shoah is, according to her, an event without a witness, since it precludes both seeing and a “community of seeing” (211): something that the movie extends to its audience. The film is constructed around the collection of many testimonies in different languages, and translated into French. This “places us in the position of the witness who sees and hears, but cannot understand the significance of what is going on” until the intervention of an —often inaccurate—translation (212). In this process the viewer/listener, as Taylor also points out, is created as an active see-er, that becomes herself a witness by virtue of her participating in the traumatic event: she becomes a co-owner of that event.
this could become *herself* a witness. This happens not only by virtue of the “palpable connections” that the “very body of the perceiver and the perceived” share in mimetic performances (which, to a certain extent, define, even if contrastively, every representation; see Taussig 1992, 250). It occurs also as a consequence of the special connections between the act of witnessing and that of seeing addressed by Taylor. In a reading of the relationship between spectator and witness inspired by Felman and Laub, the ethnographer points out that “[t]hough neither the perpetrator nor the victim of events, the witness is part of the conflict and has a responsibility in reporting and remembering of events” (1997, 25). The spectator/witness, by virtue of her listening to others’ testimonies becomes a “participant and co-owner of the traumatic event,” and is “at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself” (Taylor quoting Laub and Felman 1997, 27; for a comparison see Fassin 2008, Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

Following these lines of thought, the oxymoronic representations that I have ethnographically described so far, by virtue of the perceptive, affective, and cognitive puzzlement they convey, allow for the possibility of seeing women according to parameters that differ from the commonsensical ones, constructed around the association between women and victims (and between violence and suffering). These *alternative* representations convey and prompt affective resonances that rest upon a performance of ambiguity. This confusion or blending together that brings to mind the one described by Felman in relation to the viewers of the film Shoah (1992, 202-281), triggered by aesthetic representations, opens up particular possibilities of practices and performances of the *act of vision*: that of the witness. These representations construct new audiences (or counter-publics) of witnesses of women-as-witnesses (and not as victims). The bewildered public of the spectacles can become *testimone* itself of sexed violence and *femminicidio*, as well as of different ways to understand women’s roles in society. The latter element, in particular, allows for a re-definition of common sense in Rancièrian terms, and happens, consistently with Panagia’s claims, in relation to the presence of unqualified affects around the representations.
No Words of Rear-Guard: Imagination Versus ‘Patriarchy’

Carla is the woman who invented the slogan of the *Staffetta* (see above). She is a lawyer, and has been a feminist political activist in *UDI* for decades. Since she is from Salento, and one of the first women that I met during my offline fieldwork, I had the chance to talk with her on several different occasions about her ideas. In narrating the origin of “*Non più vittime ma testimoni,*” she told me that she had been impressed by the courage, attitude, and behaviour of some women who testified in court, during a trial for a case of rape, and that she started to recognize in this striking attitude what “makes the difference” in talking about violence. This is why Carla decided to suggest they construct the *Staffetta* around the idea of being witnesses, which, for her, is something that empowers women without re-inscribing the narrative that women are in need of tutelage. Quite bluntly, she told me that ‘patriarchy’ wants us to be victims, and that accepting this identity means being compliant with it: if there is anything that the latter does not tolerate, according to Carla, it is women’s volition (*volitività*) and the inviolability of their bodies. Therefore, it needs to act on both levels in order to control them. In this perspective, coercion and tutelage are just two sides of the same coin, for Carla and other feminists I met. This same observation is also explained well by the novel writer and political activist Michela Murgia. In her *Ave Mary* (2011), she writes:

> Being identified as victims is a condition that should be transitory for everyone, linked to precise circumstances. One is not a victim for the fact of existing as a female, instead of as a male, but one [is a victim] always of something or someone. The attempt to transform people into permanent victims regardless of the circumstances forces victims into the role of victimized. That is another form of violence, more subtle and pervasive, since it imposes a condition of passivity that precludes the ability of self-redemption. The victimized subject cannot try to exit from the condition of victimhood, since around her she has a whole system that prevents her from being something different (2011, 17).

If, according to Carla and my Salentine informants, ‘patriarchy’ wants to control women, today the latter too often reinforce the former by embracing political projects that use the
language of victimhood, and by embracing the role of victims themselves. I heard Carla state, on more than one occasion, that she does not want to talk about violence with words of rearguard, with a language that is passive, that affirms women’s political goals through negation. Language is central for my informants: for this reason, she told me, she proposed to Pina Nuzzo (originally from Salento as well) to call the third campaign of *UDI Immagini amiche* (Friendly Images) rather than *Immagini nemiche* (Enemy Images), as was first planned. Moreover, she suggested concentrating on positive images of women in media and advertising rather than focusing on their debasement. Words (and images) are a very serious matter for Carla and the feminist activists I met. After all, her opinions on the via crucis of the F9 that I presented in the previous chapter are consistent with this perspective.

My informants are not just spectators of dominant discourses and representations of women and gendered violence. Their political activity has a lot to do with fighting a war of representations. Criticizing Italian society and its ‘patriarchal’ biases is not enough: *alternative* perspectives need to be produced, and offered beyond the commonsensical ones. Carla’s words are very clear on this point as well, and her Facebook activity is consistent with her ideas: the Web is an out-and-out locus for political activism for her as well. Besides cultivating her feminist online persona by, for example, having a blog, posting and reposting articles on women’s matters, sponsoring email bombings, and promoting petitions, she has also been concentrating on the issue of promoting different types of womanhood. In order to do so, she has been producing tens of notes that navigate the Web by virtue of the hundreds of friends and acquaintances tagged in them. Published on her social networks of choice, they collect biographies of “women who made history” —i.e. women whose ‘queer’ subjectivities (see below, in chapter 8) could be a model for all of us.

***

Carla is not alone in her project. Luisa is Apulian, but not from Salento: her different Italian accent is one of the first of her features I noticed when we met. Having spent lots of time in Lecce and the Province, I had evidently internalized the sort of skepticism that most of the people I encountered have for those who come from the Northern part of the
region (and especially from Bari, the regional administrative center). My internal reaction sounded weird to me, since my own accent—Northern Italian—has been one of the subjects for which I have experienced (friendly) mocking, by my informants, since I first arrived there. I first met Luisa, a middle-aged woman on a hot summer day in a CAV in Parabita, a town in the southern province of Lecce, I had joined some activists of DNA Donna, at that time in its start-up phase and without headquarters, in a formal meeting with the personnel of a women’s shelter. Luisa was giving a class at a course for volunteers, and we had the chance to spend the lunch break with her, in a private room, and to discuss some of the issues and procedures that DNA Donna had to follow in order to formally become an association. After this very interesting meeting, at which I received detailed information on the juridical status of women’s shelters in Apulia and in Italy, a smaller group of us remained with Luisa, who immediately started talking, informally, about something important to her. She explained to us that she and others at the regional administrative offices in Bari where she works as a consultant were writing a law proposal for the regional women’s shelters. One of the most important points that she stressed in talking about this law—approved in 2014—was that the philosophy behind the choices that were directing their conception of the bill was completely rooted in women’s activism. She had been working in the local women’s associations for years before tackling this law, and made clear that these grassroots experiences were what was really giving form to the law. Since “we all know the importance of language in the struggle against patriarchy,” she explained to us that her team was working towards the elimination in the bill of the word abuse—a term that is widely used in the Italian jurisprudence and in other national and regional laws. The reason for this choice was as simple as it was important. The presence of abuse implies, indirectly, the presence, acceptance, and legitimation of the use of women by men: something she and the other writers of the law strongly wanted to avoid. The law was approved in 2014, with the title “Norms for preventing and opposing gendered violence, for supporting the victims, for promoting women’s freedom, and self-determination.”

348 http://www.regione.puglia.it/index.php?page=pressregione&id=17100&opz=display
Luisa’s quasi-Agambenian observations on the inclusive exclusions of Italian legal terminology (see Agamben 1995) can be seen as an attempt to de-victimize the status of women in the (mostly regional) public opinion. Similar to what happened to the predatory script (see above), but more subtly, the commonsensical interpretation of women as weak subjects in need of protection, or as passive victims of violence, penetrated into the Italian juridical system—in this case through the language of abuse. Interestingly, the word victim appears in the title of Luisa’s law, which is meant, mainly, to direct the action of women’s shelters in the Apulia region. Victimhood is cited in connection with women’s freedom and self-determination: an important detail to acknowledge. Women do suffer. They are considered to be passive objects. They are the recipients of men’s violence. Yet the Apulian law through the excision of the word abuse from its text seems to suggest a way to go beyond the status of victim and to imagine different and more empowering possibilities. The message that this bill conveys differs considerably from the ones women receive from other welfare agents: the Regione Puglia supports women not as victims, but as free and self-determined subjects. If this might not seem to be an achievement, it is worth noting that I was told by an informant who works for a counseling center for women that she received a phone call (April 2014) from a woman who asked for help, since she was witnessing the beating of another (a stranger) by a man. Interestingly, the woman who called the center did not consider calling the police (at 113, the Italian 911) instead, as would have been intuitive in other regional contexts. While I do not want to make a case on the basis of this single episode, it is nonetheless consistent with a certain diffused lack of trust in Italian institutions in promoting women’s wellbeing.

From objects of tutelage, women become self-determined subjects.

This attention to language as a dimension of representation, of which the Apulian law is just an example, is primary in my informants’ political goals and experiences. Images, too, though, are becoming more and more central in the political activities of many of the women I worked with, as the following remarks confirm.

***
Luca gently greeted me, and accompanied me into the conference room. I sensed a
certain grade of skepticism mixed with curiosity in his attitude. It was the first time I had
met him, and I soon realized that our common acquaintance had not told him much about
me, except that I was a friend and an anthropologist who lived in North America and
studied the Salento area. My friend came with us into the conference room of the
women’s shelter and remained silent most of the time, only occasionally engaged in the
conversation by Luca, who at the beginning turned to her to make himself more
comfortable. Pretty early in our meeting, in an attempt to make all of us feel at ease with
the situation, Luca told me how my friend, the one who was sitting with us at the table,
was a “woman with balls/testicles” (una donna con le palle). My friend looked at me. I
looked at her and, subsequently, we both looked at Luca. He immediately realized what
happened, and added that since we “were feminists” he had “to pay attention to how” he
spoke. He, the coordinator of the women’s shelter, immediately tried to explain that he
“takes balls to be not just a masculine attribute but also a feminine one,” and that, “in this
sense, there are many more women with balls than men.” I smiled, and added that I
understood what he meant, and that this was why I could safely say that, as far as I could
understand from our brief exchange, he was a “man with a vagina —which, of course, is
a compliment.”

My friend looked at me with astonishment and amusement: she could not believe I had
really said this to the coordinator of the women’s shelter, and moreover at our first
meeting. Luca smiled and gently blushed: he said it was the first time he had ever been
told he was a man with a vagina. Moreover, he muttered that of course vagina could be
used as balls/testicles, but he quickly changed the topic of the conversation to overcome
his embarrassment.

Apparently through my slightly cheeky remarks, I had gained his respect and trust. Now
he considers me, as well, as a woman with balls/testicles (although he now uses other
expressions in order to make his point). His skeptical attitude disappeared, and he gave
me freedom of action at the shelter. He answered with patience to my many questions, he
allowed me to interview as many people and attend as many initiatives as I wanted at that
CAV (women’s shelter) and at the others at which he worked. He actually arranged
interviews on my behalf, informed me about initiatives that might be relevant to my research, and let me attend some of their meetings with women they were following from behind a wall fitted with a two-way mirror.

Being a woman with balls is still (see, for example, Blok 1981, Gilmore 1987) currently used in Italy as a way to express capability, strength, and courage—a woman’s exceptional status amidst common representations of women as victims (for a comparison see for example Blok 1981, 429). The connections between male genitalia and inner qualities and virtues did not seem to be problematic to the coordinator of the women’s shelter, at least not until I inverted the factors of that equation.

I cannot assess the role that our conversation had in the development of this initiative, but six months after my first meeting with Luca, one of the CAVs that he supervises promoted a photo-contest called “Woman is. 101 shots to narrate a woman — Campaign for the awareness and prevention of gendered violence.” The aim of the contest was “to give a positive message: exalting, through the evocative and immediate language typical of photography, a new figure of woman: reactive, and willing to take her internal potential back in its entirety (emphasis in the original).” The contest, the press release continues, wanted to represent “the woman in her everyday life, willing to take her interior potential back, a new woman and REACTIVE. A POSITIVE message, which breaks with the habitual images of violence that we are used to [seeing] in the campaigns against gendered violence.”

The visual aspects of women’s representations, that include spectacles, performances, and images, grew to have particular importance in my fieldwork. As I explained in the introduction, my focus on the visual is not intended to erase all the other senses from my ethnography. On the contrary: the examples that follow, in the next chapter, aim at stressing precisely the affective and cognitive dimensions of visual representations. With Grasseni, I claim that “Vision, both as theoretically dense metaphor (as worldview), and

---

as part of a phenomenology of the senses (as visions), is relevant to anthropological practice, and is not necessarily visualist” (2007, xv).

In this chapter, elaborating on the distinctions between being victims and/or witnesses, I showed the importance of the visual and linguistic dimensions of representation as a political battlefield for the Italian feminist women I have encountered. By engaging with representations, some of my informants aim at imagining new possibilities of womanhood in contrast to the ‘patriarchal’ understandings of women-as-victims. In their intentions, and vis-à-vis their actual and imagined publics, these representations are intended to trigger what I have called, following Cavell’s interpretations of Austin, perlocutionary effects. In other words, they want to change the practices and performances of vision, of feeling, and of interpretation of women’s roles and possibilities in contemporary Italian society. The renovated subjectivities enacted by these representations —sometimes oxymoronic and constructed around ambiguity— aim at widening the sensorium and commonsensical perceptions, in Rancierian terms, in relation to women. The ethical and the aesthetic dimensions are intermingled, offering an example of practices of dissensus: this conflation of production and action, as I will show in the next chapter, also informs other aspects of my informants’ lives.
In this chapter I will concentrate on the ethical dimensions of the representational struggle that I have described so far, and on various practices (i.e. labors and works) of ascesis (in Foucauldian terms, see Introduction). They revolve around artistic engagements, doing as if, and around performances of dignity. By embarking on these works of ascesis, my informants want to construct and perform alternative forms of womanhood rooted in the dimension of becoming rather than in that of being. These forms aim to challenge the ‘patriarchal’ constraints that associate women with victims, and at promoting interpretations of women as empowered, socially relevant, and worthy/dignified (degne) witnesses. In the previous chapters I pointed out how violence against women helped to construct an imagined community of potentially violated women in Italy, which, together with the social legitimation of the word femminicidio, fostered the creation of a continuum of violence that started comprising many aspects of the lives of Italian women. According to my informants, this continuum of violence coincides with ‘patriarchy’ (see for example Rina and Lucia above), and consequently for them the representational struggle against violence overlaps with a representational struggle against ‘patriarchy’ in general. Being witnesses, and not victims, also takes peculiar meanings in the everyday lives of the women I met, for whom the personal is political in a very radical way. Being testimoni, for them, revolves around their being exempla of modern feminist womanhood: an autopoietic project that has both ethical and aesthetic dimensions, and that it is pursued through different devices.

This task, as any representational one, is contingent, and varies considerably depending on my informants’ imagined or actual publics. For example, it takes different manifestations in relation to local, online, and general (imagined or actual) audiences, but also in reference to their own gazes. In this respect, the women I met consider their feminist womanhood as something not yet fully attained, but as something that they are moving towards. In this sense, the representational struggle my informants engage is a
sensuous enterprise, one that puts imagination—understood with Andriolo as “embodied minding” (2006)—at the center of their political praxis. In this perspective, their alternative representations of being women are also framed as a condition that they have not yet attained, but one toward which they move. Representations enact more the women that they want to become, rather than the women they actually are (on the “politics of becoming” see also Dave 2014).350

I argue that practicing and performing modern feminist womanhood is also a perlocutionary enterprise: becoming witnesses, in this sense, represents a moral and aesthetical imperative (see Carla, above), aimed at promoting dissensus through the endorsement of different performances of seeing and sensing in their (imagined or actual) publics—including themselves.

Dignity, in its relationships with being witnesses, works as a multivalent symbol in this framework: it is not merely something given to every single person for being human. Dignity, especially in its emotional implications (see, for a comparison, Mahmood 2001a on fear and 2001b on ishtiya/shyness) is something that needs also to be cultivated, performed, and, eventually, acknowledged by others. It is something that happens in between the sensory and the aesthetic, the personal and the social. Dignity is adopted in a way that resonates with certain dimensions of the traditional notion of honor, as a measure of social worth, and, at the same time, as a reference point for a wider discourse on human rights: in my ethnographic field, it is a way to perform modern feminist womanhood.

S/oggett/E: on Becoming Who You Are (Just Not Yet)

It was Sunday morning. Loredana and I woke up early: we had enjoyed a “girls’ night” together in Lecce the night before, with lots of talking about life and love, and a fair

---

350 I share with Dave the attention to women’s activism, to the ethical dimensions of political practices, and to the politics and poetics of these enterprises. Our ethnographic fields, however, allow us to stress different (complementary) aspects: in my case, that of representations, and the artistic and poietic realms, are central and explicit foci of analysis. Moreover, by virtue of the close connections between the personal and the political in my informants’ lives, I tend to concentrate on individual autopoiesis more than on group creations.
amount of beer. The other members of the association Io Sono Bellissima were waiting for us for the first meeting of S/oggett/E: we could not be late. Reluctantly, we got up from the queen-sized bed we had been sharing with her cat Julia, and we headed towards the coffee machine. Loredana’s phone rang. “Hello! Yes. I understand. Are you sure? I can come. 40 minutes. Sure, no problem. Bye.” “Giovanna, let’s go. We are going to pick Diana up. We are late. Hurry up!” Unenthusiastically, I left the espresso I was sipping in the kitchen’s sink, and moved toward the bathroom.

***

My friend and I got into the car: “Lore, are you sure that wasn’t an excuse? Are you sure that she REALLY messed up last night with her friend who was supposed to drive her to Lecce?” Loredana did not reply, picked up the phone, while looking at me, and dialed a number: “Hi, Diana. I am coming. You ARE coming, right?” She smiled, and added, looking directly into my eyes: “You know, my friend Giovanna thinks this might be an excuse…OK, see you in a while.” She hung up the phone without taking her eyes off mine, and without commenting. She was grinning with satisfaction. First I rolled my eyes. Then I smiled and I told her I was sure that it would have been a tough morning for me. We laughed.

Forty minutes later we got there—finally. My stomach was upset. The meeting was in a square of a town in the Province of Lecce. Diana got into the car. She muttered a “Ciao” and took her seat in the rear, just behind me. I greeted her and introduced myself briefly, informally. She remained silent. Loredana did all the initial talking: it was the first time they had met in person, and my friend has the gift of being able to fill the silences with nonchalance—something I always really appreciate when I am with her, especially in new situations. I peeked at Diana from the car’s side-mirror. I did not want her to see me staring at her. She was looking out of the window, while Loredana was doing all the talking. Her haircut was asymmetrical and multi-colored. Her eyes were swollen. Her dark piercings stood out on her pale face. “How old are you, Diana?” I asked, exploiting one of Loredana’s pauses.

“What do you think?” she replied.
I smiled. “23?” I asked with a soft, unchallenging voice. I looked into the mirror and saw Diana’s body almost jumping on her seat.

“19. But everybody thinks that I am 16,” she replied. Her voice was mildly hoarse and twangy. She looked puzzled, but gratified.

“What do you sing?” I asked.

“I am a screamer,” she replied.

“Can you explain your technique to me?” I added, without emphasis. I peeked into the mirror, again, and saw her smiling. Her eyes were glowing.

During that car ride, in addition to a detailed description of the world of Italian screamers and of some of the techniques she uses, I learned that Diana lived with her mom and had just finished school. She was looking for a job, and cultivating her passion for music in spite of her family and friends' questions. She did not define herself as a feminist: in fact, I doubt she had spent much time thinking about it.

***

Io sono bellissima (I am wonderful, ISB from now on) is an association based in Lecce.\(^{351}\) It was created as a result of an initiative by my friend Loredana De Vitis, a journalist, writer, and artist who lives in the Salento area. Her engagement with women’s politics started in UDI but developed independently, outside the restricted feminist circuits that were often too self-referential. ISB’s audience is wider, and the language it uses is meant also to be accessible to those who are not into women’s politics, like Diana. Just a couple of persons on the staff of the association are feminist activists, and not all of the women of its governing board would define themselves as feminists and, if so, certainly not in the same ways. Io Sono Bellissima’s primary concern is the struggle against stereotypes: it takes representations very seriously. One of the recent initiatives promoted by Io sono bellissima is called S/oggett/E. Rassegna d’armi di artiste (S/oggett/E, exposition of weapons of women artists). The title forces the linguistic element into a graphic sign by

\(^{351}\) The adjective is feminine singular. http://www.iosonobellissima.it/
using slashes in the middle of a word: *soggette* (meaning subjects, a substantive inflected in the feminine plural. *Soggette* does not exist in Italian as a noun, only as an adjective meaning subjected). The slashes highlight the core of the word, which is *oggetti(e)* (a substantive meaning objects, inflected in the feminine plural. *Oggetti* does not exist in the feminine version either, in Italian). The fusion between being subjects and objects evoked by the title of the initiative parallels its graphic nature: for the Italian reader, S/oggett/E is a word and a graphic sign at the same time. It is more allusive than descriptive, and is meant to provoke a sense and affect of estrangement into whoever bumps into it. As Loredana De Vitis explained to me, the idea of this title came to her mind from the acknowledgement that “we would never free ourselves from the role of objects in our society,” and that we need to exchange “knowledge” and “praxis” (*saperi e prassi*) in order to be empowered by this condition, which we cannot excise. Being objects, for her, resonates with the fact that we are recipients of others’ (especially men’s) gazes, and that the latter engage chains of comparisons if not of competitions among women. Those gazes are interiorized by all of us, but they are not *ours*. Using the liberating and empowering language of art in order to push ourselves out of our comfort zones, allows, according to *Io sono Bellissima*, to “transform our gaze on ourselves, and to discover new ways of looking, notwithstanding the ones in which our (‘patriarchal’) society cages us (*ci ingabbia*).” In other words, according to De Vitis, by engaging their bodies artistically, and their senses, women are able to change their practices and performances of seeing: first, by transforming their personal gaze, and, only in the second instance, the gazes of the spectators. These “expositions of weapons of women artists” are composed by three series of workshops led, respectively, by a musician, a photographer, and a poet. On Sundays the teachers and the (small) groups of women met at the *Casello*. This is a former rail tollhouse that fell into disuse and was renovated and transformed into a space for events by a group of young Salentines. I have attended many meetings organized there by Loredana, at one of which I had presented.

Diana attended two of the three workshops (music and photography) and, in spite of her difficult economic and existential situation, according to the organizers of the initiative she is one of the persons who profited the most from S/oggett/E. Loredana told me that the workshops helped her find a better “center ground” (*centratura*) vis-à-vis her personal
and sentimental lives. My friend argues that this was a result of the fact that, by “going out of her comfort zones,” she learned that it is OK to be different, and to adhere to alternative possibilities of being woman. The latter element had been evident, according to the organizers of the workshops, when, apparently, another member of the S/oggett/e group called her a “muff-diver” (lecca-figa), alluding to her (unconfirmed) love for women. Loredana claims that this episode marked a turning point for Diana who, “by virtue of the experience of S/oggett/E,” found herself questioning her own affective reactions to what she would have considered, until some time before, as an insult, a judgment, and an appraisal of her “not fitting in” society. Instead, she found the courage to embrace her actual or supposed queerness in front of others as well as in front of herself, and to transform the gaze of the other into something harmless. This happened, according to De Vitis, “without engaging with anything feminist.” As I mentioned, Diana probably completely ignores the meaning and the history of the word feminism.

The arts\textsuperscript{352} in S/oggett/E are framed as weapons, and the artists as she-warriors (see also chapter 4), evidencing a theoretical move that associates what I have described as the role of the witness with artistic creations. In other words, it connects being testimony with a form of poiesis as well as with the ethics and aesthetics of (feminist) womanhood. The aim of these workshops is “expressing, exchanging, and building forms of beauty,” and they are presented as

an itinerary leading to the discovery of ways and forms where subjectivity expresses itself, establishes itself, and produces political acts. If the world is constantly trying to make us objects, we have means, strategies, and instruments in order to affirm that we are subjects. Rather, soggette. With word, sound and image—these are some of our ‘weapons’—we can resist and attack the ugly things of the world.\textsuperscript{353}

Many dimensions of S/oggett/E offer interesting elements for my work. This initiative exemplifies the link between art and politics, aesthetics and ethics, it resonates with the

\textsuperscript{352} Io Sono Bellissima does not distinguish between visual arts and performances since it considers all forms of art as performative.

\textsuperscript{353} http://www.iosonobellissima.it/soggette-rassegna-darmi-dartiste/
issues around visibility and being sensible she-warriors that I considered in chapter 4, and it helps to substantiate Carla’s claims on the necessity to assert women’s agency and to do politics not in rearguard (see above). Moreover, for my informants it exemplifies the difference between being victims and witnesses, and it confirms an element that emerged also, for example, in connection with the amphora and in other representations of the two dimensions of being subjects: the fact that they speak as testimoni from a liminal, oxymoronic place. S/oggett/E quite literally comprises the two meanings of being subject: S/oggett/E are not only and mainly women who are objects/victims, as the ‘world’ want them to be. They are testimoni — Soggetto — through the materiality of their bodies, emotions, and affects: they become agentive objects through actions of poiesis, through the practice of poiesis, through a labor of art.

S/oggetto explicitly underscores an important dimension that was also present, less plainly, in Immagini Amiche: the explicit link between the artistic dimensions and the construction of (renovated) subjectivities. Io Sono Bellissima emphasizes an aspect of aesthetics known as autopoiesis (see e.g. Foucault 2005, Faubion 2001, Dave 2012), understood as intrinsic to artistic creations. Interestingly, it makes a political statement and a specific and explicit battlefield against ‘patriarchy’ of this element.

This latter aspect is not idiosyncratic, and I found it on other occasions during my fieldwork. Pina Nuzzo, for example, who is a painter as well as an activist in feminist politics, always told me that every campaign she promotes, for her, is like a “work of art.” With this expression she does not mean to gesture (only) toward the large amount of work and skill that the organization and promotion of such initiatives require, but (mainly) to the communicative aspects of material artistic productions, and to their ability to convey meanings and feelings, for both the artist and the public. In this sense, they are political activities, since they allow for the emergence of elements of novelty, and of new insights and representations of the world. S/oggetto/E explores these connections in a thorough way: in the performances fostered by the initiative, the participants are experiencing the two dimensions of being subjects that are believed to be intrinsic to the artistic dimension. The latter puts the actors/artists in the position of being at the same time agents and objects of the performance, from both the points of view of the audience
and of the performers. S/oggett/e are both recipients of others’ gazes and judgments (see Taylor on the Lacanian gaze 1997, 30), and agentive subjects—i.e. creators of the artistic spectacles.

What is more interesting, though, for the purpose of this chapter, is that S/oggett/E, while aiming at affecting its audience, by means of the artistic weapons it uses, does not focus exclusively on its (actual or imagined) publics. What this initiative is meant to do, primarily, is change the ways actors/artists/performers think and feel about themselves, as the example of Diana shows. S/oggett/E’s main concern is not in creating artistic performances in order to enlighten the public, or to express the specific individualities, ways of being, or essences of the performers. Rather, it is to provide the protagonists chances to create themselves according to unforeseen dimensions and directions\(^\text{354}\)—beyond victimhood—in order to become who they are (only, not yet). In my Foucauldian reading of this initiative, creative/artistic acts are not perceived as simply voicing a given subjectivity that pre-exists the artistic creation, but the latter is understood to be creating the former. In this respect, S/oggett/E epitomizes Mahmood’s claim that “[t]he importance of … practices does not reside in the meanings they signify to their practitioners, but in the work they do in constituting the individual” (2005, 29).

Constituting the individual, in this particular context defined by a representational struggle against ‘patriarchy,’ is a political enterprise: as I mention often in this dissertation, the personal and the political are tightly linked in the lives of my informants. These dynamics of reciprocal creation between the artist and her artistic performances are central to Loredana De Vitis’s life and projects. Col Corpo Capisco (with the body I know), besides being the Italian title of a novel that I introduced to her in one of our conversations (Grossman 2005), is one of the tropes that we use often in our exchanges on these topics. In her holistic vision of the world, the intelligence of the body, enhanced in artistic representations, is able to guide, and not just complement, that of the mind. Through the artistic journeys promoted by the Io Sono Bellissima initiative, then, the women who participate can learn more about themselves, discover themselves differently, and become alternatives to the widespread representations of women as

\(^{354}\) This element obviously resonates with Milena’s doing as if that I will address in the rest of this chapter.
passive victims of physical, symbolic, or structural violence. They can challenge the commonsensical understandings of the roles and status of women in Italian society that inform how others see and sense them as women. Moreover they can prompt new possibilities, ones that are different from those that have often been internalized and that define, sometimes subconsciously, how women look at themselves and at other women.

S/oggett/E, in other words, promotes imagination in the construction of subjectivities in a way that resonates with Andriolo’s reading of Coetzee, and complements Murgia’s observations (see above). In her article on protest suicide, Andriolo (2006) offers an interesting reading of the novel Elizabeth Costello by Coetzee. She claims that the novelist’s understanding of imagination may shed some light on suicide as a form of political protest. For Andriolo (100) ‘imagining’ is an ‘embodied minding,’ where the latter term keeps both the meaning of caring and of mental reasoning. ‘Imagining can penetrate into territories that are impossible for abstract thought’ (101), and “engages the body as an experiential and metaphorical site” (100). S/oggett/E endorses experiences of imagination in this sense: starting from the bodies of women in artistic representations in order to give directionality to the process, this initiative frames imagination as both an embodied experience and the result of a labor—i.e. of an ongoing practice.

While the project of ISB can be read as promoting practices of autopoiesis (see Faubion 2001), or of ascesis (see Introduction), it also suggests further developments. I believe that the contribution of my ethnographic material to the current anthropological debates on these topics resides in the consequences of the quite explicit link between practice and autopoiesis, the work of art and political activism that animates the lives some of the women activists I met in Salento (on the connections between ethics, aesthetics, and political activism, see also Dave 2011. On performance and politics see, for example, Tamisari 2006, on the role of practice in the ethical realm see, for example, Lambek 2000a, 2014). In this respect, it represents a point of conjunction between the aforementioned literature on the Anthropology of Ethics (see Introduction), and the work of Rancière. What I believe S/oggett/E and the other representations I have described so far suggest is a possible conciliation between the Aristotelian perspective on the anthropological study of ethics, on the one hand, and politics understood as a
reconfiguration of the sensible in Rancièrian terms, on the other. By transforming their subjectivities, the Salentine activists I worked with hope to challenge the current Italian ‘patriarchal’ understandings of womanhood. This particular gloss on the personal is political adage puts the realm of sensations and artistic work and labor at the center of their feminist being in the world, epitomizing the close relations between ethics and aesthetics mentioned above. The ethical enterprises with which the women I met engage in order to imagine new subjectivities, are political enterprises; they challenge commonsensical understandings —understood both as what “makes sense” and what “can be sensed” (Panagia 2009, 3) — of women as victims, and the power structures that determine what being a woman is or should be in contemporary Italy. In other words, using a Rancièrian terminology, within a framework that adopts an understanding of politics as (specific) partition(s) of the sensible, I claim that S/ogetti/E epitomizes an element of _dissensus._ By engaging the bodies of women (understood as she-warriors) in aesthetic (sensory and artistic) performances, _Io Sono Bellissima_ aims to include in the political distribution of the sensible their own experiences, which are felt as having no part in it. In doing so, S/ogetti/E represents ways in which “sensation interrupts common sense” (Panagia 2009, 2), allowing for an expansion of the terms in which the world is perceived and sensed. This political enterprise also aims at changing one’s own gaze, and the ones of her (actual or imagined) publics.

**Inflections of Modern Feminist Womanhood**

“Whoever does not sign will be de-friended.”

This peremptory statement was delivered by Rina as a comment to a link on Facebook in which, together with some two hundreds other women, she had tagged me. Rina had posted one of the many petitions in support of women’s causes that she shares on a regular basis on her Facebook page.

---

355 This element is present also in the examples of representations I analyzed above, and in those I will examine below.
Rina is in her fifties, and is very active on Facebook and on the Internet in general. Everything there—from sharing articles and petitions to posting pictures and statuses—revolves around her feminist persona. Her comments are witty and full of puns. She writes daily on (national and local) news relevant for feminist issues, and publicly praises or criticizes other women activists (mostly, her Facebook friends), offering variations on the theme of conflicting between women (see chapter 4). She comments on the posts of other friends with the same spirit: showing, with words and emoticons, satisfaction and gratitude when she is praised and centratura and senso di sé (see chapter 4) when criticized. She writes notes, proffering reflections on particular feminist themes and, especially, situating her personal positionings within those. She participates virtually in events organized by other feminist friends and published on Facebook by clicking on the “I will attend” button, even when it is physically impossible for her to do so. The latter aspect of participation seems secondary: what really matters is giving visibility on the Web both to her friends’ political activities and to her personal political choice of attending them. Rina, when sharing the events organized by some of her preferred friends on her personal page, always tags other worthy friends—judged so according to complicated and somehow performative criteria. Having an event (or post) shared by her on Facebook, and appearing (or not) in her tags, is a measure of one’s positioning within Rina’s range of interests, a judgment of one’s worthiness and of one’s political relevancy. For those women who consider Rina’s gaze to be an authoritative one, being seen and approved by her and being (or not being) included in these sharings or tags makes a big difference. I have often received face-to-face comments from other feminists about who appears in Rina’s sharings and tags and, especially, on who does not appear (but maybe used to).

Rina shares images, too. Often, they are photos taken with her smartphone in her everyday life. The suggested reading of these pictures is normally alluded to in the words she uses to comment upon them: almost always the images are linked to her feminist identity. She posts (and tags her worthy friends in), for example, pictures of women’s sociality, vagina-like images of nature (vaginas are celebrated as a form of beauty, and are seen, for example, in open figs, in the logs of old olive trees, or in particular shapes of cliffs), and pictures of special women whom she encounters. She posts videos of songs
with a feminist message, accompanied by some lines of their lyrics (obviously considered by her as particularly meaningful). Rina also creates and publishes her own videos on Facebook: Youtube links to video-blogs addressing her political (feminist) opponents, ironic (political) re-interpretations of songs, and montages of images from particularly meaningful political meetings, and so on. In all her online activity, she widely employs the instrument of tagging as a way to give visibility to her political activities. Tagging friends allows her to reach the Facebook walls of friends of friends (who often, at least partially, are not her friends), and to be seen beyond her known audience.

In sum, by looking at Rina’s Facebook profile, an image emerges of a smart, convinced, authoritative, and passionate feminist with many strong opinions —i.e. of a woman whose life revolves completely around women’s issues and activism. This is something the rest of us, in our offline lives, cannot live up to.

I had the chance, though, to witness not only the online performances of modern feminist womanhood of Rina (and of other informants), but also the contexts and the material aspects surrounding her practices of Facebooking. I was physically present when, with her notebook or smartphone in her hands, she wrote or commented on, tagged, and edited her Facebook page. On those occasions, I observed her practices, listened to her comments, and asked questions about her choices: I was being a spectator of the acts of creation (and molding) of her online feminist persona. I observed Rina, for example, counting the likes acquired on her (and others’) posts, confronting the numbers, and discussing the different successes of the posts. I saw her assess who liked what and when and who did not like something, as well as monitor who accepted her tags and who did not (and, possibly, whether those who did not accept her tags accepted someone else’s). Moreover, I witnessed her check someone’s online status and Facebook activities in order to assess, for example, whether these persons deliberately or unintentionally ignored her tags or posts, or whether they commented or liked other posts before hers. She controlled who shared her links, and if they did so, by referencing their origin (something that might not pertain to Facebook’s netiquette, but that is a necessary political acknowledgement of

356 On Facebook as well, my informants do as if. See below.
disparity, according to her. On *disparità* as a political praxis, see chapter 4). Her friends (myself included) were controlled, judged, evaluated, and measured according to all these (and more) parameters that provided various types of information to Rina. These concerned not just how much they cared for the struggle against patriarchy, but also if they were worthy activists, or whether or not they belonged to her faction in off-line life—i.e. whether they sympathized or not, and how much, with Nuzzo’s faction within *UDI*, and whether they sympathized or not with *Se Non Ora Quando*. In such a context, the simple action of liking a picture or a post might have important political and personal consequences—*for the ethnographer as well*.357

These activities are part of Rina’s everyday life and, as will become evident, take up much of her time. I have reason to believe that these practices are not limited to the aforementioned examples, though. I remember that on one occasion, when I returned to Salento for the summer after a year spent in North America, I sent her a text message asking if I could come to her house for a visit, since I was in the area. I remember I mentioned to her that I would be coming with my friend Carmela, whom she did not know. She agreed eagerly and, when I saw Rina, I suspected that she had checked the Facebook profile of Carmela (whom Rina would be able to identify from my own Facebook friends list) before our meeting in order to gather information on her: Rina mentioned some of Carmela’s musical passions and details about her life *as if they were matters of public knowledge*.358

357 While I tended not to intervene directly on Facebook, by openly commenting upon the posts, statuses, and images of Rina and of the other feminists I worked with online, I realized I could not avoid giving signs of participation to their online activities. I used to accept every tag (even the ones I did not agree with), and to use the like instrument as a way of communicating my support to their cause. Occasionally, I shared some links or posts (mostly, as a way to give audience to their initiatives). Of course, knowing that my Facebook activity could be scrutinized by Rina and some others, I behaved consistently in reference to my other friends (non-feminist, and not linked with my ethnography). This lack of intervention also helped me to protect my informants from the possible gazes of my other Facebook friends. I have considered opening a specific Facebook account for the purposes of my ethnography, but, given the peculiarities of my informants, I am pretty sure it would have been understood as a way to put a distance between my own life and theirs—something that would have been detrimental to my ethnography. I preferred to use the privacy settings on Facebook, by dividing my friends into groups, and to allow certain people, and not others, to see my activities online. Sometimes, for example, I had to put Rina and others in my acquaintances group in order to subtract myself from their gaze.

358 Carmela is not a public figure and does not share common acquaintances with Rina aside from myself.
The relation between the public and the personal is a sensitive field for my informants: in many respects, they explicitly contest the conflation between personal and private and, less explicitly, between public and political — but not in consistent ways (see for example Warner 2002, in particular 2002, 44-63; Cody 2011). In light of this it is not surprising that Facebook is a particularly used political platform for them. Since the personal is political in a radical way for my informants, this social medium, which engages with the (construction and performances of the) personal in a public way, translates into an ideal locale for their political activities (on Facebook as a locus for ethnography, see Miller 2011, Gershon 2011, Boellstorff et al. 2012, Uimonen 2013). These revolve around (online as well as offline) performances of modern feminist womanhood that aim at challenging commonsensical ways of seeing and sensing womanhood in their (online and offline, actual or imagined) audiences and publics. In this respect, what I have witnessed on Facebook vis-à-vis the cultivation and performance of womanhood is not so dissimilar from what I have witnessed offline. The attention and labor that Rina and other activists I worked with put into constructing their online personae parallels those that inform their representations in the physical world. These performances have ethical connotations, both offline and online. In the latter space, for example, the more one is active in posting, reposting, sharing, and so on, the more one demonstrates her care for the women’s cause.

359 Nuzzo, for example, writes that “very often, in women’s political spaces, an excess of words exposes a difference between how a woman represents herself, and her real experience [sic]. The risk is not being able to distinguish between what is personal, and therefore political, and what is private and should remain so” (Nuzzo 2011). This is a clear stance against some opponents within UDI and against the traditions of the practice of self-awareness (see chapter 4), and, in Carla’s words, it becomes a critique of dooirs that can be ascribed to pretending and not doing as if. These remarks are nonetheless interesting since they pose a clear distinction between the private and the personal. Nuzzo explained this distinction to me (email, 15 October 2014) by referring to an example. She writes: “I never found it necessary to ask individual women to tell their stories or experiences of violence, since this would not have added anything to what we already know about violence. What we already know is enough to make it the object of political actions.”

Moreover, Marta, who participated in the preparation of the XV Congress, told me that in the aftermath of Berlusconi’s sexual scandal some UDI women claimed that, being heiresses and witnesses of the political thought that states that the personal is political, they knew how to distinguish and demonstrate that debagging in the private realm functions to dissimulate personal responsibilities, whereas partire da sé (starting from oneself) is a pivotal element of Italian feminist political activism. For the relations between public and private, personal and political, see for example Warner 2002, Cody 2011, Linke 2011, Landes 1998). It is worth noting that Warner’s attention to counter-publics and to their role in redefining the terms in which we understand the public and the private (see for example 2002, 61) parallel the attention to representations and to their perlocutionary function in my informants’ activism: the attention to visibility and the awareness of some gazes and not others can be framed within such an understanding of public opinion (i.e. as formed by different publics).
Minding is not something that has only to do with making information circulate, it also revolves around being witnesses and conveying alternative representations of women. These are framed as ways to challenge and fight ‘patriarchy.’

For many of my informants, then, beyond ISB, the distinction between being a victim and a witness, and between being passive or active, is central for the ways they conceive themselves and construct and represent their (modern) feminist womanhood—online and offline. For some of my informants, being a feminist woman is an ethical enterprise that revolves around doing and making womanhood differently, in the sense of work and labor (see Lambek 2010, 14-16 on Arendt). Sometimes, these practices and performances are openly in contrast with common local, traditional, and media understandings and expectations on who women are or should be (for a comparison, see for example Herzfeld 2005a). This element is evident in performances and practices, and it manifests itself also in what I call the practice of performances, i.e. the attention to aesthetic (i.e. artistic and sensory) representations that inform the everyday lives of my informants. The latter guides them, occasionally, in the creation of (more or less) special events, which are a key element both of their political activism and of the (contrastive) construction of their being women. This practice of performances goes beyond the distinction between everyday life and special occasions. Moreover, it involves spectacles insofar as it presupposes an aesthetic (in both the senses of artistic and sensorial) consciousness, the awareness of being the objects of someone else’s attention, and the presence of one or more (actual or imagined) publics that the aforementioned activities want to affect. These representational activities range from crafting posters for events to imagining and performing flash mobs, from choosing the words and logos for a national campaign to updating and commenting statuses on Facebook, from performing feminist womanhood(s) in everyday communicative transactions and cultivating its online inflections, from choosing the right kinesics in public (according to context), to playing with their audiences’ gendered expectations. In other words, it has much to do with practicing and performing a poetics of womanhood (see Dubisch 1995, Herzfeld 1985).

---

360 On performance, special events, and ordinary life see for example Lowell Lewis 2013; on performance studies and, in particular, on the anthropology of performance see also, for example, Turner 1986, Korom 2013, Auslander 2008, Alexander et al. 2006, Handelman 1990, Schechner 2003.
The connections between performances and social life have been variously explored by anthropologists. For the reader accustomed to the literature on honor and shame in the Mediterranean, for example, the relations between women, men, and particular ways of ethically and aesthetically inhabiting the private and public realms are not new. These aspects of social life have captured the attention of anthropologists since the 1950s. The traditional literature on honor and shame rests heavily on the (especially gendered) management of these two spheres. Following the lead of Herzfeld (for example, 1985), Dubisch analyzed the poetics of womanhood in Greece (1995), arguing that “[t]o perform...is to present the socially constructed self before others...and thus to convince and to draw recognition from others of one’s place and one’s satisfactory performance of that role. I would add...that these performances are transformative and not simply expressive...In other words, they are creative endeavors (204-205).”

This latter point is analogous to what is claimed by scholars of performances and, in particular, in the Italian context, by those who deal with performances of bella figura (good impression; see for example Plesset 2006, DelNegro 2004, Nardini 1999). In this respect, inspired by their work, I maintain that the performances and practices of modern feminist womanhood that I found in Salento seem to be at the same time performing and performative of gender and status (Guano 2007, 52. On performativity see Butler 2006. On the relations between gender and bella figura see, in particular, Plesset 2006, Nardini 1999, Pipyrou 2014). This aesthetics is performed, practiced, and displayed as an embodied ethics, in the Foucauldian sense, since it might be framed as an ascetic work that both shows and re-negotiates one’s position in society’s (moral) world. While I do agree with Dubisch, especially on the point on the transformative aspect of performances

361 Following Herzfeld (see 2005b), I distinguish between the Mediterranean and Mediterraneism —i.e. a category developed in conversation with Said’s well-known Orientalism, that shares with the latter its definitive feature of power asymmetries. In this respect, I follow Herzfeld’s lead in arguing, with him, that “A critical study of the Mediterranean identities is not necessarily and should not be, an act of ‘Mediterraneism’” (2005b). In reference to the Mediterranean, my ethnographic experience confirms that of Herzfeld (2005b) and others (see for example Ben-Yehoyada 2011): I found that being Mediterranean (similarly to the honor and shame complex) is a widespread —contextual, positional, and practical— self-stereotyping category in Salento.


363 On this point see also Del Negro on the performative elements of performance (2001).
(that was evident for example in S/oggett/E and is present in everyday feminist performances of womanhood in Salento, too) I focus more explicitly than her on the relationships between audiences and performances in both offline and online activism. What my ethnographic material and analyses show is that the (actual or imagined) construction of audiences and publics (online and offline), and the modification of the performances of seeing and sensing are fundamental parts of the creations and performances of modern feminist womanhood for the women with whom I have worked. For example, one of the most common performances of feminist womanhood by the activists I met has to do with the consistent, provocative at times, challenge of the Italian grammar rule that prescribes the use of the masculine form for addressing mixed groups. For example, when in front of a public group of men and women, following Italian grammar, it is correct to address the audience by saying “buonasera a tutti” (good evening to everybody), where *tutti* is the masculine plural form for ‘all.’ The feminists I worked with, who strongly believe in the importance of deconstructing the sexism embedded in the Italian language, often challenge this rule by addressing the public, during events and performances, by saying “buonasera a tutti (masculine plural) e buonasera a tutte (feminine plural)” or, when they feel particularly provocative, by saying just “buonasera a tutte” (feminine plural). These choices never go unnoticed since they flout common expectations and practices, especially when, after greeting the public, my feminist friends add a brief comment on how they do not feel greeted, personally, by a “buonasera a tutti,” given the fact that they are women. On more than one occasion I witnessed these types of performances and I observed the reactions of the public dazed by the choice, amused by the performance, or simply irritated. During a presentation of a book I saw a council member of the town of Presicce, who was sitting in the audience in the first row of the room, reacting to my informant’s greeting by almost jumping on his seat, frowning, and looking around in the hope of intercepting other equally irritated gazes of fellow-politicians. This *assessore*, after the meeting, addressed my friend by saying that “her presentation had been good in spite of the bad start.”

***
In August 2014 my feminist friend Marta and I spent the twenty or so nights preceding the Notte della Taranta final concert at an itinerant stand of a well-known tambourine maker from Torrepaduli called Luigi. We sold CDs of pizzica to locals and tourists. Each day, from the beginning of August, we worked in a different town, starting in the late afternoon and continuing until 4 or 5 am.

At that time, after having disassembled the stand, packed the merchandise, and filled Luigi’s van, we would have breakfast together with other stand owners before finally going home to get some sleep. Since traditionally selling goods at the market is an activity performed by men, my friend and I were often the only women there. This experience gave me many insights not just on the presence of traditional gendered behaviors and expectations, but also on the reception of their feminist transgressions.

Luigi loves us dearly, to the point that he often told me that he feels we are part of his family. In spite of the fact that I had noticed during the exchanges we had with the other peddlers (for example, they allowed us to buy their merchandise at a discounted price, rather than at the tourists’ one) that we were seen as associated with him, I had underestimated this statement for a long time. Our belonging, de facto, to Luigi’s household, though, became evident and somewhat unavoidable to me when, at a party at his house (and therefore in a private setting) with some of the persons of his entourage (men and women), he started watching over our modesty by using his hands to physically cover our necklines and shoulders from the eyes of his friends. If Luigi seems to adhere to a traditional understanding of gender proficiencies and expectations, he also knows that Marta and I are feminists. Of course he knows it primarily because we told him so, but also because he explicitly recognizes that we are different from other women. He is actually fascinated by this difference, and enjoys spending time with us: at times he treats us (in public) as if we were his buddies. Normally he expresses our being different with satisfaction, by saying “Ce ssiti diaule! Maledette! » (you are she-devils, you are damned). By using these expressions, which are meant to be friendly and even complimentary, he nonetheless expresses our difference by alluding to a sort of disruption of the ethical order that we introduce in his life, and in the ways he experiences our ways of being women. The point I want to make is that reactions by the public can be different, and are contextual. What the feminist performances of modern
womanhood often do is to expand the imagination of the forms in which it is possible to be women, and they are more effective when done in interpersonal engagements that allow this difference to be commensurable.

In this sense, the Salentine activists do not limit their action to strategically using available poetics and stereotypes within dominant systems of value (see, for a comparison, for example, Herzfeld 1985, 2004, 2005a, 2005b). My informants are not just adapting their performances to different publics. Rather, they aim to construct new poetics, performances, (self-stereotypes) and axiologies that could foster a change in the ways the persons they encounter engage with them, and in the ways their (imagined or actual) audiences perceive, and sense, in relation to what does it mean to be women. In Rancièrian terms, their performances are political inasmuch they are intended to broaden the available sensorium, and to expand commonsensical understandings: in themselves, and in their spectators. What I noted above could be applied also to everyday practices.

As forms of political action, the feminist women I met deploy devices that are both performative and perlocutionary: i.e. they aim at constructing new understandings of womanhood(s), and at affecting (imagined or actual) audiences, in order to change their practices and performances of seeing and sensing.

So as to be able to affect their audiences, they need to be authoritative in eyes of their spectators: for this reason, I claim, performing dignity is such an important issue for my informants (see below).

Performing (modern) feminist womanhood, especially in a context where the personal and the political are considered to be so tightly connected (see for example chapter 4), is both a way to express and construct oneself, and a way of being witnesses in front of others: it is, de facto, a political stance. As I noticed above, I find resemblances between the language and practices of feminists and the anthropological literature on Christian conversions. Similarly to their religious counterparts, the women I met engaged in performances of feminist womanhood which were meant to be exempla of a renovated way to be women, i.e. they focused on being witnesses outside ‘patriarchal’ constraints. They were perlocutionary exhibitions, especially when playing with the gendered expectations of their audience. They aimed at affecting the public, especially women-
spectators, in order to make them witnesses, as well, of novel forms of womanhood. In other words, “No more victims, but witnesses” seems to be a leading motto that permeates their lives, way beyond the *Staffetta*.

In order to practice and perform modern feminist womanhood, in their *everyday* lives, I noticed that my informants mainly use two devices. The first one develops around what Milena calls *fare come se*, and sets their political action, clearly, in the realm of becoming rather than in that of being. It is deployed in feminist settings, and in front of (imagined or actual) general publics. The second, instead, revolves around the adoption of traditional men’s behaviors, without fully embracing their social roles, and is performed in front of (imagined or actual) local publics. I read both in reference to the practice and performance of dignity — which is a multivalent concept, in this context, and, following Agamben, is *also* something that puts the realm of becoming at the center of their political activism (see below). I argue that the engagement of the senses is paramount in both.

*Fare Come Se — Doing As If*

One of the elements that I noticed, right from the beginning of my ethnography, was the *inconsistency* of the performances of feminist womanhood, as ethical and aesthetic enterprises, in the lives of my informants. While I do not consider consistency as a completely attainable project — and, even less, as a *necessary* or even *desirable* one in relation to ethics — I was nonetheless very interested in the ambivalences they had towards their self-representation as feminists. The variations occurred not just from one audience to another (actual or imagined), but also in relation to the same ones.

In the struggle of representations that I have described so far, performing modern feminist womanhood is a political practice for the Salentine women I worked with. Milena, when talking about political practices, distinguishes between pretending (in

---

364 This latter element is similar to Kirtsoglou’s description of *mangia* (see below), with the fundamental difference that, in my reading, these are oxymoronic practices that aim at triggering unmarked affective intensities that could generate, in a Ranciérian perspective, new practices of seeing, new audiences, and new ways to understand women and violence against women.
Italian, *fare finta*) and doing as if (in Italian, *fare come se*). While pretending shares some aspects with doing as if, the big distinction between the two, according to her, lies in the fact that the former expression does not entail any aim at "changing reality", while the latter one is, according to her, a specific feature of her understanding of political action. According to Milena, then, doing as if entails a discontent with "reality as it is," and is geared towards political change. Milena claims that when a woman does as if, she does not always know exactly how to name or to practically enact what she feels. Nonetheless, she puts those feelings at the center of her political experience:

doing as if has something to do with hope, utopia and why not? With lunacy, if by ‘lunacy’ we understand something not expected by ‘normality.’(...) It is something that resembles what I think I understood about the writing of a woman named Teresa [de Lauretis] when she writes about queer subjects [*soggetti eccentrici*]. [Doing as if] is the queer invention that manages to remain down to earth while remaining at the threshold between reality and what will be. For this reason it succeeds in practicing in the reality a part of what the future will bring. Politics needs to arrive always before the law…politics needs to imagine what does not exist yet…women managed to really change something when they had the capability and the will to dream, to imagine, and at the same time to practice…doing as if brings you to do things that otherwise you wouldn’t do, you wouldn’t think, and you wouldn’t practice. Because only if you intensively think of something as possible, only if you think at this as the only possible thing, you make it real. (Carone 2011)\(^{365}\)

Milena’s remarks seemed illuminating to me: the connections between doing as if and De Lauretis’s *Soggetti Eccentrici* (1999) places the ethical and aesthetic experiences of the feminists I worked with in the realms of performances and of everyday life, at the threshold between the construction of subjectivities, their fitting (or not) into the dominant common sense, and political activism.

---

\(^{365}\) It is worth noting that Milena was one of the informants who dismissed the experiences of the *tarantate*, defining them as schizophrenic. See below.
If fare come se can certainly be part of a political campaign (Milena associates it with, for example, UDI 50e50), it is in the ordinary lives of my informants that I found it more explicitly.\footnote{In her ethnographic study of the Egyptian Islamic Revival and of the Women’s Mosque Movement (2005), Mahmood makes a similar point. She inquires into the cultivation and performance of two emotions — fear (2001 a) and istiyyah/shyness (2001 b) — suggesting that, in her ethnographic context, the practice of specific emotions, “rather than formal behavior” were “a condition for the emergence of the self as such and integral to its realization” (2001b, 845). She problematizes the connection between emotions, authenticity, and spontaneity, arguing for the possibility of conceiving the cultivation and performance of emotions as a form of ethical practice. The emotion that, I believe, on the basis of my ethnographic research, my informants are cultivating when performing (and practicing) modern feminist womanhood is that of being worthy/dignified.} Doing as if represents a clear connection in their political activism between the sensory and aesthetic realms, and the ethical one, as it emerged from my fieldwork — one that is not based on the woman one is but, rather, on the woman she wants to become.

There are many examples in this dissertation which can exemplify Milena’s fare come se in my informants’ ordinary lives. I can mention, for example, Eugenia’s adoption of being feminist as an identity marker vis-à-vis the hardness and disillusionment of her personal, emotional, and work experiences (see chapter 4). Carmen’s pride in offering her narrative of coming back to Manfredonia as the result of an achieved psychological maturity (in reference to her fleeing attitude), while hardly being able to make a living and to get out of her parents’ house, is another example (she is currently living in another city. See chapter 5). Alessandra’s celebration of her sexual, emotional, and economic self-determination, while being stuck in an unfulfilling, ‘patriarchal’ relationship (see chapter 6) is another. Elder UDI members who, in narrating the 1982 Congress, claim that their brave choice left them free and wholesome…and without a salary, economically dependent on their partners (see chapter 4), is yet another.

I cannot assess, on the basis of my current ethnography, whether this fare come se is really an effective political strategy, as Milena claims that is, one that changes reality, and the ways of seeing and sensing of their (actual or imagined) audiences. Definitively, though, it is something that changes my informants’ perception of their role in the world, and their visualities and feelings about it. It also helps others to imagine new possibilities of being women (the dissonances in the lives of my informants that I described are not
accessible to all the persons they encounter). It also tells me, the ethnographer, of the importance that the gazing of the others have for the women I met (see the Conclusions).

In sum, fare come se puts the individual and collective sensory, emotional, and affective experiences of being women at the center of my informants’ political activism. It represents modern feminist womanhood as something not yet attained, but still meaningful in order to imagine and actualize new possibilities of being. In this sense, it is a transformative enterprise: performing, performative, and perlocutionary. Imagination, understood in Andriolo’s sense as something rooted in bodies, is an ethical and aesthetic project since it entrenches political activism and autopoiesis in the realm of representations. It is a political activity, since it aims at changing their own and others’ visualities and ways of experiencing and sensing womanhood.

**Negotiating Feminist Womanhood in Salento: Dignity, Honor, And Human Rights**

The small room of the women’s bookstore was crowded: underestimating the last-minute networking ability of my informants, I did not anticipate the presence of so many people at the meeting. On the occasion of the repeat performances of Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues* at the local Theatre Paisiello, my friends had organized an event at the bookstore entitled “We and Eve: Narratives in Comparison.” The subtitle of the meeting was “United against sexed violence: a political path of women in Italy.” Included on the flyer was the following comment:

> From the battle for the recognition of violence as a “crime against the person” to the national campaigns “Staffetta di donne contro la violenza sulle donne” (against every form of sexed violence, against “femminicidio”), and “Immagini Amiche” (on the possibility of a positive relationship between women’s bodies and advertisement)*videos *
> *readings *documents * comments*.”
It was a Sunday afternoon in November, and unusually cool: I regretted the fact that the bookstore lacked a heating system. We were sitting in a circle: most of us on chairs, someone on the floor, someone else standing in the corner of the room. In addition to the macare, there were other persons that I had not met before: some from Agedo, the actresses of the theatrical performance, and some clients of the bookstore. Carla started her presentation of the event, in front of that heterogeneous public, tracing the connections between violence against women, the national campaigns organized by UDI, and Enslers famous monologues. She spoke with self-confidence and composure, taking the position of an expert on those topics. She was addressing mainly the persons who did not know her (i.e. probably, non-feminists) and mentioned with nonchalance her titles: her being a lawyer, her years of activism in UDI, her well-read background. She talked

---

367 Acronym for Association of parents, relatives, and friends of homosexuals.
off the cuff about herself and her political history, fluently but without a clear outline: her sentences were apodictic, but the connections between her arguments not always strong. She dropped some feminist jargon into her speech (which seemed so long and confusing to me) while looking at the ceiling of the room: she hardly made eye contact with us, her audience, during her speech. She was so different from the Carla I knew: normally, she was very warm and witty; in that moment she looked quite distant and aloof. While I was a bit disappointed by her speech, I realized at the end of the event that she was not: on the contrary, she was very comfortable with and happy about her performance and of the event itself.

After Carla’s, it was Renata’s turn. The former asked the latter to explain the meaning of sexed violence, since this expression, which was thought to be unfamiliar to the audience, appeared in the event’s subtitle. I do not know if Renata knew she would have to speak. Nonetheless, she seemed quite comfortable with this task.

Renata is a woman in her 30s with a university degree, and a real talent for writing. Coming from a not too wealthy family in the Province of Lecce, she was taken under the wing of Carla’s mother, who used to be her teacher in school. Carla and Renata, therefore, lived in the same house during the university years of the latter. Carla’s mother, as far as I understood, fostered Renata so that she could study and cultivate her talents. This is probably why, for Renata, being cultivated is really an identity marker: at that time she was frustrated with working in her husband’s shop, since she really desired to become a teacher in Italian public high schools. Renata started explaining the meaning of sexed violence: it was pretty clear to me that she completely ignored the distinction between sex and gender —something that she actually confirmed in a chat we had at the end of the meeting. She talked about men and women, about ‘patriarchy,’ women’s dignity, and pointed out how the role and potentialities of women were smothered by the phallogocentrism of our society. Finally, Elisabetta spoke. She had prepared a reading from the book I am an Emotional Creature, by Eve Ensler, and could not wait to perform it in front of us. She read the excerpts she had chosen, and commented on the readings,
addressing mainly a feminist audience. Elisabetta is always very engaging when she talks in public: she performed a celebration of women in their beings as emotional, non-rational subjects vis-à-vis the banality of men’s composed behaviors. Emotions were good, were smart, were fulfilling. Women, who are emotional subjects, should be proud of so being.

I knew that this event was an important moment for my informants: an occasion to proselytize, to show to others their feminist womanhood, to be recognized as politically meaningful. Nonetheless, I felt anxious about how the event unfolded: I was worried that their expectations would not be fulfilled. According to my friends, though, the event was a success: when we remained alone in the bookstore, at the end of the meeting, they commented with satisfaction on their performances and the reactions of the public. I rejoiced with them, even if I had had a different feeling about the event: after all, they knew their local publics and expectations better than I did. Nonetheless, I was baffled: I had more than a few problems with the contents of the speeches of my three friends. Among other things, I wondered how my informants could not see that, even if they celebrate emotions over rationality, the same fact of adhering to such a binary interpretation of genders might re-inscribe the same patterns that Renata explained as leading to violence. Moreover, I asked myself how it was that, during the Evaluna occasion, Elisabetta was celebrating emotions —and making of this aspect a marker of their alternative feminist womanhood in front of the audience of the event —while Carla, for the sake of being recognized as authoritative, was repressing them (behaving so differently from the experience I had of her)? All this, to me, had to do with dignity, with feeling degne (worthy/dignified), and, especially, with the need to be considered as such.

As is evident in this dissertation, dignity was a widespread term in my field. Dignity appeared, for example, in the performance of Berlusconi with Angela Bruno, in the reactions to Green Power’s event, in Eugenia’s words and world vision, in her grandmother’s understanding of feminism, in the SNOQ appeal, in the flash mob the indignate performed in Bologna, in Nuzzo’s words, in Putino’s understanding of

---

368 Significantly, while the public was constituted by the same persons, Carla and Elisabetta seemed to address different imagined audiences.
conflicting, in UDI’s 1980 appeal against violence, in anti-violence ads, and was linked to the idea of caring and being a witness. It is my claim, though, that in my field dignity is not a unitary concept: on the contrary, I found it to be multivalent and malleable. On the one hand, when my informants talked about dignity, they spoke a global language, one that is related to human rights. In this sense, my informants referred extensively to dignity as a legal category, as a quality that belongs to men and women for the fact of being born, and as a feature of humanity. On the other hand, though, practices and performances—an out and out aesthetics—of dignity were sought in their lives as a way to measure, assess, and achieve social worth in front of their local (imagined or actual) publics. In this latter meaning, evident in particular in Carla’s performance in the We and Eve event, I claim, performing dignity resonated with my informants’ understandings of traditional local gendered inflexions of honor (see chapter 2).

I claim that dignity, for my informants, was simultaneously a concept and a set of practices, an emotion (i.e. feeling worthy/dignified), and an aesthetic performance. Moreover, their quest for dignity seemed to respond both to the need to partake in and to be potentially disruptive of common local social understandings of womanhood. Performing dignity allowed them, at the same time, to break with the women-as-victims narratives and representations, and to do so in a commensurable way for their (imagined or actual) publics.

The term dignity is widely used internationally, mostly in the legal field, ever since it became a reference point in human rights jurisprudence. In spite of its ubiquitous presence in legal and everyday language, its meanings and local understandings are usually not defined or spelled-out. If human dignity is something that international jurisprudence grants to every human being, it is surprising that it has not been a widely analyzed object of anthropological research.

According to Cataldo (2002, 113):

369 See for example Coundouriotis 2006, Collins 2012, Von Schnitzler 2014, Hermez 2011. For the debates on dignity and animal rights see, for example, Cataldi 2002, Meyer 2001. See also, for example, Debet 2009 for a philosophic excursus on the history and uses of the notion of dignity, and for example Weinwright and Gallagher 2009 on the understandings of dignity in medicine. See for example Bostrom for dignity and the post-human. See also Agamben 1998. On the relationship between honor and dignity, in a Kantian perspective, see for example Kaufman 2011, La Vaque-Manty 2006, Bayefsky 2013.
Etymologically, the expression dignity is related not only to notions of worth or value, but also (through the Latin decet and dignus: what is fitting or seemly) to ideas of decency and decorum. Indecorous behavior is im-proper (from propre: own), unbecoming or inappropriate - behavior that does not suit one's character or status - behavior that is not one's own (or specific to one's species),

This interpretation of dignity fits precisely with what I encountered in my ethnographic field: it is something that happens between ethics (value, worth)\textsuperscript{370} and aesthetics (decorum), in ways that define one’s being in the (social) world (character or status). Most importantly, dignity is not just something that a person has/does/is/feels in relation to herself: in order to be enacted, it needs to be acknowledged by someone else. These observations, I claim, are paramount for my ethnographic analyses. Similarly to what Kirtsoglou wrote about the practice of mangia (2004, 154-155), I noticed that my informants performed ‘queer’ femininity, in the sense explained by Milena, by fashioning their womanhood around performances of dignity. The latter are inflected “according to what is conventionally perceived to be masculine” (154) in the social world they inhabit —that is constructed, by them, as traditional. In the example above, Carla’s attitude, I claim, was informed by a similar intention. While in feminist contexts my informants emphatically expressed their emotions, and spent a good amount of time celebrating the emotiveness of women vis-à-vis the rationality of men, in non-feminist settings they did not. As I have shown above, Elisabetta’s attitude differed from Carla’s one, and the same happened, respectively, with their imagined (or preferred) public— this in spite of the fact that the public in front of which they performed was actually made by the same persons. Especially during ordinary transactions with men —for example at the market, when asking for directions, or when relating with one of the common abusive parking fees collectors of the Salento area—, the expressions of their faces, the tones of their voices, and the language choices they made tended to emphasize their being emotionless,

\textsuperscript{370} On the link between aesthetics and value in relation to exhibitions in museums (but useful also beyond this particular setting) see for example Kratz 2011 on rhetorics of value.
self-composed, aloof, and off-putting. These attitudes translate some of the aspects that are traditionally and locally associated with performances of manhood, and through which men are understood to negotiate their social worth and authority. Besides offering an oxymoronic performance of womanhood, achieved by playing with the gendered expectations of their publics, these performances aimed at negotiating the women activists’ worth and authority vis-à-vis their publics. The particular aesthetics of dignity my informants replicated, I claim, was linked to what has been referred to as honor, as it is lived and understood in this particular place of the Mediterranean (see chapter 2).

A similar attitude also emerged in my field in connection with violence against women, and in relation to women’s suffering. The associations between crying, being emotional, being victims, suffering, being passive, and being women are well established among my Salentine informants. While they rely on hegemonic (essentializing) discourses that are common in Italy as a country, as I have pointed out so far, in this particular area of the peninsula they take peculiar connotations, linked to what is perceived as traditionally characterizing the social behaviors of women. These seemingly banal equations emerged in Carla’s words and attitudes, and also appeared, for example, in Lucia and Rina’s excerpts reported in chapter 6 (they are from Salento, too). Moreover, they were an important element for the DNA Donna activists, and a message in the exhibition of Taurisano (see chapter 6). These associations are as simple as they are paramount to my research. They explicitly trace a link, in culture-specific ways, not just between ethical stances and aesthetic performances, but also between not being a victim and being progressive (changing the world), and between being a victim and being traditional and compliant to ‘patriarchy.’ In other words, they trace a direct connection, not spelled out at a national level, between being a witness and being modern, and being a victim and being traditional. It is not surprising that dignity, in this particular area of the country, is inflected according to the DNA poster’s expectations I discussed in the introduction. Weeping (i.e. being emotional) is associated with being victims and being women in the traditional Salento. Not weeping (i.e. being more composed, dignified), is associated

---

371 I understand this remark as a gloss on Herzfeld’s claims on disemia: “constant signifiers mark shifting signified” (2005a).
instead with being courageous and with changing the world. My informants associate this latter feature, in their local area, with men’s gendered social expectations, and translate it with the particular aesthetics I discussed above. If women who weep are victims who are compliant with and reproduce the status quo, it is not surprising that, at a local level, embracing traditional behaviors that are associated with their opposite (i.e. with men) is considered a feature of modernity, and of queerness.

In sum, the connections between performing and practicing modern feminist womanhood, being testimoni, and performing (and pursuing) dignity are very well-developed in Salento, and are understood as features of being feminist, active, modern, and self-possessed. They are widely employed, locally, in the representational struggle I have addressed so far.

On the one hand, their uses and performances of dignity clearly resonate, aesthetically, with the traditional notion of honor as a measure of social worth (see for example Herzfeld 1980, Lever 1986), and speak about the uneasiness that my informant have vis-à-vis the possibility of being seen as backward (for a comparison, see chapter 9). Associations between tradition and womanhood are not neutral ones for the feminists I met in Salento: adhering to the type of gendered performances that they associate with women in the traditional Salento strongly resonates with the paradigm of victimhood I have discussed above. Being passive is being traditional and being victims is being compliant with patriarchal values —something ethically problematic, according to them. Showing dignity, instead, for them, means performing modern feminist womanhood through the (‘patriarchal’) aesthetics of (traditional) men’s honor. Dignity, as a measure of social worth, is used in order to be both commensurable to (see Povinelli 2001) and disruptive of the social patriarchal context where my informants live, and that they frame as traditional according to categories and aesthetics that might be re-conducted to those of honor and shame, as described above.

On the other hand, since feminists think of themselves as modern women, they also

---

372 Smiling is intuitively considered as the opposite of weeping.
373 It is worth reminding that my informants adhere to a vision of the world informed by the thought of sexual difference that postulates, de facto, the presence of just two sexes and genders.
refuse to be completely defined by their social context according to these traditional parameters, and in particular by those of shame (on the polysemy and polifunctionality of shame in Italy see for example Plesset 2007). By virtue of their being Italian feminists informed by the pensiero della differenza, they do not aim at being equal to men. They refuse to explicitly adopt the language of honor as an identity filter, replacing it with dignity. The adoption of dignity as a measure of social worth resonates also with the language of human rights and with a public that goes beyond the local communities of Salento, allowing them to redefine their values in (global) terms that comprise humanity as their reference point. In this way they transform and transcend their local social belonging—i.e. the local audiences of their performances of womanhood—and frame their feminist identities and experiences according to human categories that are a feature both of modernity and of feminism (on the strategic uses of competing discourses and practices see for example Herzfeld 2004a).

Dignity, Shame, and Doing As If

In addition to the aforementioned ones, there are other aspects of the notion and phenomenology of dignity that important to my ethnography. In his account of the intellectual history of this term, Agamben writes that degna (worthy/dignified), today, “[i]s the person who, while lacking public dignity, does as if she possesses it” (1998, 62. My emphasis). The resonances between the Italian philosopher’s definition of dignity and the experiences of Milena and the other feminists I have so far narrated are compelling. I have extensively explained how Italian feminists have been denouncing the lack of recognition of women’s dignity in Italian society: femminicidio and violence against women represent the extremes of a continuum of violence that undermines women’s dignity in the first place. In this panorama, I argued, being (or being represented as) witnesses is a feminist marker in a context where women are often associated with (or spontaneously adhere to) the role of victims. In the representational struggle in which my

374 It is worth mentioning that there are multiple axiological reference points in the experiences of the women I worked with: for example, local, regional, national, European, and global.
informants are engaging, as a feature of their political activism dignity is something they want to attain in order to be considered as relevant, significant, and worthy: something they feel women are generally not, in ‘patriarchal’ environments. In order to “make it real,” as Milena would say, they do as if they were degne — i.e. they do as if they were recognized as socially worthy/dignified. It is precisely here that Agamben’s words and Milena’s experience coincide. Interestingly, feeling worthy/dignified (degne) is an emotion, and being degne is something that engages the senses. Being witnesses, I argue, in my ethnographic field in Salento, is both a way to show dignity, and to feel degne; doing (aesthetically) as if one were worthy/dignified (which I frame as an emotion), is a way to cultivate dignity (see Agamben 1998, and Milena), and eventually, to be recognized as degne. In other words it is both performative and perlocutionary. Here, again, dignity is not something necessarily already given, but is framed as a practice, as something that needs to be cultivated, and recognized — setting the political activism of my informants, again, in the realm of becoming, rather than in the one of being (on the relationships between anthropology, ethics, and becoming see Introduction, and for example Dave 2011, 2014, and Lambek 2014).

In addition to what I have so far discussed, there is another aspect of dignity that is relevant for my research. Agamben also offers a reading of dignity in relation to shame — a feeling he characterizes by the fact that a subject is “overstepped and overtaken by his/her own passivity” (97, my translation). This element resonates with the two meanings of being subjects I have addressed in the previous chapters, indirectly associating shame with being passive, and honor/dignity with activity. Agamben’s observations on shame — i.e. the other aspect addressed by the honor and shame code — are similar to my informants’ interpretations of being victims, and partially explain the need to construct new audiences and to change their publics’ performances of seeing. Witnessing themselves being seen as victims is shameful; in order to overcome shame and be worthy/dignified (both by virtue of their being human beings and in order to assess their social worth), they need to “be active in front of their own passivity”

---

375 In this respect it is worth mentioning the importance that terms like senso di sé, centatura, and disparità have in Italian feminist jargon (see for example chapter 4).
(Agamben 1998,101): this is precisely what the feminist women I worked with do in their special and everyday performances of womanhood.\textsuperscript{376}

An interesting example of the passage between shame and dignity (through indignation) could be considered the aforementioned flash-mob of the \textit{indignate} in Bologna in which I participated and which I describe in chapter 4. Indignation was a very popular word at that time in the Italian media: the fact that the Salento women I was travelling with chose to use this word for manifesting their disappointment with the way the works of the \textit{Congresso} were directed, though, is not a coincidence.\textsuperscript{377} Dignity and indignation share more than the same semantic field, for them. Indignation represented the channel by which to affirm their own dignity (i.e. their rights and social worth) in front of an audience that was not acknowledging it. The \textit{indignate} wanted to react to their (shameful) witnessing themselves not being recognized as worthy/dignified in the conflict between the different factions within \textit{UDI}. In this respect, their feelings resonated with not being considered by their competitors, according to Putino’s observations that I re-quote below:

Arguing between women is war-like. In order to fight this war one needs to have a deep sense of one’s own and of the other’s dignity (...) There are many ways to discourage a war meeting between two women; one of these is to impoverish (\textit{immiserire}) the other at a level where all that happens there is stripped down by another instance, determined elsewhere.

The exposure of our silent bodies, in this respect—a performance that broke with the conventional rules of behavior recognized as possible by our audience—was aimed at

\textsuperscript{376} Potentially, this element could shed some light on the oxymoronic performances constructed around the two meanings of being subjects discussed above.

\textsuperscript{377} In May 2011, \textit{El Movimiento 15 M-Democracia Real Ya} (Real Democracy Now), better known in the media as the movement of \textit{Los Indignados} (in Spanish, the indignant), took to the streets and occupied some of the main squares of the most important Spanish cities. On that occasion, the protestors read and discussed a manifesto that showed “the worries and indignation of the citizens for the consequences of the economic crisis and for the political reaction to it.” From that point onwards the Italian and other European media started labeling the protagonists of many and diverse forms of public protests throughout Europe, the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, Chile, and North America as \textit{Indignados}, sometimes somewhat independently from the intentions of the protestors. A few months before the Spanish demonstrations took place, the word indignation was already starting to appear extensively in the Italian media, although apparently with inconsistent meanings, as a reaction to the most recent sexual and political scandal of the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.
putting ourselves in the position of witnesses: active in our passivity, in Agamben’s words. It was also directed at affecting the audience, and at changing their performances of seeing and acknowledging us.

In this chapter I traced some of the connections between the political, the aesthetic, and the ethical in my ethnographic field in Salento. I argued, in conversation with the traditional anthropological literature on honor and shame and on social poetics, that the representational struggle widely addressed in this dissertation also involves what has been referred to as a poetics of womanhood. I described three aspects of the practices and performances of modern feminist womanhood, which revolved around being witnesses. They aimed at promoting new performances and practices of seeing in their (actual or imagined) publics, and involved artistic performances, doing as if, and performing dignity. First, I showed how some of my informants theorize the arts as weapons in the struggle against ‘patriarchy,’ and promote the performance of arts for constructing new types of womanhood.

Second, I presented my informants’ attempts to represent (and be) ‘queer’ subjects as rooted in what they called doing as if —something considered different from pretending. Third, I focused on the connections between performing dignity vis-à-vis their local actual or imagined publics, and my informants’ negotiations of their social worth in relation to traditional (local) gendered interpretations of honor and shame. All these dimensions, I have argued, set the political activism of the women I worked with in the realm of becoming rather than in the one of being—i.e. they are teleologically oriented towards something that is not yet, and that they represent in order to make it happen. My informants’ alternative representations of women, in other words, correspond to what they consider as modern feminist womanhood: something that they both want to embrace and promote. By affecting the spectators, the activists I met hope to challenge commonsensical representations of women as victims, and to create, affirm, and imagine new ways of being women. These practices of ascesis are considered as generative of new subjectivities (not yet attained but sought for), which develop along unforeseen directions. In these political spectacles, the language of aesthetics meets the one of ethics, contributing to the imagination of new possibilities of being in the world. In Braidotti’s words, being women becomes being “[a] subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the
Other, a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis” (2002, 12).
Chapter 9
A Precariousness Of Gazes: Italian Feminists And The Fears Of Invisibility

“The invisible is not what is hidden but what is denied, that which we are not allowed to see” (Fernandez quoted in Taylor 1997).

I conclude this dissertation by referring to a peculiar ethnographic experience, one that is defined by an absence, rather than by a presence: namely, that of the tarantate from my informants’ visual, sensory, and political worlds. This element, I claim, is particularly relevant to understanding some of the ambivalences of my informants’ lives and political activism, as described in this dissertation, and to indicate further possible directions for my research.

A Very Loud Silence: Salentine Feminists And Tarantismo

When I first arrived in Salento, I had read de Martino, and came to know about that geographic area through his works on tarantismo. I had read Lanternari (for example 1995, 1997), and Pandolfi’s analyses informed by de Martino’s works (1990). Through their legacy, I learned to look at the tarantate also as examples of resistance, and at tarantismo as a form of embodied performance that acted to challenge, sometimes consciously and sometimes not, the hegemonic roles and representations of women within the local peasant society. I embraced a Gramscian perspective on popular culture (see for example Pizza 2012, 2013 and Ferrari 2012), that informed not just my attitudes towards intellectuals and organic intellectuals, but also the ways I framed city and countryside, tradition and modernity, and Italy’s North/South divide. I expected that the importance that I, as an anthropologist who grew up in the (far) North of Italy, was giving to culture-specific expressions such as tarantismo would become a point of connection between my interests on that area, and my informants’ lives and subject-positions.

My experience in the field, though, upset my expectations. On the one hand, I noticed that the feminist women I met there seemed to have the necessity to find proto-feminist genealogies that linked their Salentine identity to their feminist one, through specific re-
readings of local examples of the past—not necessarily historical. In this respect, the
importance given to the local histories of, for example, the *tabacchine*, of the Iron Age
cult of the Mother-Goddess, or of the witches/*macare* of the Middle Ages and of more
recent times, are representative. On the other hand, though, the *tarantate*, who, from
my anthropological point of view would have been ideal candidates for these narratives
of proto-feminism, were blatantly absent from the ones of the feminists I worked with:
this was, indeed, a very loud silence, so to speak. In other words, *tabacchine, macare,*
and Mother Goddesses represented an historical genealogy (see chapter 4) within a
karstic approach to history (see chapter 4) that can be framed in a way not too dissimilar
from de Martino’s understandings of the cultivation of the concepts of presence and of
de-historicization (see for example Pandolfi 1990, Saunders 1995). The feminist women I
met seem to construct these narratives in order to position themselves within the world
they inhabit. Significantly, though, the *tarantate* do not seem *not* have a role in their
world and in their genealogies. They seem to be if not *invisible* then surely *not
recognized as meaningful* to the eyes of most of my feminist informants. In a way, they
are out of their *her-stories.*

The more I spent time with the Salentine feminists, then, the more the absence of the
*tarantate* from their genealogies came to resemble a *repressed* component —within the
local histories, and in their own lives— rather than of a simple oversight. I started to
consider the absence of the *tarantate* from their narratives as an eloquent element for
understanding their being in the world, and I began to treat these themes accordingly.

A few months into my fieldwork, I began asking my informants direct questions on
*tarantismo:* of the *macare* first of all (some of whom come from Galatina, the town of the
cults associated with these phenomena), but also of other friends and acquaintances from
Lecce and Lecce province. Even more interestingly, *all but one* of the feminist
informants that I interrogated on this particular issue dismissed the *tarantate* in just a

*W*omen who worked in tobacco plantations —very popular in Salento at the beginning of the last
century until the 1960s— and who fought for their workers’ rights.

* I waited for a few months before explicitly addressing this topic, since I wanted to try to overcome the
possible initial skepticisms around my positionality within the field —as a Northern Italian and as an
intellectual— that could affect my informants’ answers on this particular topic.
couple of sentences with answers that re-traced the formal ones of biomedicine, or of various interpretations based on positivist approaches to these phenomena. Given a certain sophistication of my informants in explaining social and cultural facts, this sounded pretty odd. They defined the tarantate as being, for example, schizophrenics, or the sexually repressed, or victims of sunstrokes, or even those bitten by a tarantula spider. While most of them mentioned de Martino, even those who had actually read him clearly did not adopt his views on those phenomena.\footnote{380} Even more significantly, in answering my questions many of them used rhetorical devices to distance themselves from those phenomena, from their direct participation in them, and from the requirements of having to have a personal opinion on tarantismo. They pointed out, for example, that they do not personally have memories or significant memories on tarantate, or that the latter might have existed but they never saw them, or that since they are from Galatina, according to the tradition, they are immune to tarantismo. My informants also often answered—or rather deflected—my questions by quoting someone else, for example, using tropes such as “my mother used to say…,” “it is said…,” “de Martino studied it…,” “there is a book that…,” “you need to talk with my aunt…,” or “that person is interested in tarantismo, you should ask her instead.”. Moreover, the uneasiness with tarantismo also penetrated spheres not directly linked with the ethnological readings of the tarantate, such as what Lűdke associated with neo-tarantismo (2011). Even the pizzica pizzica, an important soundscape (see, for example, Murray Schafer 1980, Tacchi 2002, Samuels et al., 2010) of contemporary Salento, most of my politically active informants typically perceived as an annoyance.\footnote{381}

Only one woman, Nicoletta, an amateur writer originally from Galatina, answered my questions by providing details and, even more significantly, elaborating her personal relationship with the phenomenon of tarantate.\footnote{382} According to Nicoletta, if Galatina was

---

\footnote{380}{On the reception of de Martino in Salento see the analyses of Pizza (for example 1999, 2004), and Ferrari 2012.}

\footnote{381}{This attitude in reference to tarantismo and pizzica pizzica was unusual, since it clearly did not match with the other behaviors, feelings, and discourses on these topics I encountered outside of feminist circles.}

\footnote{382}{Nicoletta chose to answer my questions by giving me an unpublished text on this subject she had written some time before.}
once a town that produced milk (*gala*) and that was associated with the Greek goddess Athena, it (sadly) became the town of the *tarantate*, i.e.

[w]omen who, working in the fields over the summer, were bitten by the tarantula spider and who, from then on, started to behave in an irrational, often unseemly [*sconveniente*], way: from their mouths came out what normally a respectable [*per bene*] woman would never say — swear words, curses, anger, drool. To free themselves from the furo that tormented them they danced to the sound of a tambourine, over fast, pulsing melodies; they danced frantically, taking their clothes off, messy, they rolled over on the ground, reproducing the same movements of the tarantula spider. The families, who were ashamed of all this, and in order to remove them from the nosy sight of the people, asked someone to help them to calm down by playing the guitar and the tambourine at their homes. (...) In the summer the malaise of the *tarantate* increased, and the only remedy was to ask for the favor of their protecting saint, Saint Paul. For this reason, on the day of his feast, from far-away places such as Switzerland, Germany, or other places where they had emigrated, and from towns close by in the province of Lecce, the *tarantate* arrived [in Galatina] carried in a truck, sitting in its open back, already screaming and ruffled and often wearing night gowns. This happened in the morning, very early, when there weren’t people around who could see. (...) It might also happen that some of them [i.e. the *tarantate*] would run away in the middle of the street, then it happened that those [men] who were in the bar in front [of Saint Paul’s church] could take advantage of that occasion to encircle them, provoking and exasperating them in order to see what unusual stunts or curses they would [i.e. the *tarantate*] become able to perform. (...) The people from Galatina, since they are protected by the Saint, are immune to the tarantula bite, and this probably explains why I have been relieved from putting on such a show. I could not avoid being terrified by their presence. I knew that the *tarantate* were so rabid that it could happen that they could attack you, maybe for something banal that
one normally did not notice. One of these banal things that could infuriate them was the sight of the color red.

In Nicoletta’s narration, tarantate are clearly associated with irrationality, turbulent emotions, disruptive behavior, and with the feeling of shame—notably, not of the protagonists but of the observers, who see tarantate as passive vis-à-vis their own malaise (see Agamben above, and Nicoletta’s claims, below). They are described as frightening, but also as ridiculed, and they are somehow blamed for the fact of being related to her hometown and its inhabitants, who became associated with these messy performances instead of being considered as heirs of Ancient Greek culture. In other words, the tarantate are associated with shame (and not with honor, or dignity. See chapter 7 and 8), are considered disruptive in the eyes of their audience, and backward in comparison to the urban educated people (like Nicoletta), who started by being connected with them, and not with their illustrious history, and ended up being relegated to a geographical and historical periphery. Mostly, though, the tarantate are seen as passive (i.e., in my informants’ jargon, victims rather than witnesses), as somehow subjected to their own bodies: their suffering is considered to be put on public display in a perspective that positions them at the threshold between being affected by protagonismo and being socially unfit. Moreover, tarantate are objects of nosy gazes, of judgment, and pity. The latter observations also emerge in the rest of Nicoletta’s story, where she focuses on how representations and audiences have a leading role in the way she—not dissimilarly to other feminists I met—understands not just the tarantate, but her own being a woman.

These are my memories on the tarantate (...) In writing, and in particular in poetry, [I can] find the id-skin [io pelle] that allows me to expose myself in a defenseless nakedness without being vulnerable. Poetry for me is body...the same messy and sorrowful [dolente, in Italian it has also physical connotations] body of the tarantate, but inside an interior space inhabited by my own gaze...for the tarantate, by contrast, it is once again

---

383 Both the latter aspects, as I have pointed out in this dissertation, are conditions of which my informants strongly disapprove. This understanding of tarantate could be read in relationship to what Butler claims for the “destitute other” (Butler 2012,121-122).
by the exposition on the square that their own suffering becomes another
condemnation, another judgment. In front of these women who bared their
bodies and souls is the innocent dignity of those who suffer again the
violation of the gaze of the other. But then the music started, the dance
takes control over the narration of a female inexpressible feature,
nourishing the gestures of a woman’s body who in this way cries her cry
of truth.

Significantly, Nicoletta, in her extraordinary sensitivity, does not see or put a qualitative
distance between her own existential experience and that of the tarantate — who, in the
previous excerpt, were depicted pretty much in terms that were at odds with the
representations of feminist womanhood that I have described in this dissertation. In
Nicoletta’s narrative, what separates her own experience of being a messy and sorrowful
body from those of the tarantate is her not being exposed, by virtue of her inhabiting an
interior space, to a gaze that does not empower, that ridicules, that judges her as unfit,
that does not recognize her being a woman, and her cry of truth. In Nicoletta’s words,
tarantate were condemned by a gaze that violated them.\(^{384}\)

In spite of the distance that my informants see and want to put between their experiences
and tarantismo, I do see many similarities between de Martino’s interpretation of
tarantismo and the women with whom I worked. These are explicit in Nicoletta’s account
and in the aforementioned texts and readings of this phenomenon, but also — perhaps less
explicitly — in the political and existential lives of the feminist activists I met. For
example, I see resemblances in the latter’s attempts to perform womanhood differently
from their society’s expectations and parameters, according to the modalities that I have
described in this dissertation. I see parallels in their playing, contrastively, with gender
roles, and in their performing — or, following Lambek (2014), interpreting — their being
women in a ‘patriarchal’ context, in ways that engage their bodily, sensory, and artistic
realms. I see similarities in their effort to put representations at the center of their
becoming what they want to be — or simply of their becoming different from what they

\(^{384}\) I suggest reading this claim by Nicoletta within the perspective that I have described in this dissertation, i.e. in reference to a definition of womanhood dependent on women being potentially victims of violence.
are. I find analogies in the ways they engage artistic performances in order to affectively challenge the commonsensical interpretations of women in their societies. Moreover, it appears that they share a common concern: that of being present to and in history.

For these reasons, the absence of tarantate from my informants’ genealogies caught my attention, and led me to read the uneasiness that my informants demonstrated in reference to the tarantate as an element that speaks precisely about this closeness. In particular, I argue, the distance that my informants put between themselves and the tarantate is evidence of the fears, anxieties, and ambivalences that are part of their own political and existential experiences—fears, anxieties, and ambivalences that the tarantate, somehow, epitomize. As emerges indirectly from the narratives I developed in this dissertation, I argue that these fears unfold around a sense of existential and political precariousness, and concern the risks to be seen but not be acknowledged, nor recognized (for a comparison see, for example, Keane 1997 on hazard and representations). For example, I believe that the choice of Italian feminists to disappear from the squares, the motivations for their independence from PCI, the understanding of genealogies as gazes that empower, the professing of not wanting to make their existence dependent upon the gaze of the other, the choice of UDI of not wanting to participate, as a group, in the Se Non Ora Quando demonstration, and the Indignate’s flash mob are all examples that support this interpretation. In all these circumstances the Italian feminists I worked with claimed not to want to be defined by a gaze of the other that does not acknowledge, empower, and recognize them.

My argument is, in other words, that if it is true that the feminist activists I have presented in this dissertation seek visibility and make representations the preferred battlefields for their political activism, they are nonetheless aware, at some level, that

---

385 For example, on the occasion of the Immagini Amiche Campaign, UDI organized some “collective actions” in order to “solicit the attention and to inform media and citizenship.” In discussing an event, the governing board of UDI writes to the members of the group about one of these initiatives, aimed at “making ourselves visible by soliciting the attention of those who, normally, ignores us.” This is why “the Group proposes to prepare for that day a gigantic cactus, symbol of the Campaign, the thorns of which should pierce the enemy images. (...) Another idea, not alternative to the first, is to think about proactively giving the journalists some glasses. The bigger, the better. The message that we would like to convey would be the following: “Don’t you see us? Don’t you see what we have been doing for the past year? Put on some glasses, [then]” (Gruppo Immagini Amiche 2010).
they do depend on the gazes of their (actual or imagined) publics — gazes that they try to change, and to affect, but that ultimately they cannot control.

Even if they are trying to change their audiences’ practices and performances of seeing and sensing in the ways I have described in this dissertation, they are by no means sure that their efforts will (or will not) be effective. The women I worked with are conscious, in their own way, of the fallibility of vision, and of the precariousness of oscillating between visibility and invisibility (Ross, 6) that is inherent in their political activity.

For my informants, the tarantate (as they understand them), in this sense, clearly represent what they fear becoming, and are a reminder of the risks associated with their representational struggle, which is steeped in the possibility of its failure (see also, for a

---

386 I read this in connection with Butler’s claim that “[w]e are not simply visual phenomena for each other…rather, who we are, bodily, is already a way of being ‘for’ the other…that is, we are made available, bodily, for another whose perspective we can neither fully anticipate nor control” (2012, 121).

387 In his 1999 article Tarantismi oggi, Pizza notices that Colazzo, in his tribute to Lapassade’s studies on tarantismo (1994), promotes an interpretation of the phenomenon that Pizza describes as ‘turning de Martino’s upside down’ (263) — i.e. Colazzo supports a reading of tarantismo as an adorcism, and not as an exorcism. Tarantismo, according to Pizza’s reading of Colazzo, is not a phenomenon that should be associated with suffering but with “a positive identity trait …with a strong aesthetic value.” (263)

388 Significantly, Pizza points out, Colazzo entitles the paragraphs where he makes a claim in support of the “revitalization of tarantismo” (264) respectively “out of history” and “out of representation.” Regardless of the judgment of Colazzo’s reading of tarantismo, it is clear that history and representation are connected for him — and for my informants, too.

389 In this respect, both the choices of visibility and invisibility of the Italian feminists that I have described in this dissertation respond to this same need: when changing the gaze of the others is not possible, hiding oneself from those gazes seems to be the only acceptable possibility. Yet the latter choice is also problematic. As the widely used metaphor of the karstic river (see chapter 4) shows, the Italian feminists’ claims of (self-inflicted) invisibility, in this respect, are not just potentially functional to the ‘patriarchal’ ideology that acts to hide women’s presence in history, but they might also be interpreted as a consequence of women’s difficulty in negotiating their position in front of a gaze that reveals itself, in spite of women’s political commitment, as still not empowering, and even violating.

388 The precariousness and fear in my informants’ experience, I claim, translates into the — realistic — possibilities, for example, of being socially invisible or marginalized, of not being politically influential, of not being recognized as meaningful interlocutors (not worthy or dignified), of not being able to change society’s perceptions vis-à-vis women, and the latter’s place within the former. As Diana Fuss (1995, 10) points out, “any politics of identity needs to come to terms with the complicated and meaningful ways that identity is continually compromised, imperiled, one might even say embarrassed by identification” (10). It is impossible, paraphrasing Fuss, to clearly distinguish between identity claims (i.e. ‘I am not another’ 1995, 10) from identification (“I desire to be another” 1995, 10) — which are made out of oscillations between nonidentity and disidentification.

If an ethnography more explicitly centered on the reception of my informants’ performances of modern feminist womanhood might be a further development out of the present research, some possible future directions of the latter might also focus on the ambivalences of Italian feminist activism, and on following the — so far ethnographically shallow — resonances between political activism and the anthropology of religion that I found during my fieldwork. In particular, on the basis of my ethnographic experience around the reception of the tarantate among my feminist informants, it might be interesting to enquire into the importance of the historical and the metahistorical in my informants’ (political) lives — i.e. what de Martino would have called the relationships between presence and de-historification. Within this possible continuation of my research, pursuing a dialogue with de Martino, and in particular, with his notion of presence — i.e. of time and history — seems a profitable enterprise. Pandolfi (1990, 1992), Saunders (1993, 1995) and Napolitano and Norget (2009, 254), for example, have each claimed the relevance of the Neapolitan ethnographer for contemporary anthropology, and my contribution would follow their lead.

“Presence,” according to Pandolfi, is “an ambiguous concept for de Martino: partially informed by Heidegger’s dasein, and partially by historicism” (Pandolfi 1990, 267. See de Martino 1981[1948], and Ferrari 2012). As Saunders puts it, directly quoting the Italian ethnographer, In several works de Martino discussed a dilemma that he referred to

---

390 Generally speaking, my ethnographic experience confirms Bulter’s claims that “one ‘exists’ not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being ‘recognizable’” (1997, 5). For this reason, it could be interesting to read my informants’ preoccupations with visibility and the employment of the metaphor of the karstic river through the filter of de Martino’s crisis of presence (see below).

391 Moreover, their fears and political and existential precariousness, I claim, are evident also in other aspects of my informants’ lives and political activism, and especially in their preoccupation with history — within and without the genealogical rift of the Italian feminist movement (see chapter 4). The importance of history for them emerges, for example, in their linking their experiences to proto-feminist figures, in collecting memories and in writing memoirs, in publishing all the writings of older members, and in creating archives (often donated to younger feminists). Quite blatantly, in the words of my informants, especially of the eldest, these are actions aimed at “not forgetting,” at “not wanting to disappear,” and at “leaving a trace.” The fear of oblivion, of not being remembered, permeates the lives of many of the women I met who are utilizing the Internet as a way to survive the menace of their biological and social deaths.
as “the crisis of presence”…which he defines as “the existential drama of being exposed to the risk of not being here” (324), that characterizes the magic world —where “presence was still a goal and a task, a drama and a problem” (de Martino 1981,190, my translation). For the Neapolitan ethnographer, cultural institutions such as religious and magical rituals could re-establish presence vis-à-vis its crisis, and prevent its loss (within such a framework he understood, for example, the phenomena of tarantismo. See also Saunders on Pentecostalism in Italy 1995). 392

If the precariousness of vision, in my informants’ experience, is linked to an existential precariousness that speaks about the possibility of not being recognized as (degne) testimoni (and, therefore, of not being at all, within the ‘patriarchal’ visualities), can that be understood in reference to the same crisis of presence that de Martino argued for the tarantate (see, for example, de Martino 1981[1948])? 393 Can presence and its crisis be considered as a feature of the contemporary world as well, and understood in relation to one’s positioning vis-à-vis others’ visualities? Can political activism be considered, similarly to the religious and magical realms for de Martino, as a cultural institution that enacts the redemption (riscatto) of presence? Can the redefinition of time that my informants enact in their practice of fare come se, and in their fostering of feminist and proto-feminist genealogies, be read in relation to Saunders’ reading of de Martino’s redemption of presence?

If “learning to see is training careful blindness” (Phelan 1993), the relationships between absence and presence —i.e. the stories that characterize the connections between my

392 In his analysis of Italian Pentecostalism, Saunders argues that “conversion allows the person to fashion not only a self and identity but also a new relationship to time and history, and particularly a newly affirmed feeling of efficacy as an actor in the historical moment” (1995,324). He read some of his ethnographic data on pre-conversion existential crisis within a de Martinian framework, arguing — similarly to Pandolfi—— in favor of the adoption in anthropology of the Neapolitan ethnographer’s concepts of presence. Significantly, Saunders stresses an understanding of crisis of presence in relation to the production of oneself and to a change in the perception of time, and of one’s place into it.

393 If it’s true that for (most of) my informants the precariousness of their existence does not take the form of a malaise or bodily suffering, as happened for the tarantate, such bodily suffering is nonetheless present and structures their being in the world through their conception of themselves as potentially subjected to violence. Their fear of not being certainly resonates with its physical connotations, but also with invisibility and lack of recognition.
informants and their publics— as described in this dissertation are laden with ambivalences. *Dissensus*, in such a context, seems to be a continuous work-in-progress.
Quoted References


Ammirati, Monia. 2013. Contro Versa. Reggio Calabria: Sabbiarossa


Apolito, Paolo. 2007 “I Beni DEA e il “fare” le tradizioni.” *Antrolopopgia Museale* 17:12-17.


Badii, Michela. 2012. *Processi di patrimonializzazione e politiche del cibo*. Segrate:
Morlacchi.


Cicioni, Mirna. 1989. “‘Love and respect, together’: The theory and practice of Affidamento in Italian feminism.” *Australian Feminist Studies*, 4:10, 71-83


Coeckelbergh, Mark. 2013. *Human Being @ Risk: enhancement, technology, and the evaluation of vulnerability transformations.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Cole, Alyson M. 1999. “‘There are no Victims in this Class’: on Female Suffering and Anti-‘Victim Feminism’.” *NWSA Journal* 11(1): 72-96.


Milano: Feltrinelli.


Review Of Anthropology 41:221-234.


Ferrero Camoletto, Raffaella and Bertone, Chiara. 2010 “Coming to be a Man: Pleasure in the Construction of Italian Men’s (Hetero)Sexuality.” *Italian Studies* 65 (2): 235-250.


Garelli, Franco. 2007b. “The public relevance of the church and Catholicism in Italy.”  

Garelli, Franco. 2013. “Flexible Catholicism, Religion and the Church: The Italian Case.”  


Herzfeld, Michael. 2004. The body impolitic: artisans and artifice in the global hierarchy


Irigaray, Luce.1985b. *This sex which is not one*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.


Koyama, Emi. 2003 “Transfeminist manifesto.” in *Catching a wave: reclaiming feminism*


McLeer, A. (1998). “Saving the victim: Recuperating the language of the victim and


Molé, Noelle J. 2013b. “Trusted Puppets, Tarnished Politicians: Humor and Cynicism in


Parmigiani, Giovanna. 2015. “The witness is passing by: a story in the affective politics of objects in the struggle against femicide in Italy.” Article draft under review.


Rose, Gillian. 2012. *Visual methodologies: an introduction to researching with visual materials*. Los Angeles, [Calif.]: SAGE.


Scarpato, Susanna. 2005. “In the Name of the Mother. Sexual Difference and the


Strathern, Marilyn. 1996. “Cutting the network.” *Journal of Royal Anthropological*


Websites, accessed for the last time on August, 14th 2014


http://27esimaora.corriere.it; http://www.ilcorpodelledonne.net;

http://27esimaora.corriere.it/articolo/io-decido-mai-piu-clandestine/

http://abbattoimuri.wordpress.com/2013/05/03/se-chiamiamo-femminicidio-anche-le-morti-per-malore/


http://abbattoimuri.wordpress.com/2014/01/15/brand-femminicidio-quanto-mi-paghi-se-faccio-la-donna-morta/


http://agedolecce.blogspot.it
http://www.alvearelesciare.org


http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2014/11/19/femminicidi-ogni-due-giorni-viene-uccisa-una-donna_cc33c7e8-81c2-46fa-b1d6-f577eedfb727.html

http://archiviofoto.unita.it/ricercafa.php?key=femminismo&frmimg.x=-747&frmimg.y=-1624

http://associazionelea.org


http://bollettino-di-guerra.noblogs.org;

http://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/03/05/news/femminicidi_124_le_donne_uccise_in_italia_nel_2012_15_solo_in_emilia-romagna-53924161/


http://comunicazionedigenere.wordpress.com;

http://comunicazionedigenere.wordpress.com/2012/05/02/analisi-di-come-i-media-giustificano-le-violenze-di-genere/

http://comunicazionedigenere.wordpress.com/2014/03/02/quando-il-femminicidio-diventa-da-calendario/

http://www.consparitatuglia.it/newsite/consigliera


http://dati.istat.it/

http://dipersamenteoccupate.blogspot.it/

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedestrian_crossing

http://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/2013/10/14/news/io-e-il-mio-aborto-impossibile-1.137446

http://www.eures.it/il-femminicidio-in-italia-nellultimo-decennio/

http://femicidiocasadonne.wordpress.com/

http://femicidiocasadonne.wordpress.com/2014/01/24/stop-al-femminicidio/


http://femminicidio.blogspot.com/

http://femminileplurale.wordpress.com/2012/10/15/paestum-2012-lautorita-come-pratica-politica-delle-donne/

http://femminileplurale.wordpress.com/2013/10/12/paestum-2013-femministe-nove/

http://femminismo-a-sud.noblogs.org


http://femministenove.wordpress.com/


http://fuorigenere.wordpress.com/2013/03/29/pubblicitaviolenza-come-fare-soldi-con-il-femminicidio/

http://georgiamada.wordpress.com/2013/02/19/angela-bruno-e-litalia-fabbrichetta-di-famiglia-di-berlusconi/


http://www.huffingtonpost.it/angela-mauro/green-power-tutti-insultano-berlusconi-ma-parliamo-di-lei_b_2661973.html

http://www.huffingtonpost.it/giuliana-proietti/il-caso-angela-bruno-dietrologie-fantasie-e-predizioni_b_2713458.html


http://www.inmondadori.it/Tabacco-tabacchine-memoria-na/eai978888176368/


http://ilmanifesto.it/mai-piu-clandestine-a-roma-le-donne-manifestano-per-la-legge-194/


http://it.avoiceformen.com/nazi-femminismo/bambini-abortiti-bruciati-come-combustibile/

http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomba_del_tuffatore

http://kiaramente1.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/lei.jpg

http://laboratoriodonne.wordpress.com:

http://laboratoriodonne.wordpress.com/2012/06/06/tessitura/


http://laboratoriodonne.wordpress.com/2013/06/03/femminismo-molecolare/

http://laboratoriodonne.wordpress.com/2013/06/03/femminismo-molecolare/

http://laboratoriodonne.wordpress.com/2013/06/10/una-femminista-molecolare/
http://laboratoriodonne.wordpress.com/2014/02/10/maipiuchiamoci;

http://laboratoriodonne.wordpress.com/about;

http://loredanalipperini.blog.kataweb.it/lipperatura/2014/02/14/che-sono-nate-dopo-il-1978/

http://maipiuchiamoci.noblogs.org/


http://paestum2012.wordpress.com/2012/10/04/rassegna-stampa-ida-dominijanni-il-manifesto3-10-2012/
http://paestum2012.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/le-parole-che-vogliamo/#more-1966


http://www.pariopportunita.regione.puglia.it/chi-siamo

http://www.pariopportunita.regione.puglia.it/contro-la-violenza-sulle-donne-e-minori

http://www.la7.it/piazzapulita/pvideo-stream?id=i668409


http://www.regione.puglia.it/web/packages/progetti/pugliasociale/daphne/4_Report_TP.pdf


http://ritentasaraipiufortunato.blogspot.com;

http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/14_marzo_01/donne-difesa-la-legge-sull-aborto-un-fantasma-non-si-riesce-ad-applicarla-ff4d24d8-a14d-11e3-b365-272f64db5437.shtml

http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/11/25/foto/il_campidoglio_si_tinge_di_rosso_per_dire_no_al_femminicidio-71934001/1/#1
http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/03/01/news/mai_pi_cladestine_donne_in_piazza_in_difesa_della_legge_194_nel_lazio_80_di_medici_obiettori-79938624/

http://scioperodonne.wordpress.com/category/appello/

http://secasomai.wordpress.com/tag/solidarieta-a-lucia-annibali/.


http://www.spaziosociale.it/articolo.asp?id_art=1921

http://temi.repubblica.it/micromega-online/maipiuintestine-parte-la-campagna-indifesa-dellaborto/

http://www.tempi.it/blog/spiegare-la-fede-come-metodo-di-conoscenza-in-classe-e-parlare-di-chiara-corbella#.VHPgYYt1QUZ

http://www.tempi.it/chiara-corbella-la-grazia-di-vivere-la-grazia#.VHP7TI1QUZ

http://tg24.sky.it/tg24/cronaca/2011/01/19/sabina_began_caso_ruby_ape_regina_silvio_berlusconi_bunga_bunga_presunti_festini_ad_arcore.html

http://udimonteverde.org/iniziative/staffetta/8marzo09.pdf

http://udinazionale.altervista.org

http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/caso-ruby-bunga-bunga/ruby-ecco-le-intercettazioni-6/60166/59030

http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/ruby-inchieste/ruby-come-nacque-la-storia-di-mubarak/62401/61117

http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/ruby-inchieste/ruby-il-bunga-bunga-e-l-harem/62407/61123

http://vitadastreghe.blogspot.com; http://www.zeroviolenzadonne.it


http://www.corriere.it/politica/10_ottobre_28/bunga-bunga-berlusconi-ruby_b7c597ce-e267-11df-8440-00144f02aabc.shtml

http://www.corriereuniv.it/cms/2010/01/per-un-mondo-inrosa/

http://www.dagospia.com/intercettazioni_caso_ruby.pdf


http://www.enel.it/enelsole/en-GB/azienda/mission/

http://www.europaquotidiano.it/2013/06/28/la-crusca- perche-si-dice-femminicidio/

http://www.europaquotidiano.it/2013/06/28/la-crusca-perche-si-dice-femminicidio/

http://www.evelinademagistris.it/2012/09/16/primum-vivere-paestum-5-6-7-octobre-2012/

http://www.feriteamorte.it/

http://www.galileonet.it/articles/4fdaf0d272b7ab43700000003,

http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/10/15/13G00163/sg

http://www.giovaniprolife.org/

http://www.gitanistan.com

http://www.globalist.it/Detail_News_Display?ID=49432&typeb=0

http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2013/07/08/sciopero-contro-violenza-su-donne-25-novembre_n_3561807.html

http://www.ibs.it/ser/serfat.asp?site=libri&xy=femminicidio

http://www.ilciriaco.it/donna/news/?news=29613

http://www.ilcorpodelledonne.net/


http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/05/11/femminicidio-numeri-sono-tutti-sbagliati/590171/

http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/02/15/legge-194-mai-piu-clandestine/881974/

http://ilmanifesto.info/cronache-di-un-mancato-matrimonio/

http://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/femminicidio_campidoglio_giornata_contro_violenza_donne_cattoi/notizie/369829.shtml


http://www.ilroma.net/content/il-silenzio-uccide-la-dignità-la-croce-rossa-la-tutela-delle-donne

http://www.ilsalvagente.it/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=9431


http://www.iostonobellissima.it/
http://www.iosonobellissima.it/soggette-rassegna-darmi-dartiste/

http://www.ipres.it.


http://www.lastampa.it/2013/01/08/cultura/opinioni/editoriali/signora-giudice-ha-scritto-proprio-una-brutta-storia-oc9JJJYeK3QM9GACsI5BYI/pagina.html


http://www.lecceprima.it/eventi/pandora-visions-differente-lucy-ghionna-2043639.html

http://www.lecceprima.it/eventi/sciopero-non-basta-2047207.html;


http://www.lecceprima.it/politica/no-alla-violenza-sulle-donne-2050703.html

http://www.lesignorinedival.com/search?updated-max=2012-03-21T05%3A58%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=4#PageNo=5

http://www.levoltapagina.it/?page_id=2929


http://www.liberiadelledonne.it/_oldsite/news/articoli/sottosopra87.htm

http://www.liberiadelledonne.it/riparliamo-di-aborto/

http://www.melty.it/silvio-berlusconi-ma-lei-viene-ennesimo-siparietto-a-sfondo-sessuale-a109055.html


http://www.menogiallopiurosa.com

http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/karst?show=0&t=1389370436


http://www.piazzasalento.it/particolare-manifestazione-per-la-festa-della-donna-taurisano-24797

http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-2628376c-5469-4e6a-929fe80c6358ff6-tg3.html?p=0

http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-f3293d14-8b95-40c5-b333-957340103241.html

http://www.regione.puglia.it/index.php?page=pressregione&id=17100&opz=display


http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2011/01/21/news/ni_donne_calpestate_nonpossiamo_tacer-11473950/?ref=HRER3-1

http://www.scioperodelledonne.it/


http://sentinelleinpiedi.it.

http://www.studenti.it/superiori/scuola/concorso_solaris.php

http://www.tempi.it/gli-omicidi-contro-le-donne-sono-uno-scandalo-ma-i-numeri-del-femminicidio-sono-gonfiati#.U2YQ7dzAX_Q


http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/femminicidio_(Neologismi)/

http://www.unionedonneinitalia.org/stage/campagna/campagna.pdf

http://www.unita.it/firmedonne/

http://www.unita.it/italia/bersani-donne-non-sono-merce-applausi-1.270112

http://www.vice.com/it/read/orsa-daniza-reazioni-perche-563


http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C09bAQjEE_k;

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHGtdft19W8;
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxtruAvF4wI

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwO51e0urSE

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBFZRm9P5Lk;

http://zapatosrojosartepublico.wordpress.com/about-2/che_cos_e_zapatos_rojos/


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--CRZf-aZv7Q

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkehYHoj74Q;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1k2fqgKZIU;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMIz8NfJc_A&feature=youtu.be

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQt4SEJwI1c;

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=No7OYwolufY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5SU9SwCM7s;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwO51e0urSE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBFZRm9P5Lk

http://www3.istat.it/dati/catalogo/20091012_00/Inf_08_07_violenza_contro_donne_2006.pdf