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To cite this article: Francesca Brunetti (2024) Raging women and their green energies. The Southern Italian woman's ecological fury, Cogent Arts & Humanities, 11:1, 2433315, DOI: [10.1080/23311983.2024.2433315](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2433315)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2433315>



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Published online: 05 Dec 2024.



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Raging women and their green energies. The Southern Italian woman's ecological fury

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ABSTRACT

This article combines artistic and intellectual research on the southern Italian woman, known as the *terrona*. It analyzes many forms of media to explore the stereotype of the southern Italian woman, examining her portrayal in novels, movies, TV shows, and popular culture as loud, choleric, sexualized, and maternal. Furthermore, it shows a creative experiment in which the traditional patriarchal stereotype of the *terrona* is changed into a new representation showing the *terrona* as a confident and gratified woman. In the article, the traditional image of the *terrona* is linked to the natural resources of the Mediterranean region, envisioning how this connection empowers her, shifting her from a marginalized and oppressed figure to one with power. An art-research approach is adopted in this work to perform a feminist examination of the social condition of the *terrona*, while simultaneously suggesting an imaginative reconfiguration of her stereotype.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 April 2023
Revised 15 November 2024
Accepted 19 November 2024

KEYWORDS

Feminism; drawing; media; ecology; gender stereotypes; and Italian studies

SUBJECTS

Environment & Gender;
Art & Gender; Visual Arts;
Cultural Studies

Introduction

In this study, I employ theoretical analysis, creativity, and imaginative practices to challenge traditional beliefs about femininity and womanhood by exploring innovative methods to link women with their surroundings. To explore this topic, I analyze the southern Italian woman as a case study. Italy has the greatest gender employment gap among European countries (Perrone, 2020, p. 1). This gap encompasses disparities between the northern and southern regions. The north is affluent, industrialized, and forward-thinking, whereas the south is less prosperous and more rooted in its traditional and popular culture. In the north, the women's employment rate is 60.2%, while in the south, it is 33.2% (Perrone, 2020, p. 3).

The analysis was published in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, the prominent Italian financial newspaper. *Il Sole 24 Ore* is owned by Confindustria, the Italian employers' federation. This data pertains to the investigation conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality in 2020. The 2022 Gender Equality Index released by the European Institute for Gender Equality indicates that the gender employment gap in Italy did not improve in the years after data was published by *Il Sole 24 Ore* (EIGE, 2022). The Gender Equality Index 2022 highlights that Italy scores below the European average in various sectors, including job, money, knowledge, time, power, health, and violence (EIGE, 2022). This statistic emphasizes the significance of investigating the issue of gender inequality in Italy.

This work aims to explore the causes of gender inequality in southern Italy by examining the stereotype of southern Italian women and proposing solutions to empower and redefine the image of southern Italian women within the context of their traditional culture. By stating the *terrona's* stereotype, I may appear to be legitimizing it, which could seem counterproductive. This choice is based on the widespread recognition of this stereotype in Italy and internationally due to the popularity of movies and novels depicting the traditional *terrona*. In this research, I aim to show how the southern Italian cultural

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tradition's sexist characteristics might be altered while preserving its appealing and seductive aspects. I examine the stereotype of the southern Italian woman using a cultural studies methodology that integrates data and information from several disciplines to explore a specific inquiry about a particular cultural setting (Grossberg & Nelson, 1992, p. 2). I collect data to study stereotypes about southern Italian women from several fields like movies and literature. I choose renowned artifacts that are widely recognized in Italy and internationally for analysis. I value films and books that have won international prizes and texts that are required in Italian schools. I analyze artifacts that influenced the formation of the southern Italian woman's stereotype in the public's view.

Following the qualitative inquiry, I utilize an arts-based research approach to address how to redesign the stereotype of the southern Italian woman. I engage in a comprehensive conversation between artistic practice and theory. I analyze how the southern Italian culture impacts my background and informs my positionality, drawing from sources such as De Leeuw and Hawkins (2017), Kamlongera (2023), and Leavi (2020). I creatively reinterpret traditional aspects of southern Italian women to highlight their empowering qualities. Theoretical research influences my studio art and inspires the substance of my drawings. Simultaneously, my artworks contribute further aspects to my theoretical exploration of gender equality and sustainability.

Terrona

Terrone is a derogatory epithet employed by northern Italians to refer to and characterize southern Italians. The English terms 'hick', 'hayseed', or 'redneck' serve as approximate equivalents. However, this language fails to convey the distinctiveness of *terrone*, its particular association with the geographical regions of southern Italy and the Mediterranean Sea. Derived from the Latin word 'terra', *terrone* refers to the act of cultivating the soil by an impoverished and ignorant individual. The mention of the ground is linked to the color of the soil, which comes in different colors of brown, to highlight the contrast in skin tone between individuals from southern and northern Italy. '*Terrona*' is the feminine version of '*terrone*' and specifically denotes a woman from southern Italy. This work examines the typical portrayal of the *terrona* as noisy, uneducated, impetuous, and aggressive throughout several forms of media.

The stereotype of the *terrona* as an aggressive and passionate woman who struggles to control her emotions and wrath is based on the belief that these traits are common across the entire southern Italian population. Northern Italians have viewed Southern Italians as impoverished, underdeveloped, aggressive, and spontaneous. This idea originated in 1861, the year Italy was unified as a country (Daniele, 2019, p. 52). Prior to 1860, the Italian peninsula consisted of several distinct state units. In northern Italy, there existed the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Lombardy-Veneto State, and the duchies of Parma and Modena. The Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Papal State were located in the heart of Italy. Southern Italy and Sicily were included in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. These distinct state entities varied in history, economy, cultural traditions, governance, topology, and orography. Northern Italy experiences a continental climate characterized by harsh winters and hot summers in the plains and valleys. The southern section of Italy is influenced by the moderating effects of the Mediterranean Sea. The average annual temperature is 51 degrees Fahrenheit in the Apennine areas and 66 degrees in Sicily. Temperature variations among the north, center, and south of Italy are more pronounced in winter than in summer. Aside from temperature variations, Italy's north and south also differ in terms of rainfall, with the south receiving less precipitation. Southern regions experience elevated temperatures and are known for their significant aridity. The aridity of the soil is exacerbated by the limited flow of the rivers. Therefore, access to water for farming and industrial operations is more plentiful in the north than in the south (ISTAT., 1950).

The north and south differ in morphology and orography. The Alps and the Apennines form a semi-arch in the north, encircling the Po Valley, which comprises 70% of Italy's plains. The Apennine mountain chain crosses the rest of the country, dividing Italy into two sections. In central and southern Italy, known as *Meridione* or *Mezzogiorno*, the scenery is predominantly composed of mountains and hills, with flat areas making up a smaller portion of the territory. Geographically, northern Italian regions have an edge in terms of resources for agricultural and industrial development (Daniele, 2019, pp. 52–75; ISTAT., 1950).

This essay examines the relationship between the geography of southern Italy and its culture and traditions and investigates how these traditions have shaped perceptions about the *terrona*. In this analysis, I study the stereotype of the *terrona* and use this theoretical research as the foundation for my artistic activity. I explore this theoretical concept in my artwork through a series of drawings created in a straightforward and minimalist style. In my works, I isolate and exaggerate the archetypal aspects of the *terrona* to change its traditional meanings. My drawings simultaneously allude to tradition and provide a twisted portrayal of it. They aim to stimulate the viewer's imagination to consider unique methods of reimagining the *terrona*. The theme of this work is the 'post-*terrona*', a woman with desires and aspirations that diverge from those traditionally allocated to her by culture.

Notable films from the twentieth century like *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (De Sica, 1963), *Marriage Italian Style* (De Sica, 1964), *Seduced and Abandoned* (Germi, 1964), *The Miracle* (Rossellini, 1948), *The Girl with the Pistols* (Monicelli, 1968), along with plays such as *Christmas at the Cupiello House* (De Filippo, 1931), *Side Street Story* (De Filippo, 1945), *Filumena Marturano* (De Filippo, 1946), established the *terrona* stereotype, elevating her to fame and endearing her to audiences. These portrayals only strengthen the perception that the *terrona* is a disorganized individual without intellectual or political influence. From this viewpoint, she appears exaggerated and artificial, lacking the ability to impact the world in meaningful and beneficial ways. Based on these depictions, the *terrona* is responsible for making decisions and has power alone within her household.

This work aims to enhance the feminist dialogue by presenting a creative and feasible approach for the *terrona* to lead an empowered, liberated, and gratified life that diverges from the societal norms imposed on her by traditional culture. I connect with the visual creations of artists like Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Judy Chicago, which explore the representation of women in media (Robinson, 2015). I am motivated by novelists that portray and empower women in their works, emphasizing storylines that delve into women's strength and their connection with the natural environment (Butler, 2000; Estévez-Saá & Lorenzo-Modia, 2020; Greer, 2013; Guess & Magee, 2015; Lai, 2008; Montero, 2021, 2016; Slonczewski, 2000, 1993).

This article discusses a creative experiment that is not intended to represent a universal feminist model. The *terrona*, as I redefine her, is positioned and defined based on how feminist speech has been conceived as an embodied and materially grounded activity (Braidotti, 2013, p. 23). Based on this, I interpret the post-*terrona* as a distinct fragment within a larger constellation consisting of several cultures and geographic regions, each with its unique approach to feminism and envisioning alternate female identities.

Environmental rage

This work explores how the *terrona*'s traditional characteristics of vitality, strength, and resilience might be redefined to give her a powerful and influential role in politics and society. I link the *terrona*'s aggressive and spontaneous nature to the Mediterranean environment and its resource management. The *terrona*'s dynamic nature is essential for practicing sustainable agriculture by cultivating crops and breeding animals. I envision the *terrona* harnessing her volcanic temperament as a renewable energy source for sustainable food production, which elevates her status and influence in society. One of the illustrations depicting the transformation of the southern Italian woman is *Cucchiara* (Figure 1). The *cucchiara* is a wooden utensil typically employed for food preparation. Beyond its basic utility, the *cucchiara* has been used by past generations of angry Italian mothers to threaten and beat their disobedient children. The artwork *Cucchiara* is based on the character Adelina played by Sophia Loren in the Italian film *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (De Sica, 1963). Vittorio De Sica directed the movie, which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1964.

The film *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* takes place in Naples in the 1950s, specifically in the Forcella district. Adelina Sbaratti, portrayed by Loren, is a cigarette smuggler who is apprehended by the authorities and opts to evade imprisonment by becoming pregnant multiple times. She is able to do this due to the provisions of statute 146 of the Italian Penal Code, which allows pregnant women to avoid imprisonment until the baby is born and for up to six months beyond the conclusion of the breastfeeding period (Mancini, 2017). In the film, Adelina evades imprisonment until her husband Carmine experiences



Figure 1. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Cucchiara*. India Ink, 8x 11".

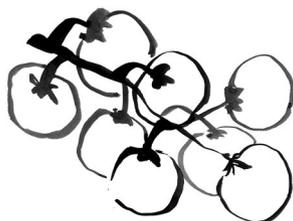


Figure 2. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Tomatoes*. India Ink, 8x 11.

a physical and mental breakdown that renders him unable to impregnate her. Carmine is fatigued due to the seven children he shares with Adelina, who prevent him from sleeping at night and weary him during the day.

Carmine's and Adelina's family lives together in a cramped one-bedroom house with limited access to food. Adelina is the sole breadwinner through her unlawful activities. After a few years, Carmine is consumed and exhausted by this challenging circumstance. Adelina continues to uphold and strengthen her lively and vigorous personality, even in the face of her family's difficult circumstances. The picture *Cucchiara* is based on a scene from the movie *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* where Adelina pursues one of her children who refuses to take cough medicine. The child hides under the bed to avoid his mother, while Adelina, feeling frustrated, bites her palm to release her fury. *Cucchiara's* artwork depicts the *terrona's* traditional trait of being choleric and irascible, showing how she directs her fury towards her children in the restricted area of her home. Conversely, the drawing's abstractness and lack of details, along with the act of holding a *cucchiara*, enable a unique interpretation. The *cucchiara* encourages immersion in the scents, shapes, and colors of herbs, fruits, and vegetables that flourish in the Mediterranean region. The picture highlights the process of blending and handling a range of Mediterranean items, including vegetables, herbs, fish, and wild animal meat, typically used by the *terrona* in her recipes.

In the sketch *Cucchiara*, I contrast the home setting with the expansive and life-sustaining characteristics of the Mediterranean environment. I juxtapose the drawing *Cucchiara* with additional drawings depicting Mediterranean components like *Tomatoes* (Figure 2), *Boar* (Figure 3), *Rosemary* (Figure 4), *Pheasant* (Figure 5), *Onion* (Figure 7), and *Bell Peppers* (Figure 8). In *Cucchiara*, the frightening *terrona's* actions does not just resemble beating her children with a *cucchiara*. It implies that the *terrona* can utilize her mental and physical energies to interact with the animals and plants in her area, as well as obtain sustenance through sustainable food production practices.

To examine the connection between the *terrona* and her territory, I analyze the literary works of two renowned Italian novelists: Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896-1957) and Carlo Levi (1902-1975). Di Lampedusa

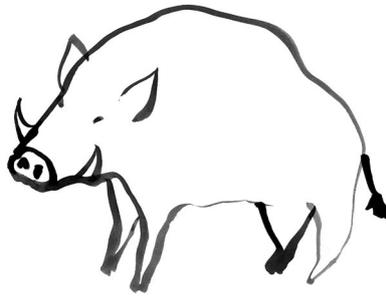


Figure 3. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Boar*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 4. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Rosemary*. India Ink, 8x 11.

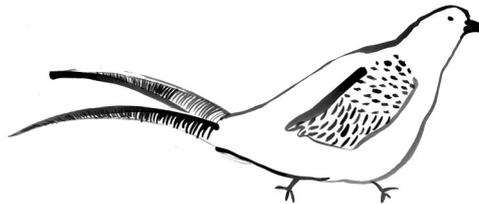


Figure 5. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Phaesant*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 6. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Onion*. India Ink, 8x 11.

and Levi explore the cultural divide between the less developed south and the more industrialized north in their novels *The Leopard* (1958) and *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945). The term 'terrone' refers to a person from southern Italy who lives in challenging conditions and has limited access to natural resources. Due to the overall circumstances concerning the southern Italian population, the southern Italian woman,

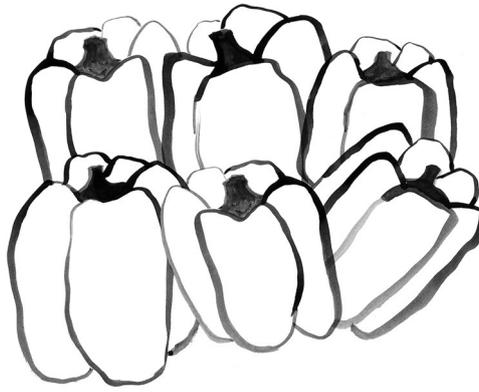


Figure 7. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Bell Pepper*. India Ink, 8x 11.

known as the *terrona*, exhibits a hostile and combative personality. She is accustomed to facing challenges and is adept at utilizing her physical strength to endure the harsh living conditions.

This work explores the *terrona's* conventional characteristics of strength and aggression by emphasizing her fierceness as a power she uses to rule, nurture, and breed the animals and plants on her land. The animals and flora in the southern Italian region have adapted to the arid climate over time, contributing to a diverse cuisine culture that is cherished and maintained by the locals. In my imaginary experiment, by fully harnessing her strength and anger, the *terrona* can achieve exceptional output and contribute to the sustenance and well-being of herself and the southern Italian population.

Southern Italian geography

Tomasi di Lampedusa depicts the rugged region of *terrona* in southern Italy in *The Leopard* as a place where the intense sun makes Sicily appear like a hazy landscape lacking substance. The Sicilian Sea appears as a vivid expanse of flat blue, while the mountains around the city of Palermo resemble a dense mass seemingly dissipating under the influence of heat. Palermo's houses are situated around the city's churches and convents, resembling a flock peacefully surrounding its shepherd. The author describes the sun as the true ruler of Sicily, attributing to it qualities of force and aggression. The sun's hypnotic influence may overpower a person's volition and suspend everything in unchanging tranquility. The sun's influence on the Sicilian inhabitants is described as a powerful force that captivates their dreams and halts their thoughts and deeds (Tomasi di Lampedusa, 2008, p. 58).

The main character of Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* is the prince of Salina, a Sicilian aristocrat residing during the period of the Italian unification in 1861. The unification of Italy led to the decline of the ancient aristocratic governing class, such as the prince of Salina, and the rise of the bourgeoisie. Tomasi di Lampedusa describes the Sicilian scenery in the novel by recounting the prince's family trip from their palace in Palermo to their vacation residence in the Sicilian countryside. The area is characterized by the sky's pastel blue hue and affected by the intense heat. The streets were riddled with potholes and dust, while the dried rivers were enclosed by cliffs and overgrown with sorghum and broom plants. The prince's carriage windows offered a view of sun, commotion, and the funeral hues of the landscape, a blend of yellow stubbles and black scorched steams, with no trees or streams in sight. The crickets were singing in the Sicilian sky, anticipating the arrival of rain (Tomasi di Lampedusa, 2008, p. 71).

Tomasi di Lampedusa depicts the Sicilian landscape as unique, where the charm of the soft and delicate beaches exists beside rugged cliffs and ravines filled with dust and thorns (Bani, 2015). He depicts the conclusion of summer in Sicily, where the population eagerly anticipates the arrival of rain, gazing with delight and optimism at the clouds heralding the initial storm of the season. The clouds are dark in hue and are being watched by many human and animal eyes, as well as many seeds in the soil eagerly awaiting nourishment. Rain has the ability to lessen the intense heat of summer and reduce the impact of the sun (Tomasi di Lampedusa, 2008, p. 90).

The prince of Salina links the aridity of Sicilian land to its underdeveloped economy during a compelling conversation with a northern Italian politician. He characterizes the Sicilian population as resistant to modernization and advancement, deeply rooted in traditional values. The prince of Salina believes that a Sicilian individual needs to exert the energy equivalent to three people in northern Italy to be fully productive during the six summer months. Sicily's main hindrance to productivity is its water scarcity. The dryness caused by the sun's intensity is followed by intense fall storms, leading to flooding of streams and drowning of animals in areas where they were previously dying of thirst (Tomasi di Lampedusa, 2008, p. 180).

The jaded and skeptical prince of Salina describes to the idealistic and industrious northern politician how the severe Sicilian environment and the difficult living conditions of the Sicilian people lead them to seek, above all else, oblivion. Only sleep and dreams provide solace to the Sicilian folk. The Prince of Salina believes that Sicilians dislike those who attempt to revive them, even if the objective is to introduce modernism, progress, and prosperity, as a northern politician was suggesting to the Prince of Salina. The prince of Salina believed that the aggressiveness, sensuality, and voluptuousness commonly seen in Sicilian people were manifestations of their desire for sleep, annihilation, and death. Sicilians avoid progress and anything that leads to innovation and significant changes. They celebrate the past since it is no longer alive and cannot bring about change. Di Lampedusa's depiction of the southern Italian mentality remains pertinent today as the southern area is still viewed by northern Italians and northern Europeans as socially and economically lagging behind (Aprile, 2021, p. 8).

This creative work explores Tomasi di Lampedusa's linkages between location, economy, and the conduct of the southern Italian population to transform his negative perception of the southern Italian person into a positive attribute of a *terrone*. I analyze the marginalizing themes in Tomasi di Lampedusa's work to counter their negative messages and demonstrate how my reimagined southern Italian woman might find answers to the restricted resources in her region. In the drawing *Vajassa* (Figure 8), I depict the *terrone* as modestly clad in summer attire, yet passionately expressing her opinions with a booming voice. I position *Vajassa* beside *Thistle* (Figure 9) to highlight the *terrone's* ability to locate nourishment and support within her restricted environment. The thistle is a modest flower that grows naturally in Sicily and other regions of Italy without the need for cultivation. Resembling a sharp and angular insect, this food item may lack refinement but is rich in nutritional content including iron, vitamins, and minerals. In Sicily, one traditional method of preparing thistle is by frying it with a batter. I aim to link *Vajassa's* angry demeanor with her practical and manual intelligence by positioning her next to *Thistle* to address



Figure 8. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Vajassa*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 9. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Twistle*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 10. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Spell*. India Ink, 8x 11.

how she excels in acquiring nutrition and sustenance through knowledge and cooking with spontaneous herbs and flowers. My goal is to change the traditional aggressiveness of the *terrona* into a useful ability that helps her thrive in her challenging environment and get recognition as a political leader in land management.

Southern Italian folklore

In this article, I analyze Levi's depiction of the Meridione in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, focusing on his portrayal of the Basilicata region in southern Italy during the 1930s (King, 1988; King & Killingbeck, 1989). Levi characterizes Basilicata as a harsh area where impoverished farmers lack knowledge of progress and

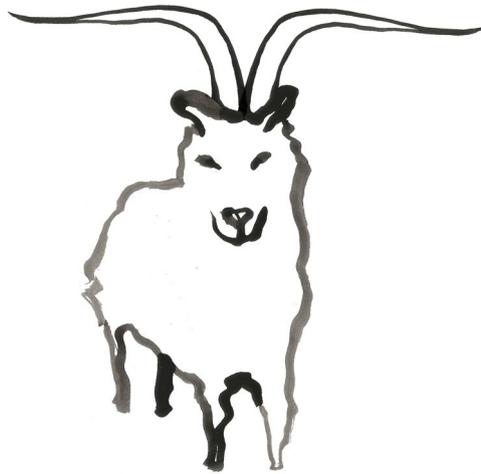


Figure 11. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Goat*. India Ink, 8x 11.

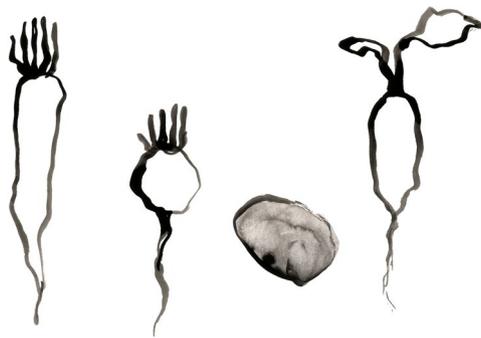


Figure 12. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Root Vegetables*. India Ink, 8x 11.

civilization. The people of Basilicata, known as the Lucans, referred to themselves as non-Christians. They equate the term ‘Christian’ with ‘human being’. The title of the novel, *Christ Stopped in Eboli*, reflects the Lucans’ self-perception. Eboli is a town near Salerno, located in the Campania area north of Basilicata. The term ‘Christ’ as it is used in the novel’s title is synonymous with ‘civilization’, and Levi adopts it to address the fact that Basilicata, different from the northern Italian regions, is a place where there is no progress and modernization. The Lucans view themselves as culturally and economically apart from northern Italians, whom they see as disinterested and unconcerned about the fate of the Lucan population (Levi, 2014, p.3-5).

Levi characterizes Basilicata as a remote place where women have black veils and engage in earthly and bloody behaviours that require a worldview open to magic and mystery to comprehend (19). Levi illustrates Grassano as a vast expanse of light-colored dirt devoid of trees and shadows. Grassano’s sunsets display hues of pink, green, and violet, which Levi characterizes as the traditional captivating colors of the malarial regions. Basilicata was considered a malarial area until the 1950s (Levi, 2014, p. 19-56). Grassano’s population led a modest and simple lifestyle, cooking meals on the fireplace in the morning and eating leftovers from lunch for dinner. Even in affluent households, individuals typically consumed bread, cheese, olives, and dried figs. Meanwhile, farmers’ households only had bread. Occasionally, the farmers were fortunate enough to enhance their bread with ingredients like as tomatoes, garlic, olive oil, or chili peppers (Levi, 2014, p. 43).

Grassano had restricted water accessibility, with only two drinking fountains available for the entire community. The drinking fountains were always full of ladies, some standing and others sitting on the ground, at any time of day. They had varying looks and ages, and they would patiently queue up to fill their containers with water from the fountain. The long procedure was due to the water’s sparse and



Figure 13. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Broom*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 14. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Garlic*. India Ink, 8x 11.

intermittent trickle. As the women waited in the sun, their white veils fluttered in the wind, resembling a grazing herd emitting a muddled and unclear noise (Levi, 2014, p. 55).

In the summer, the sun shined intensely and mercilessly. It appeared motionless in the sky and caused the clay soil to crack due to its heat. Snakes and vipers concealed themselves in the crevices of the parched soil as a persistent heat and a humid breeze desiccated the plants, the animals, and the people's bodies. The days dragged on slowly and monotonously as the population eagerly awaited the evening to provide the desired refreshing chill. The only indication of life in the quiet of the heatwave was the buzzing of the flies. Levi frequently encountered hungry fleas and famished ticks while strolling in the countryside, which would hide in the grass and leap onto his calves. In the afternoon, the town appeared deserted because the men were working in the wheat fields and the women were staying inside their houses. Levi was pursued by unseen spirits and animalistic beings in the intense desert heat. There was no way to avoid the intense heat of the summer. The limited number of olive trees Levi encountered throughout his walks could not offer him rejuvenation since the sun shone through their leaves as though they were a delicate tulle fabric. The only vegetation there was broom, which grew abundantly in bushes that served as the goats' food source (Levi, 2014, p. 67-152).

In Grassano, residents view the central government located in northern Italy as a remote organization that shows little concern for their future. The state is viewed as a calamity, a natural event that causes only unhappiness and distress; it is seen as an unavoidable burden that has always existed and will continue to do so, akin to hail, landslides, drought, and malaria. The Lucans saw the state as more distant and more malevolent than the sky or nature, as it consistently works against them and conflicts

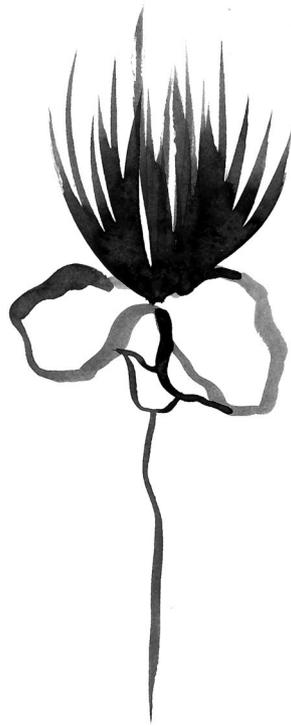


Figure 15. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Caper*. India Ink, 8x 11.

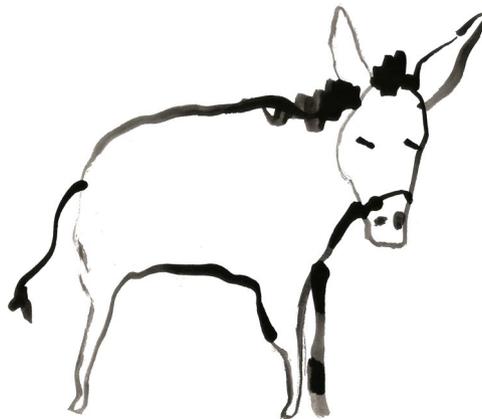


Figure 16. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Donkey*. India Ink, 8x 11.

with their needs and desires. Levi, like Tomasi di Lampedusa, illustrates how the Lucans lack political awareness and respond to the apathy of the northern central state with resignation (Levi, 2014, p. 68).

The Lucans consider themselves culturally apart from the northern Italian areas. Christianity in Basilicata incorporated pagan and legendary themes. Levi's regions are characterized by ancient beliefs that do not recognize borders between human, animal, and spirit realms. Levi believes that Lucan people lack individual consciousness and perceive all experiences as part of a unified whole governed by an incomprehensible force. They inhabit a world where humans are not threatened by wild animals, the sun, or malaria. In this universe, there is no happiness or hope, only the unyielding indifference of nature (Levi, 2014, p. 98).

Levi's account on the interconnectedness of the southern Italian individual, the southern Italian land, and its customs is being utilized in this theoretical analysis to enhance the comprehension of the *terrona*. The *terrona*, like the Lucan people described by Levi, perceives reality as an interconnection of her subjectivity, environment, and culture. She practices sustainable food production by utilizing her liveliness and volcanic personality as renewable energy in her agronomic activities due to her understanding of reality. Unlike the Lucan farmers described by Levi, my post-*terrona* does not simply endure her

impoverished situation. Instead, she actively seeks remedies to combat the aridity of her land and the destitution of its inhabitants. In my picture *Spell* (Figure 10), I depict the *terrone* as modestly attired in a plain apron, overseeing the activities of the elements portrayed in the drawings *Goat* (Figure 11), *Root Vegetables* (Figure 12), *Broom* (Figure 13), *Garlic* (Figure 14), *Thistle* (Figure 15), and *Donkey* (Figure 16). In this piece, I depict the *terrone* as a pagan witch who uses her powers to control and manage the resources of her land in order to provide food and support for herself and the southern Italian populace.

The artwork *Spell* is based on Levi's depiction of the Lucan pagan rituals conducted in honor of the Madonna of Viaggiano. The Madonna of Viaggiano is shown as a black Madonna in the traditional Lucan imagery, adorned with bracelets and necklaces on her arms and neck. The statue of the Black Madonna is paraded through the town's main thoroughfare during the procession. Two rows of firecrackers are placed along the sides of the street and detonate as the statue passes by. The farmers residing in the houses along the street where the procession takes place greet the statue's passing by stepping out onto their balconies and firing their weapons into the air.

Amidst the parade chaos, Levi observed a lack of serene serenity and religious delight in people's eyes, instead, he perceived only pagan frenzy and extravagance. During the celebration, the animals reacted fearfully to the gunshots: the goats leaped, the donkeys made loud sounds, the dogs vocalized, the youngsters yelled, and the women sang. Attendees used to fling grain seeds in the air as the statue walked by, seeking good harvests from the Black Madonna. Levi highlights that the Black Madonna depicted amidst the cries and songs was not a sorrowful mother of God, but rather a chthonic deity, a darker form of Persephone, an underworld goddess associated with the harvest. The Lucans believe that the Black Madonna possesses the power to cause both harm and benefit, including destruction, sickness, money, and success. She is alone and distant from everyone and everything, behaving based on an inscrutable determination. The Black Madonna transcends the concepts of good and evil. Every home in Grassano displays a small image of the Black Madonna on the wall. She observes people's life events from her position with her large eyes that lack a focused glance or expression (Levi, 2014, p. 103-106).

In my reinterpretation of the *terrone*, I analyze Levi's description of the Lucan traditions and envision the post-*terrone* as a female follower of the Black Madonna cult. In my drawing *Parade* (Figure 17), I depict the *terrone* participating in the procession honoring the Black Madonna. The *terrone* is depicted as being vocal and musical, like the individuals which Levi describes. Her eyes are wide open, and her countenance conveys her frenzied mood. I aim to enhance the traditional *terrone's* loud and emotive nature by associating it with her ability to engage in rituals and festivities related to nature, harvest, nourishment, and rural life.

Levi also details the rites conducted by southern Italian women to grieve deceased individuals. Levi observed the passing of a man afflicted with malaria who succumbed in his residence in the presence of his family members. Upon the man's death, the women closed his eyelids and began to sing and mourn. They transformed their subdued sorrow into intense rage by ripping their veils and disheveling their clothes. They scratched their faces with their claws, danced around the room with forceful steps, bumped their heads against the walls, and emitted a piercing scream. This solitary note could convey their profound grief over loss. They would occasionally stride to the window and shout their ominous



Figure 17. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Parade*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 18. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Grieving*. India Ink, 8x 11.

message to the world, signaling the man's demise to the surrounding area. Subsequently, they would return to the center of the room to resume their dances and vocalizations. The rite lasted for forty-eight hours before the man's corpse was interred. The ceremony was emotionally distressing, evoking physical discomfort and a sensation of tightness in the throat (Levi, 2014, p. 199).

Levi describes how the *terrona* is able to connect with her emotions and communicate her anguish when facing death. The *terrona* motivates and encourages her community to connect with their emotions and articulate their grief. In this reconfiguration, I preserve and enhance this *terrona's* competence. The post-*terrona's* emotional personality enables her to conduct death-related rituals, offer comfort to her community, and is crucial for the welfare of the southern Italian population, granting her social influence and political influence. By reflecting on Levi's depiction of mourning by southern Italian women, I created my drawing *Grieving* (Figure 18) portraying a *terrona* yelling and wailing, utilizing her voice, body, and gestures to convey her anguish.

In this reconfiguration of the *terrona*, I also analyze Levi's portrayal of his housekeeper Maria to explore the *terrona's* blend of aggressiveness, passion, excitement, and witchcraft. Levi characterizes Maria as a middle-aged woman with a parched, creased face, and a lengthy and pointed nose. She had a prominent and projecting chin, and she would swiftly execute her tasks with deft and rapid movements. She appeared as if she were always consumed by an internal flame and an unquenchable need. She moved with a nervous and sinister sensuality, and her eyes would shoot looks filled with tension and intense passion (Levi, 2014, p. 126). Based on Levi's portrayal of Maria, I depict the *terrona* in my illustration *Maria* (Figure 19) as gazing intensely at her conversation partner with her striking eyes, her upper body leaning to the left, and her eyebrows furrowed. She appears anxious as she focuses intently on casting her ecological spell.

Racist theories regarding Southern Italians

The concept of the *terrona* as a woman with extraordinary mental abilities contradicts the views presented by anthropologists Cesare Lombroso and Alfredo Nicèforo in their late nineteenth-century writings *The Criminal Man* (Lombroso, 1876) and *The Contemporary Barbaric Italy* (Nicèforo, 1898). Lombroso and Nicèforo claim that the Italian peninsula is home to two distinct races, with those in the south



Figure 19. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Maria*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 20. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Lila*. India Ink, 8x 11.

being genetically, intellectually, and morally inferior to those in the north. These theories gained popularity throughout the Italian unification period and helped shape the perception of southern Italians as violent, illiterate, and unreliable (Cimino & Foschi, 2014). Lombroso's book 'The Criminal Man' details his research on the cranial characteristics of southern Italian bandits. His research led him to the conclusion that the southern Italian population is more prone to murder and crime due to their proximity to African and Middle Eastern territories. Lombroso observed that the skulls of southern Italian criminals differ from those of northern Italians and are more akin to skulls of southern Mediterranean populations (Musumeci, 2018). Nicèforo in 'The Contemporary Barbaric Italy' argues that Italy consists of two distinct lineages. Nicèforo believes that northern Italians are of a superior lineage, exhibit a strong sense of social structure, and are naturally inclined towards social progress and the development of a modern society. The southern Italians belonging to the Mediterranean race, instead, because of their genetic inferiority, they possess an individualist personality; they are nervous and excitable, and they have weak will power that makes them inclined to murder and to commit crime (D'Agostino, 2002).

Lombroso and Nicèforo, positivist anthropologists, supported the notion that the economic disparity between northern and southern Italy could be attributed to genetic and racial theories. Their theories suggested that individuals with physical traits typical of southern Italians, such as short stature, dark eyes, curly hair, and tan skin, might be viewed as intellectually and morally inferior to those with physical traits common in northern Italians and northern Europeans, such as tall stature, blue eyes, and blond hair (Daniele, 2019, p. 78). Some contemporary scholars, like Richard Lynn, continue to endorse Lombroso's



Figure 21. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Octopus*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 22. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Nettle*. India Ink, 8x 11.



Figure 23. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Hen*. India Ink, 8x 11.

and Nicèforo's notions regarding the perceived inferiority of the southern Italian population. Lynn's article *North-South Differences in IQ Predict Differences in Income, Education, Infant Mortality, Stature, and Literacy* (Lynn, 2010), published in the journal *Intelligence*, posits that the socioeconomic variances between the northern and southern regions of Italy stem from disparities in the Intelligence Quotient levels of their respective populations. Lynn stated that the IQ of people from Mezzogiorno is 10 points lower than that

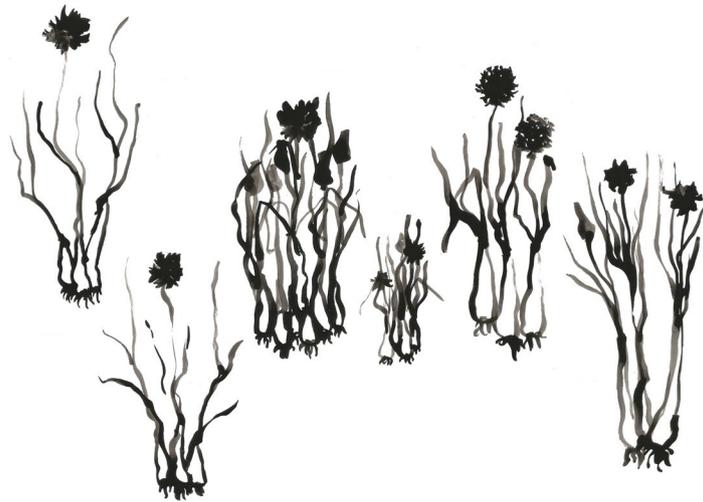


Figure 24. Brunetti, F. (2021). *Chives*. India Ink, 8x 11.

of persons from Northern Italy (Lynn, 2010, p.97). Lynn and Vanhanen discuss the same concept in the article *National IQs: A review of their educational, cognitive, economic, political, demographic, sociological, epidemiological, geographic, and climatic correlates* (Lynn & Vanhanen, 2012). Donald Templer's article on Intelligence, titled *Biological Correlates of Northern–Southern Italy Differences in IQ* (2012), suggests that Italians with biological traits more common in Central Europe than the Mediterranean region tend to have higher IQ levels (Templer, 2012, p. 515). The same concept is discussed in *Temperature, skin color, per capita income, and IQ: An international perspective* (Templer & Arikawa, 2006).

This artistic endeavor on the *terrona* serves as a rebuttal to the previously mentioned notions regarding the genetic inferiority of the southern Italian population. In this project, I depict the *terrona* as possessing tremendous mental energy and Mediterranean physical features, including thick black hair, dark eyes, and a curvaceous, powerful figure. In contrast to the stereotypical portrayal of the *terrona*, the post-*terrona*'s dynamic nature is not merely a result of frustration, as seen in the film *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* when Adelina chases her son who refuses to take his throat medicine. The *terrona*'s irascible personality is a potent source of creative and productive energy that can generate knowledge, ingenuity, and transformation regarding the *terrona*'s material existence.

Lila's character in Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels* (Ferrante, 2015) inspired the portrayal of *terrona* aggressiveness as a potent transforming ability rather than an illogical and emotional outburst. Ferrante depicts the enduring relationship between Lila and Lenù, two Neapolitan women who first encounter each other in primary school in these novels (Caffè, 2021). The story is set in a poor neighborhood of Naples right after the Second World War and it is narrated by the first-person voice of Lenù, who describes her friendship with Lila, her 'brilliant friend' as the title of the first novel of the saga references (Ferrante, 2012). Lila transitions from being a child to a woman with a remarkably strong personality and remarkable intelligence. In *My Brilliant Friend*, Lila is depicted as a malicious and mischievous infant girl displaying physical and temperamental characteristics commonly associated with the inferior Mediterranean race as described by Lombroso and Nicèforo, including olive skin, dark dense hair, dark eyes, and a hostile and volatile demeanor.

Lenù characterizes Lila as a bold child who displayed impertinence towards her elementary teachers by fearlessly engaging in mischievous behavior despite the potential consequences. She was not afraid of the nasty stones thrown by her male classmates due to their jealousy of her superior intelligence. She responds to the suffering and violence in her environment by cultivating a resilient personality that encompasses both generous and empathetic qualities as well as vindictive and cruel tendencies. Despite her family's prohibition on continuing her education beyond elementary school, she continues to utilize her intelligence in various ways. At the age of fifteen, she created original shoe designs while employed at her father's cobbler shop, which were purchased and worn by numerous Neapolitans from the middle and upper-middle class.

Throughout her life, Lila is continuously exposed to aggressive males who feel threatened by her intellect. Just as she experienced abuse and mistreatment from her father as a child, she too faced abuse and mistreatment from her spouse as an adult. Despite enduring ongoing mistreatment, Lila fearlessly confronts these men and consistently speaks out, inciting their aggressive responses. Lenù urges Lila to cease inciting her husband to prevent being physically assaulted. Lila responds that she is indifferent to his physical violence and that she really feels more empowered after his assaults (Ferrante, 2020, p.199). Lila embodies courage, brightness, and creativity. She demonstrates proficiency in crafting engaging narratives and creating aesthetically pleasing illustrations while attending primary school. Similarly, she will possess the ability to perform physical work and engage in scientific reasoning as she matures. In the third book of the epic *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* (Ferrante, 2014), Lila leaves her husband and begins working in a meat factory while learning computer programming in the evenings. She improved her financial situation by acquiring programming skills, leading to her employment at IBM and gaining a substantial salary.

Lila's character is intricate and multifaceted. She aggresses and upsets her friends and family due to her inability to manage her wrath. Simultaneously, she captivates both men and women with her imaginative and intelligent creations, including drawings, computer programs, novels, and shoes. Lila combines scientific knowledge, possessive jealousy, vindictive wickedness, and creative inventiveness in her imagination. They all represent her unstoppable energy, need for expression, and need for change. She demonstrates these via her fury, wit, and zest for life. In my works of *Lila* (20), *Octopus* (21), *Nettle* (22), *Hen* (23), and *Chives* (24), I depict *terrona* as a powerful woman who is in tune with her emotions and symbolizes change and metamorphosis. The *terrona* can support herself by exchanging physical and mental energies with the animals and herbs in the ecosystem of the southern Italian mountains, rivers, beaches, and valleys.

Conclusion

The *terrona* is a charismatic figure ingrained in the Italian collective consciousness, shaping the self-perception and external perception of southern Italian women. I chose not to eliminate the stereotype of *terrona* to introduce a completely new concept since it would not have acknowledged the cultural realities of Italian society. However, the stereotype of the *terrona* is characterized by charming and endearing qualities such as being lively, frank, and energetic, which can be preserved and used to achieve feminist goals. In this art-based investigation, I utilize appealing stereotyped qualities to confront patriarchal culture and its meanings from the inside.

This work explores how the *terrona*'s traditional characteristics of vitality, strength, and resilience might be redefined to give her a powerful and influential role in politics and society. I link the *terrona*'s aggressive and spontaneous character to the Mediterranean terrain and the utilization of its resources. The *terrona*'s dynamic nature is essential for practicing sustainable agriculture by cultivating crops and breeding animals. The *terrona* harnesses her volcanic temperament as a renewable energy source for sustainable food production, maintaining a respectful relationship with soil, plants, and animals. This involves a continuous exchange of energies, information, and sustenance between the person and her environment. The *terrona*, with great vitality and mental strength, is the ideal choice to manage the resources of her land and engage in a comprehensive discussion with it. In 2021, filmmaker Paolo Sorrentino competed for the Golden Lion at the 78th Venice International Film Festival and won the Grand Jury Prize for his film *The Hands of God* (Sorrentino, 2021). Sorrentino's autobiographical film depicts his upbringing and adolescence in Naples, focusing on his relationships with his extended family members. One character in the movie is Patrizia (Luisa Ranieri), who is the protagonist's aunt. Patrizia in the movie is shown as a sexualized character who triggers the protagonist's sensual desires. She embodies the stereotype of a *terrona* as illogical, impulsive, uninfluential, and alienated. Seventy years before 'The Hand of God', renowned actresses like Sophia Loren, Anna Magnani, Monica Vitti, and Stefania Sandrelli helped shape and popularize the *terrona* stereotype by portraying it in hit films. In 2021, pre-conceptions about southern Italian women, as portrayed by contemporary internationally famous directors like Sorrentino, still exhibit features of *terrona*'s stereotype. This project intends to challenge the negative perception of *terrona* by connecting women's empowerment with environmental awareness.

(Archer-Lean, 2016; Calvo-Pascual, 2018; Stevens, 2018). The goal is to change the negative perception of terrona into an eco-feminist idea.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

About the author



Dr. Francesca Brunetti, Lecturer, University for The Creative Arts, I am an artist and scholar, and am currently employed as a Lecturer at the Institute of Creativity and Innovation (University for the Creative Arts, UK and Xiamen University, China). I have exhibited my work in several group and solo shows in the USA, UK, Italy, China, and Japan; held teaching appointments at American, European, and Asian universities; presented my artistic projects at international academic conferences; and published articles about my work in peer-reviewed journals. My research explores the intersection of ecofeminism, posthumanism, and the visual arts, focusing on the relationship between female subjectivity and material existence. Through an interdisciplinary approach, I employ arts-based research methods to create visual narratives that challenge traditional perspectives and highlight the connection between the exploitation of nature and the marginalization of various groups. This work integrates theoretical frameworks with artistic practice, offering insights into visual culture, gender representation, and ecological ethics.

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