

## **WASTING THE SOUTH: EXPLORING NARRATIVES OF ITALIAN AND MEDITERRANEAN DISPENSABILITY**

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This paper shares what is for me the beginning of a research project that draws from eco-criticism and waste studies, 'from' and 'through' Italy, and further adrift, so to speak. This research is also converging into a project with Graziella Parati, Matteo Gilebbi and Damiano Benvegnù, whom I wish to thank for embarking on this new adventure. And, of course, it develops within a field opened up and studied by many scholars before me, such as Serenella Iovino (2016). Very recently, Marco Armiero published his work, *Wasteocene* (2021), that intersects and overlaps with much of what I have been exploring; this text has really been a guide and inspiration for my brief contribution to this debate. Marco Armiero's work is an inspiration (also) because his starting point is Naples (and the Campania region), where we both originate. This situatedness, or this sense of locality, seems to me particularly important, generally speaking, as scholars positioning ourselves when we do research, but even more so in relation to the issues of waste and discard. My aim, in this beginning of a wider investigation, is to think about waste, discard, or, in Armiero's terms, the wasteocene, setting it 'adrift', so to speak, looking onto the Mediterranean, and thinking 'with' the sea and its theoretical and material language, as Iain Chambers (2017) invites us to do. This means to overcome disciplinary and national borders in the fluidity of changing epistemological bearings, and opening up archives and narratives that have solidified into univocal roots and closed confines.

I acknowledge that I am using different terms that would require ample space for elaboration and clarification such as 'waste', 'discard', or 'dirt' and also 'disposability', among others. The debate is wide and complex (Liboiron, 2021; Morrison, 2015, among others); in this

specific space, I am working with these concepts as I understand they function in the articulation – as Stuart Hall (1985) would say – of environmental justice and new materialism, waste and discard studies, ‘wasting relationships’ (Armiero, 2021), and also post- and de-colonial thinking. For the purpose of this short contribution, I will employ these terms as paradigms working within the shifting lines of the North/South separation, while interrogating these same lines. The wider project is to look at material waste and its correlation to the narrative of Southern Italy, alongside the dismaying acceptance of ‘wasted lives’ and dispensable bodies, in today’s Mediterranean.

The idea is then to interrogate the lines of separation between North and South in the Italian narrative of national ‘progress and development’, and also in the roots and seemingly inescapable design stemming from historical dynamics of domination, projected in turn onto the Mediterranean, from different angles in different moments in history. Certainly the South of Italy sits in the ambiguous space of being within *and* without, at times *in* but not *of* Europe, but also, of being the North of the Mediterranean, certainly part of a privileged North, economically speaking, compared to the Southern shores. And yet, the liminal position of Southern Italy speaks the (maritime) language of the colonial/commercial/interconnected complexity of the Mediterranean and has existed in the subaltern condition that Antonio Gramsci famously analysed in *The Southern Question* (2005 [1926]). Narratives of Southern Italy (and Southern Europe) as part of Africa abound, with their implications of the colonial paradigm of ‘uncivilised/dirty/dangerous’, and we are all familiar with the most famous ones coming from the authors of the Grand Tour narratives (Cazzato, 2017). This is a legacy that, as we are all aware, has lasted and still persists at the core of anti-southern racism in Italy.

I am interested in exploring, through this paradigm of waste/dirt, what happens when the revivification of the racist matrix of (colonial) power that indeed was such a relevant (and silenced) part of building the Italian identity, ‘allows’ for a shifting of the lines of separation, with the arrival of migrants from ‘further south’, from across the Mediterranean. Is the shift a simple moving of the othering practice, the establishment of which lives ‘can be wasted’ (Bauman, 2004) because they are even ‘further southern’? Does the complexification of Italian identity seep through these lines? And how does it interweave with the

necropolitics 'externalising' the borders of migration further and further away, out at sea or beyond, on the 'other' side of the sea?

As Marco Armiero writes, "Entering the bodies and the ecologies of humans and nonhumans, wasting politicizes bodies and ecologies. The disposable body becomes a political body" (2021:12). I add, and this I think is crucial, the disposable body becomes a critical body, in the broadest sense of the term: a body that criticises, a body that is critical, crucial, the opposite, if you will, of dispensable. Disposable bodies, indispensable bodies (Cariello, 2016).

Thinking about waste, then, also means thinking about personhood, measures of 'usability' and disposability (also) of subaltern subjects. I am thinking of the 'dirty', inadequate (though beautiful) bodies of *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, I am thinking of the consumed bodies of southern women and men working in the factories in Turin in the 1950s and '60s, of the lives lost, the bodies and cultures severed in past and current migrations. And, today, Italy has still more dispensable lives and bodies: the women killed every other day by a spouse/family member or former partner. Dispensable bodies that are yet to be attended to seriously, I believe. I do not like inflated parallelisms and overarching definitions; I think they disempower the issues at stake. But I do think it is worth reflecting, in terms of 'wasted lives'/dispensable lives, on *where* the line between waste and value is drawn, how it moves (if it moves), who draws it, and why the politics of waste relations are so crucial. Here, the sea sets us in a powerfully more-than-human flow, in the urgency of some kind of ecological and relational justice, but also of how to dwell in the wasteocene, and perhaps that is why it is so relevant and useful to set our thinking adrift.

## References

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