

Claudia Fauzia, Valentina Amenta

FEMMINISMO TERRONE. PER UN'ALLEANZA DEI MARGINI

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di *Miriam Matteo**

“*Femminismo Terrone. Per un'alleanza dei margini*” is a “political project in the making” (p. 159), rooted in feminist and decolonial positioning. It offers a critical reexamination of classical Southern Italianism through an intersectional lens, aiming to develop an embodied and situated understanding of a specific Southern subalternity, that interacts in complex ways with other forms of inequality that generate sexism, homobiphobia, transphobia, classism, racism, and ableism. The work seeks to “initiate a profound cultural revolution capable of challenging deeply rooted beliefs about the identity of Southern people and the South in all its complexity” (p. 15), restoring multiple “ways of seeing” the South perspectives that emerge from those who have always been considered “the Other,” objects of knowledge rather than subjects who create valid knowledge of their own. The theoretical framework presented in the volume rejects any claim to being universal, acknowledging its own partiality. Instead, it aspires to a responsible *pluriversity* of knowledge, conscious of its emergence within a “liminal”



*MIRIAM MATTEO is a PhD student in sociology and social research at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Salerno.

Email: mmatteo@unisa.it

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space traversed by both privilege and oppression. It addresses both broader society and the feminist movement itself, as the authors point out that the latter “seemed to ignore the discrimination suffered *as Southern-ers*” (p. 7), identifying *anti-Southernism* as “the name of the oppression that has (cost us) so much to recognize” (p. 8), referring to the oppression of people and cultures from Southern regions a problem that “must be interpreted within a complex and layered system of power” (ibid). Fauzia and Amenta explore the systemic dynamics that have contributed to the construction of a narrative depicting the South as patriarchal, unchangeable, and marginal. They ask whether the South could instead represent “a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (hooks, 1990), and they develop their reflections across four chapters, which express a strong condemnation of the neoliberal dynamics that weigh on the shoulders of all the subaltern people and “Souths” of the world.

In the first chapter, the authors offer a decolonial critique of the “Southern Italian Question,” that emerged after the unification of Italy, arguing that this issue was shaped by a hierarchical distinction that constructed the South as backward, “the bearer of a singular Southern difference to be redeemed through adherence to Northern modernity” (p. 18). This framing reflects a “nationalist and developmentalist perspective that fails to recognize the South’s particularities, nuances, and plurality” (ibid.), overlooking the broader world-system in which Italy is embedded. Within a logic of epistemic violence, the South is rendered as the colonized Other, a mere object under the “*North Gaze*” which assumes the position of privileged knowing subject. This dynamic leads Southern individuals to “internalize the role of the Other, perpetuating the sense of never (being able to) fully become the Self” (p. 21). As a consequence, it “shapes how people perceive themselves, their land, their history, and what they ought to aspire to” (p. 43). Thus, rather than a neutral “Question”, a form of southern discrimination occurred: differences were translated into inferiority and an attempt was made to flatten them in favour of a desirable norm. This process, which continued in the following decades, affected both the unequal distribution of services and resources and the intimate personal way in which individuals perceived themselves, shaping the subaltern position of the South.

Drawing on Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony and subalternity and postcolonial feminist theories, the second chapter reconstructs the invention of the South, which can be traced back at least to the 18th century, when youths from northern European elites, eager to explore the places linked to their Greek and Latin classical education, undertook the “Grand Tour” through Southern Europe, bringing with them a colonial gaze that

translated difference into inferiority. This gaze would later be adopted by the elites of the Italian Risorgimento who, in order to redeem Southern Italy in the eyes of northern Europe, framed the South as a “foreign body to be tamed, civilised and assimilated into the hegemonic self of the nation” (p. 52). Even the positivists drew on the Italian colonial archive regarding colonized populations in order to construct, and thus invent, the South as the “Other,” using the categories of race and skin colour. As the authors note, “Italianness is formed in contrast [...], first opposing the South as the internal Other, and then the radically Other of the colonies” (p. 54). In this context, the power of representation in producing knowledge is underlined: “The broader the range of representations we can identify with, the more possibilities for existence will open up to us. [...] Having limited representations of one’s subjectivity traps individuals in a cage where not only are they perceived in a single way, but they also come to believe they cannot be anything else” (p. 55). This is why post-colonial scholars of the South speak of the “invention of the South”, revealing its artificial nature and describing it as a postcolonial space, imbued with a form of “internal Orientalism” that makes it exotic and domesticable for the purposes of exploitation that impacts differently on different subalternities. Following an intersectional approach, Fauzia and Amenta observe how various forms of inequality reinforce one another, identifying the direction of the gaze as yet another axis of discrimination shaped by stereotypes, such as the “*terrorizzazione* of trash culture”, “a proliferation of content that reduces the richness and complexity of regional identities to trivializing clichés” (p. 67). According to the authors, literature and film have also contributed to trapping the South in a dichotomy: either poverty/social unrest or bucolic/wild paradise, thus reinforcing its stereotyped representation. For instance, the historical novel “*Il Gattopardo*” has been mistakenly interpreted as evidence of Sicily’s immutability, rather than as a caustic and ironic critique of Risorgimento rhetoric and “a chronicle of inexorable decline and the end of an era” (p. 72). Similarly, the romanticization of the South in films such as “*Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*” and “*Il Postino*” has contributed to its domestication in favour of mass tourism. Threading their way through the folds of anti-Southern bias through an intersectional compass, the authors continue their feminist and decolonial analysis, describing what happens when Male and North Gaze intersect. Like Pygmalion with his sculpted woman, but with an added racist tint, this intersection gives rise to the archetype of the “fiery Southern woman:” domesticated as an expression of Mediterranean identity that blends passion with family values, while “very few intellectuals, politicians, or journalists are represented as

Southern women” (pp. 86–87). Such stereotyped representation does not even spare the feminist movement itself, within which the South is also framed as either “an embodiment of anachronistic patriarchy or a perfect matriarchy” (p. 88). Drawing on Panico’s (2022) critiques of Italian feminism, the authors call for avoiding reductive narratives and for “multiplying the directions of the gaze, expanding the narratives on the South through diverse perspectives and unheard voices” (p. 89).

The third chapter is titled “*Terrone Resistances*”, as it emphasizes the importance of memory in shaping both individual and collective identities. Fauzia and Amenta propose a “decolonial and feminist rereading of the memories we have inherited” (p. 91) as a means of fostering Southern self-determination. Indeed, “if hegemonic memory decides what is included in and excluded from official history, at the margins of official knowledge lie counter-memories. Plural, multiple, partial, and subjective [...], collateral remnants of the grand narrative, which is presumed to be univocal, universal, and progressive[...], they hold the potential to forge an imaginary distinct from the hegemonic one” (p. 93), such as the memory of Maria Occhipinti, part of the anti-fascist and anti-monarchist “*Non si parte*” movement, often misread as Southern conservatism; the memory of Rosa Balistreri, “an activist who gave political speeches with her guitar” (p. 95) and the memory of Franca Viola, whose body bore the double violence of the *mafia* and patriarchy. Fauzia and Amenta reinforce the recovery of *terrone* counter-memories by referring to the concept of “Southern thought” of Cassano (2005), which holds the potential to emancipate Southern identity discourse from the confines of the nation, as it does not stem from identitarian fervor but rather from the category of the “Other”.

The fourth and final chapter opens with a feminist and Southern Italian critique of linguistic and cultural discrimination. According to the authors, “our accent marks us. Not all accents are equal, and some carry more information than others” (p. 127). This form of discrimination, experienced by people from Southern Italy, resonates with the denunciation of Southern Spanish accent discrimination by Andalusian feminists, as well as with the linguistic and cultural inferiority internalized by *chicanas* in the borderlands of California, Texas, and Arizona. The common thread among these experiences is “shame as a signal of the structural violence suffered by Southern people” (p. 131). “If imagining new possibilities also involves assigning new meaning to what already exists [...] reclaiming a term from its usual context” (p. 128), then *La poderío* in Andalusian-accented Spanish is reclaimed from patriarchal power, just as *terrone* is “withdrawn from its stigmatizing context to be reinterpreted

through a decolonial lens, thereby acquiring political significance” (p. 155). In this way, a vocabulary steeped in colonial modernity is overturned and *terrone*, once a derogatory label used to stigmatize an internal migrant, poor and land-tied, is re-signified with a positive, appropriative value and with the power to bring visibility to family memories of migration, evoking the so-called “diasporic condition” of the South. This concept, rooted in decolonial discourse, refers to a prismatic, complex and liminal sense of belonging, animated by conflicting emotions, “cultural contamination, discovery, and identity renegotiation, that challenges both the nation as a fixed place and identity as a uniform and self-enclosed entity (p. 146). This entails a renegotiation of one’s relationship with the land, much like what happens through the notion of *restanza* (Teti, 2022), which “subverts the idea of ‘staying’ and pulls it out of the realm of immobility: staying in the same place can become an act of mobilization” (p. 152). Drawing on diasporic thinking and *restanza*, the authors assert the right to reinvent one’s relationship with their land. *Femminismo terrore*, as a collective and South-South political project, aims to unite oppressed bodies and territories in the struggle against neocolonial forms of exploitation, recovering memories, languages and practices, in order to build a present and future free from systemic oppression.

The intersectional, decolonial, and situated transfeminist positioning of Amenta and Fauzia emerges not only from the social and political issues addressed throughout the volume, but also through their use of gender-neutralization strategies, namely, non-standard morphological variations involving the substitution of final vowels in conventionally gender-marked words with numbers or symbols. The lexicon and syntax exhibit a deliberately accessible yet sufficiently technical style that establishes the essential terms of the themes the authors’ tackle.

Chapters, paragraphs, and sections are not densely packed with intratextual academic references to scientific articles on the topics discussed, as one might expect in a scholarly work. However, the text is reinforced in several places by references to feminist epistemologies and the most recent decolonial theories, which are indicated through footnotes, rather than by intratextual citations that refer to bibliographic entries at the end of the volume or of individual chapters. This choice confirms the authors’ desire for immediate communicative clarity and a divulgative intent.

While these decisions contribute to making the text more readable, with feminist and decolonial bibliographic entries readily accessible as the reader progresses, they may also raise methodological objections. Specifically, the absence of direct scientific references for many of the volume’s assertions – for example, “the South and Southern people are

recognizable only when they move within the narrow confines of stereotypes" (p. 74) – which would be necessary to provide scientifically verifiable corroboration from other researchers and scholars on these points, risks attracting criticism labelling such claims as "self-evident" due to insufficient empirical support. Nevertheless, if the aim of the volume is to disseminate the topics for the purposes of political activism, socio-cultural regeneration, and the construction of an alliance network among Southern identities, while drawing on decolonial and feminist scientific epistemologies to thoroughly explore the lines of reasoning presented, without claiming universality, then I consider the stylistic choice to discuss these themes without dense empirical validation acceptable.

Another observation concerns the claim about the "Southern question," which the authors deem "misframed" because it portrays the South as a single monolithic and underdeveloped block caught within a dichotomy of development/backwardness, limited to a purely national discourse. Actually, rather than being "misframed," it was inevitably a product of its own time: the period of the national state formation. Therefore, it would have been better to describe it as anachronistic, especially since the authors recontextualize it within a broader world-systems dynamic, while also unmasking its colonial and racial elements rooted in Lombrosian and classist frameworks.

The work, written in a pragmatic language that is both situated and "embodied", simple, yet far from simplistic, is accessible to both activists and policy makers striving for a more inclusive future for Southern Italian societies, as well as to researchers and scholars working on gender, trans-feminist, intersectional, territorial, and decolonial issues. However, without at least a basic understanding of feminist epistemologies, readers may struggle to fully grasp the theoretical and political scope of the book. For example, the volume frequently refers to bodies and to the embodied, situated experiences of those who inhabit the South of Italy, from which "new knowledges" emerge. It would have been helpful to provide readers, many of whom may not be familiar with feminist theories, with at least a brief overview of feminist epistemologies drawing on post-structuralism and deconstruction, that reject universal truths and essentialisms in favor of reclaiming the centrality of bodies, not as "natural objects" of knowledge, but as the product of specific practices, oppressions, languages, and embodied forms of resistance.

Ultimately, the volume offers new and original analytical tools regarding feminisms of difference and coloniality, Southern Italy, and the Global South. It moves across multiple levels of analysis: theoretical, political, and activist, rooted in feminist collectives from the margins and in

feminist thought on subalternity (Spivak, 2004). From these emerge forms of situated research, useful both for those wishing to delve into the folds of contemporary feminisms and explore their internal constellations, and for those working in the fields of social research applied to territory and socio-cultural planning, in order to study and develop new practices, processes, and narratives concerning the South, from an anti-neoliberal perspective.

This book is fully part of the international intersectional transfeminist and decolonial debate. Due to the originality of the topics it addresses and its alignment with feminist and decolonial scholarship, it should be translated into other languages, in order to extend its educational and political reach to a broader international audience.

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