



Francesca Brunetti

Xiamen University (China)

The Representation of the Southern Italian Mother in Popular Italian Cultural Productions

ABSTRACT. In this article I discuss how the southern Italian woman's motherhood has been represented in popular Italian cultural productions. By analyzing movies, novels and television shows I select six typologies of southern Italian mothers, and I address how these typologies, with the exception of the last one, present the southern Italian woman, the *terrona*, in a negative way. The most common typology is the one of being loving and affectionate while also being underprivileged and incapable of providing sustenance to their children. The second typology is the one of being oppressive and controlling. The third one is about being powerful and strong and to have her authority rejected by her children. The fourth one is about being selfish and uncaring, and the fifth is about being dangerous and violent. In the last typology, I discuss two rare positive representations of southern Italian motherhood where she is loving and caring while also strong, capable to take care of herself and to transmit to her children a positive approach to life. These positive representations of southern Italian mothers, however, address these women as lacking social power because they belong to the working class. The positive traits of being caring, optimistic, financially established and socially influential never emerge all together in popular representations of the southern Italian motherhood. Rather, caring southern Italian mothers are usually represented as poor and marginalized while wealthy and powerful southern Italian mothers are portrayed as selfish and uncaring. This data denounces the necessity of creating alternative representation of southern Italian mothers where they are addressed as positive and caring while also satisfied, well-off and powerful.

KEYWORDS: Representation of Maternity, Italian Cultural Productions, Italian Gender Stereotypes.

Introduction

In this article I discuss how the southern Italian woman's motherhood has been represented in popular Italian cultural productions. By analyzing movies, novels and television shows I select six typologies of southern Italian mothers, and I address how these typologies, with the exception of the last one, present the southern Italian woman, the *terrona*, in a negative

way. The most common typology is the one of being loving and affectionate while also being underprivileged and incapable of providing sustenance to their children. The second typology is the one of being oppressive and controlling. The third one is about being powerful and strong and to have her authority rejected by her children. The forth one is about being selfish and uncaring, and the fifth is about being dangerous and violent. In the last typology, I discuss two rare positive representations of southern Italian motherhood where she is loving and caring while also strong, capable to take care of herself and to transmit to her children a positive approach to life. These positive representations of southern Italian mothers, however, address these women as lacking social power because they belong to the working class. The positive traits of being caring, optimistic, financially established and socially influential never emerge all together in popular representations of the southern Italian motherhood. Rather, caring southern Italian mothers are usually represented as poor and marginalized while wealthy and powerful southern Italian mothers are portrayed as selfish and uncaring. This data denounces the necessity of creating alternative representation of southern Italian mothers where they are addressed as positive and caring while also satisfied, well-off and powerful.

Loving Mamma Terrona

The first typology of southern Italian mother that I discuss in this article is the one in which the terrona is a loving and affectionate mother ready to sacrifice everything for her children. In popular media, however, this affection and love does not have the consequence of providing the terrona's children with a good life because the terrona, despite her determination, does not have the means to change their living conditions because she is a proletarian and an underprivileged woman.

This is the case of the southern Italian mothers described by Serao in *Il Ventre di Napoli* (The Belly of Naples), 1884. Serao describes the living conditions of Neapolitans after Italy became unified and became a nation in 1862 and she gives an account of the hard life experienced by the Neapolitan proletarian mothers. They have to take care of their children and their houses while at the same time practicing exhausting jobs to contribute to the economic support of their families (p. 7).

These proletarian Neapolitan mothers can find jobs in the local tobacco industry, while others work as seamstresses or florists. These jobs are

underpaid; however, the proletarian Neapolitan mothers that do these jobs consider themselves lucky in comparison to other women who work as housekeepers (p. 14). The Neapolitan housekeeper, in fact, used to walk up to three miles every day to reach the house where she works. She is always hungry and undernourished, and the miserable salary that she receives does not include meals. Every day, while performing her job responsibilities, she takes the stairs forty times, and she takes twenty buckets of water from the water well. At night, after she is done with her exhausting activities, she crawls back home like a worn-out shadow (p. 14). One of the housekeepers described by Serao is Annarella. She used to work in three different houses for a miserable salary. When at night she reached her home, she was so exhausted that she fell asleep, skipping dinner and still wearing her clothes (p. 14). In addition to doing exhausting jobs, these proletarian mothers also find time to breastfeed and to sew their children's clothes.

Because of the hard-living conditions they experience every day, these housekeepers look like monstrous beings that provoke a mixture of pity and repugnance. When they are thirty years old, they look like they are sixty. They are humpbacked, with no hair, and with yellow and black teeth. They limp when they walk, and they wear the same dress for four years and the same apron for six months. They do not complain, and they do not cry, and before they are forty, they usually die in the hospital because they contract pneumonia or cholera. They are described by Serao as ugly, shabby, and sometimes, even disgusting (p. 14–15). They had a moment of youth and beauty in the past before getting married, and after marriage, they experienced only misery, abuse, labor, and hunger. They are forced to leave their children alone to go to work, and they are constantly worried about them having mortal accidents such as being knocked down by a carriage, being bitten by a dog, getting burnt in the fireplace, or falling down the stairs. Because of these dangers, while the Neapolitan mothers are working, and they are not at home, they are constantly worried and restless about their children's safety (p. 15). Serao addresses the attachment that the southern Italian woman has for her children by describing how she speaks about them. The Neapolitan mother calls her children "*le creature*" (the creatures), and she pronounces these words with a mixture of melancholic sweetness and maternal pity that express all the sufferings of her miserable existence (p. 16).

In the same way as Serao describes the miserable living conditions of the Neapolitan proletarian mothers at the end of the nineteenth century,

so does Carlo Levi in *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (Christ Stoppen at Eboli), 1954. Levi describes the misery of the farmers living in the southern Italian region of Basilicata during the 1930's. He addresses the southern Italian mothers as loving, adoring, and constantly fondling their children and as always anxious about the idea they may get sick or wounded. They breast-feed their children for as long as they can, and they always carry them on their back or in their arms, or by wrapping them in their black shawls while they go to get water at the fountain with the amphoras on their heads. The majority of these children die when they are still babies. The ones that survive grow fast, and they soon learn about how difficult their existences will be. Many of them get malaria, and they become yellow and melancholic. Others go to war, or they migrate to the United States. The ones that decide to stay where they are born become farmers, and they spend the rest of their lives working the Basilicata's arid land with their back bent under the sun while suffering hunger and deprivation (p. 90).

In the same way that Serao and Levi do, also Anna Maria Ortese describes the relationship between the southern Italian mother and her children as both loving and resigned, and the terrona as a mother which does not have the means to provide good living conditions to her children. Ortese in *Il mare non bagna Napoli* (The Sea Does Not Reach Naples), 1953 describes the Neapolitan proletarian class after the second world war in a moment when the Italian population was experiencing a severe economic crisis.

In the short story "Un paio di occhiali" ("A Pair of Glasses"), Ortese narrates the story of Eugenia, a little baby girl living with her family in a poor Neapolitan neighborhood. Eugenia is affected by myopia, and this prevents her from distinctly recognizing the objects and people surrounding her. One of the few images that Eugenia is capable of distinguishing are the faces of her family members. This is because at night Eugenia and her family sleep together in the same room, and while the oil lamp is on, she can observe them while they sleep. Eugenia's mother sleeps while having her mouth open, exposing her yellow and broken teeth. Eugenia's siblings are dirty, covered with pimples, with their noses full of catarrh, and producing a noise as if there were beasts inside their chests (p. 114). Eugenia, instead, has the face of an old lady with shaggy hair that looks like a straw broom. Her hands are rough and scratchy, and her nails are long and dirty (p. 115).

Ortese's story describes how Eugenia's aunt decides to buy her a pair of glasses. Eugenia, by trying on the pair of glasses at the optician shop,

for the first time experiences a clear vision of the world surrounding her. The shop is a pleasant and clean place, and by observing it, Eugenia gets excited about the possibility of seeing the rest of her neighborhood. The day she receives her glasses, however, she realizes how dirty and squalid the place where she lives is and how ugly and poor the people living in her neighborhood are. As a reaction to this, she starts to vomit. While Eugenia vomits, her neighbors try to help her. They are ragged and deformed, with pockmarked faces revealing their existence of misery and resignation. Eugenia, while vomiting, is deadly pale while having convulsions. Her eyes are protruding and distressed by the suffering, her little face is covered with tears, and she has a stupefied expression. In this situation, Eugenia's mother behaves in a loving and tender way, and she embraces Eugenia while trying to console her. At the same time, Eugenia's mother is also resigned because she is aware that there is nothing she can do to prevent Eugenia from feeling sad and sick about the misery surrounding her. Ortense's way of describing the relationship between the southern Italian mother and her children is similar to the ones described by Levi and Serao, where the misery of her social class makes the southern Italian woman resigned about the possibility of providing a good living condition to her children.

Controlling Mamma Terrona

In other sources the terrona's characteristics of being a loving and protective mother become negative traits because they are associated with the terrona's overcontrolling behavior toward her children. They include Grazia Deledda's novel *La Madre* (A Mother), 1991 and Marcello Fois's noir trilogy *Sempre caro* (Always Dear) 1998, *Sangue dal cielo* (Blood from the Sky), 1999, and *L'altro mondo* (The Other World), 2011. In these sources, the terrona's children are described as feeling unsatisfied and frustrated because of their mother's overcontrolling personality, which prevents them from living their own lives.

Deledda's *La Madre* narrates the story of Maria Maddalena, the mother of Paulo, a parish priest of a little village in Sardinia. Maria Maddalena is a peasant woman that made many sacrifices to allow her son to study and to become a priest. When she was young Maria Maddalena suffered hunger and misery and she wants her son to become a priest to avoid having him suffer what she had to endure. By deciding that Paulo would become

a priest, Maria Maddalena also plans to live with him and to take care of him for the rest of her life. Paulo, however, after seven years practicing his pastoral activity, falls in love with Agnese, a well-off independent woman that lives alone in the same village where Paulo and his mother live. Agnese and Paulo start a relationship and they decide to leave the village to start a new life together as a couple. Paulo's mother, however, finds out about the relationship and she convinces Paulo to change his mind. Paulo reconsiders his plan about escaping with Agnese because he feels guilty about leaving his mother. This is because he knows that Maria Maddalena made many sacrifices for him and that Paulo represents the only hope and love of her life. Maria Maddalena is described as not interested in having a social life and possessing material goods. Her room is humble and bare, and it is composed by only an old wooden bed and a worn-out wardrobe. She never got better furniture because the only richness for her consists in being Paulo's mother, to take care of him, and to live for him (p. 15).

Paulo is the only joy and purpose of Maria Maddalena's life. She lost her parents when she was a child and she was raised by her poor aunties. Because of her condition as peasant and orphan, in the village where she grew up everybody used to mistreat and take advantage of her. The arrival of Paulo in Maria Maddalena's life is welcomed by her with joy and enthusiasm. Paulo's father dies when he was still a toddler and Maria Maddalena manages to support Paulo by moving in a near city where she gets hired as a housekeeper in a Seminar where Paulo gets enrolled (p. 18). Despite the fact that she is young and free, and several men shows their interests for her, she refuses to get involved in physical and sentimental relationships with them. This is because she already considers herself as the mother of a priest and she conducts a chaste existence working and living only for her son. Paulo, on the other hand, grows up experiencing contrasting feelings for his mother. He loves his mother; however, he is also ashamed of her in front of her teachers and school-mates because of her condition as a servant. He feels guilty about these feelings because he knows that she is working as a servant with the only purpose of providing sustenance for him.

Paulo experiences the same guilt about leaving his mother to escape with Agnese, and because of this, he decides to break up with her. This provokes him to be sad and frustrated. Maria Maddalena is an example of southern Italian mother that despite her feelings of love for her son is not capable of making him happy because of her overcontrolling behavior and her incapability to accept him as living his life independently from her.

The same oppressive behavior is the one that characterizes the southern Italian mother described by Fois in the noir trilogy *Sempre caro*, *Sangue dal cielo*, and *L'altro mondo*. Fois's novels are set in Sardinia at the end of nineteenth century and they narrate the investigations of the lawyer and poet Bastianu. The reality described by Fois addresses the Sardinian's customs and traditions and the difficult situation Sardinia experiences in the nineteenth centuries after being annexed to the Italian state. Differently from the central Italian state, in fact, Sardinia is depicted as a traditional and conservative society that is still attached to old fashion concepts such as honor, pride, and reputation. The geographic area where the novels are set is Barbagia, a mountainous region in the center of Sardinia. Barbagia is described by Fois as a harsh landscape that presents contrasting characteristics. It is bare and luxuriant at the same time and it has threatening and hostile mountains as well as verdant threes and rivers. Its clearings are covered with a dense dark musk and they are skirted by rocky walls covered by junipers and elderberry plants. In these clearings there are grassy areas where there are holm oaks, yews, and weeping willows. There also are eucalyptus that address the presence of subterranean streams (*L'altro Mondo*, p. 39). The Sardinian population is also characterized by contradictions and paradoxes where some of Fois's characters are generous and empathetic while also violent, impulsive and attached to their principles and codes.

In the same way as Fois describes the Sardinian population as proud and short-tempered he also describes Bastianu's mother, Raimonda, as a stubborn and complicated woman. She has in common with Bastianu the fact of being touchy and irritable and she reacts to the arguments that she has with her son by being taciturn and hostile. Raimonda lives with Bastianu despite the fact he is thirty-two years old. Bastianu's father died when he was five years old and Raimonda raised Bastianu by herself. Raimonda takes care of her son by cleaning his house and by cooking for him. In addition to being loving and caring, however, she is also intrusive and indiscrete, and she gets a say in Bastianu's business relating to his job and his private relationships (p. 122).

Bastianu's relationship with his mother goes into crisis when he falls in love with Clorinda Pattusi and his mother refuses to approve their relationship. Clorinda has the scent of the lily of the valley and a mass of thick dark hair that she kept collected in a bun at the top of her head (p. 82). She has the features of a Byzantine queen with a pronounced nose and big dark eyes (p. 88). According to Raimonda, Clorinda is not a good partner

for her son because she belongs to a lower social class. Despite Clorinda's family and her education are not as good the ones of Bastianu, Clorinda is a respectable woman. Raimonda's aversion for Clorinda is motivated by the fact that she is a controlling mother and she wants to be the only person living with Bastianu and taking care of him (p. 96). In the novels Bastianu tries to make her mother to change her mind and to accept his relationship with Clorinda but Raimonda refuses to meet and to speak with Clorinda. When Bastianu formally invites Clorinda to come to visit his place, Raimonda decides to leave his house and to move to live with Bastianu's brother and his family.

Raimonda feels as if Clorinda has stolen Bastianu from her and she expresses herself in these terms while speaking with the local priest. The priest meets Raimonda in an attempt to convince her to accept Bastianu's and Clorinda's relationship. By trying to persuade Raimonda to change her mind, he reminds her that children cannot be stolen because they are free human beings and do not belong to their mothers (p. 179). At the end of the trilogy the situation between Bastianu and Raimonda is still unsolved and despite Bastianu's intelligence and his capability of solving the murders that he investigates; he is not capable of convincing his mother to accept him to get married and to start his own life (p. 282).

Authoritative Mamma Terrona

I also discuss a source where southern Italian mothers are powerful and influential. However, their children do not recognize their maternal authority. This is observable in the television show *Gomorra* (2014). *Gomorra* narrates the story of a bloody Mafia clan ruling the Neapolitan neighborhood of Scampia. The boss of the clan is Don Pietro Savastano (Fortunato Cerlino), who is an authoritarian and a ruthless man, as is his wife, Donna Imma (Maria Pia Calzone). Unlike Don Pietro and Donna Imma, their son, Genny (Salvatore Esposito) is an immature and weak young man, only interested in having fun with his friends, chasing girls, and running with his motorcycle. At the beginning of the show, Don Pietro gets arrested after being stopped by the police while he was carrying a bag full of cash that he earned with his drug businesses. While Don Pietro is in prison the control of the Savastano clan passes to Donna Imma. Donna Imma is aware that her son Genny is not ready to become a mafia boss and she wants him to get stronger and braver. To do this, she sends him to Hon-

duras with the assignment of making deals with the local drug dealers to create a new trafficking of cocaine between Honduras and Naples. Imma is not represented as a protective and caring mother and she is aware that by sending Genny to Honduras he can risk his life. However, she accepts the possibility of having her son killed because she wants Genny to become capable of taking Don Pietro's ruling position as a mafia boss.

As the result of Imma's decision, Genny comes back from the Honduras deeply proved and changed. While he was away, he risked his life, and he witnessed death and violence. In the meantime, while he was away, Donna Imma ruled the Savastano clan with her cold and calculating personality and she made sure that the enemies of her family were eliminated and silenced. However, despite Imma's ruling skills, when Genny returns from the Honduras he does not recognize Imma's authority. He takes the power of the clan and he gives the control of its activities to the young thugs that used to hang out with him before he left for Honduras. This action causes the anger of the old collaborators of Genny's father that overnight lost the power that they achieved by practicing for many years their criminal activities. With this action, Genny causes the collapse of the precarious equilibrium of the Savastano clan that Donna Imma was capable of maintaining while Don Pietro was in prison.

Genny, despite the strength and authority of his mother and her indubitable boss skills, does not accept her ruling role and he decides to leave her to go in the direction of a more traditional, patriarchal path. He takes the control of the clan despite his inexperience because he desires to become like his father. To do this, he gives the control of the clan's drug businesses to his young and arrogant friends which in a short period of time destroy the accomplishments that Don Pietro achieved after many years of illegal businesses. Genny decides to rule by himself without collaborating with his mother because Genny's life model is represented by Don Pietro and, like Don Pietro, Genny wants to rule without sharing his power with his mother, as a real man is supposed to do.

Another example that exemplifies the act of denying the power and authority represented by the maternal figure is represented in *Gomorra* by the relationship between two mafia women: Scianel (Cristina Donadio) and Patrizia (Cristiana Dell'Anna). When Don Pietro gets arrested and the power balance of Scampia gets upset as the result of Genny's actions, the control of the Neapolitan neighborhood got shared among several mafia bosses. One of them is Scianel, a woman who has power in a world dominated by men. Thanks to her clever and merciless per-

sonality, she manages to find her space in the criminal life of Scampia. In the television show there is no mention of her supposedly deceased husband and the only male figure she cares about is her talentless and weak son that she supports by making sure that he has a place in the drug trading of Scampia. Scianel is represented as a feared and respected woman who spends her free time by smoking, drinking beer, and playing cards with her girlfriends. She trusts nobody, and she exerts her power in solitude.

However, after meeting Patrizia, for the first time in her mafia career Scianel trusts another person, a woman. After being impressed by Patrizia's intelligence and shrewdness Scianel desires to have her as her close consultant and trusted collaborator. Patrizia started her mafia career as the helper of the boss Don Pietro. Don Pietro, after being arrested by the police in the first season of the show, manages to escape prison and to find refuge in a secret hideout close to Scampia. From this hideout Don Pietro keeps on ruling the part of his clan that remained loyal to him and he entrusts Patrizia with the task of being his courier. Patrizia, despite her initial inexperience in the mafia environment, soon demonstrates her possession of the right skills to make a career in the criminal world of Scampia. Because of this, after Don Pietro's death, her services are requested from two others mafia bosses: Genny and Scianel.

While working with Patrizia, Scianel deals with her with respect and admiration and she offers to Patrizia her teaching and advice about how to be a ruling woman in the mafia world. A scene in *Gomorra* describing Scianel's mentoring behavior is the one when Scianel buys a new dress in the shop where Patrizia is working as a shop assistant. Patrizia comments on Scianel's new outfit by saying that she looks like a panther. Scianel replies that she rather prefers to look like a hyena because the female panther is very pretty, but it has no power. The female hyenas, instead, are the ones that detain the power in the herds where they live.

Despite Scianel's mentoring behavior and the intention of sharing with Patrizia part of her power, Patrizia decides to betray her symbolic mother. In the third season Scianel manages to achieve lots of power and her interests get into conflict with the ones of Genny. Between Scianel and Genny, the ruling unconventional woman and the old established patriarchal power, Patrizia decides to ally with Genny and to kill Scianel. In the last episode of the third season, Patrizia shoots Scianel, who incredulously dies murdered by the only person that she trusted and respected during many years of mafia career. Scianel was dreaming about

a future where she and Patrizia would have taken the power of Scampia. By doing this, for the first time in the history of the neighborhood two women would have had the control of one of the most important drug-dealing hotspots of Naples. Patrizia, instead, decides to ally with the old establishment represented by the Savastano family and to work for Genny. By doing this Patrizia refuses to recognize Scianel's maternal authority.

Selfish Mamma Terrona

In my survey about the southern Italian motherhood I also consider unusual representation where the terrona is not described as a loving and caring. Rather, she is represented as selfish and disinterested about the future and the well-being of her children. One of these examples is addressed by Serao in *Il Romanzo della fanciulla*, (Unmarried Women), 1893. The novel is set in Naples at the end of the nineteenth century and it is composed of five short stories where Serao describes the life style, aspirations, and desires of several Neapolitan young women (*fanciulle*). One of these short stories is "*Per la monaca*" (For The Nun), where Serao recounts the story of the aristocratic young woman Eva Muscettola. Eva is described as a beautiful wealthy teenager. She has a generous and friendly temperament and she desires to love and be loved. Her desire, however, is unsatisfied because of the members of her family are disinterested in spending time with her. Eva's mother is a young and beautiful aristocratic woman always busy attending parties, sleeping until late, and having lunch alone. Eva's father is always busy with his outdoor activities such as riding horses and going to hunt. Eva's brother is mostly interested in playing cards and travelling to Monte Carlo, Baden, and Paris. Eva's family cares for her in an emotionless way and the little time they dedicate to her is not enough to satisfy her need of affection.

Eva gets engaged with Innico Althan, an aristocratic man that becomes friend with Eva's mother, Natalia Muscettola. Eva is ingenuously happy about their friendship and only at the end of the story she realizes that they are lovers. Innico's and Natalia's betrayal breaks Eva's heart and as a reaction Eva decides to escape society by taking the religious vows and becoming a nun. Eva's monastication in the church of Saint Chiara is described as a crowded and gloomy event. Eva's friends are sad and confused because they do not understand why she decided to become nun despite

the fact she is rich, beautiful, and young. The procession is compared by Serao to a funeral and Eva's decision of becoming a nun to a suicide that she commits because of the suffering that her mother and Innico inflicted upon her. During the ceremony Eva's rich clothes get replaced with a dark rough cassock and the old abbess cuts her long brown hair with a pair of big scissors. After pronouncing the monastic four vows—chastity, poverty, obedience, and perpetual cloister—she lays down on the ground and she gets wrapped in a black velvet blanket that has the embroidered the images of a skull and two crossed bones. In this position Eva appears to be dead. Four big candles burn around her, the bells of the church sound the death knell, and the nuns sing the *De Profundis*.

Serao's story offers a negative description of the southern Italian mother and a tragic account of her relationship with her daughter. Natalia is not only selfish and indifferent to Eva's happiness but also capable of profoundly hurting her daughter by having a relationship with her fiancé. Natalia, differently from the typologies of terrona-mothers described before, presents the positive aspect of being able to pursue her own pleasure and enjoy life. However, Natalia's lack of affection and her incapability to love her daughter make her a negative character that causes Eva's unhappiness and her premature symbolic death.

In the same way as the character of Natalia in *Per la Monaca* is described by Serao as self-centered and selfish, also the character of Amalia (Leda Gloria) represented in Eduardo De Filippo's movie *Napoli Milionaria* (Side Street Story), 1950, is predominantly focused on her own businesses and ambitions. In the movie Amalia, Gennaro's wife (Eduardo De Filippo), accumulates money by selling products on the Neapolitan black-market during and after the second world war. By doing this, she exploits the poor people of her neighborhood by selling them the food that they need for themselves and their family as overpriced. Amalia, by practicing the black-market, can provide material sustenance to her three children while her husband has been deported in Germany by the Nazi army. However, by doing this she becomes greedy and materialistic and she starts to accumulate money with the only intention of purchasing jewels, clothes, and furniture. While doing this, she neglects her children that without a parental guide go down the wrong road. Amalia and Gennaro's young daughter, Maria Rosa (Delia Scala), loses her virginity with an American soldier that gets her pregnant and abandons her to go back in the States. Amedeo (Gianni Glori), Amalia and Gennaro's son, becomes a thief because he does not want to work.

When Gennaro returns home from the deportation camp, he finds his house and his family severely changed. Amalia is busy while enriching herself with illegal activities and his children are lost and without guidance. In addition to this, Amalia's and Gennaro's youngest daughter, Rituccia (Concetta Palumbo), gets sick and the only way to save her life is to provide her with penicillin. This medicine, however, cannot be found. Penicillin, in fact, is a product that the traders working in the black market keep hidden. They do this to have its price to increase and to make profits by selling it overpriced. Amalia used to practice the same illegal activity by selling overpriced products to the indigent people of her neighborhood. Now she is the one that is victim of the black-market's unfair system. At the end of the movie, one of the people that Amalia damaged with her illegal activity, the accountant Spasiani (Mario Soldati), gives the medicine to Amalia for free. Spasiani has the medicine because he used it in the past to cure one of his children. By giving the medicine to Amalia, he does not ask for money. However, he reminds to her that she behaved in a merciless and selfish way by selling him overpriced food when he had to feed his starving family. At the end of the movie Rituccia survives and Amalia understands her mistakes. She decides to stop her illegal business and she becomes more involved in her children's life. De Filippo's presentation of Amalia's character is not as negative as the one of Natalia that Serao describes in that Amalia's mistakes can be redeemed, and her relationship with her children can be recovered.

Evil Mamma Terrona

The untraditional representation of the southern Italian woman as selfish and unloving is extremized in Giorgio Todde's novel *Paura e Carne* (Fear and Flesh) 2003 and Fois's novel *Dura Madre* (Harsh Mother), 2001. In these novels the terrona is described not only as a cold and unkind mother, but also as a dangerous woman ready to plan the death of her own child or to be complicit with it to preserve her assets and to affirm her power. Todde's *Paura e Carne* is set in Sardinia at the end of the nineteenth centuries in the city of Cagliari. The protagonist of the novel is the investigator Efisio Marini, a doctor and an embalmer that investigates the murder of the lawyer Giovanni Làconi. Giovanni Làconi has a ninety-two years old mother, Michela. Michela is a terrible woman obsessed with the conservation of her body and the preservation of her patrimony. When Mi-

chela was young she married a man called Dionigi with the only purpose of increasing her belongings. Michela got pregnant and delivered her son Giovanni with the intention of having him study to become a lawyer and to economically exploit him to amplify her goods. During her pregnancy Michela makes sure to keep her body as unaltered as possible. She gains only as much weight as it is required to maintain Giovanni's growing fetus alive and after delivering him she nurtures and takes care of him the minimum needed to make him survive. Because of this, Giovanni grows up with no love and affection from Michela.

In addition to this, Michela, after finding out that her son has the intention of giving part of his inheritance to the local theatre and the local church, she designs a plan to have him killed. Another reason why Michela wants to kill her son is because every month he used to give money to a Tunisian woman with which he had an illegitimate daughter twenty years before. Michela is afraid that Giovanni's illegitimate daughter can access part of his patrimony and she decides to kill him before he can modify his testament. After Giovanni's death, Michela also plots the death of Giovanni's wife, Tea, because she is the one inheriting his goods. After Tea, Michela also plan the murdering of all the other people that can claim part of Giovanni's assets.

In addition to preserving her goods Michela is also obsessed about keeping herself alive and conserving her body as unaltered. She spends her life indoor, in the darkness, because she believes that sun dries her skin. She exclusively eats boiled, unseasoned zucchini, and she only drinks the water of her water well. She takes frequent naps because she is convinced that they contribute to preserve her brain's functions. While sitting on her armchair, she falls asleep while having conversations with other people. When she does it, she unexpectedly places her head back and while snoring, she has her little red and pointed tongue outside her mouth. Michela represents a terrible portrait of southern Italian mother that differently from the mothers described at the beginning of this article as loving and caring, does not love her son, rather, she hates him. She is a misanthropic woman that only cares about herself and her money.

In the same way as Michela is described by Todde as an unconventional terrible mother, also the character of Mariangela Marongiu in Fois's novel *Dura Madre* is proud, violent, and dangerous. *Dura Madre* is set in the contemporary Sardinia and it begins with the finding of the

corpse of Michele Marongiu in a construction site in the outskirts of the city of Nuoro. Mariangela, Michele's mother, is a woman that considers her honor and principles more important than anything else. Mariangela is an authoritative woman exerting total control on her domestic space and on the members of her family. Marongiu's family is composed by Mariangela, her son Michele (the victim), and other two sons: Ettore and Raffaele. Mariangela's husband has recently died because of a disease. With the Marongiu's family also lives Palmira. Palmira is the daughter of Mariangela's cousin, which sent Palmira to live with Mariangela when she was twelve because her family was experiencing economic problems. Palmira is an almost forty-year-old timid and lowly woman that spent her life silently working as a servant in Mariangela's house. Palmira is involved in Michele's murdering because Michele's wife (Maddalena) kills him when she found out that Michele has a relationship with Palmira and that she is pregnant of his child.

Mariangela knows that Maddalena killed her son Michele. Despite this, Mariangela helps Maddalena to hide Michele's murdering. This is because Mariangela, even if Michele is her son, does not approve of his behavior and she believes that Maddalena rightly punished him. Mariangela is still resentful and angry about the betrayal of the man that was supposed to marry her when she was teenager, Cosimo Mele. Many years after this episode Mariangela is still resentful and angry with Cosimo Mele and she goes every day to visit his tomb to spit on it and to insult him. Mariangela is still wounded and offended by Cosimo's betrayal and she feels supportive of her daughter-in-law for punishing Michele's betrayal with his murder. Differently from Michela in *Paura e Carne*, Mariangela is more interested in questions of honor, proudness, and control, rather than money. In the same way as Michela did, Maddalena does not love her son, and she considers her dominion and jurisdiction on her family's businesses more important than her son's life.

Differently from the monstrous mothers described by Todde and Fois the terrona-mothers described by Elena Ferrante in the novel *L'Amore Molesto* (The Love Harassing), 2002 and by Elio Vittorini in the novel *Conversazione in Sicilia* (Conversation in Sicily), 1941, represent positive representations of southern Italian mothers. They are described as strong characters capable of transmitting to her children positivity and confidence. They attempt to conduct a fulfilled and satisfying existence while at the same time caring and sustaining their children.

Positive Underprivileged Mamma Terrona

In *L'Amore Molesto* Ferrante describes the relationship between Delia and her mother Amalia. Significantly, the book is dedicated to the author's mother. The story begins with the finding of Amalia's corpse as she drowned in a stretch of sea close to Naples. Amalia's death becomes Delia's opportunity to think about her life and her childhood. Delia remembers about the relationship that she had with her mom when she was a child and she elaborates the traumas that she experienced in her past. Delia has a cold and detached relationship with her mother. However, when she was a child her relationship with Amalia was morbid and obsessive. When Amalia was young she was a strong and charismatic woman and she used to attract the attention of multiple suitors. One of them is Caserta, an old family friend obsessed with Amalia that continues to court her until her death when she is almost seventy. Amalia's spontaneous ability of attracting men's attentions causes the violent reactions of her husband. Delia's father is an insecure man and a mediocre painter eager to receive other people's approval and admiration. He is violent and possessive, and he is jealous about Amalia's spontaneous capability of attracting attention and admiration. In addition of provoking the jealousy of her husband, Amalia also causes Delia's possessiveness. In the same way Amalia's husband suspected that when she was alone she used to behave in an indecent and licentious way, also Delia used to imagine her mother forgetting about Delia's existence while flirting with other men. She visualized Amalia while laughing with a loud voice, eating pastries, and drinking wine. In the same way as her father, Delia was especially jealous about Caserta and she was worried that Amalia could love him more than she loved Delia.

Because of this, when Delia was a child, she attempted to push Caserta away from Amalia's life by lying to her father about their relationship. Delia does it by associating to her mother and Caserta a trauma experienced by her. Delia gets sexually harassed by Caserta's old father, the owner of a candy shop where Delia used to go. Because of her obsession for Amalia, Delia transposes the sexual harassment that she suffered from Caserta's father to Caserta and Amalia and she tells her father that she witnessed a sexual intercourse between them. As a consequence of Delia's lie, Amalia gets violently bitten by her husband and she decides to leave him and to bring Delia with her. Amalia, despite her husband's violent abuses is described as a resilient woman always smiling and laughing. At seventy, during the months before she died, she dates her

old suitor Caserta. They used to hang out together, going to cinema and restaurants, having walks while making jokes and laughing loudly, buying flowers, and eating pastries.

Initially Amalia does not succeed to transmit her positive personality to her daughter. Delia, in fact, is described as a gloomy and solitary person incapable of feeling attachment to other people and getting involved in sentimental relationships. She is also frigid and incapable of feeling physical pleasure. After Amalia's death, however, Delia manages to solve some of her personal problems by reflecting on her mother's personality and about her relationship with her. At the end of the story, Delia remembers a strange conversation that she had with Amalia the night before she died. Amalia called Delia by phone, and she told her obscene phrases that shocked and confused Delia. By reflecting about this episode, Delia realizes that the obscenities that her mother told her were the same that Caserta's father told to Delia when he sexually harassed her. Amanda knew about them because Delia, when she lied to her father about witnessing a sexual intercourse between Amalia and Caserta, told him about the obscenities that Caserta's father told to her as if Caserta told them to Amalia. Amalia, by reminding to Delia about these obscenities helped Delia to overcome her trauma. By pronouncing the traumatic obscenities that Delia heard when she was a child Amalia shows to Delia that now they are harmless, and that Delia can think about them without feeling pain.

Another positive representation of the southern Italian mother is the one that Vittorini narrates in the novel *Conversazione in Sicilia*. *Conversazione in Sicilia* was written in between the two world wars and it narrates about Silvestro, a thirty-year-old Sicilian man that emigrated to the north of Italy when he was fifteen. After being fifteen years away from Sicily Silvestro decides to go to visit his mother Concezione in the little village where he was born. He decides to do this because he receives a letter from his father saying that he left Concezione for another woman. By emigrating from Sicily to the north of Italy Silvestro achieves a better living condition and has become capable of providing sustenance to his children and wife. Despite this, he receives his father's letter while he is in a tormented mood. He is experiencing a crisis motivated by his political and existential reflections about the world's injustices. Silvestro feels sadness and frustration for the oppressed people that live in misery and poverty. During his travel in Sicily Silvestro observes the local people and he reflects about their economic problems as well as their solitude, marginalization, and tragic existence. Silvestro is sad and depressed when he arrives at his mother's

place. Concezione, however, differently from Silvestro is a strong and positive woman and despite being abandoned by her husband is not in a sad and desolated mood as Silvestro would have expected.

Concezione is almost fifty years old. She has brown hair and dark eyes. She is strong and in good health. When Silvestro arrives at her place she is roasting herrings. Concezione and Silvestro have lunch together, and they speak about Silvestro's childhood. They also address Silvestro's father that, unlike Concezione, is a weak and vain man always in need of receiving the attentions of other women and flirts with them by sending them love poems.

Concezione, despite her husband's departure, is not described as a lonely and heartbroken woman. Rather, Concezione successfully manages to live without him and she becomes economically independent by learning how to deliver injections to people affected by phthisis and malaria. After having lunch with Silvestro, Concezione brings him with her to visit her clients and to show him how she performs her new job. By going with Concezione to visit her clients, Silvestro witnesses the condition of miserable human beings living in poverty and sickness. The houses visited by Concezione are poor and dark and the contrast between the daylight of the Sicilian landscape and the dimness of the houses' interiors is compared to the passage between the world of the living and the ones of the dead populated by spirits and ghosts (p. 83). Silvestro, by passing from one world to another, feels confused and disoriented. Concezione, instead, looks comfortable and at ease in the daylight as well as in the darkness of the poor people's houses.

Similar to Amalia, Concezione represents a positive portrait of southern Italian mother that loves her son and attempt to transmit to him her strength and positivity. Despite her poor living condition and her weak and unfaithful husband Concezione is described as a woman capable of surviving the adversities without losing her irony and sarcasm. In the novel Silvestro is described as melancholic and sad because of his reflections about the human condition. By conversing with his mother, however, he improves his mood and he spends his time with her by laughing and making jokes.

Conclusions

Concezione and Amalia are strong, caring and positive mothers, however they live a humble existence, they have not an influential role in their

society and they do not detain political power. On the other hand, the terrona mothers analyzed in this work that are well off and have social power are uncaring and disinterested to their children or they have their authority rejected by their children. According to my investigation about the terrona motherhood the characteristics of being loving, strong, positive, fulfilled, well-off and powerful never emerge all together in the same character. This data underlines the necessity to produce new representations of southern Italian mothers where she is addressed in a more positive and empowering way.

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