Italian Experiences of Trauma through Film and Media

Italian Experiences of Trauma through Film and Media

Edited by

Alberto Baracco and Rosario Pollicino

Italian Experiences of Trauma through Film and Media

Edited by Alberto Baracco and Rosario Pollicino

This book first published 2022

To doctors and healthcare workers
engaged in the fight against Covid-19

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

PREFACE

This volume stems from the meeting of the two editors at scholarly conferences where trauma within Italy was the main topic discussed. The editors, who combined their expertise in trauma and film studies, agreed that the study of trauma, in its interdisciplinary perspective, has become a focus of scholarly attention in multiple countries. These studies have followed two different paths of analysis: a national one, such as is found in the book *The Unspeakable: Representations of Trauma in Francophone Literature and Art* edited by Amy L. Hubbell and Nevine El Nossery (2013); or a thematic one, such as is exemplified in Linnie Blake's *The Wound of Nations* (2012). However, in spite of the importance of the topic, there was no single book that addressed the relationship between trauma, media and Italy as a whole country, especially through media beyond films. Specifically, the editors sought to identify relationships to different traumatic experiences that needed to be voiced because they were less known than others and, above all, understand the different perspectives of those (lesser) known traumatic experiences.

The main question that prompted the editors to create this volume was whether these traumatic experiences could be linked to one another rather than seen as separate simply because they were caused by a wide range of different traumatic situations. This question has led them to seek an interdisciplinary approach, namely by looking at trauma from a sociological and psychoanalytical perspective through media studies. The latter allow to combine the traumas of different people that may not suffer to the same event but for whom media plays "matchmaker" in enabling them to understand and support one another. This support creates a community that helps in fighting trauma and its repercussions. Media provides the way in which a traumatic event is represented to people who may be close or far and/or involved (or not), and it is through media that the trauma becomes the link among people. It is this link that is investigated here, because while it is expressed through specific cases, incidents and instances, it opens a broader discussion on how to face other traumatic situations that cannot necessarily be predicted.

This volume explores different traumas from the 20th century and what they have produced not only in terms of suffering but also the healing or soothing processes arrived at in consequence. These reveal the presence of

people in Italy who live with those traumas but above all with the awareness that they are not recognized at a national level. The latter is important in the present volume because it highlights that, while there may not be a single traumatic experience that simultaneously affects all the people living in Italy, there are different situations that instead involve or have involved a large number of people regardless of their nationality and the way they are perceived by others. The common denominator of all the people involved is that they have lived in Italy during those traumatic events. Thus, the national perspective in this volume is not intended as necessarily indicative of a political sense of belonging to Italy but, rather, embeds also the opposite; namely, the inclusion of transnational people who should also be considered part of Italy despite that they are not official citizens. A further twist on this question of belonging is this: this volume acknowledges the people who are citizens but whose citizenship is not recognized, which is itself a source (or a compounding factor) of trauma. The point is worth raising here because it highlights how the volume investigates the links between individual and collective trauma, which show how one subject can be linked to another through unpredictable events and demonstrate how these people become part of bigger subnational or transnational communities through these traumatic events.

At the beginning of this project neither the editors nor any of the contributors could have imagined facing the Covid-19 pandemic, which occurred shortly after this project began. While the editors found it to be too early to analyze the seismic shock of the pandemic in any depth, as trauma is a state that affects people in the aftermath of the event itself, all the contributors have had the challenge of being slowed down. The pandemic posed difficulties to many people involved in this volume. Within the circle of contributors, the pandemic, in the midst of which we still find ourselves as this preface is written, has caused the loss of family or friends, fear of moving and meeting, and a general mistrust of others. The dedication of this volume came naturally as the volume developed during the pandemic emergency. The horrors and wounds the pandemic inflicted on the world have shown, with terrible immediacy, how important a reflection on individual and collective trauma and media is in contemporary times.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Introduction

Trauma in the Italian Experience: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Rosario Pollicino

Since its onset in the mid 1990s, the field of trauma studies has proliferated and scholars have developed deeper insights by focusing on analysis within multiple individual countries. Recent works have focused upon Italy, such as *Story Takers* (Salvio 2017), which looks at the mafia and trauma in Italy through media, and Dana Renga's *Unfinished Business* (2013), which looks at recent mafia films. They analyze film and media but only through the lens of Jeffrey C. Alexander's cultural trauma perspective. This theory of trauma considers collective trauma exclusively, seeing individual trauma as detached from collective suffering. This present edited collection, on the other hand, focuses on Italy and trauma and aims to present this relationship considering both individual and collective trauma. Benedict Anderson notably describes the concept of nation as an "imagined community" and this volume, beginning from this perspective, highlights the existence of subnational and transnational communities shaped by trauma cases that have thus far remained mostly unconsidered. Kai Erikson, speaking of collective trauma, states that "trauma shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can" (Erikson 1995, 186), and this volume proposes each section as a representation of a community that may (or may not) be created by the traumatic experience but whose members identify themselves as part of that community through the trauma suffered.

The terms subnational or transnational community are here used partially as synonyms for the sociological term 'social category', which the open dictionary of sociology defines as "a group of people, places, and things that have commonalities" (Seaman 2015). In this volume we consider trauma and social categories mostly in reference to human beings as they form those communities; however, they are also connected to a specific place, Italy, and sometimes even to specific regions of the country. Obviously, "things"

cannot get traumatized per se, but we place in this category "living things", such as the environment and nature, that somewhat unpredictably may create further trauma(s) to human beings via both direct and indirect repercussions (for instance, a severe earthquake, as explored in section 4 of this book). These three elements—human beings, the environment and nature—will be considered in the book, highlighting the presence of these traumatized communities in Italy. These subnational and transnational communities must not be identified as small groups of people who personally know each other, because in sociology this would mean a social group very different from a social category mentioned above. While the volume does not exclude the presence of social groups as targets of the traumatic events presented in this book, the phrases subnational or transnational community employed here serve a twofold purpose. First, they allow the contributors to include a sociological approach to trauma, considering mostly the social category but—according to the different traumatic situations—the social group can also be in place without necessarily substituting for the bigger group in which members do not know each other personally. This bigger group still learns about its members as victims of a similar traumatic situation, namely, the social category, for example a family and its community hit by a mafia murder (see section 3 of this book). Secondly, and more importantly, this book looks not simply to Italy and trauma cases mostly unknown so far but examines how they represent individual and collective trauma. Indeed, it is the relationship between individual and collective trauma that allows us to read Italy through an interdisciplinary lens, which in turn represents a new approach to looking at Italy and trauma.

The majority of the communities discussed here are composed of individuals who have suffered a traumatic experience that, in one way or another, has also been inflicted on other people in the same way and, consequently, affects the community to which these people belong because of the sameness of trauma suffered.[1] While the people involved may or may not personally know one another, media play the important role of recounting a traumatic event, which makes them understand that their experience has not been simply an individual matter. There are people who may recognize themselves as experiencing the same traumatic event if for instance the media refer to a historical occurrence, or some other major event that although removed in time and place has caused a similar suffering. For example, a disaster at a nuclear plant would link those people directly involved in it to the ones who suffered from the Chernobyl accident.

---

[1] It is very important to clarify, following Erikson's theory, that sameness of trauma does not constitute collective trauma, as I explain on page 7 of this introduction.

We may be tempted to think that Chernobyl has not been repeated; however, there have been 57 other nuclear accidents or severe incidents since then (Sovacool 2010). This is important because the people involved in the Chernobyl accident have received international attention, and although the damages they suffered in a psycho-physical perspective have been huge they found comfort not simply in the community of the city (that is, all the people directly involved), but also in this much bigger community of people from all over the world who showed solidarity with them. For the other 57 accidents or severe incidents the representation of their victims' trauma through social media has not been so impactful. This is to say that for those people involved in nuclear accidents after Chernobyl, the community involved directly in the accident/incident become of paramount importance for the receipt of psychological support. However, they also know that the well-known Chernobyl accident has created a community of victims of whom they are a part, even if they have never met any of the people affected by the Chernobyl explosion; they know that there are people other than those they know personally who can fully understand them. This communal dimension is important and can easily be provided by media because "shared experience becomes almost like a common culture, a common language, a kinship among those who have come to see themselves as different" (Erikson 1995, 189). This difference to which Erikson refers is exactly the awareness that a traumatic experience has changed the people involved, meaning that this particular experience made them *different* from the people who were not involved but at the same time gave a commonality to the traumatized subjects. This is pivotal for this volume's theoretical approach as it is through film and media such as documentaries, websites, TV and advertisements that the traumatized subjects acknowledge their position within a subnational and/or transnational traumatized community.[2] Media allows the sharing of an experience with an audience that may hear, by chance, about a specific event, which may be useful to the casual listener who understands the traumatic experience and can offer or receive emotional support when the

---

[2] This volume's editors have decided to omit the case of the Holocaust as an obvious transnational community highly traumatized because it has occupied, justly, a dominant space and position in scholars' work about Italy and other countries. Instead, the aim of this volume is to give a reading of new traumatic cases, which show communities who have not been considered so far. More importantly, as previously mentioned, belonging to one community does not preclude an individual from belonging to others. The editors have also decided not to include the Covid-19 pandemic as at the time of writing this is still happening. To talk about it effectively from the traumatic perspective, the case studies related to it should be studied after its conclusion.

listener has shared an experience of the same kind. This cannot be offered by printed literature such as a memoir because for a book to be found it must be purposefully sought.

This volume, overall, argues that individual and collective traumas are not in a binary relationship and that individual trauma often has a collective traumatic repercussion. This book examines this relationship and explores how the traumatized subject searches for this community in order to be fully understood in the context of the experience suffered. This leads on to the fascinating passage from individual to collective trauma, which ultimately represents an attempt to at least partially soothe the individual's traumatic suffering. It is this connection, explained through the different examples discussed in this book, which makes Alexander's theory of Cultural Trauma inappropriate, as it excludes not only the psychoanalytic approach to trauma but disregards individual trauma entirely. Alexander considers individual trauma necessarily detached from the collective suffering and classifies the psychoanalytic approach to trauma as a "lay understanding of trauma" (Alexander 2004, 4). Interestingly enough, speaking always in the sphere of collective trauma, he states that "First and foremost, we maintain [a perspective] that events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma" (Alexander 2004, 8) and I wonder how such a general statement can be made when historical traumatic events such as the Holocaust, and wars generally, necessarily generate individual and collective traumatic repercussions. Obviously, these traumas are related to the people directly involved with the war, but they also affect those involved indirectly. We do not think this is a "lay understanding of trauma" but rather an indication that trauma belongs to lay people, (not-) citizens, who are, necessarily, members of subnational or transnational communities. However, Alexander justifies such a standpoint:

> while every argument about trauma claims ontological reality, as cultural sociologists we are not primarily concerned with the accuracy of social actors' claims, much less with evaluating their moral justification. We are concerned only with how and under what conditions the claims are made, and with what results. It is neither ontology nor morality, but epistemology, with which we are concerned. (Alexander 2004, 9)

Now we can understand that his theory of cultural trauma does not fully reconcile with this volume's interdisciplinary approach. All the contributors and the editors share this perspective because we share a belief in the importance of both individual and collective traumas, considering the wide range of traumatic situations and repercussions for the individual and collectivity involved. Because traumas affect people in many different

ways, and above all in many different circumstances, to adopt just one perspective, as Alexander did, means not to interrogate possibilities that are necessarily involved, like the concept of identity, that in its wider possible meaning links an individual to the community. The latter has of course an identity too, to which Alexander pays attention, but the collective identity is not separated from the identity of its individuals. Indeed, transnationalism, migration, murder and violence, and environment and nature (the different sections of this volume) form those communities of which I have been speaking so far, and they do participate in shaping identities, just like the state of trauma does.

Trauma has the power to change its subject, not necessarily for worse or better (this is not the point), because it represents an experience that might be overcome and so strengthen its subject—or at least give them the knowledge and understanding to live with it and its consequences. A clear example is given by Shoshana Felman when she describes two Holocaust survivors who get married not so much because they wanted to be together but because that terrible experience had changed both of them and they were the only ones, or so they thought, who knew who each of them was (Felman 1991, 65). What it is interesting in this example is not the Holocaust effect *per se*. I recognize, together with many other Trauma scholars, that the Holocaust is the trauma *par excellence*. Rather, each traumatized subject went through events that were clearly an "overwhelming experience or sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 1991, 181). So, while catastrophic might be a word that justifies the traumatic state of a subject, it is not intended as a universal descriptor of a tragedy for all of humanity such as the Holocaust. Trauma is a subjective state that has a value determined by the event and, above all, how important or catastrophic it is considered by the subject(s) involved. This is to say that a traumatic state must be respected in the suffering that it causes rather than the nature of the generating event. What is at stake in this example of the Holocaust couple is how they speak about their individuality, namely, the fact that only they could know each other because went through the same experience. These two people did not consider their community of traumatized subjects, all the other millions of people who went through the same suffering directly and indirectly through the loss of families and friends. This, I contend, might also have helped them in moving their suffering from the individual to the collective trauma sphere and feeling much more support. But, in a more simplistic way (and no less efficiently), getting married assumes exactly this same role. The couple in this case can be seen as a small community through

which they fight and/or learn to live with the trauma(s) suffered together in an understanding home environment. For all this, all the contributors recognize the need to adopt interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of trauma which is true to its nature.

I share Alexander's concept of "trauma process" and the difference between the traumatic event and its representation (Alexander 2004, 11), because the latter is first and foremost given by the recounting by the traumatized subject(s). The recounting process does not simply include words but also silence and body language. An example of such process is the collection of testimonies of the Holocaust victims, which Dori Laub accomplished in his interviews for the *Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies* at Yale University. What it is important here is not the traumatic event, namely, the Holocaust, but rather how the representation of it must start by the recounting of the traumatic experiences. The recounting may happen in different settings, it can be oral in a psychoanalytic session, to a journalist (with either hidden or revealed identity) or simply to a friend. However it happens, what makes all this important is the understanding that a trauma must be first and foremost recounted and represented, while acknowledging the clear risks of not having a perfectly faithful representation (Laub 1992). In the vast majority or traumatic situations which are not part of historical happenings, the traumatized subject recounting will focus mostly on the individual aspect of it. Psychoanalysis is necessarily involved in such a process but we often come across narratives expressed in writings such as memoirs. Traumatized subjects who have decided to "talk" by writing are also looking for a listener, namely, a reader, who might be casual or a scholar of literature or history. The Humanities are therefore just as much a part of this understanding of trauma as psychoanalysis. However, we often come across testimonies given through media such as newspapers, TV programs, documentaries and advertisements, as well as through fiction, such as films and docufiction, a mix of the reality of a testimony and the representation of a situation without being linked to real persons. Indeed, when at the beginning of a film or television series we find words like "inspired by a true story", we understand that this is not a witness testimony, but we must acknowledge there is always a latent attempt to reconstruct a community shaped by that trauma. This is to say that the people affected by a traumatic event share their experiences because they want to be heard. They hope there is someone who can fully comprehend them, i.e., another person who went through this same kind of experience. Now it is possible to understand exactly what this volume means for the interdisciplinary approach. We consider psychoanalytic theory about individual trauma; sociological theories about collective trauma; together with history, Eco-

criticism, literature and media studies to understand how these communities are shaped. These approaches are interdisciplinary as it is only by mixing them and considering them together that they can clarify the complexity of trauma among its manifestation, awareness and soothing/overcoming processes.

This volume is organized by theme and deliberately focuses on traumatic experiences related to Italy that begin with WWII and continued throughout the 20th century. As previously mentioned, each section of the volume represents a community, which is identified through the shared traumatic experience. Erikson states that collective trauma "is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support" (Erikson 1976, 154). He refers to communities that knew of their existence and belonging before the traumatic experience hit them. In this volume we extend Erikson's concept to communities that are created and then identified through the traumatic experience itself. To understand this concept, it is vital to remember that these subnational and transnational communities are not exclusive because, as Steward Hall said, cultural identity is

> a matter of *becoming* as well as of *being*. It belongs to the future as well as to the past [...] cultural identity come from somewhere have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation [...] identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narrative of the past. (Hall 1990, 225)

These perceptions change both in space and time, so that the same individual may feel that they belong to different communities at the same time, dictated by national belonging, gender, political and religious beliefs, place of dwelling and many other factors. Often, these subnational or transnational communities are not given any strong social importance but rather tend to be embedded in the nationalist idea, and force an identity perception of a huge and, mostly, homogeneous national community. Doing otherwise would weaken the idea of a united nation that, although is an "imagined community", to recall Benedict Anderson (1991), continues to be central in the formation of each country. It is worth remembering that Italy is one of the youngest nations in Europe, only being formed in 1861.

The first section of this volume, entitled "WWII, Italy and Transnational Trauma", aims to demonstrate how political borders do not block traumatic experience but instead help us to identify communities shaped by important historical event such as WWII. Carmen Concilio's essay focuses on the film (and the novel) *The English Patient* (Minghella 1996), which connects with other two transnational narratives about the warscape in Italy, both written

by the Sri Lankan-Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje. Meanwhile, Paola
Della Valle's contribution offers a perspective on Maori participation in
WWII in Italy. These two essays highlight a traumatic relationship between
the Commonwealth countries and Italy, presenting trauma as a way to create
a transnational community that despite national borders unites a group of
people that suffered the same losses. The traumatic perspective in this
section offers, then, a possibility of soothing trauma's repercussions by
deconstructing the meaning of war itself, which *never* belongs to people of
specific nationalities or ethnicities but just to nations, and as such is inflicted
on real people under this motivation. The latter concept allows detachment
from war traumatic memories, and at the same time empowers a more direct
process of trauma soothing (or even healing) by seeking acknowledgment
with, and among, people of other nationalities. Interestingly enough, the
individual trauma perspective offered in these essays has links to the
territory in which the war is taking place, Italy, showing the connection
between individual trauma and the land.

The second section of the volume, entitled "Forced Migration and
Trauma", analyzes cases of forced migration, by which we mean migration
not simply to attain better economic conditions, but as an expulsion or as an
attempted way to escape from a tragic present circumstance. Rosario
Pollicino's contribution focuses on the trauma of the refugees from Libya,
descendents of former settlers. Pollicino highlights how this community has
been highly traumatized, both individually and collectively, by the diaspora
into which it was forced after Qaddafi's *coup d'état* in 1969. Highlighting
this dispersed community through the websites of the Italians of Libya, he
shows that the term "tripolini" does not refer simply to the Italians of Libya
but to all people of postcolonial Libya originating from other countries. This
essay shows how through websites we have a case of e-diaspora (Diminescu
2012) and a community that looks at the future rather than at a nostalgic
past. Moira Di Mauro-Jackson's essay, entitled "Mobility, Migration and
Trauma: Rethinking the European Art Film of Today", considers how the
films and documentaries about the current migration through the
Mediterranean combine the representation of the 'mythical', while
deterritorializing/reterritorializing themes on filmic languages are the two
key components of these films' geopolitical aesthetics. The latter becomes
a tool for rethinking migration, trauma and the European art film of today.
This section deliberately identifies both individual and collective trauma. It
shows how a very large community such as the migrant community may be
formed by political process such as the settlement of Libya, during fascism,
and by difficult living conditions such as the migrants from different
African countries who cross the Mediterranean in contemporary times.

Today's migrant is still considered as different from the Italian host community. The two different media employed in this section (websites, documentaries) have the goal to represent real traumas, ultimately showing how the lack of Italian citizenship is often used as an excuse to negate migrant rights. Indeed, the former Italians of Libya, despite holding Italian citizenship, suffer the same as if they had migrated to a foreign country. This shows the migrants as a subnational and a transnational community much larger than what is usually perceived by categorizing them simply as being between an origin and a host country.

The third section, entitled "Murder and Trauma", aims to highlight how the strongest representation of violence, murder, traumatizes not simply the people directly involved, the actual victim and their family, but also inflicts a collective trauma on the community to which the people involved belong. Following the diachronic order of the Italian experience of trauma, Fabiana Cecchini's essay highlights the link between the traumatic effects of the 'years of lead' and ordinary people. Beginning with the film *Lavorare con lentezza* (Working slowly) by Guido Chiesa (2004), Cecchini highlights a connection with the historical events of the years of lead that, while including the case of Aldo Moro, analyzes the tormented period through popular forms of protest such as the experience of Radio Alice, one of the first private Italian radio stations, and the song "Lavorare con lentezza" (Working slowly) by Enzo Del Re (1974). Cecchini's essay depicts Italian society in a historical moment of fracture as a whole by highlighting, through the films' characters, how a collective and individual trauma can not only coexist, but she argues that one, in this case the collective trauma, can somehow exclude the individual one. Giovanna Summerfield's essay, entitled "*Femminicidio* in Sicily: Literature, Media, and Contemporary Life" revisits the personal stories and literary plots of the Sicilian women of the 19th and 20th centuries, focusing on common trends and narrative choices. She analyzes the historical, social and legal contexts of those times to facilitate the understanding and overcoming of a pressing contemporary phenomenon that in Italy amounts to one death every three days, with more than 1,600 new cases of orphans (*orfani speciali*) in the last ten years. The works by Capuana, Verga, Messina and Pirandello serve here as points of departure for a close analysis of narrative approaches used by Italian contemporary media outlets to deliver stories of abuse and death, where the term "femminicidio" is often omitted to be replaced by recurring terms associated with passion and "too much love". Robin Pickering-Iazzi centers the traumatic experience between mafia and media, and her essay, entitled "Mafia and the creation of Testimonial Communities: The Case of Annalisa Durante", examines the heterogeneous testimonial discourses as Annalisa's

diary, in print, and such remediated online artifacts as YouTube videos, photography and painting. Pickering-Iazzi shows how mafia generate both individual and collective trauma through specific life-threatening conditions of daily living, which members of the community may not acknowledge but which still produce pain and suffering, as well as changes in social identities and behaviours, breaking thresholds of trauma. This section shows how a large traumatized community can be formed, such as the women of an entire country (not only in Italy) who comprise a targeted community for those crimes and who, in spite of the clear statistics that Summerfield highlights, struggle to be officially recognized. Summerfield shows how a collective trauma is inflicted among the women of Italy who now know that lovers do kill women and their murder is often socially justified. Pickering-Iazzi complements this section by showing another community, the one traumatized by the Mafia and now totally forgotten, has been left in a daily battle that goes well beyond the murders and mourning of the family. This section shows how media may play a role in both creating a narrative that justifies murders and, at the same time, protests it. These three essays reproduce the link between a mostly-neglected contemporary event, such as feminicide, and others that have been forgotten, like the Mafia and the Radio Alice experience.

The last section of the book, entitled "Nature, Environment and Trauma", highlights another traumatized community that links the three elements with Italy. Enrico Cesaretti's contribution uses Daniele Atzeni's docu-fiction *I morti di Alos* (Atzeni 2011) to flesh out an eco-trauma case that occurred in Sardinia. Cesaretti's essay focuses on the combination of a psychoanalytic approach to individual trauma with a collective trauma expressed through history. His essays sheds light on how docufiction is a new form of media to recount traumatic situations. Alberto Baracco's essay "The 1980 Irpinia and Basilicata Earthquake on Documentary Film: An Ecocritical Perspective on Trauma" focuses on the transformations, starting with the web revolution, that have changed the ways the Irpinia 1980 earthquake has been and continues to be remembered through cinema and photography. Baracco highlights the importance of a historical representation of trauma for the Irpinia and Basilicata earthquake. He uses three different documentaries to analyze this different way of representing trauma and also focuses on the acting out and working through concept (LaCapra 2001). If in Baracco's essay there is a tension in the temporality that looks at the trauma of how a natural disaster traumatized the people involved, Cesaretti's contribution instead approaches eco-trauma through the analysis of docu-fiction and fictionalized reality that not only expresses a real eco-trauma but particularly shows how fiction can serve as a first step to working through

the trauma(s) inflicted. Both of these essays recall the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to trauma studies as the most comprehensive approach to understanding what cannot be easily grasp because of the variety of its representations.

To conclude, trauma is part of Italy through individual and collective experiences that have for these reasons shaped the Italian population in its individuality but also in the formation of subnational and transnational communities, which complicates the much-sought-after definition of *Italianità*. The meaning of communities here does not simply stem from a sociological definition but rather from a traumatic experience that brings together the people involved as they recognize themselves as part of a community *because* of that specific trauma. In the attempt to soothe the suffering caused by these traumas, the people share through different media their experiences, with the aim of (re)connecting with other people affected by similar events. If in some cases this reconnection is possible, in others is not. However, in both situations the trauma-affected people know that they are part of a community. If the traumatized people have not reconnected among themselves, they know of the existence of others through the media—but they do not find true support guaranteed by the sameness of other people's experience. If they have reconnected as community members, a process in which some media do play a role, this connection may also act as a trigger to the suffering inflicted by the trauma. In one way or another, after the individual suffering there is the awareness that "'I' continues to exist though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. 'You' continue to exist though distant and hard to relate to. But 'we' no longer exist as a connected pair or as a linked cell in a larger communal body" (Erikson 1995, 187). The communities presented in this book, even if it might be argued that they represent imagined constructs such as the national community, get traumatized by real events, as the four sections of this book show. What is important in this book is not whether the communities highlighted 'really' exist or not but, rather, how the real trauma inflicted has influenced the people who lived and are living in Italy and who search or receive help from others who have been directly or indirectly involved in similar events. Indeed, while the contributions to this volume relate to traumatic experiences that really happened, the book *also* shows that films and docufiction relating fictionalized stories can help individuals to understand that the individual trauma they suffer(ed) refers also to a collective traumatic dimension. After all, the fictionalized works are inspired by real events.

This approach to Italy, individual and collective trauma provides the theoretical novelty of this book, as it allows the identification of these

communities. These representations, analyzed through an interdisciplinary perspective, allow us to map a new analysis of contemporary Italian society, and therefore open a new way to look at Italy. This edited collection's emphasis on trauma and Italy does not aim to mark trauma in Italy as a negative element. Rather, it analyzes the trauma as a product of modern and contemporary society and its study becomes imperative in understanding new and current problems. It is our hope that the reflections provoked by this volume improve awareness of contemporary Italian society, and the subnational and transnational communities that exist within and throughout it.

References

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2004. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma." In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 1–30. Oakland: University of California Press.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Atzeni, Daniele, dir. *I morti di Alos* [The casualties of Alos]. 2011. Araj Film, Areavisual.

Caruth, Cathy. 1991. "Uncliamed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History." *Yale French Studies* 79 (1): 181–192.

Chiesa, Guido, dir. *Lavorare con lentezza* [Working slowly]. 2004. Fandango.

Del Re, Enzo. 1974. *Lavorare con lentezza*.

Diminescu, Dana. 2012. "The concept." e-Diasporas. Accessed October 8, 2021. http://www.e-diasporas.fr

Erikson, Kai. 1976. *Everything in Its Path*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Erikson, Kai. 1995. "Notes on Trauma and Community." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, 183–199. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Felman, Shoshana. 1991. "In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah." *Yale French Studies* 79 (1): 39–81.

Hall, Steward. 1990. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Identity, Community, Culture and Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, 222–237. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

LaCapra, Dominick. 2001. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Laub, Dori. 1992. "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening." In *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and*

History, edited by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, 57–74. New York: Routledge.

Laub, Dori, Laure Fox Vlock, Geoffrey Hartman, and William Rosenberg. n.d. "Home." Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. Accessed October 8, 2021. https://fortunoff.library.yale.edu/

Minghella, Anthony, dir. *The English Patient*. 1996. Miramax, Tiger Moth Productions.

Ondaatje, Michael. 1992. *The English Patient*. New York: Vintage.

Renga, Dana. 2013. *Unfinished Business: Screening the Italian Mafia in the New Millennium*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Salvio, Paula M. 2017. *The Story-Takers Public Pedagogy, Transitional Justice, and Italy's Non-Violent Protest against the Mafia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Seaman, Claire E. 2015. "Social Category Definition." Open Education Sociology Dictionary. Accessed October 8, 2021.
https://sociologydictionary.org/social-category/

Sovacool, Benjamin K. 2010. "A Critical Evaluation of Nuclear Power and Renewable Electricity in Asia." *Null* 40 (3): 369–400.

SECTION I

WWII, ITALY AND TRANSNATIONAL TRAUMA

CHAPTER ONE

INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA AND BOMBTURBATION:
WORLD WAR II IN ITALY,
IN M. ONDAATJE AND H. JANECZEK

CARMEN CONCILIO

Between "the limit of history and the beginning of fiction" (LaCapra 2001, 7) trauma can insinuate itself and explode. In this essay, I wish to discuss individual trauma and "bombturbation" in relation to World War II in Italy, by analyzing two novels: *The English Patient* (1992), by Sri Lankan-Canadian author Michael Ondaatje; and *Le rondini di Montecassino* (*The Swallows of Montecassino*, 2010), by Polish-Italian novelist Helena Janeczek. In particular, I will be looking at trauma as equally affecting both individuals and the land(scape).

The Gustav Line, running across Italy midway between Naples and Rome, the Gothic Line, crossing central Italy, and the area around Trieste were three strategic regions where war raged horrendously between 1943 and 1945. The Germans, having become enemies of Italy, did all they could to slow down the advance of the Allied Forces who had landed in Sicily, at Taranto, at Calabria and at Salerno. Bombs reduced cities to rubble and debris; historical and artistic heritage was destroyed; bridges and river banks were blown up to interrupt transport and to produce flooding; people were left in extreme poverty and wandered in rags from place to place for shelter. This is the portrait of the country that emerges from war narratives. More recently, Michael Ondaatje's latest novel is a spy story dedicated to the area of Trieste, which was threatened first by the presence of Fascists and later by Tito's army. Thus, *Warlight* (Ondaatje 2018) is a moving reconstruction of the war-scape in Italy, not dissimilar to his previous novel.

The English Patient is well-known as a classic of postcolonial literature, for its apology of blurred identities, borderless countries, and anti-colonialism (Jacobs 1997, 107). It has been classified as "historiographic metafiction", according to the definition famously provided by Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon (1988), because of the merging of historical facts and fictional