

Gazes Upon the World of Italian Contemporary Women Filmmakers

Anita Trivelli, Università degli Studi 'Gabriele d'Annunzio'

Abstract

The essay aims at offering a journey within the documentary heritage of contemporary Italian women filmmakers, a survey drawing a varied map of approaches to the film medium, which take part in the redefinition process of cinema and its paradigms. The movies of these female directors deploy an exemplary commitment to (audio)visually exploring places, both central and peripheral, pointing out their nomadic vision and an itinerant gaze upon the world that is able to capture the current challenges and complexities with passion and rigour. Their works modulate in an original way the relationship between authorial intervention and social, cultural, historiographical investigation. Moreover, they propose a viewing on the most opaque and elusive sides of the contemporary realities, an observation that overall constitutes an innovation in the field of cinema as well as a change in the image of women, who are fully subjects of history, culture, and agency.

For Lorenza Mazzetti
and Agnès Varda

We are sealed vessels afloat upon
what it is convenient to call reality;
at some moments, without a reason,
without an effort, the sealing matter cracks;
in flood reality.
(Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*)¹

The current presence of female film directors in Italy amounts to about 15% of all filmmakers; within the national film industry the contingent of women engaged in the documentary practice is even higher. A good number of these filmmakers modulate in an original way their own relationship between authorial

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), p. 142.

intervention and social, cultural, historiographical investigation, with regard both to national history and international current events.²

The documentary is not only a visual testimony but also the true lifeblood of a contemporary audiovisual context, despite being punished by distribution that does not equal that of fictional movies. Without any pretense of being exhaustive, what follows provides some traces for the recognition of this documentary heritage for Italian women filmmakers. Their works draw a varied map of approaches to the film medium, which take part in the redefinition process of cinema and its paradigms. Moreover, they propose a viewing on the most opaque and elusive sides of the present world, an observation that overall constitutes an innovation in the field of cinema as well as a change in the image of women, who are fully subjects of history, culture, and agency. As Marco Bertozzi underlines, this cinema, the result of a ‘documentary passion’ that detaches itself from the dominant system — is ‘practised with obstinacy and with ridiculous production facilities’. Furthermore, Bertozzi adds that ‘whereas the film industry regulates the relations in legal-economic terms, the best female documentary introduces an immeasurable “freeness”. An ethic of gift, an exchange, that involves both the individual and the community in an emotional tam-tam far from the totem of commodification’.³

My essay aims at offering a journey within the documentary heritage of contemporary Italian women filmmakers by illustrating a range of films primarily featured in the prominent international film festivals, beginning with the Venice Film Festival. These filmmakers deploy an exemplary commitment to (audio) visually exploring places, both central and peripheral, pointing out their nomadic vision and an itinerant gaze upon the world that is able to capture the current challenges and complexities with passion and rigor.⁴

² The articulation of the Italian female film production, from 2008 to 2018, is the following: 9% feature films, 21% documentaries, 17% short films (source: *Seminar on Gender Equality and Inclusivity in the Film Industry*, Venice Film Festival, 2 September 2019).

³ Marco Bertozzi, *Storia del documentario italiano. Immagini e culture dell'altro cinema* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008), pp. 295–97. See also the interviews with women documentarians collected in *Il miraggio del reale: per una mappa del cinema documentario italiano*, ed. by Marco Bertozzi, *Quaderni del CSCI*, 4 (2008). A stimulating dialogue, long avoided or marginalized, between documentary and feminist film studies is triggered in the volume *Feminism and Documentarism*, ed. by Diane Waldman and Janet Walker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), which reveals the productivity of a mutually dynamic comparison. On the one hand, there are the challenges posed by feminist elaborations to theory, history and documentary practices; on the other hand, there is the enrichment that the production of documentaries has brought to the feminist theories themselves, especially with regard to the reflections on gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, class and nation.

⁴ The richness and variety of contributions of Italian women filmmakers to past and present audiovisual production are the core of the following collective volumes recently published in Italy: *Storie in divenire. Le donne nel cinema italiano*, ed. by Lucia Cardone, Cristina Jandelli and Chiara Tognolotti, *Quaderni del CSCI (annual review of Italian cinema)*, 11 (2015), and *We want cinema. Sguardi di donne nel cinema italiano*, ed. by Laura Buffoni (Venezia: Marsilio, 2018). As a mere in-progress list it is worthwhile to mention a few names of contemporary female directors

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The starting point of this voyage has a conceptual and cultural inspiration: that is the notion of *flânerie*, related to the notion of nomadism, a key idea pertinent for investigating the experiential and experimental declination exercised in the work of Italian female directors. *Flânerie* is rooted in both motion and vision: it combines looking (as well as being looked at) with moving — through spaces, places, environments, and landscapes. It is an esthetic trope, which also indicates a visual strategy connected to the idea of cinema itself, as a means of making ‘visible the invisible’, thanks to a gaze that is mobile and in flux.

Neglected or completely ignored by the historians, the *flâneuse* asserts herself in a different form than the *flâneur*: her *flânerie* differs from the male counterpart both for her use of public sphere, and for her resolute proximity to the object of attention. Moreover, it is useful to stress at the outset the conceptual evolution of the female *flânerie*, whose starting point, it has been argued, was the discovery of the department stores — with the industrial revolution and the concomitant development of cities — and then gradually, as we will see, it moved on to the discovery of the world.⁵

On the other hand, the practice of *flâneuse*-filmmakers, and particularly of these female documentarians, breaks a double cardinal rule of patriarchy related to the spaces assigned to women as well as to their predetermined areas of pertinence. On one side, the patriarchal tradition relegates women to the domestic sphere

whose works are not examined in my essay: Elisa Amoruso, Giulia Amati, Donatella Baglivo, Eva Baratta, Juliane Biasi Hendel, Laura Bispuri, Cecilia Calvi, Morena Campani, Carlotta Cerquetti, Giada Colagrande, Paola Columba, Enrica Colusso, Francesca Comencini, Cristina Comencini, Aurora Deiana, Antonietta De Lillo, Giulia Di Battista, Nunzia Di Stefano, Alexandra D’Onofrio, Margherita Ferri, Ilaria Freccia, Annamaria Gallone, Valeria Golino, Maria Iovine, Anna Kauber, Wilma Labate, Letizia Lamartire, Maria Martinelli, Cristina Mazza, Francesca Mazzoleni, Daria Menozzi, Elisa Mereghetti, Giulia Merenda, Laura Muscardin, Anna Negri, Michela Occhipinti, Elisabetta Pandimiglio, Martina Parenti, Valentina Pedicini, Katia Pedrotti, Silvia Perra, Rosalia Polizzi, Sara Pozzoli, Silvana Profeta, Paola Randi, Lorella Reale, Angela Ricci Lucchi, Alice Rohrwacher, Emma Rossi Landi, Fabiana Sargentini, Lilian Sassanelli, Stella Savino, Rossella Schillaci, Elisabetta Sgarbi, Carola Spadoni, Veronica Spedicati, Giovanna Taviani, Tekla Taidelli, Valeria Testagrossa, Maria Tilli, Maria Sole Tognazzi, Roberta Torre, Cinzia Th. Torrini, Claudia Tosi, Adele Tulli, Marisa Vallone, Cristina Vuolo. Some of these filmmakers are interviewed in the debut movie of Diana Dell’Erba, *Female Directors (Registe)*, (2014), taken from her dissertation in sociology, while the *leitmotif* of the film investigation starts from the pioneer Elvira Notari (personified by Maria De Medeiros). Twenty years ago, only Elvira Notari, Liliana Cavani, Lina Wertmüller and Suso Cecchi D’Amico represented Italy in the volume *Women Filmmakers Encyclopedia. Women on the Other Side*, ed. by Amy Unterburger (Michigan, USA: Visible Ink Press, 1999). And, again, Notari and Wertmüller are the Italian women filmmakers mentioned in the *Cahiers du Cinema*, 757 (Juillet-Août 2019) (dossier *Une histoire des réalisatrices*).

⁵ On film, *flânerie*, and the modern city, see the following pivotal works: Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1992); Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. by Leo Charney and Vanesha R. Schwartz (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995). A focal study on female *flânerie* in relation to literature is the chapter, ‘The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity’, in *Feminine Sentences*, by Janet Wolff (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990).

as a privileged *milieu* for the fulfilment of the roles of wife and mother. On the other side, it identifies the feminine with Nature, i.e. women as a repository for what cities have cancelled or neglected, and thus as a site which confirms, under another guise, the female function of nurturing and welcoming-care. This 'natural' framework is also included in the figure of 'the woman as a muse', which is opposed by the *flâneuse*, who is instead characterized by her active role, corresponding to her *badaud* (curious, eager) spirit and her desire for exploration.

As a practice that strengthens female subjectivity, the *flânerie* of the female directors is thereby a transgressive act, since it goes beyond the spatial and environmental boundaries reserved for women, suggesting that overcoming geographical frontiers is also a prerequisite for change.

These motifs are related to the idea of nomadism, one to which I will shortly return, since it permeates the documentary practice of these Italian filmmakers in the new millennium. Their movies point out, in fact, both the possibility and the necessity of 'seeing closely' and, at the same time and consequently, the need for motion and the impulse to travel through different spaces and times. Thus their exploration becomes the practice of a gaze upon the world that is capable of capturing the complexities of our time, often without urging radical positions or agenda, but with a nonetheless vigorous testimonial commitment.

In regard to the notion of nomadism, I will outline Rosi Braidotti's argument, as an original rethinking of Deleuze and Guattari's elaboration of this topic.⁶ For Braidotti, nomadism 'is an intellectual form; it is therefore not so much being homeless, as rather the ability to recreate one's home anywhere'.⁷ And 'the nomadic consciousness', she adds, is 'also an epistemological position'; it is 'a form of political opposition to a vision of subjectivity based on hegemony and exclusion'.⁸ The conquering of this space within an industry that is traditionally male chauvinist is indeed a meaningful development; it is an ideal metaphor of the recent Italian *flânerie* of women filmmakers, despite the phenomenon of the 'autrici interrotte'⁹ (interrupted film *auteuses*), the scant numbers of their movies as well as the scarce circulation and critical attention.

⁶ See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Edipe. Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972); Gilles Deleuze, 'Pensée nomade', in *Nietzsche aujourd'hui?*, ed. by Gilles Deleuze and others (Paris: Union Générale d'Édition, 1973); Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, 'Traité de nomadologie: la machine de guerre', in *Mille Plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980).

⁷ Rosi Braidotti, *Soggetto nomade. Femminismo e crisi della modernità*, ed. by Anna Maria Crispino (Roma: Donzelli, 1995), p. 21.

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 28.

⁹ This expression is by Barbara Maio, *Attrici e autrici. Per una mappa al femminile del cinema italiano*, in *Gli invisibili. Esordi italiani del nuovo millennio*, ed. by Vito Zagarrìo (Torino: Lindau, 2009). In her essay Maio stresses the number of Italian female directors who, after struggling for their debut, did not go beyond the first work, or had to wait many years before being able to make another film. As for the term *auteuse* see Rosanna Maule, *Her Blog: Women's Cinema in the Digital Age*, in *Contemporary Women's Cinema, Global Scenarios and Transnational Context*, ed. by Veronica Pravadelli (Milano, Udine: Mimesis International, 2017), pp. 238–39.

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My analysis opens with the pioneer Cecilia Mangini (born in 1927), who has been active as a filmmaker and screenwriter since the 1950s. In 1965 she shot *Being Women* (*Essere donne*, 1965), a film-inquest on Italian women workers, which denounced their conditions in the labor world in Italy during the economic boom (it was made amongst the factories of the North and in the rural areas of the South). At that time, the movie was censored, whereas today it has fully found a place in the history of Italian documentarism.¹⁰

In 2013 Mangini filmed with her colleague and fellow citizen Mariangela Barbanente (they were both born in Mola di Bari, Apulia) *My Travels with Cecilia* (*In viaggio con Cecilia*, 2013), a documentary that explores *en route* the contemporary Apulia region and its changes after industrialization. The movie intertwines contemporary footage with documentary excerpts from the 1960s taken by Mangini herself, portraying two women documentarians from different generations at the same time. The trip reaches Taranto immediately after the seizure of the largest steel plant in Europe, ILVA, and the filmmakers show what is happening nearby in the Apulian industry, an inquiry which is also a current overview of the nation.

In line with Mangini's civil commitment are recent works by Sabina Guzzanti and Fiorella Infascelli, with their movies *Sympathy for the Lobster* (*Le ragioni dell'aragosta*, 2007) and *Closed Fists* (*Pugni chiusi*, 2011) respectively. These two documentaries, shot in Sardinia, are exemplary of the political quality that belongs to the *nomadic consciousness* discussed by Rosi Braidotti.

In *Sympathy for the Lobster* Sabina Guzzanti focuses her gaze on the severe lobster depopulation in Sardinia that compromised the local sea economy. The 'pre-text' of a show aimed at defending the Sardinian fishermen acts as a diegetic frame, a simulated backstage scene conceived, written and performed by the filmmaker herself, effectively combining creativity and information. In the form of a fake reality show, which also functions as a critique of contemporary television, Guzzanti's movie promotes new ways of collective participation and mobilization. This practice was already present in her previous film *Viva Zapatero!* (Sabina Guzzanti, 2005) and the apex of this tendency is her docu-drama *The State-Mafia Pact* (*La trattativa*, 2014), which will be described later.

Fiorella Infascelli's *Closed Fists* narrates the protests of laid off workers from the Vinyls factory located in Porto Torres, which was recognised as an industrial pillar of excellence because it produced PVC without toxic vinyl chloride. The filmmaker 'shadows' (to use Zavattini's term) a group of workers who mobilised

¹⁰ In 2007 the restored documentary was released on DVD (ed. by Davide Orecchio and Carlo Ruggero, Rome: Edit. Coop.), with an additional interview with the director and an update of her inquest, entitled *Being a Woman Today* (*Essere donne oggi*). Moreover, Cecilia Mangini is one of the fifteen female voices collected by Concita De Gregorio and Esmeralda Calabria for their documentary film *Mother Yeast. The Girls of the Past Century* (*Lievito madre. Le ragazze del secolo scorso*, 2017), a passionate and vital testimonial excursus offered by the protagonists on politics, sex, work and dreams. The film includes, among others, Luciana Castellina, Natalia Aspesi, Adele Cambria, Piera Degli Esposti.

in a unique way against the company's dismantling of the labor force by occupying the former super prison of Asinara, a highly symbolic place in recent Italian history. In August 1985, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who had received death threats, withdrew there with their families to prepare the Maxi-trial against 460 *mafiosi* (held in Palermo from 1986 to 1992), whose final sentence was of 19 life sentences and penalties of a total of 2,665 years of imprisonment for the 346 convicts.¹¹ Moreover, in that 'maximum security prison' notorious bosses like Totò Riina were convicted. The workers' 'self-imprisonment' lasted over a year, starting from February 2009, and gained unexpected resonance on the media via press, TV and social media.

Itinerancy is iconic of four documentaries on the Italian 21st century, in which the existential plane is conjugated with the historical one: *Simply Beautiful* (*Bellissime* I, 2004; *Bellissime* II, 2006) by Giovanna Gagliardo, *We Want Roses Too* (*Vogliamo anche le rose*, 2007) by Alina Marazzi, *Girls... Life Is Trembling* (*Ragazze... la vita trema*, 2009) by Paola Sangiovanni, and *Mad Earth* (*Terramatta*, 2013) by Costanza Quatriglio. Gagliardo, Marazzi, and Sangiovanni retrace the history of women in light of consciousness about female roles both in the cinema and in the history of Italy. Thus, their documentaries act on the one hand as reenactments of the Italian women's liberation movement, and on the other as a reminder of the disseminating function carried out precisely by documentary practice in order to increase women's awareness.¹² Gagliardo in *Simply Beautiful* favours a 'classic' documentation testimony that reconstructs Italian history from a feminist point of view using archival footage and material from various sources. On the other hand, Marazzi with *We Want Roses Too* is committed to articulating a search of forms, shaping a cross-media play that is densely poetic. The third of these directors, Sangiovanni, in *Girls... Life Is Trembling*, cultivates an existential-experiential aspect, which consists of a direct confrontation of the documentary material with the lives of the female protagonists.¹³ In all three movies, female experience is central: women are posited as the subjects, and the viewer catches the process of this affirmation and the films' willingness to consolidate memory as opening, as Luisa Passerini writes, to 'new ways to conceive the relationship between the political and the cultural, and specifically the link between politics and daily life'.¹⁴

¹¹ Six years later Fiorella Infascelli returned to these locations to narrate in her movie *Once in Summer* (*Era d'estate*, 2015) the stay of the two Sicilian magistrates in the Asinara.

¹² On this specific point see Bernadette Luciano, Susanna Scarparo, 'Tra storia e memoria. Il movimento femminista nel nuovo documentario femminile', in *Filmare il femminismo. Studi sulle donne nel cinema e nei media*, ed. by Lucia Cardone and Sara Filippelli (Pisa: ETS, 2015). On the history of the Italian feminist movement see also Lorella Reale's movie *History of Feminist Movement in Italy* (*La storia del movimento femminista in Italia*, 2006), made with the exclusive use of archival materials.

¹³ In her last documentary, *The Sea of Our History* (*Il mare della nostra storia*, 2018), Gagliardo explores the relationship between Italy and its former Libian colony, retracing the turbulent history of the Mediterranean Country through archival footage and current testimonials and images.

¹⁴ Luisa Passerini, 'Afterword', in *Memory. Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 460. Gender and cinema

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This theme also innervates *Mad Earth: The Italian Twentieth Century of Vincenzo Rabito Sicilian Illiterate* (*Terramatta: Il Novecento italiano di Vincenzo Rabito analfabeta siciliano*, Nastro d'argento 2013/Silver Ribbon Award 2013 for Best Documentary) by Costanza Quatriglio, taken from Vincenzo Rabito's autobiographical novel, which has been called a 'popular *Gattopardo*' (the famous novel by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, 1956-1958). Vincenzo Rabito (Chiaramonte Gulfi, Sicily, 1899-ivi 1981) defined himself as '*inalfabeto*' ('illiterate'). He obtained his primary school license at the age of 35, and for 7 years secretly wrote his life story, full of tribulations and adventures, but also rich with rewarding achievements, such as his writing, through which he reworks the Italian history in the 20th century from poverty through the economic boom, using the unprecedented viewpoint of a wretch. His language is a private *argot*, neither dialect nor Italian, 'a made-up language' born out of listening, hence out of an oral tradition — Quatriglio explains — which dates back to the work of Sicilian puppets and of the *cunto*. Much like the three previous documentaries, *Mad Earth* intermingles multi-media materials (Rabito's typewritten pages, photographs, TV images, archival and musical material, and so on), passing through the personal journey of the 'ballad-singer' Rabito, as well as through the salient parts of the Italian twentieth century: the century that ferried Italy out of poverty and into the economic boom.

Within Quatriglio's strong documentary background (she is also the artistic director of the Sicilian branch of the Experimental Center of Cinematography dedicated to documentary cinema), at least another three of her documentaries should be mentioned: *The World on Their Shoulders* (*Il mondo addosso*, 2006), *87 Hours. The Last Days of Francesco Mastrogiovanni*, (*87 ore. Gli ultimi giorni di Francesco Mastrogiovanni*, 2015) and *Triangle* (2014), in addition to her medium-length docudrama *Bated Breath* (*Con il fiato sospeso*, 2013). *The World on Their Shoulders* describes the stories of four young Afghan refugees, who arrive in Italy to escape war and persecution (they are of Hazara origin, an ethnic group that has been subject to genocide for more than a hundred years in Afghanistan).¹⁵ *87 Hours. The Last Days of Francesco Mastrogiovanni* recounts an absurd and tragic experience of medical malpractice, occurred in 2009, which was still under trial when the film was released (the final verdict was issued in 2018). *Triangle* (which won the Nastro d'argento 2015/Silver Ribbon Award 2015 for

studies have propulsively pushed the surveys on memory (memory studies), a field of inquiry with a complex genealogy emerged in the 1970s, which poses strong historical questions, such as the role of the Holocaust in the 20th century and in the present. For updated reference studies see Alice Cati, *Gli strumenti del ricordo. I media e la memoria* (Milano: Editrice La Scuola, 2016), and *The Past in Visual Culture. Essays on Memory, Nostalgia and the Media*, ed. by Jilly Byoce Kay, Vathy Mahoney and Caitlin Shaw (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017).

¹⁵ This documentary inspired Costanza Quatriglio's docudrama *Just Like My Son* (*Sembra mio figlio*, 2018), which reconstructs the events of one of the four young immigrants, Mohammad Jan Azad (played by the Hazara poet and journalist Basir Ahang), who was co-writer of the film along with Doriana Leondeff and the director herself.

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Best Documentary) juxtaposes two tragedies involving women workers: the first being the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in NYC in 1913, which caused the death of 150 women, mostly immigrant workers; and the second, a century later, in Barletta (Apulia), in 2011, in which another group of female textile workers were crushed when their illegal factory collapsed. *Bated Breath* is instead inspired by the diary of Emanuele Patanè, who received his doctorate in Pharmacy at the University of Catania and who died of lung cancer in 2003, five years before the chemistry labs were closed due to their pollution. Quatriglio inserted in her reconstruction of these events both Emanuele's father's testimony and the accusations of the young man himself (voice over by Michele Riondino) regarding the lack of oversight and precautions in his workplace.

A similar docudrama vein is characterized in the works of Marina Spada, Serena Nono, Federica Di Giacomo, and once again Sabrina Guzzanti. Marina Spada dedicates *Poetry That Looks at Me (Poesia che mi guardi, 2009)* to the Milanese poet Antonia Pozzi, who belonged to a prestigious family from Lombardy (her father was a lawyer appreciated by the Mussolini regime, her mother a highly cultivated countess), and who committed suicide in 1938, at the age of twenty-six. The movie's title is borrowed from her verses, and following the writings and the places frequented by her protagonist, the filmmaker amalgamates current images and images from the past (found footage, family home movies, photos with and of Antonia Pozzi herself), composing a fascinating portrait of a young woman who was both vital and talented, however unsuited to her time and environment. After her suicide, her parents censored her poetic works, but they were rediscovered many years later.

The Venetian painter Serena Nono, Luigi Nono's daughter and Arnold Schönberg's grandchild, stages in her movie *The Way of the Cross (Via della Croce, 2009)* an original Passion of Christ with the homeless people of La Casa dell'Ospitalità di Sant'Alvise in Venice. Shot in the alleys of a scarcely known area of Venice, the movie blends christological *tableaux vivants* with the protagonists' declarations about the Gospels and their own hardships. With this choral *happening* of a marginalized humanity, the filmmaker celebrates 'hospitality as a cultural value'.¹⁶

Rich in humanity and anthropological tension is *Set Me Free (Liberami, 2016)*, Orizzonti Award for Best Film at the Venice Film Festival) by Federica Di Giacomo, a documentary dealing with the phenomenon of exorcism, which indirectly shows the film as a *work in progress*. During the filming of *Set Me Free*, the filmmaker approached the world of possession and exorcism, gradually shedding her prejudices on the subject, and penetrating it with a rigorous *participant observation*. The movie promotes critical thinking about and a real

¹⁶ An ulterior multi-ethnic and multi-lingual work by Serena Nono, again from a workshop made with La Casa dell'Ospitalità is her costume drama *Venice Saved (Venezia salva, 2013)*, on the failed sacking of Venice in 1618 by the Spanish Crown, following the tragedy after the same title of Simone Weil (1943).

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knowledge of the explored situations. The phenomenon under investigation, which we tend loosely to associate with the Middle Ages, has recently made a comeback in quite a number of Western countries, a return which a few years ago would have been regarded as highly unlikely, and that forced the Vatican into multiplying the recruitment of exorcists by their bishops. In Italy the regions that have the highest number of recruits are Lombardy and Sicily, where Di Giacomo carried out her research for the film for three years. There is indeed a church school for the priests willing to dedicate themselves to this kind of activity, a school in which they also study the various fields of psychology. In the selection process that characterized the filmmaker's research, the inadequacy of any discourse that was not based on the lived experience of the characters became evident through the observational use of the camera.

On the other hand, Sabina Guzzanti took four years to make *The State-Mafia Pact*, a vehement cinematic pamphlet on the deal between State and Mafia, which has recently (re)emerged on the Italian judicial stage, casting many shadows on the leading personalities of the current political landscape. The movie mixes cabaret, journalistic fiction and investigative-film as well as archival footage and ad hoc interviews, effectively combining the fictional component with documentary elements.

Memory is once again the explicit core theme of another quartet of documentaries made by Italian women filmmakers in 2001, within the series *The Sacher Diaries (I diari della Sacher)*, promoted by Nanni Moretti in collaboration with the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale (National Diary Archive). Two of them are tales of existential redemption: this is the case for the ex-convict protagonist of *In the Name of the Italian People (Nel nome del popolo italiano, 2001)* by Valia Santella, as well as for the story of the female protagonist of *Luisa's Notebooks (I quaderni di Luisa, 2001)* by Isabella Sandri, who confesses her marital unhappiness and her resistance for 'the good of the children and the family' only in her diary.

The other two film directors dealing with the memory theme, Mara Chiaretti and Susanna Nicchiarelli, concentrate instead on the experiences of war with their respective documentaries, *Davai Bistré!-Forward! Quick March (Davai Bistré!-Avanti! Presto!* by Mara Chiaretti) and *Cra Cri Do Bo* (by Susanna Nicchiarelli). *Davai Bistré!* does so through the indelible memories of a survivor of Mussolini Russian Campaign, while *Cra Cri Do Bo* considers war through the softened memories of three *bourgeoise* young girls, alert and intelligent but still protected from war's horrors.¹⁷

In addition to focusing on themes of voyage and itinerancy, recent documentaries by women offer a valuable observatory of excruciating contemporary issues and global emergencies. Thus, Giuliana Gamba travels across Iraq and Armenia to talk about the Kurds' plight in her *Hard Life in Kurdistan (In Kurdistan è*

¹⁷ Another documentary by Susanna Nicchiarelli, *For Life (Per tutta la vita, 2014)*, made of archival footage and home movies, focuses on the definitive introduction of divorce in Italy (1974) and on the significance of this conquest in the process of women's self-awareness.

difficile, 2004); Laura Angiulli explores the Bosnian territory battered by the war in what was formerly Yugoslavia, working with the mothers of Srebrenica in her *Towards East (Verso est*, 2008); and Barbara Cupisti describes in *Mothers (Madri*, 2007, David of Donatello Award in 2008) the experience of some Israeli and Palestinian mothers who lost their children in the endless war between the two peoples. These mothers further reacted to their pain by founding the association Parents Circle, which helps families to contend with their mourning, starting with the recognition of a common suffering and continuing by advancing new paths for dialogue and mutual understanding.

These movies are excellent examples of the manifold 'nomadic' view that inspires them, visions testifying to the 'epistemological positions' of these *auteuses* counterpoised against forms of hegemony and exclusion. Moreover, they represent the voyage, often through uneasy and unsafe places, as the essential prerogative for exploring the chosen subject matter, together with the anthropological tension of *participant observation* of these filmmakers.

Following the methodological work of *Mothers*, Cupisti shot *Womanity* (2018), which relates vigorous female stories. First there is the Egyptian Sisa, awarded as 'ideal mother' (in her twenties, widowed and pregnant, she has been disguising herself as a man for over forty years to be able to work as a shoeshine and so raise her daughter); next are Geeta and Ritu from India, at the forefront in defence of women (against the outrage of feminicides, of attacks with acids, of killings of baby girls and female fetuses); and finally there is the American Jonnie, a truck driver in an oil area of North Dakota mostly inhabited by men and suffering a high rate of violence and prostitution (she strives to overcome her complexes as an overweight woman and form a friendship with her few female peers there).

Barbara Cupisti also authors of *I am. Stories of Slavery (Io sono. Storie di schiavitù*, 2011) on the burning issue of migrants, in particular of those who came to Italy to seek refuge from wars and misery. In order to pay back stratospheric debts (from 4 to 12 thousand euros) to crime organizations, these people undergo exploitation with the black market for labor as well as prostitution, sinking into an invisible 'underworld' bereft of rights. They are modern-day slaves, victims of human trafficking, which is a violation of fundamental Human Rights. The profit of this silent 'underworld' is gigantic: migrant smuggling is the third large source of income for organised crime, second only to arms and drugs. In 2015 Cupisti deals again with this epochal issue of immigration from countries at war, making *Exiles (Esuli)*, a three-part documentary filmed in refugee camps in Kenya, Jordan and Turkey, as well as among Tibetan exiles in India and climate refugees from Brazil and California.

The aftermath of war is the core of *Ward 54* (2010), directed by Monica Maggioni, an international war reporter and former president of RAI (the Italian State Television). *Ward 54* deals with the post-traumatic stress syndrome that affects 20% of American veterans from Iraq. As the only Italian journalist embedded in the US military campaign during the second war in Iraq, Maggioni had the opportunity to closely follow the Iraqi Freedom mission and subsequently

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its side effects on the soldiers' lives after returning home. In *Ward 54*, these young soldiers (all born in the early 1980s), haunted from 'survivor's guilt', live on the brink of the abyss without being adequately assisted, while their families are powerless and abandoned to themselves. According to data from the *Army Times*, the US military magazine, 18 veterans commit suicide every month, for a total number that (just until 2009) exceeded that of those killed in the war.¹⁸

The Iraqi war through children's eyes has been recounted by the freelance documentarian and reporter Francesca Mannocchi in her film *Isis, Tomorrow. The Lost Souls of Mosul* (2018). Mannocchi, who collaborates with Italian broadcasters (RAI 3, La7, Sky TG24) as well as with Italian and international magazines (*L'Espresso*, *Al Jazeera*, *Middle East Eye*, and *Focus*), deals with migration (see her reports from Tunisia, Calais, the Balkans and Libya), and was awarded the Giustolisi Prize for her inquest *Missione impossibile* (*Mission impossible*), on migrant smuggling and Libyan prisons. The children in her *Isis, Tomorrow* are the children of the Isis militants, educated and trained for violence.

Another Italian journalist, Paola Piacenza, conveys a similar professional intensity in her documentary *Shadows from the Deep* (*Ombre dal fondo*, 2016), centering on the work of her colleague Domenico Quirico, a correspondent for the newspaper *La Stampa*, who was kidnapped in Syria on April 8 2013 and freed after 152 days of captivity. That ordeal was indeed explicitly the base of the conception of the movie highlighting Quirico's professional ethics and his methods of investigative journalism ('an investigator of the human condition', as Piacenza defines him). The journalist's reflections are accompanied by images of his return to the area where he was kidnapped, together with his passage through the Russian-Ukrainian front and his patient waiting for the authorities' permission to enter Syria. 'The return is not to home, the return is to here', Quirico says at the end, showing how much the work of the correspondent can be profound, complex, questioning and extremely human: far from the glamour that all too often is associated with the journalist profession.

And after these journalist-filmmakers, it is worthwhile to mention other Italian women reporters who were, and some of them still are, in the forefront of international war scenarios: from veteran Lilli Gruber to Tiziana Ferrario, Giovanna Botteri, Maria Cuffaro, Lucia Goracci, Liliana Mistretta, to name a few. Above all, I would like to commemorate two young Italian journalists killed while carrying out their nomadic work with passion and competence: Ilaria Alpi,

¹⁸ Maggioni filmed also *Out of Tebran (four stories)* (2011), on the stories of four Iranian expatriates, opposing the Teheran regime, who faced the vicissitudes of clandestine escapes. Conceived during a trip between Asia and Europe that lasted one year, her second documentary shadows 'some Iranian exiles, forced to flee their homeland, then under the regime of Ahmadinejad, where 'those who think are in danger'. Their stories are linked by the voice of a young woman, whose silhouette in half-light is sometimes seen. In the end the audience discovers that she is the daughter of a close collaborator of Ahmadinejad, and that she is herself a filmmaker, who had to leave Iran for having made a documentary on torture and human rights.

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a RAI reporter killed in Somalia in 1994 with her cameraman Miran Hrovatin because she had discovered an international traffic in weapons and toxic waste in this African Country; and Maria Grazia Cutuli, *Corriere della sera* reporter, killed in Afghanistan in 2001 together with three other non-Italian journalists. Her last article in the newspaper, published the same day of her killing, is titled *A gas depot nervine in Osama's base*. These are unforgettable, beautiful minds curious about the life and the world: with a passion 'vigilant and disarmed', to put it in Cesare Zavattini's words, to witness and document the complexities of the present — and with a brilliant and rigorous gaze, which celebrates an irreducibly civil and humanistic audiovisual practice.

As a conclusion, I would also highlight two significant experiences of female protagonists within the current Italian audiovisual scenario, MAUDE and ADA, which were presented in 2011 in the program *The Strength of Truth (La forza del vero)* by the Laboratorio Immagine Donna (Laboratory Image Woman), the historic international Women's Film Festival of Florence, born in 1975, the oldest festival devoted to female directors in Europe.¹⁹ MAUDE, based in Rome, is formed by media activists and cinema professionals in all film roles, and in Florence it proposed an example of flash-movies for discussing female issues and activism campaigning. ADA is formed by a group of women documentarians from Tuscany — ADA stands for Associazione Documentaristi Anonimi (Anonymous Documentarians Society) — which is committed to disseminating documentary culture through educational workshops, documentary screenings, and so forth, as well as being committed to serving as a reference point for those who work or want to work in the documentary field, as a place for the exchange of ideas and for structural support.

Far from directionless wandering, these audiovisual works aim at a clear goal: to be at once part of a place and to be on the outside, in order to find a proper observational range. Their essential characteristic is their rootedness in the present. This filmmaking has 'the courage to be anchored to our present' and 'in the world', to quote Giona Nazzaro: '(it) is able to think the present in order to imagine the future'.²⁰ These films are 'the result of situations that saw them coming alive. They come from specific places that go towards the world'.²¹

Ultimately, the audiovisual survey considered here deploys the conceptual duet *flânerie* — *nomadism* with which this essay began. Far more than a purely academic formula, this dyad summarizes the core points of the documentary practice of numerous contemporary Italian women filmmakers: liberation from the confinement traditionally assigned to women combined with a militant civil

¹⁹ Excerpts from the ADA manifesto are provided by the website of the Laboratorio Immagine Donna di Firenze.

²⁰ Giona A. Nazzaro, *For a Cinema of Today*, Catalogo della 34. Settimana internazionale della critica, 76. Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica, la Biennale di Venezia 2019 – SNCCI, p. 11.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

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commitment, understood in its deepest meaning as fostering an active citizenship, one which fully participates in the construction of the common good.

These key points are achieved through the exploration of what we do not yet know, thanks to a gaze focused on unknown realities, a gesture that affirms — through cinema — our ethical curiosity as fully human beings. Therefore, these audiovisual practices bear witness to the professional advancement of women in a notoriously male-dominated field. They make publicly visible both the cultural and political status of the female agency. In so doing, they experiment with a variety of unexplored narrative possibilities, outside of the ones offered by established fictional or non-fictional structures and formats.