

The politicization of ill bodies in Campania, Italy

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Abstract

The communities affected by toxic contamination in Campania, Italy, have had to confront the challenge of proving a direct causal connection between exposure to pollutants and health issues, given a long history of mismanagement of waste. Medical studies have been conducted, but the social and political debate is static. In September 2014, the Italian Ministry of Health simply repeated earlier statements that Campania's increasing cancer rates are due to poor lifestyle habits. The article casts light on the politicization of ill bodies of Campania. We analyze three practices of political action and resistance which employed the subjectivization of physical bodies and illnesses to expose environmental injustice affecting communities. In the neighborhood of Pianura, Naples, people gathered medical records as evidence for a trial into 'culpable epidemics.' In the so-called Land of Fires, in the northern periphery of Naples, hundreds of postcards featuring pictures of children killed by rare pathologies were sent to the Italian Head of State and the Pope. Finally, in the town of Acerra, the blood of a dying shepherd became a political object to prove exposure to dioxin contamination in that area. The politicization of illness and bodies conflates the public and private, challenges the mainstream production of knowledge, and proposes an alternative narrative for affected communities and individuals. Nevertheless, the practices of this politicization have differed and are not always 'political', as we will show through the three cases.

Key words: popular epidemiology, biopower, waste, Campania, political ecology of disease, private is political

Résumé

Les communautés affectées par la contamination toxique en Campanie, en Italie, ont dû faire face au défi de prouver un lien de causalité direct entre l'exposition aux polluants et les problèmes de santé, compte tenu d'une longue histoire de mauvaise gestion des déchets. Des études médicales ont été menées, mais le débat social et politique est statique. En septembre 2014, le ministère italien de la Santé a tout simplement répété des déclarations antérieures selon lesquelles les taux croissants de cancer en Campanie sont dus à de mauvaises habitudes de vie. L'article éclaire la politisation des corps malades de la Campanie. Nous analysons trois pratiques d'action politique et de résistance qui utilisaient la subjectivisation des corps physiques et des maladies pour exposer les injustices environnementales qui affectent les communautés. Dans le voisinage de Pianura, Naples, les gens ont rassemblé des dossiers médicaux comme preuve pour un procès en «épidémies coupables». Dans le pays de Fires, dans la périphérie nord de Naples, des centaines de cartes postales contenant des photos d'enfants tués par des pathologies rares ont été envoyées au chef de l'État italien et au pape. Enfin, dans la ville d'Acerra, le sang d'un berger mourant est devenu un objet politique pour prouver l'exposition à la contamination par les dioxines dans cette zone. La politisation des maladies et des corps

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confond le public et le privé, remet en question la production traditionnelle de connaissances et propose un récit alternatif pour les communautés et les individus touchés. Néanmoins, les pratiques de cette politisation ont divergé et ne sont pas toujours «politiques», comme nous le montrerons à travers les trois cas.

Mots clés: épidémiologie populaire, biopouvoir, déchets, Campanie, écologie politique de la maladie, privé est politique

Resumen

Las comunidades afectadas por la contaminación tóxica en Campania, Italia, han tenido que enfrentar el reto de demostrar una relación causal directa entre la exposición a los contaminantes y problemas de salud, dada una larga historia de mala gestión de residuos. Aunque se han realizado estudios médicos, el debate social y político ha estado estático. En septiembre de 2014, el Ministerio de Sanidad italiano se limitó a repetir declaraciones anteriores de que el aumento de las tasas de cáncer de Campania es debido a los malos costumbres de vida. El artículo arroja luz sobre la politicización de los cuerpos enfermos de Campania. Se analizan tres prácticas de acción política y resistencia que emplearon la subjetivación de cuerpos físicos y de enfermedades para exponer la injusticia ambiental que afecta a las comunidades. En el barrio de Pianura, Nápoles, la gente ha recolectado los registros médicos como prueba para un ensayo en 'epidemias culpables'. En la llamada Tierra de los Fuegos, en la periferia norte de Nápoles, cientos de postales con imágenes de niños muertos por patologías raras fueron enviados al Jefe de Estado italiano y el Papa. Por último, en el municipio de Acerra, la sangre de un pastor agonizante se convirtió en un objeto político para demostrar la exposición a la contaminación por dioxinas en esa zona. La politicización de la enfermedad y los cuerpos mezcla lo público con lo privado, se opone a la producción de conocimiento convencional, y propone una narrativa alternativa para las comunidades y los individuos afectados. Sin embargo, las prácticas de este politicización han sido bastante diferente y no siempre políticas, como se verá a través de los tres casos.

Palabras clave: epidemiología popular, biopoder, residuos, Campania, ecología política de la enfermedad, privado es político.

1. Introduction

...one of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution. (Hanisch 2000: 114)

Environmental crises are also crises of knowledge and science. Communities affected by industrial pollution, waste disposal or any other sort of environmental damage face crucial struggles over the demonstration of a 'causal nexus' between what they perceive to be negatively affecting their health, and official expert knowledge, often supported by the state, that opposes local claims and therefore closes off political debate (Ulezalka 2007; Wakefield and Baxter 2010). In such struggles, bodies and the private space of human life become public and political. Scientific proof and evidence are contested matters and "the neutrality of science is a chimera" (Mangiameli 2013: 321). This is precisely the case in Campania, in the South of Italy, where a failing waste management regime has led to a 20 year-long environmental emergency. The aim of this article is to shed light on the politicization of ill bodies in Campania, through examining the practices of political action and resistance in three communities. We use extensive primary data collected over a decade of fieldwork in Campania, and a theoretical background from feminist studies and environmental justice, with a Foucauldian inspiration. The collection of medical records in Pianura, postcards from the Land of Fires and the controversy resulting from the death of a shepherd, illustrate the subjectification of physical bodies and illnesses to oppose the continuous and historical indifference or negation by the state to environmental injustice and unequal exposure to toxic contamination.

2. Methodology

Our research is qualitative, through the collection of oral histories which offer insights about the formation, discourses and practices of the actors involved in social movements. Following Yow (2005), we have envisioned the collection of oral histories as a tool "to understand the ways that the narrator attributes meanings to experience" (Yow 2005: 9). Oral history seemed to be the most effective methodology in order "to make connections in the interpretation of history; for example, between different places, or different spheres, or different phases of life." (Thompson 1994: 11).

Our investigation is built on three months of in-depth field-work in Pianura (Iengo) conducted during summer 2014, and a multi-year research project on the waste crisis in Campania (Armiero). Participant observation, interviews, and critical analysis of written sources were the main methodological tools. In particular, we conducted 26 interviews in Pianura and over 100 for the rest of Naples and the province. In the tradition of political ecology scholarship, we aim to contribute to understanding the politicization of ecology, including the very human body and the scientific knowledge constructing it.

We frame this article within our broader project of a *guerrilla narrative*. By this, we mean interrupting mainstream organized narratives through counter hegemonic storytelling, and the sabotage of *toxic narratives*² (Wu Ming 2011), particularly those which reproduce or silence injustice (Barca 2014). Methodologically, adopting a guerrilla narrative approach implies a commitment towards the co-design and co-production of knowledge and the recognition of storytelling as a fundamental tool in this process.

3. Background

The capital of Campania region, Napoli (Naples), is one of the poorest and most densely populated cities in Italy. The rate of household poverty in Napoli is around 33.9% (Commissione di Indagine sull'Esclusione Sociale 2009). The region contains a complex urban-rural system of 4 million inhabitants (Figure 1). Since the Roman Empire, when it was first called 'Campania Felix' (Happy/Fertile Campania), good soil fertility led to extensive cultivation, which is now practiced on more than half of the land area (D'Alisa *et al.* 2010). Nevertheless, the agro-industrial system and the landscape have been affected by the impacts of past and present waste management activities, both legal and illegal (D'Alisa *et al.* 2010, 2017).

Since the 1980s, *Camorra*³ - the historic organized crime organization originating in Campania - has dumped enormous quantities of toxic waste in the region with the complicity of industrial companies and the connivance or indifference of the state (D'Alisa *et al.* 2010; De Rosa 2016; Iaculli 2007; Martinez-Alier *et al.* 2013; Petrillo 2009). The waste materials, including aluminum salts, ammonium salts, lead, acid sludge, contaminated soils, rubber from tires, and asbestos are unlawfully dumped, buried or incinerated (Armiero 2008). As a result of incineration, high levels of carcinogenic dioxins are released in the atmosphere. The World Health Organization, the Campania Region and the Italian Research Council showed that in Campania, specifically around the metropolitan area of Napoli, there has been a 400% increase of certain pathologies that can be related to toxic contamination, such as bronchitis and asthma (Fazzo *et al.* 2008; Martuzzi *et al.* 2008); moreover, the region's mortality rate due to liver cancer is 38.4%, compared to 14% nationally (Brandolini 2007).

Today, there are approximately 2,500 highly contaminated sites in the region, and, according to Legambiente, the Italian main environmental NGO, around 13 million tons of waste were illegally disposed by 'Ecomafia' in Campania between 2006 and 2008 alone (Legambiente 2009). The very word 'Ecomafia' has been coined by Legambiente to define the business activities which "apply disruptive use of environmental resources and in which organized mafia-like crime has a prominent role" (D'Alisa *et al.* 2015: 10).

² For the concept of toxic narratives, we are indebted, once more, to Wu Ming.

³ *Camorra* is the Napoli-based Mafia syndicate. It is also known as *O'Sistema*, the System. *Camorra* is strongly defined by a search for economic gains, by running international enterprises and infiltrating local administration to seize profit from large-scale development plans. See Saviano (2007).

There are two inter-related processes at work in the story of Campania's waste crisis. The first process is the proclamation by the Italian government in 1994 of a 'state of emergency', which shifted legal powers from the local administration to the ad-hoc agency *Commissariato di Governo per l'emergenza Rifiuti* (Committee for the waste emergency in Campania, hereafter CWE). By handling the State of Emergency, this body became capable of technocratic decision-making, without allowing for democratic confrontation and participation. The second process, which has been hidden and silenced from public debate for decades, is the continuous illegal dumping of industrial and hazardous wastes in pre-existing landfills and on agricultural land. This has been perpetrated by the criminal partnership of industrialists and *Camorra* with the complicity or silence of the authorities (Iacueli 2007; Petrillo 2009). The current political debate pits local communities demanding land remediation for contaminated sites and health policies for contaminated people, against official experts and governmental discourse that tries to diminish the health effects by blaming the unhealthy lifestyles of Campania's inhabitants (Corriere del Mezzogiorno 2014).



Figure 1: Map of Italy with Campania region marked in red. Author: TUBS, Wikimedia Commons.

4. Biopower and the politicization of (ill) bodies

Territory and population is the traditional field of exercise of modern power [...]. In the Campania case the point of crisis is precisely the one where the spatial management of waste fatally encounters the special management of populations. Pure biopolitics. (Petrillo 2009: 14)

Addressing practices and notions that are taken for granted in society is a feature of a post-structuralist epistemology. This has important implications for political ecology (Bryant 2015; Robbins 2012). We can deconstruct the dominant truths and claims that are made about how people, groups and institutions come to naturalize and internalize state mandates (Robbins 2012). Political ecology, inspired by Foucauldian approaches, analyzes how people are subjected to political webs of power: "what people do precedes who they are and what they think; practice precedes the self; the body becomes the site of politics" (Robbins 2012: 75). Foucault's work on biopolitics and biopower can help to illustrate the politicization of bodies and the transformation of the private sphere into public and political spaces. Biopower is conceived as the different forms power takes in managing, controlling and shaping the characteristics of individuals and collectivities, actions, and life itself (Rabinow and Rose 2003). In Foucauldian terms, medicine and illness are part of how a population is governed and this, in turn, involves asymmetrical relations of power, where contestation occurs (Rabinow and Rose 2003). In Campania, the choices regarding the siting of landfills and incinerators have very little to do with environmental assessments, while they were deeply connected to the

...two sciences familiar to those who manage the state in a Foucauldian sense: demography and political economy of bodies. The elected areas are 'marginal'. In all senses: spatial, economic, political and social. Waste with waste, indeed. Production waste with consumption waste and all the physical waste with human waste. (Petrillo 2009: 14)

Biopolitics and biopower infiltrate subaltern bodies. By subaltern we mean those groups that, in a given hegemonic formation, occupy subordinate positions *vis à vis* dominant groups in terms of labor, exploitation, racism, ethnicity and other forms of cultural subordination. In other words, place-based struggles reveal that people do inhabit their bodies, relate to their environments, and act like economic subjects, through practices that differ on the basis of their positionality in the social structure. As C. Wright Mills said long ago (1959), "what we call 'personal troubles' are located in particular times and places, and individuals' narratives about their troubles are works of history, as much as they are about the individuals, the social spaces they inhabit, and the societies they live in" (Mills, quoted in Riessman 2000: 171).

When diseases have contested or uncertain causes, social diagnoses become crucial (Brown 2011). The concept of 'social diagnosis' connects a specific illness to social, political, economic and cultural conditions, and it also involves social actors that help to uncover the political and economic factors that determine health and illness (Brown 2011). Foucault argued that biopower, including regulatory controls and the anatomic-politics of the human body (Foucault 1990) – which entailed the individual body, as a machine, to be disciplined -, consolidated and established over the nineteenth century. As a response, new kinds of political struggles emerged. In those struggles the "right to life, to one's body, to health, to the satisfaction of one's needs" were central, claiming life itself as a political object (Rabinow and Rose 2003:2).

Historically, the environmental justice movement has drawn attention to the uneven "incidence of environmental and health disorders in low-income and working class communities" and "the field of popular epidemiology is emerging to challenge traditional epidemiology and forge alternative – and empowering – approaches to community health" (Novotny 1994: 32). Popular epidemiology can be defined as a critique of discourses of epidemiological and public health, developing new ways of producing epidemiological data (Brown 1992, 1997; Martinez-Alier *et al.* 2014). Moreover, it challenges traditional epidemiology that does not include historical and sociological investigation (Novotny 1994). It brings the health concerns of specific communities to the attention of the media, government officials and industries through diverse practices of data collection, such as community health surveys and collection of documentation by lay-people, in order to enlighten suspected links between health disorders and environmental hazards in a specific place (Novotny 1994). Arthur Frank's *The wounded storyteller* (1995) makes clear that the need to tell stories of illness to others is connected to the restoration and creation of memory. Moreover, Frank describes, in Paul Ricoeur's words, that "the self only comes to be in the process of the life story being told: the subject is never given at the beginning" (Frank 1995: 61). Working on the self-narratives of illness and pain, Stacy Alaimo (2010)

proposed the concept of material memoirs, meaning the merger of science, autobiography, and the substantial self. She employs Audre Lorde's *Cancer journals* as an example of the politicization of breast cancer and toxic discourse (Buell 1998). Similarly, in her book *Inescapable ecologies* Linda Nash shows how Mexican American *braceros* – manual farm laborers - countered the mainstream production of knowledge through reading their own bodies as "a kind of instrument whose limits and illnesses measured the health of the land" (Nash 2006: 138). According to Nash the *braceros'* knowledge emerged "not from official discourses but, from embodied experiences" (Nash 2006: 138).

We argue that the narration of stories about illness have a personal aim, giving voice to those bodies and a social purpose, a counter-narrative opposing the hegemonic discourse of illness and contaminated territories.

5. Investigating the politicization of Campania's ill bodies

Despite considerable research into the health impacts of waste disposal in Campania (Senior and Mazza 2004; Fazzo *et al.* 2008; Martuzzi *et al.* 2008; Pirastu *et al.* 2014), the social and political debate over the waste emergency has changed little over the last twenty years. In September 2014, after grassroots movements had campaigned for many years for a cancer registry (an official record of the cancer cases in the region), the Italian Ministry of Health repeated their view that the increased prevalence of cancer in Campania is strongly tied to lifestyles habits. This statement minimized activists' claims that cancer is linked to waste dumping, actually blaming the local population for their health problems (Saviano 2015). Countering this assumption, we now explore the politicization of ill bodies as counter-hegemonic narratives centered on structural environmental injustice, rather than individual lifestyles.

Legally ill

Contrada Pisani landfill is sited in Pianura, a working class neighborhood in the western periphery of Napoli (Figure 2). Pianura went through a dramatic urban transformation in less than 50 years, shifting from being a rural area at the margins of the metropolis to a large concrete jungle where illegal buildings mushroomed without basic public services, soaked into the mortifying smell from the dump. The municipal landfill in Pianura was open in 1953, which makes it the oldest operating waste storage facility of the metropolitan area of Napoli. Since then, around forty million cubic meters of all sorts of waste have been dumped in the Pisani landfill (De Biase 2009). During this time, the landfill was operating without any safety measures to reduce or minimize its impacts on health and the environment.

Local communities, individuals and families have protested for three generations against the landfill, until 1996, when it was closed after a citizens' petition, that strongly advocated for land remediation of the entire landfill area (De Biase 2009). Instead, in 2007, during one of the cyclical waste crises, the CWE proposed the re-opening of the landfill, igniting more popular opposition. The diverse forms of activism that Pianura's movement has developed have included picketing, barricades, seeking legal measures and even urban rioting.

In 2008, the Regional Agency for Environmental Protection in Campania (ARPAC) filed a report on the National Interest Site (SIN)⁴ of Pianura after a request from the Environmental Ministry. The aim of this report was to classify a polluted area which requires land remediation after profound environmentally destructive management. The local inhabitants signed a petition that led eventually to a criminal investigation of the legally recognized crimes of environmental disaster⁵ and culpable epidemics.⁶ The judiciary seized and

⁴ SIN stands for Site of National Interest, which defines a geographical area where land remediation must be implemented due to the environmental damage caused by previous management and use. On the contrary, SIR stands for site of Regional Interest and is a declassification to the regional level of competence. [Available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/jgmqf8t>. Accessed 8 Dec. 2016].

⁵ Following Italian environmental protection and eco-crimes law: the offense of environmental disaster, is considered in the case of: an irreversible alteration to the equilibrium of an ecosystem; an alteration to the equilibrium of an ecosystem whose elimination is particularly costly and achievable only with exceptional measures; the offense of injury to public

cordoned off the landfill. In gathering evidence to support the criminal investigation, local activists subsequently decided to collect medical records from the inhabitants living at the borders of the landfill, who had been diagnosed with cancer or other rare pathologies. They did so with the help of a lawyer, who thereafter followed the case as the plaintiff's attorney. According to Gianni, one of the activists of Pianura, between seventy and one hundred medical files were collected and offered to Dr. Stefania Buda, the prosecutor in charge of the investigation in 2009. However, in 2010 Dr. Buda had to dismiss the culpable epidemics line of investigation due to the absence of an official cancer registry record in Campania. Only such an official tool could have supported the causal link between health issues and the presence of about 40 million cubic meters of all sorts of waste – of which around 23% has been assessed to be toxic (Crescenti 2009).

The practice of collecting private material to be used in a legal investigation allowed many of the activists to deepen and strengthen their awareness on how widespread the health issue was, confirming their worst fears. The use of private medical records in court, of course, is nothing new, but, in this case it was embodied in a collective struggle which utilized several passages from affected individuals to a common experience of resistance.

Postcards from hell

Today the Roman's Campania Felix, the fertile region between the Gulf of Naples and the Apennines, has become the *Land of Fires*, named after the final chapter of Roberto Saviano's book *Gomorra* (2007).⁷ This area comprises the provinces of Napoli and Caserta and it has suffered environmental degradation and contamination due to illegal dumping of toxic and hazardous waste over the last 20-25 years. It is called the Land of Fires because criminal organizations have used it as a gigantic landfill for toxic waste: they burn everything, soaking the land and the sky with dark smoke and a pestilential stench. The illegal disposal of toxic waste has been ignored in the mainstream reporting of the crisis which has preferred to focus on the highly visible piles of urban waste in the central streets of Napoli. Nonetheless, since 2006 activists have tried to raise awareness of the health hazards coming from illegal waste disposal (Capone, Cuccurullo and Micillo 2006).

Over the last few years, public attention to toxic waste has gradually 'mainstreamed' the issue. In February 2014, the Italian government decided to tackle the problems of the Land of Fires with a decree which mandated a complete mapping of the contaminated territories, stricter controls over agricultural production close to contaminants, and free health screenings for the population living in the 81 municipalities comprising the area. This national interest in the contaminated lands of Campania has been unprecedented, although is still questionable whether such measures were actually implemented, or if they produced any real change.

Father Maurizio Patriciello is a local priest in the Land of Fires and a leading figure in the struggle to prove the relationship between toxic contamination and the high incidence of disease and death in the area. Father Patriciello and photographer Mauro Pagnano had the idea to photograph some of the mothers who had lost their children because of cancer or other rare pathologies. Pagnano photographed each mother in the child's bedroom holding a framed picture of the beloved, deceased child (Figure 3).

safety determined with reference to the relevance of the extent of the environmental degradation or its harmful effects, to the number of persons both injured and exposed to danger (Goisis *et al.* 2015).

⁶ Following Italian criminal law, the constitutive elements of the 'culpable epidemics' crime, in a material sense are: diffusion and uncontrollability of the spreading of some ailment in a specific territory and over an indeterminate and non-definable number of individuals (Lattanzi 2015).

⁷ *Gomorra* was published for the first time in Italian in 2006 (as *Gomorra*) and attracted national and then international attention to the Neapolitan mafia, the *Camorra*. For this reason, the *Camorra* has condemned the author of the book to death. Since October 2006, Saviano has lived undercover, protected by the Italian police.



Figure 2: The perimeter of Pianura's Site of Regional Interest (SIN) including the old municipal landfill, the Di.Fra.Bi landfill and other illegal dumpsites around the area. The round-shaped Northern section is the old Senga crater, not visible today and replaced by a green hill with a horse track. The bottom section of the SIN defines the Di.Fra.Bi landfill that is adjacent to the WWF regional natural park, the Astroni crater. [Photo Available online: <http://tinyurl.com/jlsx8k7> Accessed on: April 18, 2016]

Those photos were made into 150,000 postcards with slogans, as a campaign appealing to the Italian Head of State and Pope Francis. The campaign was effective in attracting public attention to the Land of Fires issue. Both the Italian President and the Pope wrote back to Father Patriciello, who was undoubtedly the true winner of this campaign. He reinforced his leadership of a large portion of the movement fostering what might be defined as a moderate agenda, based on dialogue with local and national institutions. Among others, the Italian Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, and the governor of the Campania region all passed by his parish in the middle of the Land of Fires. The collateral damage of this campaign was the fracturing of the movements, with the most radical fringes being extremely critical of this dialogue with official institutions.

The shepherd's blood

Acerra is a town of 60,000 inhabitants situated in a plain between the provinces of Napoli and Caserta, where for centuries agriculture has been the main activity. Today, more than half of the land surface is under cultivation. However, Acerra is not a bucolic village at the doors of Naples. In 2007 the government declared a state of emergency "in order to address the dioxin contamination in the area" (Presidenza della Repubblica Italiana 2007). In fact, the Italian agency for the dismantling of nuclear power plants and the disposal of nuclear waste, SOGIN, had found dioxin levels were 10,000 times higher than the limits permitted by law (Senato della Repubblica Italiana 2006). The main suspects for such dramatic contamination are a chemical

plant, which was active in the area from 1978 to 2004, and the illegal dumping of toxic waste. In both cases, criminal investigations tried to individuate legal responsibilities and bring the culprits to justice. In court, the management of the chemical factory was 'only' found guilty for the death of 88 workers caused by exposure to asbestos, while the prosecutor was not able to prove causal connections between environmental contamination and the high rate of other diseases among workers and people living in the area. The judiciary also proved the existence of a criminal organization in Acerra devoted to the illegal dumping of toxic waste, and sentenced the culprits to seven years in prison.



Figure 3: Luisa with the picture of her beloved deceased daughter. Photo courtesy of photographer Mauro Pagnano, all rights reserved.

An article published in 2004 in *Lancet Oncology* confirmed the impression that Acerra was a hub for toxic contamination (Senior and Mazza 2004). In that article, the authors defined the land between the towns of Acerra, Nola and Marigliano as 'the triangle of death', documenting a significant rise of cancer rates between 1994 and 2000. In 2004 the CWE and the corporation in charge of the management of waste in Campania region selected Acerra as the location for the construction of a gigantic incinerator, which started operating in 2009. Following a recurrent pattern in environmental injustice cases, corporate and political powers in Campania selected already polluted communities as the ideal recipient for any kind of unwanted facilities. This combination of different sources of contamination, the near impossibility of tracing linear causal connections between sick bodies and polluted environments, and, the entanglement of humans and more-than-human nature are at the core of the story of a family of shepherds in Acerra, to which we will now turn (Armiero and Fava 2016).

As demonstrated in the literature, sheep are sentinels that signal the contamination of the environment, and in Acerra they presented high levels of dioxin in their blood (Izzo 2009). The story of shepherd Vincenzo Cannavacciuolo was brought to national public attention, first due to the monstrous deformities among his

sheep (Figure 4), and subsequently when he became sick and finally died at the age of 59 of an extremely aggressive cancer. Vincenzo Cannavacciuolo had lived his entire life with his herd, grazing under the silhouette of the Montefibre factory and the chimneys of the incinerator, under construction.



Figure 4: The Cannavacciuolo shepherds showing a picture of their deformed sheep. Photo courtesy of Photographer Maura Pagnano, all rights reserved.

Following the suggestions of several activists and especially those of Dr. Antonio Marfella - a toxicologist at the *Pascale* Cancer Institute in Napoli, and member of Doctors for the Environment (Italian branch) - the Cannavacciuolo family decided to investigate dioxin levels in the blood of their (at that point) dying relative. Together with Vincenzo, three other people were tested in two certified laboratories, one in Porto Marghera, Italy, and the other in Canada (Pacific PRIM laboratories). The highest contamination level among the four patients was found in the shepherd's blood - 255 pictogram per gram of dioxin in contrast with 70 pictograms per gram, the reference level for industrial cities (Marfella 2008). In academic and especially in public debates, the study was criticized due to some procedural mistakes in the blood sampling, but the stilted way in which the results were dismissed is suspect. As often occurs in environmental justice struggles, mainstream scientists critiqued and focused on the sampling procedures, but the need to bio-monitor people in contaminated areas in the face of the potential ongoing health risks faded in to the background.

6. The politicization of ill bodies to expose environmental injustices

Potent ethical and political possibilities emerge from the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature. Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always inter-meshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from "the environment." (Alaimo 2010: 2)

Since its beginning, the environmental justice movement has challenged apolitical perspectives on environmental health (Temper *et al.* 2015). While mainstream environmentalism has depicted nature as an 'elsewhere' space, EJ activists have defined nature as where people live, study, work, play and pray (Novotny 2000). For them, it is a porous space where the body and the surroundings meet (Nash 2006; Alaimo 2010). The issue of public health is crucial in the EJ framework. A sick environment produces sick communities. Hence, even before becoming political, the body must be understood as an ecological subject connected to the ecology of place. This is the first bodily revolution in the EJ approach. The body is not only an individual matter, determined by genetic memories and personal choices. It is also an ecological matter, that is, part of socio-ecological relationships. In our cases, the socio-ecological body is marked by the ways in which capital has organized space and production. Bodies and the environment are the archives of histories of injustice and exploitation. One might say that the very entanglement of body and socio-environment is the 'organic machine' of capitalist production (White 1996).

The *politicization of ill bodies* is radically alternative to the economization and the acculturation of the body, which is mainstream in a capitalist ecology. Bodies are part of the production-consumption treadmill; but they are also represented as cultural objects, shaped by ways of life and personal behavior. The healthy/ill body is, then, understood and seen as a result of personal care and medical expertise (Alaimo 2010). The politicization of the ill body breaks the usual patterns: the body becomes relevant not only as part of the workforce or as a consumer, but also because it is ill. Making the ill body political means thinking collectively about socio-ecological assemblages (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2012), breaking down the society/environment dichotomy and overcoming the individualization of the body. In a capitalist ecology, the individual is responsible for the health or sickness of the body (Luke 2000), while structural constraints and violence are almost erased. The politicization of the ill bodies implies going public, transforming what has always been perceived as a private matter into a public and political one.

The three cases we have examined differ in terms of how the material in question was made public, reflecting different strategies for achieving justice. In the Pianura case, the medical files were given to the prosecutor not the press, while the postcards were designed to maximize publicity, in search of a just outcome. In the case of Cannavacciuolo the main aim was to reach the wider public (something the family had already done in regard to their deformed sheep, which they showed to journalists and film makers). The politicization of ill bodies also uses different languages to convey their message of resistance: the legal language of petitions and impounding in Pianura, the visual language of postcards from the Land of Fires, and the scientific and medical language in numbers and pictograms in Acerra. In Pianura the operation was much less public than the postcards. And the politicization of ill bodies occurred through scientific and legal language rather than through crude images of pain. Nevertheless, the politicization of those bodies was officially dismissed.

It is interesting to discuss whether these different registers affect the politicization of ill bodies differently. Certainly, they produce different reactions. The most successful case in terms of gaining public attention has been the postcards. It might be said that it exploited the mainstream taste for human miseries. Somebody may have spoken of a pornography of pain, and the exhibition of affliction appealed to some audiences. Many opinion-makers who had been silent in the face of contamination, became vocal when confronted with pictures (Del Bello 2015). The main message of those opinion-makers went precisely in the opposite direction from our argument in this article, that is, the empowering implications of the politicization of ill bodies. For them the ill body must remain a private matter: it cannot become political.

The politicization of ill bodies is inscribed in feminist practice that considers the personal to be political (Hanisch 2000). But it also goes beyond this. The politicization of ill bodies transforms a personal issue in a collective one, creating what Paul Rabinow has called 'biosociality' (1992). The experience of sickness creates a community of people who share the same bodily struggle. This is clear in the cases of Pianura and the postcards from the Land of Fires, but weaker in Acerra. From this point of view, we believe that our cases show clearly that the politicization of ill bodies is a very material process happening in the hospital corridors, in the buses packed with relatives of patients, and in the churches where parents try to heal their losses.

The politicization of ill bodies occurs when a personal sufferance becomes an experience revealing patterns of injustice and exploitation, and a call for collective political action. We recognize this clearly in the Pianura case, where a group of people used their and their relatives' sick bodies to oppose the re-opening of the landfill. It was clear to them that they had suffered an injustice, a crime, and they decided to act. The postcards project is more difficult to analyze. While it is clear that there was a community of people who shared the same defeating experience of having lost a child and framed this tragic event not as a fatality but the product of an injustice, their political action seems more controversial. Writing to the Italian head of state and the Pope seems to suggest a demand-for-justice approach. This feeling is confirmed by some general choices made by the group promoting the postcards project, who were often inclined to ask for top-down solutions from the authorities. Nevertheless, it must be said that targeting two high profile personalities was a successful strategy to obtain mass media coverage, as well as the whole country's attention and support from civil society.

The reactions to the politicization of sick bodies are also relevant. In terms of media and public attention, the postcards from the Land of Fires were the most successful. We have mentioned the controversy regarding the exhibition of suffering. It is interesting to note that the ill body can be public, when for instance it appears in campaigns to fundraise for medical research or to promote healthy lifestyles. But in those cases, the ill body is not actually political - rather it is driven back to the very individual scale of asking for charity, or promoting proper behaviors and choices. The postcards from the Land of Fires raise troubling inferences between ill bodies and social structure in Italy - the connection between the ecology of the body and the ecology of capitalism. Or, we might say, between the ecology of affections and the ecology of power. Nevertheless, the disturbing factor was the use of the ill body through discourse and the practice of resistance.

The body can be exploited by capital, but cannot easily be a political subject. The failed use of the medical files in Pianura illustrates this. First of all, the operation was much less public than the postcards project. Secondly, the politicization of ill bodies occurred through scientific and legal language rather than through explicit images of affliction. Nevertheless, the politicization of those bodies was dismissed. In this case, the politicization of the ill body was not scientifically sound. The prosecutor declared that she did not have the resources needed to establish a direct causal connection between the presence of the landfill and ill bodies. The attempt to establish a connection between the ecology of ill bodies and the socio-ecological structure failed. The scientific/legal apparatus rejected the idea that a private condition of socialized illness could become a proof. Science also played an important role in the Acerra case. The politicization of Vincenzo Cannavacciuolo's ill body clashed with the procedures of a proper blood test. The attempt to politicize the body, actually the blood of the shepherd, was trumped by the application of medical expertise. The dying shepherd with his deformed sheep faded into the background of a scientific debate about the methods of blood sampling and testing. Indeed, the ill body became a battlefield between counterpoised visions, a contested space of scientific explorations.

7. Conclusions

In the three stories presented in this article, ill bodies enact different forms of resistance through storytelling. In Pianura, bodies are narrated through medical records with the aim of sabotaging the official language of medicine, which does not recognize a connection between the stories. Collecting the medical records is ultimately an attempt to create an autonomous and counter-hegemonic narration of illness. In the Acerra case, the attempt is similar in that the power of language is at stake. Blood tests use a universal language; they tell stories using the same language of power and science. Nonetheless, the bodies whose blood is tested do not speak the same educated language of power. What the shepherd's blood says remains as controversial as much as the story it attempts to narrate.

In the postcards from the Land of Fires project, narration goes beyond the scientific representation of bodies. Hence, the ill body is evoked, but it is practically and visually absent. Illness is not mentioned, but narrated visually through the mutilated bodies of mothers separated from their children. The storytelling becomes a social and affective experience. In this article, we are interested in the process of the politicization

of ill bodies, more than with the outcome of the process. In the two cases of Pianura and the Land of Fires, the politicization of ill bodies stemmed from a collective experience. It was a result of the building of a community. The politicization of ill bodies occurs when a personal sufferance becomes an experience revealing the patterns of injustice and exploitation, and a call for collective political action. It is a hotchpotch of private and collective processes and we strongly believe that the political emerges in the shared and collective experience, more than in the moment it becomes 'publicly visible.' We are therefore interested in how the ill body enables the construction of a community.

In telling these stories, we have focused more on activism than illness, however the aim is to expand and extend it to carve out a choral narrative of toxic guerrilla autobiographies (Armiero 2014). In Campania, armed capitalism has inscribed its regime into the body of people (D'Alisa *et al.* 2017). The governmentality project has tried to normalize the capital's appropriation of life, transforming injustice (contamination) into cultural choices (unhealthy individual lifestyles), and patrolling the borders between environment and health, science and emotions. But the subaltern body is not an easy subject to be governmentalized.

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