



ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Naples and the Nation Image, Media and Culture in the Second Republic

Ruth Glynn



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Naples and the Nation

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For Richard

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Some of the material in this book has previously appeared in article form. Sections of Chapter 2 first appeared in a special issue on ‘City and Nation in Comparative Perspective’ that I edited for the *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* (8.2, 2021). Chapter 3’s interrogation of cultural responses to the Neapolitan Renaissance includes a discussion of literary texts published in a special issue of *Forum for Modern Languages Studies* dedicated to ‘Urban Utopics’ and edited by Michael G. Kelly and Mariano Paz (59.1, 2023). Chapter 6 reworks an article on Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan Novels that was published in a special issue of *Annali d’Italianistica* addressing ‘Urban Space and the Body’ and edited by Silvia Ross and Giulio Giovannoni (37, 2019).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Naples and the Nation

Naples has long been subject to intense cultural interrogation and critical enquiry. Its picturesque setting, unstable geology and eventful history have combined with its unique social structure and distinctive cultural practices to attract the attention of artists, writers, musicians and essayists. The substantial body of cultural production generated in response to the city—often experienced as an assault on the senses—is complemented by a rich corpus of scholarly work deriving from the diverse fields of the human and social sciences; these seek to capture the essence of the city or explicate different aspects of life in Naples by unearthing its secrets and elucidating its hidden dynamics. It is, then, onto a crowded virtual bookshelf that *Naples and the Nation* seeks to insert itself. The book lays claim to a space on the shelf in merit of its original focus and approach: though Naples has been interrogated with respect to almost every historical period and from virtually every critical angle, its status as an Italian city and its evolving relationship with Italy remain under-explored in the context of the contemporary period. This book seeks to redress such critical neglect by interrogating contemporary Naples and its relationship with Italy, as articulated in diverse forms of cultural production and in the light of postcolonial theory.

My focus on the interrelation between city and nation arises from the centrality of that relationship to the construction of Naples in public discourse in Italy and to the ambiguous role played by Naples in the

Italian cultural imaginary. Viewed from the outset of the Italian nation state as a problem city, diverging from prevailing urban norms and threatening to undermine national claims to modernity, Naples has often been marginalized in discussion of ‘Italian’ culture. At the same time, and precisely because of its variance from the expectations of national modernity, the city has featured prominently in state-of-the-nation discourses, serving as a barometer of national well-being.¹ Naples’ renown as a hotbed of innovation and the cradle of a popular Italian culture disseminated throughout the world further complicates understandings of the city’s relationship with Italy. Reinvigorated in recent times by its extraordinary prominence in the mass media and cultural production, Naples has again come to represent Italy on the international stage, reshaping the image of the country at home and abroad.

The prominence currently enjoyed by Naples reflects a wider shift in the fortunes and image of the city, dating back to the 1990s and the introduction of direct mayoral election to Italy in 1993. Coinciding with the inauguration of the ‘Second Republic’ and the associated renewal of the national political landscape following the devastating *Tangentopoli* corruption scandal, direct mayoral election was designed to liberate Italy’s cities from the ill effects of short-term planning and the subjugation of local interests to party-political ambitions at the national level.² It empowered municipal administrations to take a more strategic approach to the governance and development of their cities.³ For a struggling Naples, mired in corruption and dogged by a history of municipal mismanagement, the advent of direct mayoral election ‘aroused palingenetic expectations’ at the local level.⁴ As I will explore in detail in Chapter 3, the candidature of Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of the Fascist

¹ On the relationship between Naples and Italy at the outset of the nation state, see Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

² ‘Second Republic’ is an unofficial term denoting the inauguration of a new electoral system designed to counter the increasingly fragmented and unstable post-war political configuration now known as the ‘First Republic’. On the ‘Tangentopoli’ corruption scandal, see Martin Rhodes, ‘*Tangentopoli*—More than 20 Years On’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, ed. by Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 309–34.

³ Domenico Fruncillo and Michelangelo Gentilini, ‘Napoli 1993–2016. Da Bassolino a De Magistris: Solo andata?’, *Quaderni dell’Osservatorio elettorale*, 76.2 (2016), 85–134.

⁴ Fruncillo and Gentilini, ‘Napoli 1993–2016’, p. 88.

leader, and her confrontation with Antonio Bassolino, a hard-line former communist, ensured that the contest was framed as the ultimate ideological clash and seen to resonate for the political future of Italy as a whole.⁵ The eventual triumph of Bassolino was greeted as evidence of a progressive alliance uniting Italy and of Naples' conformity with national ambition and sentiment.

The impact of direct mayoral election and its coincidence with Italy's new electoral system has warranted the designation of the Second Republic as the 'Republic of the Cities'.⁶ Certainly, for Naples, the effects were dramatic; under Bassolino's two-term administration (1993–2001), the city underwent an astonishing period of renewal that came to be known as the 'Neapolitan Renaissance'.⁷ Central to the success of the administration in regenerating the city centre, reinvigorating civil society and fostering urban citizenship was its promotion of Naples as a city of culture, its restoration of culturally significant sites of collective identity and its hosting of open-air cultural events designed to draw people back to neglected public spaces. In just a few years, a city that had become 'a synonym for urban decay', disorder and dysfunction was rehabilitated as a model for urban regeneration, studied worldwide.⁸ More significantly, perhaps, Naples emerged as a beacon of the new Italy; in Isaia Sales' words, it was 'la città più evocativa del cambiamento che si annunciava in Italia dopo il crollo della Prima repubblica' [the city that best evoked the change announced in Italy after the fall of the First Republic].⁹ The

⁵ See Marco Demarco, *L'altra metà della storia: Spunti e riflessioni su Napoli da Lauro a Bassolino* (Naples: Guida, 2007).

⁶ Antonio Bassolino, *La Repubblica delle città: Conversazione con Ada Becchi, Piero Bevilacqua e Carmine Donzelli* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996).

⁷ See Demarco, *L'altra metà della storia*; Nick Dines, *Tuff City: Urban Change and Contested Space in Contemporary Naples* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Patrizia La Trecchia, *Uno sguardo a sud: Vent'anni di movimenti, storie, conflitti e trasformazioni nella città di Napoli, 1990–2010* (Naples: Liguori, 2013); Alex Marlow-Mann, *The New Neapolitan Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 159–88; Luigi Musella, *Napoli: Dall'Unità a oggi* (Rome: Carocci, 2010), pp. 149–55; Maria Federica Palestino, *Mira Napoli: La costruzione dell'immagine urbana negli anni '90* (Naples: Clean edizioni, 2003).

⁸ Dines, *Tuff City*, p. 7.

⁹ Isaia Sales, *Napoli non è Berlino: Ascesa e discesa di Bassolino nel sogno di riscatto del sud* (Milan: Dalai, 2012), p. 9. See also Fruncillo and Gentilini, 'Napoli 1993–2016', p. 88. All translations in this chapter are my own.

success of the Bassolino administration in demonstrating what enlightened administration, inclusive politics, strategic regeneration and the fostering of urban citizenship might achieve under even the most challenging of circumstances suggested that ‘da [...] Napoli sembrava dover ripartire il Paese’ [it seemed that the country would have to restart from [...] Naples].¹⁰ Not since the late-nineteenth century had the fortunes of Naples been so prominently associated with the successes or failings of the Italian nation state and never before had the city represented such a beacon of hope for the nation.

As is well known, however, the good news about Naples would not last. Despite dramatically improved investment gradings and increasingly positive reviews of the city in quality-of-life surveys, already by the end of Bassolino’s second term as mayor, the ‘Neapolitan Renaissance’ moniker was being called into question.¹¹ Among the growing criticisms, the mayoral administration was accused of emphasizing ‘sites of identity’ in the historic centre at the expense of tackling social problems in peripheral areas. There, poor quality environments, inadequate provision of services and employment and inattention to the expansion of organized criminality did little to reignite the sense of urban citizenship so successfully mobilized in the historic centre. Moreover, the cultural strategy pursued by the Bassolino administration was increasingly seen to have fallen short of effecting a meaningful socioeconomic impact on the city as a whole; Naples was still afflicted by unemployment, infrastructural deficiencies, inadequate housing and crime.¹² Stalled progress in the reclamation and redevelopment of vast tracts of industrial land to both the east and west of the historic centre compounded the growing sense of dissatisfaction.¹³

¹⁰ Sales, *Napoli non è Berlino*, p. 9.

¹¹ Bassolino’s decision to combine his mayoral role with the role of Minister of Welfare in the national government in 1998–99 was seen by some as a betrayal. See *Potere e società a Napoli a cavallo del secolo: omaggio a Percy Allum*, ed. by Ottorino Capelli (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2003), p. 29; Felia Allum and Marco Cilento, ‘Parties and Personalities: The Case of Antonio Bassolino, Former Mayor of Naples’, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 11.1 (2001), 1–26 (p. 11).

¹² A sinkhole disaster in the outer suburb of Secondigliano in 1996, resulting in eleven deaths, exemplified the perceived divide between the regeneration of the city of culture in the historic centre and the deterioration of conditions in the neglected outskirts. See Dines, *Tuff City*, p. 285.

¹³ See Roberto Esposito, ‘Morte di una stagione napoletano’, *Micromega*, 1 (1999), 11–19.

It was during the subsequent two-term administration of Rosa Russo Iervolino (2001–11) that the eruption of a bloody Camorra feud in 2004–05 and the deterioration of a waste management crisis in 2007–10 confirmed the demise of the ‘Neapolitan Renaissance’. These shocking events, which garnered sensational media coverage of Naples worldwide, were accompanied by a host of more mundane concerns, from rising street crime and a cocaine pandemic to the demise of the vibrant cultural life that had characterized the historic centre in the 1990s.¹⁴ The dramatic deterioration of both the quality of life and the image of the city became the subject of an extensive body of publications by writers, intellectuals and journalists, especially in the aftermath of the extraordinary success of Roberto Saviano’s exposé of Camorra power in *Gomorra* (2006).¹⁵ Targeting a general audience and riven with sensational titles and opinion, these works were marked by the recurrence of stereotypes, clichés and themes familiar from the historical repertoire of writings about Naples; they characterized the city as irredeemably flawed and mired in dysfunction.

Given the close association between Naples and the nation and the hopes invested in the city as a beacon of national renewal at the outset of the Second Republic, one might have expected Naples’ subsequent descent into deep dysfunction in the early 2000s to raise urgent questions about Italy’s—as well as Naples’—ability to meet the social and economic challenges of the new millennium. That such questioning did not generally occur and that there was, instead, a reversion to historic discourses stigmatizing Naples, and Naples alone, suggests an ongoing reluctance in Italy to acknowledge the interrelatedness of the Neapolitan and the national when the news from Naples is less than rosy.¹⁶ Such inattention to the interrelation between the city and the nation may be

¹⁴ There was also a marked rise in racist attacks, including a series of attacks on individual members of the Roma community and on Roma camps in the eastern suburb of Ponticelli in May 2008. See EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, ‘Incident Report: Violent Attacks against Roma in the Ponticelli District of Naples, Italy’, 2008 <https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/196-incid-report-italy-08_en.pdf> [accessed 23 August 2024].

¹⁵ Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra: Viaggio nell’impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006). On the wider corpus, see footnote 27.

¹⁶ The coverage of Naples in the weekly magazine *L’Espresso* is particularly revealing. Cover stories with dramatic titles such as ‘Napoli addio’ (September 2005), ‘Napoli perduta’ (September 2006), ‘Bevi Napoli e poi muori’ (November 2013) and ‘Sparanapoli’

seen to pervade the entire spectrum of critical intervention, from political debate through media reportage to academic scholarship. Rare exceptions include Piedmontese journalist Giorgio Bocca's *Napoli siamo noi* (2006), which posits Naples as the supreme expression of the ills that pervade social and political life in Italy, and *Napoli non è Berlino* (2012) by Neapolitan politician and essayist, Isaia Sales.¹⁷ Sales' work explores the rise and fall of Bassolino in the light of the relationship between Naples and Italy and through a comparative analysis of post-unification economic policy in the Italian south and the former German Democratic Republic. His conclusion that 'tutto ciò che è successo a Napoli e in Campania in questo ventennio ci parla della nazione, dell'Italia, della sua politica, della sua economia, dei suoi partiti' [all that has happened in Naples and Campania over the last twenty years speaks of the nation, of Italy, its politics, its economy, its parties] is a rare recognition of the ties that bind the fortunes and image of Naples to those of the nation in the Second Republic.¹⁸

This book complements Sales' approach by placing the relationship between Naples and the nation at the forefront of its analysis. It takes a different path, however, by focusing its analysis on the field of cultural production, a privileged medium for the production, exchange and consumption of shared meanings and for the articulation and circulation of new knowledge and identities.¹⁹ For some scholars, the city-nation focus might appear anachronistic, in view of the transnational turn taken

(March 2016) all portray problems in Naples as particular to the city and as evidence of its perennial dysfunction.

¹⁷ Though guilty of demonising Naples and the Italian south in his earlier work, especially *L'Inferno: Profondo Sud, male oscuro* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), Bocca here criticizes the tendency for Italians to view Naples as a case apart and thereby absolve themselves of responsibility or the need for action. The advertising blurb on the inside reverse fold declares: 'Napoli ha elevate a potenza malattie molto simili a quelle del resto d'Italia. Il suo problema più grave non è la camorra: è l'immoralità e la vigliaccheria della politica, che fa affari, che cerca il consenso costi quel che costi, che fa finta di non vedere' [Naples has, at highly elevated levels, similar afflictions to the rest of Italy. Its greatest problem is not the Camorra; it is the immorality and cowardice of its politics, which does deals, seeks consensus at any cost, and turns a blind eye]. Giorgio Bocca, *Napoli siamo noi: Il dramma di una città nell'indifferenza italiana* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006).

¹⁸ Sales, *Napoli non è Berlino*, p. 354.

¹⁹ See Stuart Hall, 'Introduction', in *Representation*, ed. by Stuart Hall, Jessica Evan and Sean Nixon, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2013), pp. xvii-xxvi.

over the last decade or more in Italian studies and urban studies alike.²⁰ Yet, although transnational theory has been particularly beneficial to scholarship addressing the Italian south, facilitating the emergence of new understandings that contest the conventional knowledge produced by the ‘southern question’, the intensity of the relationship between Naples and Italy demands special attention.²¹ Indeed, that relationship lies at the heart of this book precisely because the historical tensions between the city and the nation continue to be keenly felt in Naples. They continue to condition perceptions of, and responses to, the city and to feature conspicuously in Italian cultural works addressing Naples. Moreover, as I will argue in Chapter 2, while a transnational approach has proved to be highly productive for critical interrogation of forms of cultural production that are open to, and the product of, transnational cultural exchange, it is rather less relevant to the study of cultural products that are overwhelmingly preoccupied with the impact of national realities and discourses. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the enduring preoccupation with the relationship between Naples and the nation in the cultural production of the Second Republic does not imply a lack of engagement with transnational concerns where relevant²²; nor does it imply an ongoing attachment to historical discourses or a singular understanding of the city-nation relationship. Rather, what emerges most forcefully from the material studied here is a rejection of historical discourses that view Naples as diverging from national norms and a desire to showcase instead the continuities between Naples and Italy in order to reframe the relationship between the city and the nation as inherently entangled. That such entanglement and its implications for the discursive construction of Italy remain largely unacknowledged and uninterrogated in the critical

²⁰ See, respectively, Emma Bond, ‘Towards a Transnational Turn in Italian Studies’, *Italian Studies*, 69.3 (2014), 415–24 and *Transnational Italian Studies*, ed. by Charles Burdett and Loredana Polezzi (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), and *Transnationalism and Urbanism*, ed. by Stefan Krätke, Kathrin Wildner and Stephan Lanz (New York: Routledge, 2012).

²¹ On transnationalism and the Italian south, see esp. Goffredo Polizzi, *Reimagining the Italian South: Migration, Translation and Subjectivity in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021).

²² A transnational consciousness surfaces primarily in cultural works addressing organized crime or the presence of new migrant communities in Naples. See, for instance, the discussion of *Gomorra* in Chapter 4.

scholarship, even when featuring prominently in cultural works addressing Naples, is something that this book aims to remedy.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION: NAPLES AND THE NATION

The cultural products analysed in this study include news reports, novels, feature film, soap opera and fashion. They have been selected for their capacity to demonstrate the centrality of the city-nation relationship to prevalent understandings of Naples and for their innovative elucidation or reconceptualization of that relationship. The diversity of ways in which individual texts construct the relationship between city and nation is particularly important for reimagining Naples beyond the criminalized frame that has dominated academic studies of Naples and Neapolitan culture for much of this century. The corpus represents but a fraction of the wealth of literary, cinematic, televisual, theatrical, musical and artistic works emerging from an exceptionally vibrant cultural scene that predates the Second Republic but that has become increasingly important to the city and its relationship with Italy in the period in question. The continued efforts of successive mayoral administrations to support cultural initiatives and promote Naples as a city of culture have contributed to the rejuvenation of struggling sectors, the expansion of existing activities and the development of new cultural industries.²³ The inauguration of the Second Republic coincided with an important cultural moment in Naples, where grass-roots cultural initiatives dedicated to preserving the city's cultural heritage and developing a sense of civic consciousness coincided with the rejection of outmoded forms of representation of the city on the part of cultural operators, especially in the fields of music and cinema.²⁴ The first Bassolino administration capitalized on such activities and developments to rebrand Naples as a city of culture in a bid to

²³ Under the Iervolino administration, which was consumed by the Camorra feud of 2004–05 and by the toxic and waste management crises of 2004–2011, the emphasis placed on the city's cultural identity was less overt and the administration refrained from the more high-profile cultural events favoured by the Bassolino administration.

²⁴ See Palestino, *Mira Napoli*, pp. 25–69 on the Napoli 99 Foundation's initiatives to restore monuments and promote Neapolitan museums; see La Trecchia, *Uno sguardo a sud*, pp. 164–22, on the political music of groups like Almamegretta and 99 Posse, formed in the social centres of Naples and addressing discrimination and social inequality in Italy, and paying particular attention to the problems of the south.

engender a sense of civic pride, revitalize the image of the city and attract tourism and inward investment. Literature, live events (theatre, music, song), commissioned artworks, television and cinema were all identified as potential accelerators of a vibrant cultural industry, with particular emphasis on cinema, which enjoyed critical acclaim in the form of the ‘New Neapolitan Cinema’.²⁵ Ironically, while television in the form of Italy’s first soap opera, *Un posto al sole*, would prove to be an important vehicle for the transmission of the new vision of Naples promoted by the Bassolino administration, the films of the ‘New Neapolitan Cinema’ often exposed the limitations of the ‘Neapolitan Renaissance’. Their anthropological scrutiny of the daily struggles of alienated subjects subsisting on the outskirts of the city and falling prey to organized crime preceded the criminal exposés of the following decade and foretold of the cost that would be paid for the neglect of Naples’ most vulnerable citizens.²⁶

Rather than tempering the growth of such activities, the radical deterioration of the city’s image and fortunes amidst the Camorra feuding and urban waste crisis of the 2000s generated an unprecedented level of interest in Naples in the cultural sphere. It was the remarkable success of Roberto Saviano’s literary exposé of the Camorra’s ‘economic empire’—rather than the events themselves—that attracted new cultural operators to the city and inspired a rush of literary and cinematic interrogations of the effects of organized crime on Naples and its hinterland. In the literary sphere, numerous works of reportage attested to the apparently unassailable reign of organized crime throughout the territory; they detailed the human and environmental cost of Camorra exploitation by bringing to light stories of blighted communities, and individual lives prematurely ended.²⁷ Such works were accompanied by a small but continuing stream

²⁵ The strategy was developed by Renato Nicolini, who held the ‘Identity’ portfolio in the first Bassolino administration. Nicolini viewed Naples in those years as ‘la capitale del cinema’ [the capital of cinema]. See Palestino, *Mira Napoli*, p. 84.

²⁶ See Marlow-Mann, *The New Neapolitan Cinema*, esp. pp. 169–86.

²⁷ Works of reportage include Bocca, *Napoli siamo noi*; Jacopo Fo and others, *Napoli nel sangue* (Milan: La Voce, 2006); Sergio Nazarro, *Io, per fortuna c’ho la camorra* (Rome: Fazi, 2007); Francesco Durante, *Scuorno* (Milan: Mondadori, 2008); Marco Imarisio, *I giorni della vergogna: Cronaca di un’emergenza infinita* (Naples: L’ancora del Mediterraneo, 2008); Adolfo Scotto di Luzio, *Napoli dei molti tradimenti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008); Aldo Masullo and Claudio Scamardella, *Napoli siccome immobile* (Naples: Guida, 2008); and Bruno de Stefano and Vincenzo Iurillo, *La casta della monezza: Dall’emergenza rifiuti alla crisi bancaria* (Rome: Newton Compton, 2009).

of fictional works focused on the initiation of young boys into a life of crime and violence; they presented a darkly fatalistic account of the inevitability of the boys' trajectory, in the absence of alternative opportunities for socio-economic advancement.²⁸ While stories of this kind also featured in the cinema of the early 2000s, in continuity with the thematic and aesthetic concerns of the New Neapolitan cinema,²⁹ the visual representation of Naples in the years that followed was dominated by Matteo Garrone's adaptation of Saviano's literary exposé of Camorra power (2008) and Sky Atlantic's televisual rendition of the same in *Gomorra: La serie* (2014–21).³⁰ The widespread influence of such works, focusing overwhelmingly on the perpetrators of Camorra violence and characterized by bleak urban landscapes and a suffocating dark aesthetic, ensured that the prevailing view of Naples was of a crime-ridden urban wasteland blighted by unemployment and under-investment; mired in violence, drug addiction and hopelessness; and lacking any sense of civic or social consciousness.

While the criminalized portrayal would continue to pervade cultural representations of Naples (and feature film in particular), a more diversified depiction of the city would soon emerge to challenge its dominance. Already in 2011, a new celebratory approach to the city was identifiable

²⁸ This strand of narration predates the publication of *Gomorra*. It includes Peppe Lanzetta, *Figli di un Bronx minore* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1993) and *Ridateci i sogni* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2002); Maurizio Braucci, *Il mare guasto* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 1999); Diego De Silva, *Certi bambini* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001).

²⁹ See esp. *Vito e gli altri*, dir. by Antonio Capuano (Italy, 1991); *Baby Gang*, dir. by Salvatore Piscicelli (Italy, 1992); *Pianese Nunzio, 14 anni a Maggio* [*Sacred Silence*], dir. by Antonio Capuano (Italy, 1996); *Certi bambini* [*A Children's Story*], dir. by Andrea and Antonio Frazzi (Italy, 2004); *Vento di terra* [*Land Wind*], dir. by Vincenzo Marra (Italy, 2004); *La guerra di Mario* [*Mario's War*], dir. by Antonio Capuano (Italy, 2005); and *I ragazzi del Vesuvio*, dir. by Giuseppe Ferrara (2010).

³⁰ *Gomorra*, dir. by Matteo Garrone (Italy, 2008); *Gomorra: La serie* (Sky Atlantic, 2014–2021). Camorra-centred films include *Tatanka*, dir. by Giuseppe Gagliardi (Italy, 2011); *Perez*, dir. by Edoardo de Angelis (Italy, 2014); *Milionari* [*The Price of Crime/Mafia Millionaires*], dir. by Alessandro Piva (Italy, 2016); the *Gomorra: La serie* spin-off *L'immortale* [*The Immortal*], dir. by Marco D'Amore (Italy, 2019) and the animated *La gatta cenerentola* [*Cinderella the Cat*], dir. by Alessandro Rak and others (Italy, 2017). They were accompanied by documentaries and features detailing the ecological effects of toxic waste disposal; these included *Biutiful cauntri*, dir. by Esmeralda Calabria, Andrea D'Ambrosio and Peppe Ruggiero (Italy, 2007); *Una montagna di balle*, dir. by Nicola Angrisano and Ascano Celestini (Italy, 2009), *Bella e perduta* [*Lost and Beautiful*], dir. by Pietro Marcello (Italy, 2015) and *Veleno*, dir. by Diego Olivares (Italy, 2017).

in feature films generated by Italian directors and production companies based in Rome; these sought to counter the prevailing criminal tendency by featuring anti-Camorra resistance in its various forms and by showcasing the visual pleasures and other positive attributes of the city that had been disregarded in the moral panic following the publication of *Gomorra* in 2006.³¹ The return to the visual pleasures and easy sociality of the historic centre effected by the new, ‘national’ cinematic gaze on Naples was accompanied by the appearance, in the literary sphere, of the female universe of Elena Ferrante’s cycle of ‘Neapolitan Novels’, integrating Neapolitan and national histories.³² These innovations in the cultural sphere coincided with the start of the de Magistris administration (2011–2021), which renewed efforts to revitalize Naples’ image and capitalize on the city’s prominence in the cultural sphere while also working to regain control of the outskirts and end the Camorra’s hold over waste disposal.³³ Building on the Bassolino administration’s attention to sites of identity in the historic centre, the cultural politics of the de Magistris administration emphasized Naples’ vibrant street culture and its rich reservoir of popular cultural practices to promote the city as a destination for experience-led, independent tourism.³⁴ The city’s hosting of the Dolce &

³¹ Among the strategies employed by feature films emerging from directors and production companies based in Rome, to celebrate Neapolitan resilience and anti-Camorra struggle were the introduction of comic and/or romantic plots, inclusion of Neapolitan cultural forms and practices, and attention to the role played by new migrant communities in potentially disrupting Camorra power. See, for example, *Into Paradiso*, dir. by Paola Randi (Italy, 2010); *Song’e Napule*, dir. by Manetti Bros. (Italy, 2011); *Mozzarella Stories*, dir. by Edoardo De Angelis (Italy, 2011); *Ammore e malavita* [*Love and Bullets*], dir. by Manetti Bros. (Italy, 2017).

³² On the national cinematic gaze on Naples, see Ruth Glynn, ‘The Camorra Comedy: Naples in the (Post-)National Cinematic Gaze’, *The Italianist*, 39.2 (2019), 191–215; Elena Ferrante, *L’amica geniale* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2011); *Storia del nuovo cognome* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2012); *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2013); *Storia della bambina perduta* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2014).

³³ De Magistris was awarded the Valerio-Impastato prize in 2017 for his dedication to anti-mafia struggles, as both a magistrate and as mayor. See Anon, ‘De Magistris vince premio Valeroti Impastato’, *Il denaro*, 4 March 2014 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20170306211811/http://ildenaro.it/news/93-cro-nache/79987/de-magistris-vince-premio-valeroti-impastato>> [accessed 19 August 2024].

³⁴ See Paolo Macry, ‘Sovrani repubblicani’, *The Passenger—Napoli* (Milan: Iperborea, 2021), pp. 8–31 (p. 30).

Gabbana Alta Moda show in 2015 contributed to the agenda of showcasing Naples' tangible and intangible cultural heritage and effectively inaugurated a new heritage gaze that would soon come to dominate screen productions set in the city.³⁵ The abundance and range of literary, televisual and cinematic productions currently emerging from the city and gaining national and international recognition reflects confidence in the city's support for cultural production, the existence of a thriving cultural sector and the profusion of creative possibility that Naples affords new generations of cultural operators.³⁶ The city's apparently unceasing ability to inspire, coupled with support from the municipal council, has cemented the appeal of Naples as a vibrant site and subject of Italian cultural production.³⁷

Within the vast panorama of cultural activity emerging from Naples since the start of the Second Republic, the relationship between city and nation features consistently but not always prominently or explicitly. The works I have selected for analysis reflect the spectrum of the treatment afforded the city-nation relationship, comprise different media types and showcase different aspects of Naples and its culture. They range from newspaper reports and television soap opera, through literary reportage and novels, to a fashion show and feature film. All, in different ways, speak to the impact of the historical legacy of Naples' relationship with

³⁵ The heritage gaze in film is best represented by *Napoli velata* [Naples in Veils], dir. by Ferzan Özpetek (Italy, 2017), which I discuss in Chapter 6, but it may be seen to operate in films as diverse as *Ammore e malavita* [Love and Bullets], dir. by Manetti Bros. (Italy, 2017); *Il Sindaco del Rione Sanità* [The Mayor of Rione Sanità], dir. by Mario Martone (Italy, 2019); *Qui rido io* [The King of Laughter], dir. by Mario Martone (Italy/Spain, 2021); *Black Parthenope*, dir. by Alessandro Gagli (Italy, 2021); and *È stato la mano di Dio* [The Hand of God], dir. by Paolo Sorrentino (Italy/Netflix, 2021).

³⁶ In cinema, between 2017 and 2021, the Fondazione Film Commission Campania financed 281 films (including feature films, documentaries, shorts and series), so that Naples constituted 'il primo set d'Italia' [the top Italian film set]. Maurizio Gemma, cited in Peppe Fiore, 'Partenosfera', *The Passenger—Napoli* (Milan: Iperborea, 2021), pp. 136–51 (p. 139). Beyond *Un posto al sole* (Rai Fiction and Freemantle Media, 1996–), *Gomorra: La serie* (Sky Atlantic, 2014–2021) and *L'amica geniale* [My Brilliant Friend] (RaiFiction, 2018–), Naples-based TV series on international streaming platforms include *Mare fuori* [The Sea Beyond], (RaiFiction/Netflix, 2020–) and *The Lying Life of Adults* (Netflix, 2023). On the literary side, there is a notable dominance of Naples-centred fiction in the lists of publishers specializing in translations of novels from Italian into English, such as Europa Editions.

³⁷ Though now growing, the production side of the screen industry in Naples has been slower to develop. See Fiore, 'Partenosfera', p. 144.

Italy and seek to contest the construction of Naples as Other to a national norm in the historical repertoire of discourses relating to the city and the modernity of the Italian nation state. In analysing these texts, I explore the role played by cultural production in shaping understandings of the relationship between Naples and Italy. I ask what the view from Naples reveals about the nation state, its workings and its discourses and I interrogate how Italian national identities and discourses play out in the context of Naples—how they are negotiated, refracted, challenged or made concrete in the microcosm of the city and its representation. The book counters a prevailing tendency in existing criticism to reinforce—however unconsciously—conventional perceptions of Naples as an exceptional urban and cultural reality, unrelated to national concerns or deviating from an implied national norm.³⁸ It identifies instead the ways in which cultural production documents continuities between the city and the Italian nation state in the context of globalization and geopolitical change, and it demonstrates how cultural representations of Naples speak simultaneously to issues of local, national and transnational significance. By highlighting the diverse ways in which national identities and discourses are interpreted and negotiated in Naples and its cultural representation, this book seeks to transform common understandings of the city and its relationship with Italy, while gesturing towards the ways in which it may challenge our understanding of Italy. It further seeks to provide a model for the study of the city as a privileged site for the articulation, implementation or refraction of national discourses and dynamics, with close reference to cultural representation as a vehicle through which cities and nations are imagined, shaped and maintained.

³⁸ This is evident also in the disproportionate number of anthropological and ethnographic studies dedicated to Naples, relative to other Italian cities, especially in the English-speaking context. See Thomas Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Victoria Goddard, *Gender, Family and Work in Naples* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996); Dines, *Tuff City*; Jason Pine, *The Art of Making Do in Naples* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2012); Antonia Lucia Dawes, *Race Talk: Languages of Racism and Resistance in Neapolitan Street Markets* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My approach throughout is indebted to postcolonial theorizations of Naples and the Italian south, especially the work of Franco Cassano, Pasquale Verdicchio and Iain Chambers.³⁹ It is also indebted to Jennifer Robinson's postcolonial critique of urban studies' Western bias and its application to the Neapolitan context by Nick Dines.⁴⁰ Together, these theoretical frames have facilitated the development of a postcolonial approach that has proved to be highly productive in liberating Naples from the burden of historical stereotypes and in reconsidering the city not in opposition to modernity but as constitutive of it. I have found, however, that such theorization is insufficient to elucidate the concerns of cultural works focused on the city-nation relationship, which is overlooked in the existing postcolonial critique. For that reason, I supplement postcolonial critique with theories of cultural accentedness and propose a new approach to Naples premised upon a reframing of national culture in terms of differently accented practices, discourses and interpretations.⁴¹ This approach is intended as a model for critical interrogation of the relationship between city and nation more broadly, both within and beyond Italy. Though discussion of cultural accentedness is more prominent in some chapters than in others, it nonetheless underpins the aim of the book as a whole—that is, to demonstrate how contemporary cultural production challenges the historical construction of Naples as other to a national Italian norm and encourages a reconceptualization of Italian

³⁹ Franco Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano* (Bari: Laterza, 1996); Pasquale Verdicchio, *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism Through the Italian Diaspora*, rev. edn (New York: Bordighera Press, 2016), and 'The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy', in *Revisioning Italy: National Culture and Global Culture*, ed. by Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 191–212; Iain Chambers, 'Naples: A Porous Modernity', *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 71–129. See also Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale: dall'Ottocento a oggi* (Rome: Donizelli, 2005). On postcoloniality and Naples, see also Maria Ridda, *Criminality and Power in the Postcolonial City: Mapping the Mean Streets of Mumbai and Naples* (London: Routledge, 2023).

⁴⁰ Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* (London: Routledge, 2006); Dines, *Tuff City*.

⁴¹ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Carli Coetzee, *Accented Futures: Language Activism and the Ending of Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013).

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