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The Blues Continuum: New York Calls – Naples Responds

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by

Alessandro Buffa

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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My dissertation traces a form of call and response between New York City and Naples in the 1970s and 1980s. It foregrounds the importance of the ‘blues’ in the traffic of sound, images and oppositional ideas between these two cities located on the same geographical parallel. The blues here is understood as a musical style and feeling, as well as an affect of trauma, loss, memory and an intimate relationship that artists and activists established with their city spaces in the age of the so called “urban crisis.” It proposes a “blutopia,” based on utopian/dystopian tensions that promote alternative forms of knowledge, or a bluesology.

While I focus on the 1970s and 1980s, and on New York and Naples, I move across time and space tracing multiple histories that connect past and present, local and global. My dissertation argues that cultural expressions and activism in the 1970s and 1980s in New York and Naples were part of a “blues continuum” that began with the early slave rebellions, the Maroon communities in the Americas, the multiethnic revolt of Masaniello in Naples and continued with Pan-Africanism, black liberation movements, postcolonial thinking, and urban struggles in both cities.

Like a deejay working at the turntables I mix sounds, poetry and filmic images with stories of resistance and urban survival. Like “a botanist of the asphalt” I imagine walking on the streets of New York City and Naples listening to the “small voice of history.” Sustained by the saxophone sound of James Senese, the electro funk of Afrika Bambaataa, the rappin’ style of Sandra María Esteves, the activism of Evelina López Antonetty, Lillian López and Richie Pérez, the urban struggles of the mothers against heroin, the murals of Felice Pignataro, the echo of dub from Jamaica to New York and to Naples, the blue maps of Bobby Womack and Mario Merola, and the futuristic impulse in *Blues metropolitano* and *The Brother from Another Planet*, this is a story of unexpected and critical connections between the black Atlantic, “Nuestra América” and a fervently creolized Mediterranean.

In loving memory of my mother, Olimpia Citarella (1930-2013)

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INTRODUCTION

Escape From New York and Naples

New York and Naples have been linked for decades through the emigration of millions of southern Italians to the New World.¹ Although New York and Naples have different histories – the former has been named the capital of the xx century and is still an important hub in world finance, communication, arts and fashion. The latter is a former capital now without its kingdom. Many scholars and commentators have made connections between the two cities. Film historian Giuliana Bruno argues that: “Like the filmic metropolis of *Blade Runner*... [New York City and Naples] are dystopian cities. Always somewhat decayed and embedded in debris, these striking cities are never too far from an exquisite state of ruin. Cities in ruins, they exhibit the social contradictions, and show the high and low, side by side, in the architectural texture, making a spectacle of the everyday.”² Anthropologist Thomas Belmonte in his ethnographic study of urban poverty in Naples writes: “The crowds on the sidewalk were robotic, hard and rushing, as they tend to be in Naples and New York.”³ An American journalist who visited Naples in the late 1970s during a conversation with Neapolitan writer Domenico Rea said that

¹ Giuliana Bruno, “City Views: the Voyage of Film Image,” in David B. Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City* (London: Routledge, 1997), 46-58.

² Ibid., 46. See the evocative excerpt from *Blade Runner* on you tube (“Blade Runner- Futuristic Cityscape”): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deA6FU1TwtY>

³ Thomas Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain*, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 1979), 148.

Naples is a metropolis while Rome is a huge village. She told him that Naples reminded her of New York because like in New York everything is based on chance; everything seems to be not planned.⁴ You can pass from very rich areas to very poor areas within the distance of one block. In addition in these cities there is not a clear demarcation in the movement from “the planned city to the corporeal city.”⁵ Italian novelist Elsa Morante considered “Naples as the only true Italian metropolis.”⁶ Already in 1914 Walter Benjamin in his essay titled “Naples” wrote: “Fantastic reports by travelers have touched up the city. In reality it is gray...Tenements block of six or seven stories, with staircases climbing their foundations, appear against the villas as skyscrapers.”⁷ Naples, like Gotham City, is a dark metropolis and a vertical city. Mark Twain in his trip to Italy wrote: “Naples, with its immediate suburbs, contains six hundred and twenty-five thousand inhabitants, but I am satisfied it covers no more ground than an American city of one hundred and fifty thousand. It reaches up into the air infinitely higher than three American cities, though, and there is where the secret of it lies. I will observe here, in passing, that the contrasts between opulence and poverty, and magnificence and misery, are more frequent and more striking in Naples than in Paris even.”⁸ From Jacob Riis’s photographs of the Lower East Side in the late 19th-century to the illustrated press of the

⁴ Domenico Rea, *Vivere a Napoli* (Naples: Ibiskos, 1988), 27.

⁵ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), Plates 7 and 8.

⁶ Quoted in Bruno, “City Views,” 47.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Naples,” trans. Peter Demetz in Peter Demetz, ed., *Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 165.

⁸ <http://www.roguery.com/cities/naples/history/twain/index.htm> (excerpt from Mark Twain, *The Innocent Abroad*, 1869).

early 20th-century, as film critic Ben Singer (1995) has demonstrated, New York city appears as an urban hell.⁹ Historically, New York and Naples have been considered dual cities. Writers like “Philip Hone, Richard Henry Dana, and Charles Dickens contrasted such ‘dark, filthy, violent, and degraded’ places as the ‘Five Points’ with the bright achievements of Broadway.”¹⁰ In the seventeenth century Naples was the second largest city in Europe after Paris as well as an important cultural center but the city also comprised the worst slums on the continent. Historian Fernand Braudel in his history of big cities describes Naples as “both sordid and beautiful, abjectly poor and very rich.”¹¹ However, especially since the late 1960s, “the image of these cities” has been unavoidably linked to “the mean streets.”¹² In the 1970s and 1980s, events like the cholera epidemic and the earthquake in Naples, fires and destruction in New York, unemployment, street crime and drug diffusion in both cities attracted journalists and other media practitioners from all over the world.¹³ In the press, films, television, reportage and public discourse the message was simple: “Escape from New York and from Naples.”¹⁴

⁹ Ben Singer, “Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism,” in Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 72-99.

¹⁰John Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells, “Introduction,” in John Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells, eds., *Dual City: Restructuring New York*, (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1991), 3.

¹¹ Quoted in Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 165.

¹² Bruno, “City Views,” 47.

¹³ See Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 21-61.

¹⁴ Bruno, “City Views,” 47.

To walk in Naples and New York can be likened to watching a dystopic science fiction film set in a city of the near future: traffic jams, “robotic crowds,” tall buildings, piles of garbage, street vendors selling umbrellas at every corner of the city center, a post-apocalyptic feeling pervades the air, as if everyone knew that the end is near. Yet, at the same time, the ordinary people whom you meet on buses, on the street, at the subway stations tend to be “generous; open-minded but skeptical...bursting with energy and a commitment of doing.”¹⁵ In a way, this dissertation is also woven with my memories of Naples in the 1980s. I remember walking with my father through the pedestrian subways that ran underneath the huge piazza Garibaldi connecting one side of the square to the central station (Napoli Centrale). Standing up along the wall for almost the whole tunnels’ lengths, dozens of drug addicts injected heroin without caring for the hundreds of people who walk there. More recently, nearby the terminal of the “circumvesuviana” (a light train connecting Naples with the eastern outskirts) not far from the central station, I saw a man probably in his forties who could barely walk because under the effect of heroin. Suddenly he collapsed and remained on the ground without moving. Most of the people just ignored him but someone called the emergency number. In a few minutes an ambulance arrived. As the paramedics touched him, he opened his eyes and calmly said “hey, what’s going on.” In that moment I felt like the happiest person in the world. I had thought the worst. Another time, I saw another man in the same condition. That time I called the emergency number. I described the situation to the operator and he

¹⁵ Joshua Freeman, *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: The New Press), xv.

said, “Listen, go there and ask him if he is all right.” I went there, I sat on my knees next to him and said: “Hey, are you all right?” He just nodded, saying yes.” I added: “Do you need any help?” And again he just nodded, this time saying no.

Naples and New York are two cinematic cities in the sense that they attract cinema. In this dissertation my intention is to approach Naples and New York with a cinematic sensibility. Famously Walter Benjamin compared the camera to a knife which cut with surgical precision into the urban body and cinema as something which totally reconfigured our perception of the city through an alteration of time and space. As he famously wrote: “Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second.”¹⁶ Following Benjamin I would like to offer a journey that cuts underneath the official city maps. If, as Stephen Greenblatt suggests, “mobility lies at the heart of the historian’s method,” I will move like the “man with the movie camera” across these two cities.¹⁷ In doing this I will try my hand at using the different techniques of cinema like enlargement, slow motion, time-laps, which, as Graeme Gilloch, contends, “bring to light that which the human eye sees but cannot, or does not discern.” Like in film, I will try to show “things normally unseen” or things that “remain unnoticed” because too small or

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 209.

¹⁷ Quoted in Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso), 16.

too fast to be noticed.¹⁸ Yet I don't rely only on the eye. My analysis will be mutisensory considering the city space as part of our skin, as a sonic environment and as a site of memory.

The Blues Continuum

As Siegfried Kracauer argues: “Most people turn their backs on garbage cans, the dirt underfoot, the waste they leave behind. Films have no such inhibitions, on the contrary, what we ordinarily prefer to ignore proves attractive to them precisely because of this common neglect.”¹⁹ Yet, mainstream cinema and the media in general have both consciously and unconsciously fixed the image of New York and Naples as urban nightmares and blamed the poor for the abandoned condition of neighborhoods, the rise of street crime and health problems. In a word, the blacks and Puerto Ricans urban poor of New York and the urban poor of Naples have been considered naturally or culturally inclined to commit crime, leave garbage on the street and so on. I argue that this naturalized racist discourse about the urban crisis of New York and Naples was mostly produced and constructed from above by national and local policies, urban renewal policies that further marginalized the poorer population and planned shrinkages that cut municipal services in disadvantaged neighborhoods. This discourse has its roots in imperialism, capitalism, the social science and popular culture of the 19th-century that

¹⁸ Graeme Gilloch, “Urban Optics: Film, Phantasmagoria and the City in Benjamin and Kracauer,” *New Formations* 61 (Summer 2007): 115-131.

¹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, 1960), 54.

lives on in contemporary mainstream media and social science.²⁰ In contrast with this racialized discourse I prefer looking from below at urban resistance to the urban crisis. Instead of focusing on the “pathologies” of the disadvantaged areas of New York and Naples, I consider these neighborhoods as crossroads of culture and resistance. I argue that a history of New York and Naples from below challenges nationalist ideas of culture. In the South Bronx and Harlem, for instance, to use a phrase of historian Earl Lewis, we have a history of overlapping diasporas.²¹ Here the black Atlantic meets what critic Édouard Glissant referring to the Caribbean called “the Other America” and what Cuban intellectual José Martí referring to the America that speaks Spanish called “Nuestra América.”²² Naples is a large port city located in the southern part of the Mediterranean that has always been on the edge between Europe, Africa and the Middle East and so open to different cultures and influences. Although until recently officially

²⁰ Deborah and Rodrick Wallace, *A Plague on your Houses: How New York was Burned Down and National Public Health Crumbled* (London: Verso, 1998), 9-19; Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other,’” in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 223-290.

²¹ Earl Lewis, “To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas,” *The American Historical Review* 100 (Jun. 1995): 765-787.

²² Édouard Glissant developed his argument about “the other America,” in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989). José Martí coined the term “Nuestra America” in the article “Nuestra America,” *El Partido Liberal*, January 30, 1891. For an excellent reading of Martí’s “Nuestra América” and Glissant’s “Other America” in the context of the black Atlantic musics, see Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Essential readings on Martí from the perspective of a critical and transnational American studies are Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman, eds., *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005) and Jeffrey Belnap and Raul Fernandez, eds., *José Martí’s “Our America”: From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). See also Laura Lomas, *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). On Glissant see Martin Munro, *Different Drummers: Rhythm and Race in the Americas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), and Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

there was a very small percentage of locals of African origin, Naples in the seventeenth century was “host to some ten thousands foreign slaves.”²³ In 1647 it was also the home of one of the first proletarian revolts in the world. This revolt led by fisherman Masaniello was also one of the examples in which multiethnic proletarian crowds organized together in struggle.²⁴

It is within the context of these hybrids past and previous struggles that new cultural expressions emerged in the postindustrial New York and Naples of the 1970s and 1980s. Hip hop, salsa, Blaxploitation, Nuyorican poetry in New York and jazz, blues, dub, and cine-sceneggiata in Naples stand by the side of the oppressed and wretched of the city and consequently became part of broader urban struggles. As the Nuyorican poet and essayist Sandra María Esteves says: “We want to keep art in the community. Everyone wants fame and fortune, but that’s not our priority. Our priority is to empower our community.”²⁵ This form of resistance drew from struggles of the past in order to empower the present and to imagine a better future. Although sometimes these struggles are linked to the local context, they are part of a globalization from below that runs parallel to globalization from above. They have roots in the revolutionary Atlantic of the early modern age, in the Maroon communities of the Americas, in the multiethnic crowds and rebellions of Naples in the 17th century, in “Afrological” cultural

²³ Iain Chambers. *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 95.

²⁴ Peter Linebaugh, and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 112-116.

²⁵ In Carmen Dolores Hernandez, *Puerto Rican Voices in English* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 60.

expressions.²⁶ Following the late and great (LeRoy Jones) Amiri Baraka, I call this form of globalization from below a blues continuum.²⁷ In his work on black music, Baraka proposes an approach to black music understood as a “changing same” that adapts continuously to new historical phases of the black experience in America without losing its initial oppositional meaning born during slavery. I extend this concept to the Mediterranean and to other spheres like literature, art, and any form of urban resistance. Geographer Clyde Woods has argued that, “the blues tradition has consistently served to unite working-class communities across different spatial scales: blocks, neighborhoods, towns, cities, regions, ethnicities, and nations.”²⁸

²⁶ On Maroon communities in the Americas see Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press); Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); and Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exile: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014). On the rebellion of Naples see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra*, 112-116. On the difference between “Afrological” and “Eurological” perspectives in improvised music see George E. Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,” in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 272-284.

²⁷ LeRoy Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from it* (New York: William Morrow, 1963). See also Paul Gilroy, “Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a *Changing Same*,” in Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley, eds., *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London: Verso, 1994).

²⁸ Clyde Woods, “Sittin’ on Top of the World: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” in Katherine McKittarick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), 53. On the blues as history from below and a form of social movement see Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in the Mississippi Delta* (London: Verso, 1998); Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Hazel V. Carby, “The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues,” “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context,” “Black Women’s Blues, Motown and Rock and Roll,” They Put a Spell on You,” in Hazel V. Carby, *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999); Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); George Lipsitz, “The Class Origins of Rock and Roll,” in *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Champaign, IL.: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Who Set You Flowin’?: The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press,

Contemporary black music arrived to Naples through the Allied troops presence in the city during and after World War II and adapted to local sounds. Neapolitans in Italy, like Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the United States, have been considered as “the Others” within Italian culture. Still now, as American studies scholar Alessandro Portelli observes, when Napoli soccer team plays away matches in northern cities, right-wing local supporters show banners reading: “Italy is for Italians, get rid of all Negroes and Neapolitans.”²⁹ It is also this historical subordination of African Americans, Puerto Ricans and Neapolitans, and the “racialization” of Neapolitans especially those from the working class, that opened up a subterranean dialogue during the 1970s and 1980s between these sounds in catching “the experience of the inner city” (Iain Chambers) of Naples and New York in times of crisis. Following the work of Paul Gilroy on the culture of the black Atlantic, we can argue that black music took a detour from the Atlantic toward the Mediterranean. In this sense, Naples, which in the past was a colonial city and embedded in the network of planetary currents of people and goods including the brutality of the slave trade system, re-enters this circuit through the black music that arrived in Naples via records and the Allied Forces present in the city during and after the war.³⁰

1995); Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2013); Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The 1927 Mississippi River Flood in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

²⁹ Alessandro Portelli, “The Problem of the Color-Blind: Notes on the Discourse of Race in Italy,” in Paul Spickard, ed., *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2005), 358.

³⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

In the 1970s and 1980s early hip hop in New York and jazz/blues in Naples were part of a transnational blues continuum, however each of these expressions was also embedded in the peculiarities of the two cities during the crisis. Blues themes were embraced by Neapolitan musician and rap artists in New York to condemn social inequalities and racism, to voice the pain of seeing the city in crisis and communities in poverty. In New York and Naples the blues was adapted to new historical contexts, to new acts of resistance. We can hear it in early rap and the electro funk of Afrika Bambaataa and his various groups from the Soul Sonic Force to the Zulu, R&B/funk/jazz/blues of Napoli centrale and Pino Daniele in the 1970s and in the dub/trip hop of Almamegretta in the early 1990s, and also in the poems of Nuyorican writers and the short stories of Peppe Lanzetta. This blues originated in Africa but took several directions – to the Arab world, Mediterranean, the Americas, and then returned to the Mediterranean under the impulse of black oppositional urban sounds. It changed across time and space. Music itself became agency.

My dissertation is deeply influenced by four approaches that look from “way, way, below” and across time and space. They are: the new black history from below of the 1980s and 1990s; the school of thinking of the “long Civil Rights;” cultural studies (both the so called Birmingham school and the so called new film history); and what scholar George Lipsitz called the “other American studies.”³¹ In the new black history from below the agency of the black working-class and oppressed people plays a central

³¹ George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3-30.

role. Yet, it is a concept of agency which does not include exclusively the activism of labor unions, solidarity movements, and working-class groups in the workplace, but also daily acts of resistance of common people, community and neighborhoods based organization, the so called “lumpen-proletarian,” and what historian Robin Kelley called “unorganized social movements.”³² The school of thinking of the long civil rights focuses on the “political use of the past” (Jacquelyn Dowd Hall) and argues that the civil rights movement is part of a broader international movement which dates back to the slave revolts, multi-ethnic crowds in the Atlantic and Mediterranean ports, pan-

³² Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994). See also Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 1998; Farah Jasmine Griffin, ‘Who Set You Flowin’?’: *The African-American Migration Narrative*, 1995. Predecessors of the black history from below of the ‘80s and ‘90s are C.L.R. James *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Second Edition Revised (New York: Vintage Books, 1963, 1938); W.E.B. Du Bois *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1962, 1935); Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*, 30th Anniversary Edition, 2007; Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Knopf, 1976); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slave Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974). On history from below and cultural history in the United States see Herman Lebovics, “Why, Suddenly, Are the Americans Doing Cultural History?,” in *Imperialism and the Corruption of Democracies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). Black radical feminists since at least the early 20th-century have anticipated what is now called black history from below. See Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (New York: The New Press, 1995); Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Woman are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1981); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984); Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983, 1981). See also Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women’s in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race.” *Signs* 17 (1992): 251-74.

Africanism, anti-colonialism and so on.³³ This critical approach draws from the work of black radicals thinkers and activists like W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Oliver Cox, and Eric Williams, among others, who consider capitalism, slavery, racism and imperialism as interconnected forces.³⁴ This approach allows us to dig up histories which have been silenced and repressed. On the surface the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plessy vs Ferguson* (1896) in the US, which sanctioned the beginning of Jim Crow Laws, and the Unification of Italy (1860) have not much in common, yet if we go beyond nationalist

³³ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Use of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (March, 2005): 1233-63; Van Gosse, "A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left," in Van Gosse, ed., *The Movements of the New Left, 1950-1975: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan/Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005); Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is A Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Robin D.G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision," *Journal of American History* 86 (Dec. 1999): 1045-1077; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

³⁴ C.L.R. James *The Black Jacobins*; W.E.B. Du Bois *Black Reconstruction in America*; Eric Williams *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944); and Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class and Race* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1948). See also W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part which Africa Has Played in World History* (International Publishers, 1965, 1947). In the chapter on the history of slavery, entitled "The Rape of Africa" Du Bois considers slavery as one of the first examples of modern capitalism. In his words: "The Negroes were purchased with British manufacturers and transported to the plantations. There they produced sugar, cotton, indigo, tobacco and other products. The processing of these, created new industries in England; while the needs of the Negroes and their owners provided a wider market for British industry and New England agriculture" p. 56. Another important part of the same chapter is the relationship between slave revolts, American Revolution, and the French Revolution. It is important because not only we can see how black slaves were not minor actors, the so called passive and docile slave, but also how the plantations and the Atlantic World were a much more complex space that we have learned from history textbooks. It is important to note that in the act of revolting women played a major role. The story of revolts introduces the class and gender dimension into the historiography of the Atlantic World. Regarding class, it is also interesting how Du Bois makes connections between the conditions of blacks and that of the white working class. In addition he sees the institution of modern slavery as a degradation of the idea of labor. "Labor," he says, "was degraded, humanity was despised, and the theory of race arose. There came a new doctrine on universal labor: mankinds were of two sorts - the superior and the inferior; the inferior toiled for the superior, and the superior were the real men, the inferior half men or less. Among the white lords of creation there were lower classes resembling the inferior darker folks." (p.19)

views we can find unexpected connections. *Plessy vs Ferguson* coincided with the official ingression of the United States in the imperial adventure that included the seizure of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, and the control of Cuba after the Spanish American war (1898).³⁵ In this way the history of racial segregation at home cannot be separated from imperialism abroad. Similarly, the unification of Italy occurred during the high days of European imperialism. As a number of scholars have stated, with the arrival of the Piedmonts to the South we have the same logic of imperialism in which Northern Europeans control the South.³⁶ It is not a coincidence that the Italian imperial adventure began during the same years. The colonial possessions in the Horn of Africa in the late 19th-century and Libya in the early 20th-century were justified by anthropological studies which underlined a biological hierarchy of races. These same studies considered the population of northern Italy “Arian” and “Caucasian” and the population of the South “Negroid.”³⁷ There is a striking similarity between the words of a northern Italian general who in 1860, reporting to Count Cavour in Piedmont about the conditions of the South,

³⁵ Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is A Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, 29

³⁶ See Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2005), Kindle Edition; Anna Curcio and Miguel Mellino, “Editorial: Race at Work – The Rise and Challenge of Italian Racism.” *Darkmatter* 6 (October 2010), <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2010/10/10/editorial-race-at-work-the-rise-and-challenge-of-italian-racism/>; Francesco Festa, “Oltre l’emergenza: Pratiche, condotte ed esperienze di ‘comune’ nel Sud Italia,” www.uninomade.org (accessed 2/8/2014); Anna Curcio, “Un paradiso abitato da diavoli...o da porci. Appunti su razzializzazione e lotte nel Mezzogiorno d’Italia,” www.uninomade.org (accessed 2/8/2014). See also Orizzonti meridiani, eds., *Briganti o emigranti. Sud e movimenti tra conricerca e studi subalterni* (Verona: Ombre corte, 2014); and Christina Lombardi Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

³⁷ Sandro Mezzadra, “Anti-Racist Research and Practice in Italy.” *Darkmatter* 6 (Oct. 2010), <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2010/10/10/anti-racist-research-and-practice-in-italy/>

said: “This is not Italy! This is Africa,”³⁸ and those of the General Baldissera in 1888 who supporting the Italian colonial adventure in Eritrea said: The Abyssinian needs to be ours because this is how it works with inferior races; the blacks step by step will disappear, and we need to bring the civilization to Africa not for the Abyssinians but for ourselves.³⁹ Needless to say the perception of the Southern Italians as blacks reached the United States and developed in social Darwinism and the construction of Italians as not white.

“The other American studies” emerged in the United States in the last decades especially in departments of ethnic studies, Black studies, and Latino/a and Chicano/as studies. The other American studies questions the ideological appropriation of the term America by the United States. In contrast with this hegemonic and nationalist project, “the Other American Studies” proposes Trans-American connections and an “outernational” framework including the black and revolutionary Atlantic, circum-Atlantic performances, hemispheric Islam, Other Asias, and Mediterranean blues.⁴⁰ In

³⁸ Quoted in Nelson Moe, *The View From Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2.

³⁹ Quoted in Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?* Kindle Edition, position 815.

⁴⁰ Here I am drawing from and extending José David Saldívar’s argument in his *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), xxvii. See Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); José David Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Linebaugh, and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Gayatri Spivak, *Other Asias* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Wai Chee Dimock, “Hemispheric Islam: Continents and Centuries for American Literature,” *American Literary History* 21 (Spring 2009): 28-52; and Iain Chambers, *Mediterraneo Blues* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012).

addition, this critical and militant approach not only successfully combines postcolonial, subaltern and cultural studies with history from below, but it also opens up a dialogue between social movements outside of the academy and the work of critical theorists, feminists, historians, and artists like Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Antonio Gramsci, Lisa Lowe, Angela Davis, C.L.R. James, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sonia Sanchez, Barbara Smith, Américo Paredes, John Akomfrah and others.⁴¹

Cultural studies has helped us to rethink the hierarchy of knowledge in which disciplines like sociology, history, and anthropology are considered more important than the study of film, music, literature and other forms of popular culture. From a cultural studies perspective cinema, music, literature, and popular culture in general are not just representations of reality; rather, they intervene on social reality becoming themselves a form of critical thought like sociology, history, and philosophy.⁴² Because of its

⁴¹ Kuan-Hsing Chen, "The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual: An Interview with Stuart Hall," in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 485-503; Ramon Saldivar, *The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2006); George Lipsitz, "Like Crabs in a Barrel: Why Interethnic Anti-Racism Matters Now," in George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, 117-167; Lisa Lowe, "Angela Davis: Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA. Interview with Lisa Lowe," in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds., *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Karin Ikas, "Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa," in Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 25th Edition, Fourth Edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Chandra T. Mohanti, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 1983; Barbara Smith, *The Truth that Never Hurts: Writings on Gender, Race and Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Hazel V. Carby, "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood," in *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999); Sonia Saldivar Hull, *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); John Akomfrah and Black Audio Film Collective, *Handsworth Songs*, 1986; Isaac Julien, Sankofa Film and Video, *Territories*, 1984.

⁴² Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems," in Stuart Hall et al., eds., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (London: Routledge, 1996,

significance in cultural studies, cinema plays a central part in my dissertation. It is an instrument which allows us to make connections and at the same time to dig underneath official maps of New York and Naples. Beyond a “hierarchy of knowledge” which sees the city of facts (social science) as being more important than the city of feeling (cinema, literature, music) and drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, I argue that cinema itself becomes sociology.⁴³

From the Screen to the Street

It is impossible to think about the “urban crisis” of New York and Naples without considering cinema. Since its inception cinema has so much shaped the urban imaginary of New York and Naples that following philosopher Jean Baudrillard we can argue that in order to “grasp [their] secret you should not then begin with the city and move inwards

1980); Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People’s History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Iain Chambers, “Scratching the Lens: Media, Memory and Mimesis,” *Anglistica* 11 (2007): 9-13; Iain Chambers, *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience* (Routledge, 1988); Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Jim Pines, “Territories: Interview with Isaac Julien,” *Framework* (26-27): 1985; Jim Pines and Paul Willemsen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1983); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996); Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Tom Gunning, “Early American Film,” in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, eds. *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴³ On the “city of feeling” and the city “of fact” see Carlo Rotella, *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1-16.

toward a screen; you should begin with the screen and move outwards toward the city.”⁴⁴ Cinema has been always attracted to city life, streets, marginality, and to paradigmatic figures of urban space like the gangster, the drug dealer, the prostitute and so on.⁴⁵ New York and Naples with their busy street life, incessant flows of people and cars, thriving neighborhoods, dark alleys and littered streets are two emblematic cinematic cities. Already during the silent era cinema had provided us with images of New York and Naples as dystopian cities, overcrowded metropolis, and dangerous places.⁴⁶ However, between the late 1960s and the late 1980s there occurred a proliferation of films that depicted New York and Naples as emblematic of the “city in crisis and the city as crisis.”⁴⁷ A number of films like *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974), *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971), *Super Fly* (Gordon Parks, Jr., 1972), *Fort Apache the Bronx* (Daniel Petrie, 1980), *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter, 1981), *Un complicate intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* (Lina Wertmuller, 1986), *Le occasioni di Rosa* (Salvatore Piscicelli, 1980) and *Blues metropolitano* (Salvatore Piscicelli, 1984), *Mi manda Picone* (Nanni Loy, 1985) and *Scugnizzi* (Nanni Loy, 1986), *I contrabbandieri di Santa Lucia* (Alfonso Brescia, 1983), *Il camorrista* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1987) are now considered classics of urban cinema. Although different from one another, in these films the urban crisis in all its forms – gangs, crime, mafia, camorra, heroin diffusion,

⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1988), 56. See also Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁴⁵ See the excellent historical overview on cinema and the city by Colin McArthur, “Chinese Boxes and Russian Dolls: Tracking the elusive Cinematic City,” in David Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City*, 19-45.

⁴⁶ See Bruno, *Street Walking on a Ruined Map*.

⁴⁷ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 110.

garbage strikes, traffic, marginality, abandonment in public housing and inner city – is a central theme.⁴⁸

When we deal with films that have as a central theme marginality, difference and poverty, representation matters because as film scholar Richard Dyer reminds us: “How social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life, that poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination (in housing, jobs, educational opportunity and so on) are shored up and instituted by representation.”⁴⁹ Yet, focusing in a narrow way on images can “also block real investigation.”⁵⁰ That is why in my dissertation rather than remaining trapped in the “prison of images” (Alice Walker) I consider cinema as a sensorial instrument which allows us to almost touch the streets of New York and Naples and to hear the urban rhythms and voices of resistance that beat and emerge underneath the official map of these cities (even when they are overlooked by the film itself). My main interest in looking at these films is how they help us to re-think the “memories, dead lives and labor inscribed in the streets that contest a predictable account” of New York and Naples.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). The problem of the urban crisis in all its manifestations from traffic, pollution, corruption, street crime, drugs epidemic, garbage crisis and so on, was omnipresent in films, media in general, and everyday conversations. Of course this kind of discourse about the urban decline was not exclusive of New York City and Naples, however the two cities have an iconic status and everything that happens in there is magnetized. Historian Joe Austin argues that the decline of New York “was taken as index for all other central cities” (Austin, 14).

⁴⁹ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossing*, 90.

On the screen, Siegfried Kracauer suggests, “street and face...open up a dimension much wider than that of the plots they sustain. This dimension extends...beneath the superstructure of specific story contents.”⁵² For example, films like *Death Wish*, *the Out-of-Towners* (Arthur Hiller, 1970), *The French Connection*, and *Fort Apache, the Bronx* in New York and *Mi manda Picone*, *Scugnizzi*, *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* depict the streets of these two cities as urban nightmares and in a sense “have exploited the devastation” of some neighborhoods of New York and Naples. Yet, looking in the gaps and fissures of these frozen images and reading the debate that they generated, we are able to investigate the acts of resistance that emerged from the same neighborhoods depicted in these movies and which at the same time are not fully explored or totally ignored by these movies. For example, the work of community-based organizations like The United Bronx Parents Association in the South Bronx and GRIDAS in Naples, promoted education for disadvantaged children and struggled everyday against poverty, social injustice, racism, and heroin diffusion. Yet, their work is rarely reported in history books and films about New York and Naples. However the special programs that they organized such as reading groups, classrooms, film screenings, theater performance, and workshops with local artists, novelists, and musicians played a crucial role in enriching communities which had been depicted and perceived only as problems.

The low-budget movies of Blaxploitation in New York and sceneggiata in Naples at first sight can be simply understood as falling into the popular genre of action movies

⁵² Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 303.

meant to appeal to urban working class audiences in Naples and New York in the 1970s. Or, as many authors argued, as kinds of “revenge movies” in which black and Neapolitan working-class “heroes” and “heroines” triumph over the white and upper classes. However, these films – *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971), *Superfly*, *Coffy* (Jack Hill, 1973), *Across 110th Street* (Barry Shear, 1972), *I contrabbandieri di Santa Lucia, Napoli serenata calibro 9* (Alfonso Brescia, 1978) and others – do more than that. They set in motion a kind of instantaneous communication between all the inner-cities in the world. To use Nikhil Pal Singh’s words they “valorized the ghetto [and the inner-city] as a location from which to finally overturn centuries of racial stigma.”⁵³ To do this, their protagonists look backward and forward at the same time. On the one hand they draw from black and Neapolitan vernacular culture, on the other they imagine a better future because people from the inner-city need more than others images of tomorrow. Moreover, although these films have been accused of promoting violence and defending the underground economy, in reality the majority of them are against the insertion of heroin in the community.

In Movies like *Wild Style* (Charlie Ahearn, 1983) and *Beat Street* (Stan Lathan, 1984) which are about the advent of hip-hop culture in the South Bronx, the story goes far beyond the screen to intersect with histories of Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the South Bronx. Looking in “the gaps and fissures” (Miriam Hansen) of the cinematic image we can hear the voices of Nuyorican poets narrating stories of urban changes, marginality and urban destruction, the social commentary of early hip-hop artists, and

⁵³ Singh, *Black is A Country*, 193.

life stories of African American residents of the South Bronx collected by Fordham University scholars in their oral history project. Although these cultural expressions emerged in the 1970s, their work connects with previous cultural expressions like doo-wop, mambo, slave songs, and blues, and the radical thinking like abolitionism, pan-Africanism, tri-continentalism, anti-colonialism, and internationalism. In other words, they are part of a long civil rights struggle.

In Naples, films like *Immacolata and Concetta* (1977), *Le occasioni di Rosa* (1980) and *Baby Gangs* (1991), all directed by Salvatore Piscicelli, deal with the transformation of the outskirts of Naples from rural to urban areas after the relocation of families from deteriorated sections of the old center and the catastrophic consequences of urban renewal. These movies can be considered as a fluid archive of urban transformations. In addition they can be used as a starting point for the excavation of memories of the working-classes since the postwar and an investigation of the urban struggles which took place in Naples to obtain better housing. In these films, the camera, like an “analytical cyborg” (Giuliana Bruno) and a sociological probe, sounded out the territory. They enter into dialogue with other stories of the “Neapolitan Bronx” narrated by writer Peppe Lanzetta, with the metropolitan blues and free jazz of James Senese and Franco De Prete of the band Napoli Centrale, the trip hop of the Almamegretta and the murals of Felice Pignataro.

PART I

TEACHERS OF THE FUNK

The Ki-Kongo word is closer to the jazz word “funky in form and meaning, as both jazzmen and Bakongo use “funky” and lu-fuki to praise persons for the integrity of their art, for having “worked out” to achieve their aims. In Kongo today it is possible to hear an elder lauded in this way: “Like, there is a really funky person – my soul advances toward him to receive his blessing (yati, nkwa lu-fuki! Ve miela miani ikwenda baki)...

Robert Farris Thompson - *Flash of the Spirit* (1983)

Sound Waves

Each city has its peculiar sounds, yet like the waves of the Atlantic and of the Mediterranean these sounds, “are destined to travel in a manner that rapidly exceeds the frontiers imposed by local identities and immediate boundaries.”¹ With this in mind, I want to embark on a journey from the South Bronx to the periphery of Naples. Carried by the sounds and life stories of hip hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa, nuyorican poet Sandra María Esteves and afro Neapolitan saxophonist James Senese, I will travel between Africa, the Americas and Southern Europe. Yet, this is not a linear journey. Like a deejay working at the turntables I will mix obscure sounds – rap, salsa, funk, mambo, reggae, electronics, slam poetry, rock, jazz, Neapolitan popular music, chants, and shouts

¹ Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossing: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

of street vendors. Like “a botanist on the asphalt” (Walter Benjamin) I will imagine walking on the streets of the South Bronx and of the periphery of Naples listening to the “small voice of history,” relying on alternative cartographies which have been repressed and silenced by the official histories of these two cities located on the same parallel. Sustained by the saxophone sound of James Senese, the electro funk of Afrika Bambaataa and the mambo/jazz/hip-hop style of Esteves’ poetry, this is above all a story on how the periphery subverts the center.² Drawing on the subterranean histories of the black Atlantic pioneered by Paul Gilroy I argue that the work of Afrika Bambaataa, Sandra María Esteves and James Senese produced a prolific and unexpected dialogue between the cultures of the black Atlantic, the Americas and a creolized Mediterranean. Their art is not simply a reflection of urban struggle and community based organizations that have fought in both New York and Naples for better housing, education, and living condition, but a central part of it.

The Long Civil Rights and Black Power: A Global View

Following historians Jacqueline Dowd Hall, Nikhil Pal Singh, Van Gosse, and Alondra Nelson, this part embraces and expands the concept of a “long civil rights movement.”³ The long civil rights for these authors did not emerge exclusively in the

² Ranajit Guha, Quoted in José David Saldívar, *Trans-Americanities: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2012), xviii.

³ On the long civil rights movement see: Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Use of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-63; Van Gosse, “A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left,” in Van Gosse, ed., *The*

South of 1950s and 1960s with the juridical defeat of segregation and Jim Crow laws, but as Alondra Nelson puts it: “it was inaugurated at least several decades earlier...in both the southern and northern United States.”⁴ Expanding the pioneering work of this school of thinking I will argue that the civil rights movement and black power are part of the same struggle and they date back to the Maroon revolts in the Americas, Slaves revolts and the Haiti Revolution of 1791.⁵ These struggles continued in the 20th century with pan-Africanism, tricontinentalism, postcolonialism, urban revolts, Black Panthers, Chicano movement, women of color, Young Lords.⁶

My idea of a “long civil rights and black power” is inspired by the groundbreaking work of historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker on the revolutionary Atlantic.⁷ In their book they explore the “long waves and planetary currents” of multiethnic revolutions that spanned from Africa, to the Mediterranean, then the Atlantic and the Americas between the 16th- and 18th centuries. Music played a

Movements of the New Left, 1950-1975: A Brief History with Documents (New York: Palgrave Macmillan/Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005); Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); and Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁴ Nelson, *Body and Soul*, 7.

⁵ On agency during slavery see the groundbreaking book by Cedric J. Robinson *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, new edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000, 1983). See also Robin D.G. Kelley's “Foreword” to the 2000 edition of *Black Marxism*.

⁶ On the connection between tricontinentalism, Pan-Africanism and the emergence of postcolonial studies see Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), especially pp. 159-317. On African American Asian connections see Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was kung fu: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). For an excellent introduction on the non alliniated countries and the birth of tricontinentalism see Vijay Prashad's *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

⁷ Peter Linebaugh, and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

central role in these afrodiasporic and multiethnic revolutions.⁸ As Linebaugh and Rediker puts it:

The people of the African diaspora fought against American slavery and the deliberate degradation, dehumanization, and destruction of name, lineage, culture, and country. Organized in mass in the mine or on the plantation (the cotton gin was invented in 1793), black or pan-African consciousness arose from resistance of blood and spirit, which achieved historic successes in the 1790s....Haiti was the original Black Power. If the distinctive accomplishment of the English working class was its labor press, the singular achievement of the black freedom struggle was its music.⁹

The long civil rights movement and black power are deeply imbricated with modernity, imperialism and capitalism.¹⁰ For this reason in the United States these movements are not exclusively a black/white issue, and we need to include Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Indians and Asian American and other oppressed people. At the same time, in global movements opposing imperialism, civil rights and black power are embraced by different people in the world subjected to colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism. In Italy, for example, the Risorgimento and the subsequent unification of Italy in 1861, took place during the high-days of imperialism and coincided with the so called scramble for Africa.¹¹ In the unification of Italy we find the same idea of a

⁸ Underground Resistance, “Interstellar Fugitive Maroon. Available on youtube.” :<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfrASzuIFao>

⁹ Ibid., 334.

¹⁰ Precursors of the “long civil rights movement” school of thinking are C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins* (1938); W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*; Eric Williams’s *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944); and Oliver Cox’s *Caste, Class and Race* (1948).

¹¹ Giampaolo Calchi Novati and Pierluigi Valsecchi, *Africa la storia ritrovata: Dalle prime forme politiche alle indipendenze nazionali* (Rome: Carocci, 2012, 2005), 236; Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossing*, 15.

civilizing mission of imperialism and colonialism in which northern Europe and North America rescue the uncivilized masses of the south of the world.

Making Connections with and through Sound: Afrika Bambaataa, Sandra María Esteves, James Senese

Afrika Bambaataa, Sandra María Esteves and James Senese seemingly have not much in common. Bambaataa is the pioneer of electro funk and a key figure in the early hip-hop movement of the late 1970s. Esteves has been considered the godmother of Nuyorican poets since the early 1970s. Senese has been the leader of the jazz/progressive rock/R&B band Napoli Centrale in Naples since 1975.¹² Yet if we look more carefully at their life stories, sounds, community involvement and politics we can find unexpected critical connections that not only link New York and Naples but also navigate through the black Atlantic, *Nuestra América* and a fervently creolized Mediterranean. Paul

¹² Afrika Bambaataa, with his various groups – the Jazzy Five, Cosmic Force, and the Soul Sonic Force – has produced fundamental singles in the history of hip hop and electro funk such as "Zulu Nation Throwdown" (1980), Jazzy Sensation (1981), Planet Rock (1982), Looking for the Perfect Beat (1982), Renegades of Funk (1983), Bambaataa's Theme (1986), Zulu War Chant (1990). He has also made many collaborations with other musicians in Unity (1984) with James Brown, Reckless with UB40s (1988), World Destruction with John Lydon (1984), and Street Happiness with Neapolitan saxophonist Enzo Avitabile. Sandra María Esteves's poems have appeared on a number of Nuyorican poets anthologies such as *Nuyorican Poetry* (1975), *Puerto Rican Writers at Home in the USA* (1991), *Aloud, Voices From The Nuyorican Poets Cafe* (1994), *The Afro-Latin@ Reader, History and Culture In the United States* (2012). She has also published entire books of poetry such as *Yerba Buena Poems & Drawings*; (Greenfield Review Press, 1980), *Tropical Rain: A Bilingual Downpour*; (African Caribbean Poetry Theater/self-published, 1984), *Bluestown Mockingbird Mambo*; (Arte Público Press/University of Houston, 1990); and *Poems In Concert* (Air Loom Publications/self-published, 2006). James Senese with his bands Vito and 4 Conny in the early 1960s and with the Showman and Showman 2 in late 1960s made several singles and the Album Showman. As leader of Napoli Centrale from 1975 until now has produced landmarks albums and cds such as *Napoli Centrale* (1975), *Mattanza* (1976), *Qualcosa ca nu' mmore* (1978), *Jesceallah* (1991), *Ngazzate nire* (1994). He has collaborated with jazz giants like Gil Evans, Lester Bowie and Don Moye. He was also member of the super-group of the Neapolitan bluesman Pino Daniele with drummer Tullio De Piscopo and percussionist Toni Esposito.

Gilroy's pioneering work on the black Atlantic, with its subterranean histories of slavery and racial terror, not only subverted the prevalent accounts of Atlantic modernity, but also broke with the ocular obsession of Occidental critical thought by proposing sound as an alternative knowledge and counter-geography of modernity. This perspective allows us to shift away from the concept of music merely as a reflection of history or as a sonoral testimony waiting to be filled with political meaning. On the contrary, music itself becomes a form of political and historical agency. At the same time, as James Clifford reminds us, "[i]t is important to specify that Paul Gilroy writes from a North Atlantic /European perspective."¹³ In a similar vein, ethnic studies scholar Josh Kun argues that "[a]ll of Gilroy's examples speak to the Atlantic nexus between Europe, the United States, and Africa, rarely considering the presence of either the Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean or Central and South America."¹⁴ It is within this fracture that a number of studies such as Josh Kun's *Audiotopia: Music, Race and America* (2005) and Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996) have modified Paul Gilroy's black Atlantic geography including what the Cuban intellectual José Martí, referring to the America that speak Spanish called *Nuestra América*. This idea of a broader America has been further elaborated in recent scholarship in critical American studies. Sandhya Shukla's and Heidi Tinsman's collection, *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame* (2006), José Saldívar's *Trans-Americanity* (2011) and *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural*

¹³ James Clifford, "Diasporas," in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: 1997), 267.

¹⁴ Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, America* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 147.

Studies (1997), and Kirsten Silva Gruesz's *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (2002) among others, have underlined the importance of an hemispheric notion of America that challenge the idea of America as synonymous of the United States. The appropriation of the term America by United States is an imperial gesture and poses the culture of United States imperialism as a continuation of European imperialism. Yet, in these works people of the Caribbean, Latin America, the Mexican-US borderlands and of the internal colonies of US "ghettos" and "barrios," are not simply "specters of victimized objects but as actors, producers and sources within transnational circuits."¹⁵ This brings us to the notion of a black and creolized Mediterranean. Traditional American studies has focused on the arrival of black American culture in Europe as a consequence of the direct influence of American culture in the long twentieth century. By contrast an outernational critical U.S. studies pays attention to the creolized past of the Mediterranean. In addition, an outernational approach to American studies allows us to make even more connections. For example, an innovative collection on the African American presence in Europe has called the arrival of black American culture in Europe the "Blackening of Europe." Yet this idea of a blackening of Europe from a U.S. and European perspective, as innovative as it is, still relies on a direct influence of African American culture over Europe. I think that more than of influence we have to talk about a return since black culture in the Mediterranean has existed since antiquity. European hegemony has silenced this culture but it has continued to live underground –

¹⁵ Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman, "Introduction: Across America," in Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman, eds., *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 12.

especially in its music. Of course with the arrival of black music in Europe in the early 20th century, especially during and after World War II, in the forms of jazz, blues, funk and dub, Naples and the Mediterranean increasingly hybridized. We can hear this fusion in the street funk and free jazz of James Senese, the blues of Pino Daniele, the dub and electronic sounds of Almamegretta.

Bambaataa, Esteves, and Senese are part of the African diaspora. Afrika Bambaataa was born in the mid 1950s in Manhattan from Caribbean parents and moved with his family to the South east Bronx in the 1960s. Sandra María Esteves was born in the South Bronx in 1948 of a Puerto Rican father and a Dominican mother. James Senese was born in 1944 in Miano (a neighborhood in ‘north Naples’), the son of a Neapolitan woman, Anna Senese, and an African American soldier, James Smith, who was in Naples with the Allied troops during WWII and flew back to the US immediately after its conclusion. It was not easy for James Senese growing up in the working-class area of Miano without his father. Although at that time in Miano there were other ‘mixed-race’ children, so called ‘sons and daughters of the war’ born from relationships between African American soldiers and Neapolitan women, James was the only black kid on his block. James recalls that when he happened to have an argument with other kids they immediately called him “o nirone” which can be translated as “nigger.” However, in his street he also found many friends and people who loved him; for example a woman who

lived opposite to his window on the other side of the alley nicely called him “Jamesiello” which means little James.¹⁶

Music has been central to Bambaataa, Esteves and Senese since they were children. When his mother was out at work, Bambaataa would invite his friends to his place and put on for them some classics from Aretha Franklyn and Miriam Makeba to Mighty Sparrow and Joe Cuba. He was particularly inspired by James Brown, as he says: “In the ‘60s, that’s when I was young and I was seeing a lot of things that was happening around the world. What got me excited first was when James Brown came out with ‘Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud.’ That’s when we transcend from negro to black.”¹⁷ Esteves grew up in a neighborhood where there was a powerful mixing of African Americans from the South and Puerto Ricans from the island. As she says in the documentary *From Mambo to Hip Hop*, “the children of those people growing up together exchanged of R&B and Mambo, so you had African Americans dancing mambo and Puerto Ricans doing doo-wop.”¹⁸ Music had been Senese passion since he was a child. When his father left Naples he did not take his jazz collection back to the United States. So James grew up listening to his father’s music. He expanded this collection, buying more jazz records by artists such as John Coltrane, Miles Davis and others. One day while he was having lunch with his mother, he took out a record of John Coltrane and, pointing at the picture on the cover portraying Coltrane with a sax in his hand, said:

¹⁶ John Turturro, “Passione,” *Skydancers and Squeezed Heart Production*, 2010.

¹⁷ Quoted in Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Ebury Press, 2007, 2005), 93

¹⁸ Henry Chalfant, *From Mambo to Hip Hop: A South Bronx Tale* (New York: City Lore, 2006).

‘Mom, look this is my dad!’ He identified so much with that picture that a few years later he bought a sax and started studying music.¹⁹ Following Bambaataa, Esteves and Senese we are able to think with and through music about the history of the South Bronx and Naples. Music itself becomes a form of connection; music itself makes communities; music itself becomes history.

For Bambaataa, Esteves and Senese the South Bronx became an international site of struggle. Here Afrika Bambaataa founded the Zulu Nation, described by Bambaataa as a “youth organization that’s into all different things, rappers, DJs, dancers, people who just down to be down, people who are working, people who are into music, people into Hip Hop.” In Sandra María Esteves’s poems we can literally hear the sounds of the South Bronx – buildings collapsing, fires and despair, the silence of empty lots, but also the rhythms of salsa, mambo and boogaloo craze, the experimentation of free jazz, doo-wop groups harmonizing in subway stations, and precursors of rap The Last Poets. In addition she became involved in community projects with children especially regarding art and literature. James Senese, although he is from Naples elected the Bronx as a source of inspiration. The back-cover of his autobiography reads: “I was born black and I am from Miano. I play the sax and my sound is in between Naples and the Bronx.”²⁰

¹⁹ *Canzonette...mai Napoli Centrale*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUJHV80aSn0>

²⁰ Carmine Aymone, *Je sto cca' ...James Senese* (Naples: Guida, 2005), back cover.

Chapter 1

“Street Happiness”: Music, Poetry and Social Movements in the South Bronx¹

The South Bronx: Histories of Overlapping Diasporas

The Bronx is part of the United States but it is also a crossroad of cultures disturbing the narrative of American exceptionalism and the idea that the word America is synonymous with the United States. In general historians have considered the black experience in the United States exclusively in nationalist terms (cotton fields in the South, the first and second Great Migration from the South to the North, deindustrialization in the North and the rise of Sun Belt cities) silencing the different connections reaching out to the black Atlantic and Caribbean.²

¹ Afrika Bambaataa and Enzo Avitabile “Street Happiness” (1988). In this incredible video Neapolitan jazz and funk musician Enzo Avitabile and Afrika Bambataa sing together following a call a response style between Naples and New York. The video is shot on location in the Lower East Side. Available on you tube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5TDLHZRJ7E> (accessed on 3/7/2014).

² On a transnational and critical approach to American Studies see Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 29-47 and 145-183; José David Saldívar, *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2012); George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); John Carlos Rowe, *The New American Studies*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 3-49. See also the excellent collection edited by Donald E. Pease and Robin Wiegman, *The Futures of American Studies* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002), especially the following essays: Jan Radway, “What’s in a Name?”; Lisa Lowe, “The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique”; Donald E. Pease, “C.L.R. James, Moby-Dick, and the Emergence of Transnational American Studies”; Gunter H. Lenz, “Toward a Dialogic of International American Culture Studies: Transnationality, Border Discourses, and Public Culture(s).”

Yet, if we look at the history of the South Bronx we see that already in the 1940s the South Bronx was an international center for black and Latin music.³ The section of Morrisania, as historian Mark Naison tells us, “had perhaps the most diverse and vibrant live musical culture outside of Manhattan.”⁴ Musicians like Thelonious Monk, Dexter Gordon, and Charlie Parker played regularly at clubs like 845 and Sylvia’s Blue Morocco in the 1940s. Multicultural crowds attended Latin music concerts in the clubs like Tropicana. In the late 1960s the Bronx was also the home of salsa musicians like pianist Charlie Palmieri and the ‘high priest’ of salsa percussionist Tito Puente. Salsa, as Black studies scholar Alexander Weheliye puts it:

Far from being a ‘pure’ musical genre, denotes a syncretic field that encompasses various Caribbean and Latin American musical forms refracted through the urban centers of the United States, particularly New York. Furthermore the majority of previous musical practice that salsa draws upon already comprise an amalgamation of African rhythms, European harmonics, and Amerindian musical features; salsa also contains traces of African American soul, funk, and jazz genres.⁵

The musical genre and culture of Hip hop which emerged in the South Bronx in the late 1970s, in spite of having been considered a symbol of racial authenticity in black

³ On the international character of African American history see Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision,” *Journal of American History* 86 (December 1999): 1045-1077. On the afro-diasporic dimension of latin@ see Miriam Jiménez Roman and Juan Flores, eds., *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁴ Mark Naison, “From Jimmy Castor to Grand Master Flash: The Role of Morrisania in Hip-Hop’s Evolution.” Paper delivered at Lehman College Hip Hop Conference, New York City, October 21, 2005, 2. See also Roberta Singler and Elena Martinez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale” *Centro* xvi (Spring 2004): 177-201.

⁵ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 139.

America, reflects the hybridity of the South Bronx mixing up Jamaican sound system, Puerto Rican music from salsa, plena to mambo, African American music and a variety of other music from punk, hard rock, electronics to found sounds.⁶

In the South Bronx African American and Caribbean histories overlap. To use Earl Lewis's words, in the South Bronx we have a "history of overlapping diasporas."⁷ The South Bronx is a series of neighborhoods – Mott Haven, Hunt's Point, Melrose, Morrisania, Crotona Park. In the first half of the twentieth century it was a predominantly white ethnic area (Irish, Italians, Jewish, Germans) with small pockets of black and Puerto Rican populations in Morrisania and Hunt's Point. Until the 1940s the majority of African American and Caribbean populations lived in Harlem. Many members of the Harlem Renaissance were Caribbean. Arturo Schomburg, the founder of the Schomburg Center in Harlem was Puerto Rican. Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was Jamaican.⁸ East Harlem was known as the barrio. It had the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in New York. By the early 1940s in the South Bronx, especially in Morrisania and Hunt's Point, the black and Puerto Rican

⁶ On the afro-diasporic dimension of hip-hop see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); George Lipsitz, "Techno: The Hidden History of Automation," in *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 238-262.

⁷ Earl Lewis, "To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas." *The American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): 765-787.

⁸ On Caribbean radicals in early 20th-century Harlem see Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1998). For two excellent accounts which extend the concept of radicalism and resistance to African slaves in North America see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000, 1983), chapters 6 and 7; and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

population increased. Gradually in the postwar decades the black and Puerto Rican communities expanded to other neighborhoods of the South Bronx and to adjoining areas in South West and South East Bronx.

The influx of African Americans, Puerto Ricans and other Caribbeans was composed of families who moved there in search of better housing compared with the overcrowded areas of Harlem and East Harlem and other areas in Manhattan subjected to slum clearance. At the same time by the late 1940s thousands of blacks from the southern U.S. and Puerto Ricans from the island flocked into the South Bronx. In the 1960s new conditions in other parts of the Caribbean gave the chance to thousands of people from Jamaica, Trinidad, and Guadalupe to move to New York City.⁹ Some of them found in the Bronx their new home. Although there are differences between the African American, Puerto Rican and other Caribbean experience in the U.S., these groups share histories embedded in racial terror, colonialism and imperialism. In addition African Americans and Puerto Ricans, though US citizens, did not have equal access to housing. In their study on American Apartheid, sociologists Nancy Denton and Douglas Massey, notice that African Americans and Puerto Ricans share a similar history of housing segregation.¹⁰

⁹ Peter Manuel, with Kenneth Bilby and Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995). See also Michael E. Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes & Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 243-260.

¹⁰ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Although U.S. historiography has been characterized by what American studies scholar Amy Kaplan called the paradigm of denial of U.S. imperialism, the history of the South Bronx shows how histories of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and racism overlap and continue to exist in contemporary cities.¹¹ Here, histories of imperialism (Puerto Rico), of the black Atlantic (slave trade system, Caribbean migrations) and US mainland migration (the Black Great Migration) intersected.

As historian Laura Briggs in her brilliant book on the intertwining of race, science, gender and U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico puts it:

First, colonialism was not a series of isolated incidents, in which larger powers opportunistically or strategically took advantage of smaller ones. This assumption, although rarely articulated in this way, is nevertheless key to the belief that the U.S. participation in colonial practices – first through continental expansion, later through the seizure of insular possessions was – was lackadaisical, partial, and accidental. Rather the United States was a full participant in what is recognizable as a colonial system – an international economic, political, and cultural system that shared common assumptions, strategies and rules.¹²

From this perspective, we cannot consider the advent of the cotton field in the South without framing it in a global history of U.S. imperial expansion since the early 19th-century through the genocide of Indians, the purchase of Louisiana in 1803 which

¹¹ Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture.” In Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 13.

¹² Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 21-22. See also Kaplan and Pease, eds., *Cultures of the US Imperialism*; Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press); Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

gave the U.S. control of the Caribbean, the Mexican-American war of 1846-1848 and the annexation of what today is the south west United States.¹³ These events were the prelude to further expansion of U.S. imperialism with the seizure of Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam after the Spanish-American war in 1898, and the control of the Caribbean with several invasions in Dominican Republic, Grenada and other areas in Central America.¹⁴ At the same time the Great Migration of Southern black to the North though it was an internal migration, needs to be framed in previous histories of slavery and racial terror which in its early phase did not make any distinction between the Caribbean, what today is called the United States and, I would add, the black Atlantic in general.¹⁵ Take for instance the life-story of Olaudah Equiano who in his autobiography tells us his incredible story from his kidnapping in Africa and the terror of the middle passage on the slave ship, to the brutality of plantations in Barbados, then in Virginia and finally his passage to Great Britain where he became a leading figure in the abolishment movement. Referring to the second passage from Barbados to Virginia. Marcus Rediker in his beautiful book *The Slave Ship: A Human History* writes:

¹³ Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Weheliye, *Phonographies*, Chapter 5.

¹⁵ Following the groundbreaking Joseph Roach's book *Cities of the Dead*, in recent years have emerged excellent studies on the South of the United States as part of the Caribbean. See Clyde Woods, "Sittin' on Top of the World: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography," in Katherine McKittarick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Cambridge MA: South End Press, 2007); Rachel Adams, "Blackness Goes South: Race and Mestizaje in Our America," in Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman, eds., *Imagining Our Americas*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing*, 2002, 108-145. See also Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, eds., *Look Away! The US South in New World Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

For Equiano and several of his shipmates, the Middle Passage did not end in Barbados. These few ‘were not saleable amongst the rest, from very much fretting. The traumatic passage had apparently made them unhealthy – emaciated, diseased, melancholy, or all of these. The buyers must have doubted their survival and declined to purchase them. They became ‘refuse slaves.’ They stayed on the island for a few days and were then carried to a smaller vessel, a sloop, perhaps the Nancy, Richard Wallis master, bound for the York River in Virginia.¹⁶

During slavery there was a continuous traffic of slaves between the Caribbean and the United States. As Dena Epstein tells us:

The two areas shared close commercial ties and a constant interchange of population, both black and white. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries both Britain and France regarded all the colonies in the New World as part of the same colonial structure, regardless of where they were located. Barbados and South Carolina, the French Antilles and Louisiana, were closer in their interests, their plantation system and their exchanges of population, than, say, Massachusetts and South Carolina.¹⁷

“True Blues”: The New Plantation System of the South Bronx

True Blues ain't no new news 'bout who's been abused
for the blues is as old as my stolen soul

The Last Poets – True Blues (1971)¹⁸

¹⁶ Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007), Kindle Edition.

¹⁷ Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 22.

¹⁸ “True Blues” from the 1971 album *This is Madness*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKb5OiX8ag8> (accessed 3/7/2014)

In the *longue durée* from the Middle Passage to the plantations in the Americas, the cotton fields in the Americas, to the new plantation system of the South Bronx, blacks and Puerto Ricans have shared a history of racism. We are all familiar with images of New York City in popular films of the 1970s and 1980s like *Fort Apache The Bronx* (1981), *The Out-of-Towners*, and *The French Connection*. In these movies, The South Bronx, the Lower East Side, and central Brooklyn appeared as “an urban sore, a mess of problems, a social embarrassment, a tragic locale, a no-man’s land an urban desert.”¹⁹ How was it possible that the South Bronx and other areas which were part of the richest city in the United States deteriorated to such a condition? In order to understand the so-called urban crisis of New York City of the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, we need to concentrate on the postwar years which were a critical turning point in New York City, in terms of racial, economic, social and spatial transformations.

Urban historian Mike Davis, comparing the process of deindustrialization of New York with those of cities like Detroit and Chicago, has called the experience of New York City “a kind of purposeful deindustrialization.” In New York, Davis argues, “private accumulation strategies manipulated public policy to help drive small manufacturing out of Manhattan.”²⁰ Urban sociologist Robert Fitch calls this process the assassination of New York.²¹ He places its roots in the Regional Plan Association’s 1929

¹⁹ Lydia Yee, “Photographic Approaches to the Discourse of the South Bronx,” in John Alan Farmer, ed., *Urban Mythologies: The Bronx Represented since 1960s* (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1999), 10.

²⁰ Mike Davis, *Dead Cities* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 308.

²¹ Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (London: Verso, 1993).

Master Plan for New York City. As Urban ecologists Deborah and Rodrick Wallace argue: “Under the succession of plans from 1929 through 1969, New York was to metamorphose from an industrial caterpillar into a financial and cultural butterfly.”²² New York did not have a history of decline, like in Detroit, but one of transformation, a transformation from a blue-collar city to a world leading center in finance, communications, and fine arts. Labor historian Daniel Walkowitz has called the history of postwar New York, a tale of two cities. In his words: “New York...has experienced fundamental growth in consumer goods, finance for transnational corporations, and product diversification for corporate growth and control. The growth, however, has been uneven, and the result has been the emergence of two separate cities divided along class and racial lines.”²³ By the late 1960s areas like East and Central Harlem, The South Bronx, and Central Brooklyn “had come to symbolize another city, one of danger, and violence.”

In New York, race, class, deindustrialization and urban renewal overlapped. In postwar New York there occurred enormous demographic shifts. It has been estimated that between the 1940s and the 1960s about 4 million southern blacks and 2 million Puerto Ricans flooded into Northeastern and Midwestern cities. Black communities in New York expanded. In the 1930s the black population of New York was about 300,000, by the 1960s it had reached one million. Before the war there were about 50,000 Puerto

²² Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on your Houses*, 12.

²³ Daniel Walkowitz, “New York: A Tale of Two Cities,” in Richard M. Bernard, ed., *Snowbelt Cities: Metropolitan Politics in the Northeast and Midwest since WWII* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 190.

Ricans living in New York. By the 1960s New York became the second largest Puerto Rican city after San Juan with a community of 600,000 people. One can compare Puerto Rican and African American migration flows of the 1950s with previous European migration flows of the late nineteenth century.²⁴ As cultural sociologist Christopher Mele argues: “The neighborhoods where newcomers resided, the poor conditions of their housing, and the low level-level unskilled and semi-skilled jobs they took resembled the plight of earlier generations of arrivals.”²⁵ However, Mele contends, the 1950s labor market conditions were very different from the turn of the century and the decades before World War II. In the postwar migration flow, histories of imperialism, racism, and economic exploitation intersected with social, economic and spatial transformation. Urban planner Walter Thabit in his study on the ghettoization of East New York (a district in the borough of Brooklyn), has argued that “blacks and Puerto Ricans have a long history of being exploited and oppressed.”²⁶ In the immediate years after the war, shortage of laborers attracted millions of blacks and Puerto Ricans to the northeast and Midwest rustbelt cities. However, two reasons for these migrations that are often forgotten are racism and economic exploitation of blacks and Puerto Ricans. As Walter Thabit put it: “They were forced from their lands by business interests and unsympathetic governments. For them, moving to the big cities was not so much a liberating experience, not so much a new opportunity, as it was a further punishment at the hands of their

²⁴ Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings, Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 32-42.

²⁵ Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 125

²⁶ Walter Thabit, *How East New York became a Ghetto* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 23.

oppressors.”²⁷ From 1945 to 1964 millions of southern blacks left the South because of racism, poverty and the mechanization of agriculture. At the same time the United States exploited the Puerto Rican economy transforming it from a multi-crop agriculture to a mono crop economy based on sugar.²⁸ Many Puerto Ricans peasants had no choice but to leave the island and move into mainland cities.

Parallels can be made between the racism that emerged during previous migration flows with the racialization of postwar migration. However, as Stuart Hall suggests, while racism bears the traces of the past it also changes according to the historical moment and the context. “No doubt there are certain general features to racism,” he explains. But even more significant are the ways in which these general features are modified and transformed by the historical specificity of the contexts and environments in which they become active.”²⁹ As Urban historian Robert Beauregard, in his book on the representation of urban decline in the US, contends: “Negroes became the scapegoat for urban decline.”³⁰ In 1960s New York, the issue of race and racism was more complex than in other cities like Detroit and Chicago. It moved beyond the “the black-white binary” that has dominated the scholarship on the urban crisis of the Northeast and Midwest cities because of the large Puerto Rican community. This mixed community allows us to consider race as a social construction strictly linked to class and other

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁸ Ibid., 23-36.

²⁹ Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s relevance for the study of race and ethnicity” in David Morley & Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 435.

³⁰ Robert A. Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of US Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell), 165.

categories like gender. It also connects the experience of New York with Naples where the “underclass” although not composed of so called “ethnic minorities” was racialized.

Blacks and Puerto Ricans in New York were particularly affected by deindustrialization and urban renewal, especially those who arrived at the moment that these transformations were taking place. Initially, their “dominant occupational categories tended to cluster in center city blue collar positions left behind by the exodus of workers to new industries in the suburbs or by the occupational advancement of existing workers.”³¹ Because of transformations in the economy it was more difficult to advance inside the workplace and so blacks and Puerto Ricans remained in the bottom level occupations in a state of permanent semi-poverty. In addition, during the 1950s there was a further decline of manufacturing employment with the biggest drop in the textile, apparel and leather industries in which “a disproportionate number of employees were minorities.”³²

A key figure in the restructuring of New York City was the legendary planner Robert Moses who between the 1930s and the 1960s contributed to the emergence of these two separate cities.³³ As Wallace and Wallace contend possibly “Robert Moses

³¹ Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, 126.

³² *Ibid.*, 127.

³³ The figure of Robert Moses is omnipresent in the scholarship on postwar New York urban history. The most detailed accounts about the connection between the decline of New York and Robert Moses are: Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso 1983), 287-329; Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); Joel Schwarz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1993). See also Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

inflicted great harm on the poor minority families and, by himself, was responsible for the heroin epidemic of the 1950s and 1960s.”³⁴ Robert Moses projected a system of tunnels, bridges, and highways that allowed the white middle class to reach the city’s offices and then in the evening go back to their houses in the suburbs. His most famous example is the Cross-Bronx Expressway which cut through the Bronx permitting commuters to reach the city from the suburbs. The construction of this highway was very controversial because large sections of the neighborhood of Tremont were destroyed. Some scholars argued that Tremont and the South Bronx in general were already in a process of decline, however; the expressway certainly accelerated the process and affected urban communities of a solid working and lower-middle class section of the Bronx.

Suburbanization contributed to racial segregation. Urban neighborhoods became the home of mostly blacks and Puerto Ricans. Deindustrialization affected mostly the black and Puerto Rican working-classes relegating them to poverty conditions and limiting “their housing opportunities.”³⁵ Urban renewal in New York was very complex because it embodied a “combination of racism and humanism.”³⁶ On the one hand, urban renewal razed old working-class neighborhoods replacing them with high rise office buildings, luxury apartments, or transformed working-class areas into upper-class neighborhoods like the Upper East Side. On the other hand, it promoted highway

³⁴ Wallace & Wallace, *A Plague in Your Houses*, 16.

³⁵ Mele, *Selling The Lower East Side*, 129.

³⁶ Wallace & Wallace, *A Plague in Your Houses*, 13.

construction connecting the city with the suburbs where most of the white middle class moved.

It was at this moment that the landscape of New York City began to change. A neighborhood like the Upper West Side for instance, “once a lower-middle class and working class district,” was transformed into an area with luxury apartments and elegant boutiques.³⁷ To build projects like the Lincoln Center (center for performing Arts), the New York Coliseum, and the financial districts in Southern Manhattan, entire lower-middle class and working-class districts were cleared. Scholars have called this process of urban renewal “urban removal” because the working- class populations living in these neighborhoods were relocated to public housing or overcrowded neighborhoods in the Bronx.³⁸

Public housing, which during the 1940s gave poor people the opportunity to move out of deteriorated buildings, by the early 1970s had become degraded places and drug markets disconnected from the social structure of the neighborhood and without control and cultural recreational opportunities for the young. As historian Mark Naison argues, they became the places where there lived people “too poor, or troubled, to escape to safer areas.”³⁹ In the 1970s municipal cutback of essential services like garbage pick-up, street and building maintenance and education and so on hit areas like the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, Harlem, the Lower East Side and other disadvantaged neighborhoods. The

³⁷ Mele, *Selling The Lower East Side*, 120.

³⁸ Rose, *Black Noise*, 30-34.

³⁹ Mark Naison, “From Doo-Wop to Hip Hop: the Bittersweet Odyssey of African Americans in the South Bronx,” *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal* 2 (2003): 76.

population living in neighborhoods most affected by “planned shrinkage” paid the highest price. They were “labeled as lawless, pathological, and irredeemably locked into an antisocial behavior pattern.”⁴⁰

It is not a case that with the increasing black and Puerto Rican populations in the South Bronx and other areas of New York City the white exodus began – called white flight – from New York City toward the suburbs of Long Island, New Jersey and New Haven. As Joshua Freeman writes in his incredibly rich book *Working Class New York*: “During the 1940s nearly a half million white New Yorkers left the city; during the 1950s, 1.2 million; and during the 1960s another half million, an outmigration on a scale associated in world history with forced departure or natural disasters...Many departing New Yorkers continued to work in the city.”⁴¹ The development of the suburbs coincided with another icon of the disaster of the South Bronx: the Cross-Bronx Expressway which by the 1950s allowed commuters from the suburbs to reach the center. As urban historian Marshall Berman in his classic study *All That is Solid Melts into Air* writes:

Indeed, when the construction was done, the real ruin of the Bronx had just begun. Miles of streets alongside the road were choked with dust and fumes and deafening noise – most strikingly, the roar of trucks of a size and power that the Bronx had never seen, hauling heavy cargos through the city, bound for Long Island or New England, for New Jersey and all the points south, all through the day and night. Apartment houses that had been settled and stable for twenty years emptied out, often virtually overnight; large and impoverished black and Hispanic families, fleeing even worse slums, were moved in wholesale, often under the auspices of

⁴⁰ Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on your houses*, 21

⁴¹ Joshua B. Freeman, *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 172.

the Welfare Department, which even paid inflated rents, spreading panic and accelerating flight. At the same time, the construction had destroyed many commercial blocks, cut other off from most of their customers and left the storekeepers not only close to bankruptcy but, in their enforced isolation, increasingly vulnerable to crime. The borough's great open market, along Bathgate Avenue, still flourishing in the late 1950s, was decimated; a year after the road came through, what was left up went up in smoke. Thus depopulated, economically depleted, emotionally shattered – as bad as the physical damage had been the inner wounds were worse – the Bronx was ripe for the dreaded spirals of urban blight.⁴²

Heroin, which in the South Bronx reached epidemic levels and the fear of crime accelerated the deterioration of the South Bronx and the racialization of blacks and Puerto Ricans. White flight was not seen as the consequence of unequal access to loans in order to buy semi-detached houses in suburbs and racism, but the consequence of hordes of black and Puerto Rican junkies who terrorized white shop owners and the elderly. As Jill Jones writes in her classic book *We're Still Here*:

As the junkies multiplied, longtime merchants closed their doors for good, including Jake the Pickle Man. He retired after forty-five years as a premier pickle maker, but continued to live on Jennings Street. He who had once been the terror of the housewives was now scared of addict-muggers. One neighbor remembered him calling up his stairs to make sure no one was lurking. On June 10, 1963, Jacob Shertzer was found murdered in his apartment, his hands tied behind him, the gas on, his mouth stuffed with a rag. Jake's brutal murder sent waves of fear through the nearby street and shops. What kind of animal would kill an old, helpless man like that? In a neighborhood that had never seen a mugging from one year to the next, it now seemed there were vicious killings every two or three weeks. More of the old stores closed on Jennings Street – Rosenblatt's dry goods, Stern's bakery, Weintraub's ladies wear, and Ralph's grocery. By

⁴² Marshall Berman, Quoted in Lloyd Ultan and Barbara Unger, eds., *Bronx Accent: A Literary and Pictorial History of the Borough* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 213-214.

1967 when Patrolman Sam Strassfield of the Forty-first Precinct (soon to attain widespread infamy as ‘Fort Apache’) was assigned to the Jennings Street – Charlotte Street foot patrol, the addicts were as bad as a plague of locusts – they swarmed everywhere and were just as destructive. ‘So many people OD’ed,’ remembers Strassfield, ‘we used to get them all the time in the hallways and vacant lots. Who had time to deal with the drugs? Our job was to protect lives and property. The junkies went to the roofs and cellars to transact their business.’⁴³

The South Bronx of the 1970s was “intellectually as well as financially and fiscally abandoned.”⁴⁴ The geographical and social destruction of the South Bronx was seen by conservative social scientists and urban pundits as evidence of the failure of welfare interventions, liberal policies, and “the laziness and irresponsibility of ghetto poor.”⁴⁵ In reality, as urban historian Mike Davis suggests in his “natural history” of urban ruins, it was the consequence of the “disinvestment in the older central cities ... led by banks, endorsed by federal policies, and reinforced by ensuing local fiscal crises and contraction of lifeline municipal services.”⁴⁶ Similarly, the fires that devastated a substantial part of the housing stock in some neighborhoods of the South Bronx were not

⁴³ Jill Jones, Quoted in *Ibid.*, 201.

⁴⁴ Davis, *Dead Cities*, 390.

⁴⁵ Steve Macek, *Urban Nightmares: The Media, The Right, and the Moral Panic Over the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 63. For an excellent overview of social science researches about urban poverty in the U.S. see Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War of Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989). For the social construction of the “ghetto,” see Robin D.G. Kelley, “Looking for the “Real” Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto,” in *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 15-42. A brief list of conservative social science studies on urban poverty in New York and the U.S. in general includes: Edward Banfield, *The Heavenly City* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1968); Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1965-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Daniel P. Moynihan, ed., *On Understanding Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1968); Wilson James Q., *Thinking About Crime* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); Irving Kristol, *On the Democratic Idea in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

⁴⁶ Davis, *Dead Cities*, 389.

interpreted as “the work of the arson industry – a shadow world of property owners, mortgage men, corrupt fire officials, insurance adjusters and mobsters,”⁴⁷ but as indicators of “lawless, pathological anti-social behavior” of the South Bronx inhabitants.⁴⁸ To describe the destruction and abandonment of the South Bronx and to “evoke the full horror of this process,” urban theorist Marshall Berman coined the term “urbicide.”⁴⁹

In the 1970s the abandonment of the South Bronx was strictly related to racist urban policies. In 1976, Roger Starr, the New York’s housing and development administrator, through a series of speeches and newspaper’s articles, “suggested that the city follow the lead of private capital and walk away from...the South Bronx and other troubled areas.”⁵⁰ This plan, known as “planned shrinkage,” aimed to reduce fundamental services for devastated areas, considered hopeless (letting them die and then eventually be reborn in the future – what Roger Starr called the “life cycle of cities”), while concentrating resources on other neighborhoods. The plan was rejected but as Joshua Freeman writes: “The city endorsed a version of it, a kind of planned shrinkage ‘lite’ that gave priority in public investment, tax relief, and economic development to the central business district, while leaving outlying areas, including those undergoing devastation, to

⁴⁷ *Newsweek* (September 1977), Quoted in Davis, *Dead Cities*, 393.

⁴⁸ Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on your Houses*, 21.

⁴⁹ Marshall Berman, “Views from the Burning Bridge,” In *Urban Mythologies*, 73.

⁵⁰ Freeman, *Working Class New York*, 277.

fend for themselves.”⁵¹ These policies “inflicted great harm on the poor minority families” of the South Bronx.⁵²

In one of his speeches Roger Starr said: “Our urban system, is based on the theory of taking the peasant and turning him into an industrial worker. Now there are no industrial jobs. Why not keep him a peasant?”⁵³ This is a clear reference to Puerto Ricans in New York City that echoes postwar racism. A 1948 travel book, *New York Confidential* described the Puerto Rican migrants of the 1940s as “mostly crude farmers, subject to congenital tropical diseases, physically unfitted for the northern climate, unskilled, uneducated, non-English-speaking, and almost impossible to assimilate and condition for healthful and useful existence in an active city of stone and steel.”⁵⁴

Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony for centuries. On the island arrived thousands of slaves in the early phase of the slave trade system. In 1889 The United States took the island during the Spanish American war. In 1917 Puerto Ricans obtained American citizenship but were not given the same benefits as white U.S. mainland citizens. Between the 1940s and the 1950s three events occurred: Operation Bootstrap, the formation of the “Estado Libre Asociado” or Commonwealth in 1952 (the U.S. decolonized Puerto Rico but still retained control over the island), and the mass

⁵¹ Ibid., 277.

⁵² Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on your Houses*, 16.

⁵³ Quoted in Freeman, *Working Class New York*, 277.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 62.

migration of Puerto Rican unskilled laborers to New York. In the age of Cold War.⁵⁵ These events served the United States' intentions because they showed the world that, contrary to the Soviet Union, they were an example of democracy that exported anti-imperial ideology to the "Third World," supported the economic development of Puerto Rico, and promoted mass migration to the mainland.

Operation Bootstrap, a plan to industrialize Puerto Rico "was based on policies that actively promoted emigration as a 'safety valve' to alleviate the structural pressures of production."⁵⁶ Much of the emigration was composed of people "displaced from declining production sectors and those newly unemployed as a consequence of industrial technology."⁵⁷ To encourage emigration, the U.S. reduced the price of flights, making the Puerto Rican migration between the 1940 and 1960s the first air-borne mass migration.⁵⁸ However, when Puerto Ricans arrived in New York they found a hostile territory. They moved to the worst neighborhoods "where the mice live like millionaires and the people do not live at all."⁵⁹ They took job positions that once were filled by white ethnics. Furthermore, the Bootstrap program was devoted to the island and not to the Puerto Rican communities on the mainland. Once they arrived in New York, Puerto Ricans were

⁵⁵ Frances Negron-Muntaner, *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 6.

⁵⁶ Virginia Sanchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 217.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ See Luis Rafael Sanchez, "The Airbus," *Village Voice*, 1984, 39-43. See also James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 36-37.

⁵⁹ Pedro Pietri, "Puerto Rican Obituaries," in Darrel Enk-Wanzer, ed., *The Young Lords. A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 72-73.

abandoned to themselves and did not receive funding for adequate education and bilingual programs.⁶⁰

By the 1960s, with deindustrialization and the moving of factories and sweatshop away from New York, thousands of Puerto Ricans lost their jobs. While African Americans were in part able to occupy the lowest paid jobs in services, Puerto Ricans became the poorest group in New York City. Puerto Ricans have shared of neighborhoods with African Americans. They have joined African Americans as the population most affected by urban renewal, called it for this reason “Negro removal” or “spic removal.”⁶¹ Although American citizens, neither group benefited from loans to buy houses in the suburbs, and during the 1950s and 1960s the massive movement of the white middle class from central cities to the suburbs, transformed the city centers into Black and Puerto Rican areas. The South Bronx was one of the areas that most suffered from this transformation. Gradually services were cut and stores closed. Buildings were not repaired and slumlords, after taking all the profits, hired professional arsonists to set fire to their buildings in order to claim the insurance. Nuyorican poet Sandra María Esteves in “Father’s Day On Longwood Avenue” made the “urbicide” of the South Bronx audible and visible:

⁶⁰ Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley, University of California Press), 110.

⁶¹ On how urban renewal further marginalized Blacks and Puerto Ricans see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 27-34; Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, 129-133; Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on your Houses*, 10-19.

Returning to that abandoned past of youth,
Bronx neighborhood of her father's house.
A five story structure, still, but standing.
Where once his tall husky frame sat
In a top floor window, drinking beer.
As she watched from below,
In awe of this person, she barely knew.

Three blocks south from him
The Beck Street tenement she first claimed home,
Last year, torn to the ground,
Nineteen years tumbled into shadows,
Dust traces of rubble remain,
Names of neighbors, best friends, disappeared.

And in the place where her room once held her,
Where she became alive, cried,
And learned to love her mother,
Studying world through windows facing sun,
Chanting incarnations to the Moon
Of top forty hit parades
In fourth floor ghetto repertoire.
Space of broken concrete, limping paint,
So dear, the only water she knew,
Now a lane through a park where lover's walk
Over new matted rugs of prefabricated astroturf.
Titi Julia's apartment one, where life began,
Now air and space where birds fly in symbolic liberation
Of land reclaimed by wind,
Spirit of her home set free,
An unraveled karma.

While the shell of her father's house endures,
a monument braced against the elements.
Roof leaking to basement, only rats take notice.
Winds howling lonely sonatas, no one hears.⁶²

⁶² Sandra María Esteves, "Father's Day On Longwood Avenue," in *Bluestown Mockingbird Mambo* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1990), 17.

In the 1970s and 1980s the decline and urban ruins of the South Bronx became a media spectacle. Media representations of the South Bronx greatly affected the ways in which the Bronx was perceived because they reached a far wider audience than the research of social scientists. A proliferation of television documentaries, films and news reports focused on crime, marginality, deterioration and fires.⁶³ The majority of these media texts “symbolically annihilated” black and Puerto Rican communities of the South Bronx.⁶⁴ From both conservative and liberal perspectives blacks and Puerto Ricans were identified either as the source of the problems or as victims. The most common phrases used by the media to describe the South Bronx was: “the most famous slum in America,” “the dark side of hell,” “the international symbol of urban decay and devastation,” “home of the poorest of the poor,” “a disaster area,” “like the bombed out cities of Europe after World War II.”⁶⁵

⁶³ In chapter 3, which deals with cinema and visuality, I will talk more about these visual texts. However, a preliminary list of films, television documentaries and even sit coms which touched the issue of urban decay in the South Bronx can be helpful for the reader. Television documentaries, news, and special programs: *Man Alive*, “The Bronx is Burning,” 1972 (BBC); *New York Illustrated*, “Saturday Night at Fort Apache,” 1973 (WNBC); *New York Illustrated*, “Savage Streets,” 1973 (WNBC); CBS Reports, “The Fire Next Door,” 1977 (CBS); *Only in America*, “Detectives,” 1980 (Thames Television Limited); *The Police Tapes*, 1977 (Directed by Alan and Susan Raymond). Comedy series: *The Jeffersons*, “Blackout,” 1978 (CBS). Feature Films: *Serpico*, 1973 (directed by Sidney Lumet); *The Warriors*, 1979 (Directed by Walter Hill); *Koyaanisqatsi*, 1983 (Directed by Godfrey Reggio); *Fort Apache, The Bronx*, 1981 (Directed by Daniel Petrie); *Wolfen*, 1981 (Directed by Michael Wadleigh); 1990: *The Bronx Warriors*, 1983 (Directed by Enzo Castellari); *Escape from the Bronx*, 1985 (Directed by Enzo Castellari); *The Bronx Executioner*, 1986 (Bob Collins); *Emperor of the Bronx*, 1989 (Directed by Joseph Merhi); *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, 1990 (Directed by Brian De Palma); *Rumble of the Bronx*, 1996 (Directed by Stanley Tong).

⁶⁴ I borrow this term from media scholar Larry Gross. See Larry Gross, “The Ethics of (Mis)representation,” in Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby, eds., *Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 190.

⁶⁵ Raquel Z. Rivera, *Nuyorican from the Hip-Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 50.

To make matters worse Hollywood could see profits in the destruction of the Bronx and launched a series of movies like *Fort Apache - the Bronx* (1981), *The Warriors* (1979), *Wolfen* (1981), *the Bonfire of Vanities* (1990) and others. These films disseminated around the world via Hollywood the images of ruin.⁶⁶ As Tricia Rose reminds us: “Depictions of black and Hispanic neighborhoods were drained of life, energy, and vitality. The message was loud and clear: to be stuck here was to be lost.”⁶⁷ These movies drew on previous stereotypes about blacks and Latinos/as. In them, as media scholar Steven Macek suggests: “the old racist, imperialist image of the anonymous mass of natives against whom ‘is always counterimposed the isolated white figure’ gets resurrected and set in a modern metropolitan context.”⁶⁸

Afrika Bambaataa: The South Bronx Strikes Back!

...That's the hip-hop that that that we're about. We come from the uhh the root of, of Kool DJ Herc, who originated hip-hop in the early 70's and then Afrika Bambaataa and Zulu Nation (mmhmm) who instigated something called The Infinity Lessons and added consciousness to hip-hop, and then Grandmaster Flash with the invention of the mixer
KRS-One⁶⁹

⁶⁶ See Loretta M. D’Orsogna, *Il Bronx: Storia di un quartiere “malfamato”* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2002); Max Page, *The City’s End: Two Centuries of Fantasies, Fears, and Premonitions of New York’s Destruction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 143-197.

⁶⁷ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), 33.

⁶⁸ Macek, *Urban Nightmares*, 204-205.

⁶⁹ KRS-One, *Hip Hop Knowledge*, 2008.

Historian Joe Austin suggests that “the urban crisis was frequently assessed by observing the city from “the streets,” and it was “in the street” that the crisis was most commonly located in representation.”⁷⁰ Yet, it was also from the streets that the major responses to the urban crisis emerged.⁷¹ One of these responses, often left out from accounts on urban resistance and struggle in the South Bronx, was hip hop.⁷²

[At first glance, hip hop is nothing new]... “Rap’s fore bears stretch back through disco, street funk, radio DJs, Bo Diddley, the bebop singers, Cab Calloway, Pigmeat Markham, the tap dancers and comics, The Last Poets, Gil Scott-Heron, Muhammad Ali, acapella and doo-wop groups, ring games, skip-rope rhymes, prison and army songs, toasts, signifying and the dozens, all the way to the griots of Nigeria and the Gambia.”⁷³

While a modern genre hip hop places African American culture “in a wider transcultural and subaltern history of the Atlantic” by mixing African American,

⁷⁰ Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 36.

⁷¹ On urban social movements in the South Bronx during the urban crisis see: Jill Jones, *South Bronx Rising: The Rise, Fall and Resurrection of An American City*, Expanded edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Evelyn Gonzales, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Jim Rooney, *Organizing the South Bronx* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Robert Jensen, ed., *Devastation/Resurrection: the South Bronx* (The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1977). See also Bronx United Parents Association papers; Dana Caballero papers; Lillian Lopez collection, all at the Center For Puerto Rican Studies Archives, Hunter College, City University of New York; and Jill Jonnes Papers at the Archives of the Library at Lehman College, City University Of New York.

⁷² On this absence historian Robin D.G. Kelley writes: “Social Scientists working on the black urban poor have been conspicuously silent, leaving most of the discussion to music critics and cultural studies scholars. The result has been a fairly sophisticated body of work that takes into account both aesthetics and social and political contexts.” Robin D.G Kelley, “Looking for the Real Nigga,” 187.

⁷³ David Toop, *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1991), 19.

Jamaican, and Puerto Rican cultural expressions.⁷⁴ At the same time, it disrupts the notion of black authenticity and ethnic absolutism by cutting, mixing and sampling European and Japanese electronic music, movie soundtracks, hard rock, new wave, the sound of Japanese video games, and a myriad of other sounds. Hip hop is an example of “subaltern creativity.”⁷⁵ As Iain Chambers suggests it takes “the simplest and most widely available devices in the recording chains – turntables and microphones – and transform[ed] them into musical instruments in their own right.”⁷⁶

The DJ, putting the needle on the record and using the technique of scratching – “slowing time, stopping, accelerating time” – interrupts the linearity of history. On the turntable, history is always now.⁷⁷ The MC drops some science and alternative knowledge through the microphone. He or she combines “utopic/dystopic tensions” celebrating the re-appropriation of spaces denied to Afrodiasporic people during slavery and racial terror but also in the present days metropolis.⁷⁸ These two figures, the DJ and the MC, become kind of archivists or scientists who trace, through a collage of sounds, “the myriad and complex ways that blackness travels, dwelling and encountering

⁷⁴ James Clifford, “Diasporas,” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 259.

⁷⁵ Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae, Sound Systems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 161.

⁷⁶ Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan 1985), 190.

⁷⁷ Kun, *Audiotopia*, 129.

⁷⁸ Clifford, “Diasporas,” 263.

different notions or versions of itself in different locations and under different circumstances.”⁷⁹

Hip hop famously consists of four elements: DJing, MCing, Bboying, and graffiti. DJ Afrika Bambaataa, who along with Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash, is considered the “godfather” of hip hop, added a fifth element to it: “Knowledge, culture and Overstanding.”⁸⁰ He was a member of the Black Spades, a notorious street gang that had one of its headquarters in the Bronx River Housing. Hip hop scholars like David Toop, Jeff Chang and Cheryl Keyes all agree that Bambaataa is particularly important in the hip hop movement because he allows us to understand hip hop as a grassroots movement that emerged from the streets.⁸¹

Steven Hager, one of the first journalists writing on the hip hop movement, relates the development of hip hop to street gangs, and in particular to the Black Spades, a gang from the South East Bronx: the territory of Afrika Bambaataa. He writes: “It all started in 1968 at...the Bronxdale project [a public housing nearby the Bronx River Housing] when seven incorrigible teen-agers, who were terrorizing playgrounds, robbing bus drivers, and wreaking havoc throughout the southeast Bronx, began calling themselves the Savage

⁷⁹ Herman Gray, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 165.

⁸⁰ Quoted in *U-net, Bigger than Hip Hop: storie della nuova resistenza afroamericana* (Milan: Cox18 Books, 2006), 7.

⁸¹ On hip hop and urban space see Cheryl L. Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002); and Murray Forman, *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002); Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013).

Seven...Before long, others wanted to join and they had to be changed to be the Black Spades.”⁸²

Bambaataa joined the Black Spades in the early 1970s. In 1975, his best friend was assassinated by the police. This tragic event led Bambaataa to quit gangs. In that year he created an association called the Zulu Nation. The Zulu Nation was organized like a gang but it went beyond the aggressive territoriality of gangs, becoming a point of reference “for funk loving street kids.”⁸³ As he explains, “[the Zulu Nation] is a huge young adults and youth organization which incorporates people that are into breakdancing, DJing, and graffiti. I had them to battle against each other in a nonviolent way, like rapper against rapper rather than knife against knife.”⁸⁴ This detour signaled the birth of hip hop not only as music, dance and writing but as a whole culture and as a social movement.

⁸² Steve Hager, “Afrika Bambaataa’s Hip Hop,” *Voice*, Sept. 21, 1982, In Hip Hop Steven Hager Collection, Archive of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Box 1, folder 1.

⁸³ Dick Hebdige, *Cut ‘N’ Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (London: Routledge, 1987), 139.

⁸⁴ Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 48.

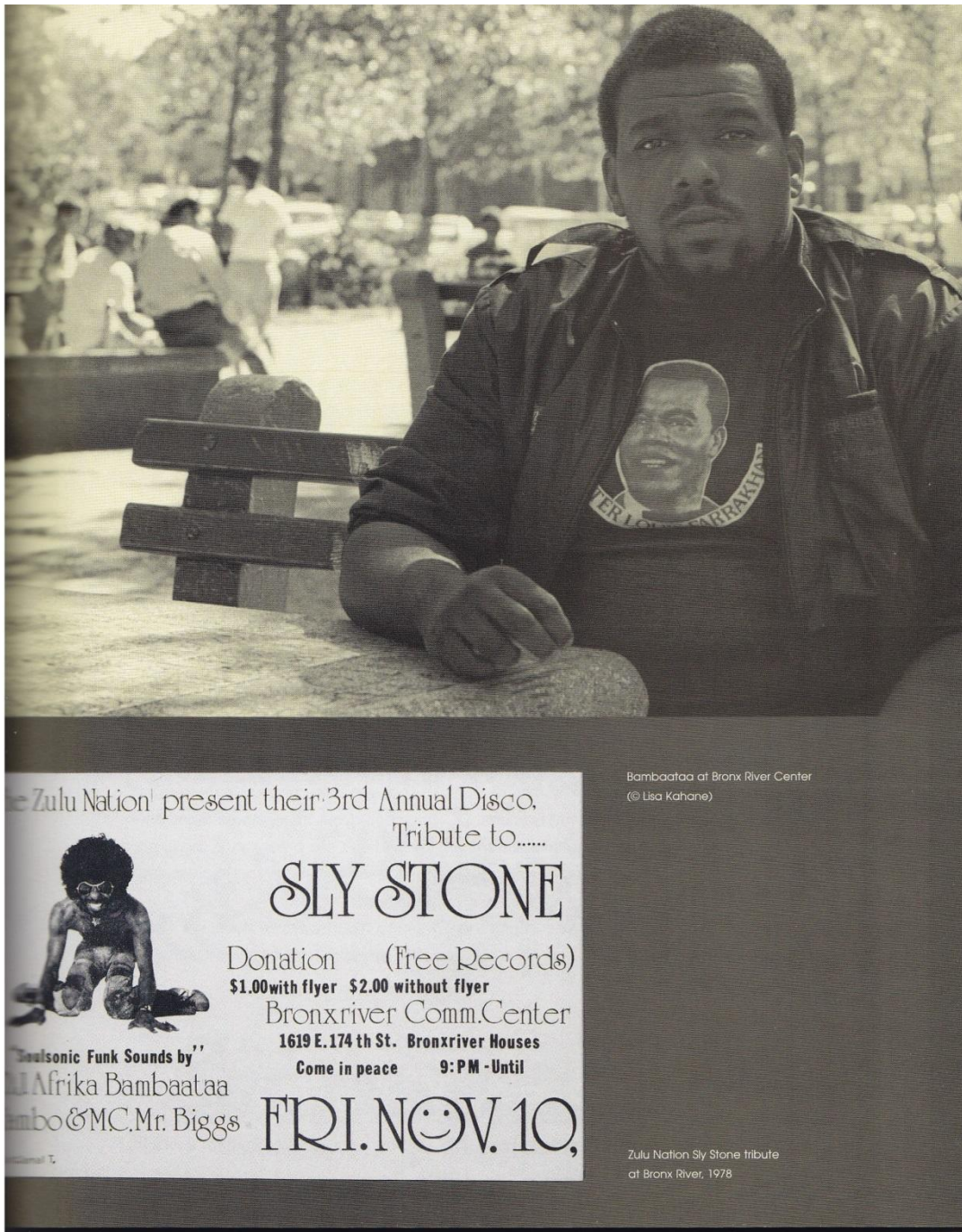


Figure 1. Afrika Bambaataa at the Bronx River Center, Photo by Lisa Kahane. Source: The Experience Music Project, *Yes, Yes, Y'all: Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 51.

The Zulu Nation: Musical Mission

The Zulu Nation certainly emerged as an alternative to gangs, but it was above all a response to urban policies that marginalized, stigmatized and excluded inner-city communities in New York. The harms inflicted by urban policies have contributed to the construction of a narrative which has influenced the media, public opinion and the perception of the South Bronx as an isolated area inhabited by dangerous “Others.” Yet, as media scholars such as Larry Gross, John Fiske, Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, and others have often underlined: “Images are polysemic ... they have a variety of potential meanings.”⁸⁵ Oppressed people often produce unexpected readings of stereotypical images. For example, Bambaataa appropriated the image of Zulus depicted in the movie *Zulu* (1964) as “Noble Savages,” giving it a new meaning and applying it to the context of the South Bronx and 1960s political struggles. As he recalls:

The Zulu Nation. I got the idea when I seen this movie called Zulu which featured Michael Caine. It was showing how when the British came to take over the land of the Zulus how the Zulus fought to uphold their land. They were proud warriors and they was fighting very well against bullets, cannons and stuff. They fought like warriors for a land was theirs. When the British thought they'd won the next thing you see is the whole mountain full with thousands of Zulus and the British knew they was gonna die then. But the Zulus chanted – praised them as warriors and let them live. So from there that's when I decided one of these days I hope to have a Zulu Nation too. And then as the years went by, through all the

⁸⁵ Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz and Jay Ruby, “Introduction: A Moral Pause,” In *Media Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television*, edited by Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 18. On radical and alternative reading of media images see John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Jo Ellen Shively “Cowboys and Indians: Perceptions of Western Films Among American Indians and Anglos,” in Robert Stam and Toby Miller, eds., *Film and Theory: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

civil rights movement, human rights, Vietnam war and all the folk and rock that was happening to the whole world – it just stayed with me to have some type of group like that.⁸⁶

Hip hop, like the anti-colonial struggle of Zulus, challenged “the neo-plantation” system of the South Bronx.⁸⁷

As urban policies, the media, and the social sciences fixed the meaning of the South Bronx as an international symbol of urban decay proposing a geography of destruction, abandonment and social pathology, Afrika Baambaataa and the Zulu Nation reconceptualized the South Bronx as an international symbol of urban struggle, creative and constructive forces from below. The South Bronx became a new nodal conjunction and crossroad in the intricate web of the black diaspora. There it was possible to revise the past and challenge the present. As Tricia Rose brilliantly contends: “Although city leaders and the popular press had literally and figuratively condemned the South Bronx neighborhoods and their inhabitants, its youngest black and Hispanic residents answered back.”⁸⁸

If we look at hip hop and the Zulu Nation from a traditional and orthodox leftist perspective, perhaps we cannot consider them as social movements. The Zulu Nation and hip hop did not stop planned shrinkage, police brutality, heroin diffusion, disparities of power, or racist representations of the South Bronx. They are “not a safe house for

⁸⁶ In Toop, *Rap Attack*, 57.

⁸⁷ I borrow this term from Woods, “Sittin’ on Top of the World: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” 61.

⁸⁸ Rose, *Black Noise*, 34.

revolution and resistance.”⁸⁹ Yet if we follow historian Robin Kelley and define social movements as things that “transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly to imagine a new society,” then hip hop and the Zulu Nation can be considered social movements.⁹⁰ First, they gave young black and Puerto Ricans “excluded from access to arts education and resources” the chance to create new cultural expressions like rapping, DJing, and graffiti.⁹¹ At a moment when funds for music programs were cut and more and more schools were shut down, kids found inspiration in places considered by city politics as dangerous and without hope. Second, hip hop and the Zulu Nation taught blacks and Puerto Ricans how to avoid the trap of the inner-city. As rapper KRS-One in one of his “didactic” piece says:

Hip means to know
It's a form of intelligence
To be hip is to be up-date and relevant
Hop is a form of movement
You can't just observe a hop
You got to hop up and do it
Hip and Hop is more than music
Hip is the knowledge
Hop is the movement
Hip and Hop is intelligent movement.⁹²

One of Afrika Bambaataa’s dreams was to help keep kids away from heroin, which was sweeping the South Bronx already by the mid-1960s. Afrika Bambaataa, took his name from a famous nineteenth-century “Zulu chief.” It means “Affectionate leader.”

⁸⁹ Kun, *Audiotopia*, 17.

⁹⁰ Kelley, *The Black Radical Imagination*, 9. On music as social movements in the African diaspora see Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

⁹¹ Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, 179.

⁹² Krs-One, *Hip Hop Lives*.

As DJ Van Silk recalls, “Bam’s a very influential, very strong, very community – conscious person. Bam is more like a father figure to a lot of young kids in the Neighborhood he came from, in Bronx River. He was the type of person that would get the summer jobs for kids, all the city summer jobs. Without the help of Bambaataa, we would have been in a lot of trouble.”⁹³ Although not specifically a feminist movement, the Zulu Nation helped break down gender barriers within hip hop culture, which was often characterized by masculinity and sexism. The Zulu Nation headquarter at the community center of the Bronx River Housing was a “safe-space” open to everybody. Sha-Rock, perhaps the first female MC in the history of hip hop, remembers that “if you went to a Afrika Bambaataa party, you expect to be safe, because nobody was starting any trouble at a Afrika Bambaataa/Zulu Nation party. That was a good atmosphere, and I think that’s what a lot of groups wanted – people to feel safe and come in and just listen to the music and everything.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Jim Fricke, Charlie Ahern and the Experience Music Project, eds., *Yes, Yes, Y’all: Oral History of Hip-Hop’s First Decade*. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2002), 55.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

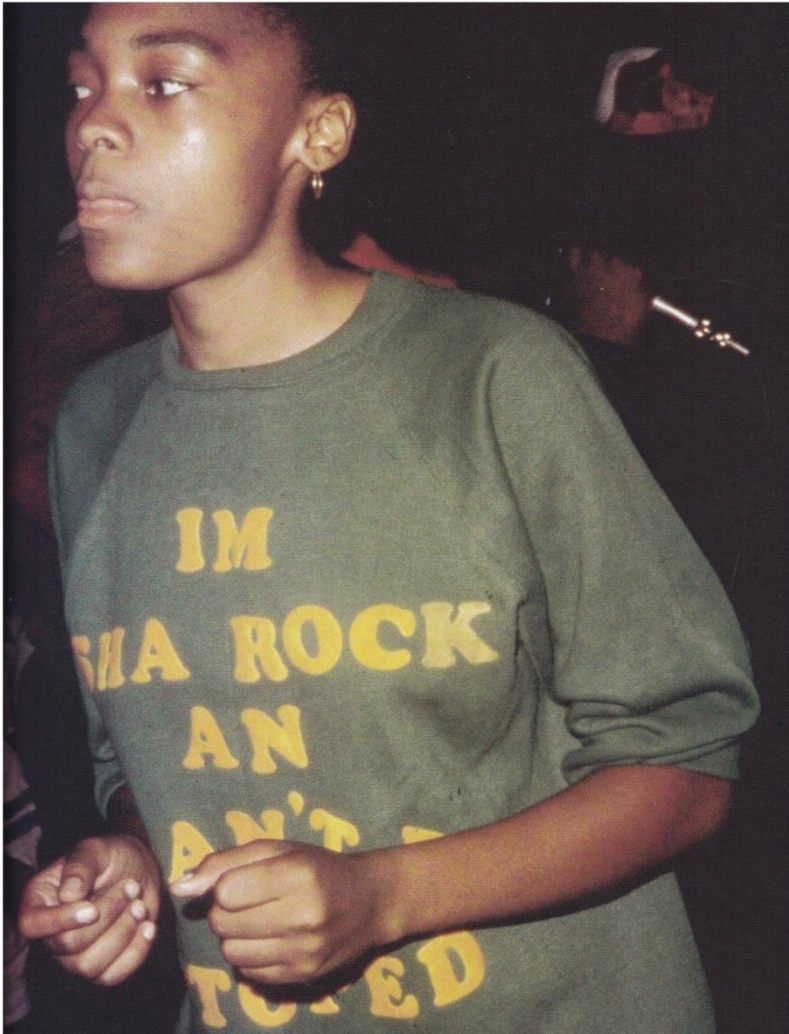


Figure 2. “She’s Sha-rock an’ she can’t be stopped. At the Valley, June 1980.” Sha-rock is one of the first female MC and the inventor of the “echo chamber” effect. Copyright Charlie Ahearn. Source: The Experience Music Project, *Yes, Yes, Y’all: Oral History of Hip-Hop’s First Decade* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2002), 152-153.

Renegades of Funk: Looking Backward to Look Forward

The major hit by Afrika Bambaataa and the Sonic Force entitled *Renegades of Funk*, to use Robin Kelley’s words, “look[s] backward to look forward.” Bambaataa in the song speaks from the future about the 1970s South Bronx. At the same time, it connects the struggle of the 1970s Bronx to the struggles undertaken in the past. In the

video released for the song, we are in the South Bronx. Bambaataa is checking out the South Bronx from a roof of a building. In the background we hear “No matter how hard you try you can’t stop this now.” This line is taken from the 1969 Temptation’s hit “Message from a Black Man.”⁹⁵ Immediately the hip hop movement is connected with funk and R&B of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the next sequence we are in an empty lot of the Bronx, a group of writers meet up to make a masterpiece on a wall. At a distance old homeless people are sitting on chairs as if they were listening to a blues ballad from Skip James or Robert Johnson. Like in the film *The Last Angel of History* (John Akomfrah, 1995), this sequence is an archeological digging into black sound and politics: blues becomes R&B, R&B becomes funk, funk becomes hip hop.

Then suddenly we are projected into the future from which Afrika Bambaataa talks about the Bronx of the late 1970s. Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force imagine being runways having escaped to another solar system. The traumatic experience of the slave trade system can be compared with the science fiction trope of alien kidnappings. Africans were deported from Africa to the Americas where they became aliens in an alien land.⁹⁶ Yet, Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force considering themselves

⁹⁵ See also Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (New York: Ebury Press, 2007, 2005), 190.

⁹⁶ On the futuristic impulse in the African diaspora see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 29-35; Mark Dery, “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose.” In Mark Dery, ed. *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington and Anthony Braxton* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun* (London: Quartet, 1998); Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, And the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010); Herman Gray, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*, 2007, 133-184; Alondra Nelson, ed., *Afrofuturism: Special Issue, Social Text* (June 2002); Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (O-Books, 2009).

aliens, through technology they were able to transform African rhythms and chants brought by slaves in the Americas into electronic sounds. Like the protagonist of the science fiction film *The Brother from Another Planet* (John Sayles, 1984), they return to New York, which in the meantime has assumed a post-apocalyptic aspect dominated by burned building, vacant lots, heroin destroyed generations of youth, white vigilantes, police brutality.

Here, Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force being a force of another creation teach the art of funk: funk as resistance, creativity, imagination and fun! Funk is crucial to the birth of hip-hop. This is the funk created in the hard streets of Chicago, Detroit and New York, but it is also the exchange between US Black America and the Caribbean. The heavy signature of the bass was part of the dub tradition in Jamaica. At the same time funk rhythms arrived in Jamaica through U.S. radio stations. A few years later the echo of bass and reverberation of dub, especially the technique of talk-over, arrived in the Bronx with Jamaican and other Caribbean migrants. The initiator of hip hop DJ Kool Herc, applied the technique of the Jamaican sound system to the funk rhythms of James Brown and others funk musicians. There was Latin music too, and so the Afro-diasporic Spanish speaking population was also central to the birth of funk. Bogaloo music is an example of that, or the latin tinge rhythms in Jimmy Castor's hit "It's all Begun." Finally, the infectious rhythms of Tito Puente's congas certainly did not go unnoticed by young Afro American and Puerto Rican funk lovers in the South Bronx.

The futuristic impulse of Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force in *Renegades of Funk* is also a way to revise the past. To use music critic Graham Lock's expression, it is

a form of “blutopia” which is “a utopia tinged with blues, an African American visionary future stained with memory.”⁹⁷ Here Bambaataa and the Sonic Force anticipated the new scholarship in history which focuses on the long civil rights movement: a global movement which goes back in centuries and continues in the present. *Renegades of funk* opens up a dialogue between what cultural critic Jose Saldivar calls the postcolonial in the United States and what historians Linebaugh and Rediker call the Revolutionary Atlantic.⁹⁸ In this sense the song connects the struggle against the internal colonialism of Indians, Chicanos and African Americans with the struggle against imperialism, racism and slavery waged by Maroon communities, motley crews, crowds and intellectuals. These are multiethnic struggles and not just African Americans ones. The visionary political philosopher Thomas Paine, one of the central figures of the American Revolution, wrote: “Freedom hath been hunted round the globe...Oh! Receive the fugitive and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.”⁹⁹ Three centuries later Martin Luther King visiting Ghana put it this way: “I want you to come to visit us down in Alabama where we are seeking the same kind of freedom that the Gold Coast is celebrating.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Lock, *Blutopia*, 3.

⁹⁸ In recent years a prolific dialogue has emerged between Chicano Studies, Black studies and Postcolonial studies. See José Saldivar, *Trans-Americanity*; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra*; Gayatri C. Spivak, *Other Asias* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

⁹⁹ Quoted in American Social History Project Under the Direction of Herbert G. Gutman, *Who Built America? Volume One* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 158.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Kevin Gaines, “A World to Win: The International Dimension of the Black Freedom Movement,” *OAH Magazine of History* 20 (October 2006): 14.

we're the renegades in this atomic age\this atomic age of renegades
Since the Prehistoric ages and the days of ancient Greece
Right down through the Middle Ages
Planet earth kept going through changes
And then the renaissance came, the times continued to change
Nothing stayed the same, but there were always renegades
Like Chief Sitting Bull, Tom Paine
Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X
They were renegades of their time and age
The mighty Renegades

From a different solar system many many galaxies away
We are the force of another creation
A new musical revelation
And we're on this musical mission to help the others listen
And groove from land to land singin' electronic chants like
Zulu nation\Revelations\Destroy all nations

We're teachers of the funk
And not of empty popping
We're blessed with the force and the sight of electronics
With the bass, and the treble the horns and our vocals
'Cause everytime I pop into the beat we get fresh!¹⁰¹

Afrika Bambaataa and the Sonic Domain of the South Bronx

It was especially through sound itself that in hip hop the history of the black diaspora as struggle is continually reconstructed and renewed. In popular imagination public housing is associated with the birth of hip hop. It is generally considered a site of violence and a pathological culture.¹⁰² Indeed, public housing in the Bronx went through enormous changes between the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Nathan Dukes, who was

¹⁰¹ Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force, "Renegades of Funk" (1983). Lyrics from: http://www.lyricsmania.com/renegades_of_funk_lyrics_afrika_bambaataa.html

¹⁰² For an innovative perspective that goes beyond the idea of public housing as a site of pathological culture see Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

interviewed by the Bronx African American oral history project, remembers that in the Patterson Houses in the South Bronx area of Morrisania by the mid-1960s “the impact of heroin was...traumatic.”¹⁰³ Even Bambaataa, paraphrasing Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five hit “the Message,” recalls that in the South Bronx there “was broken glasses everywhere.”¹⁰⁴

Despite the cuts in the surveillance and municipal services in public housing, Bambaataa transformed anonymous high rise towers and alienating structures of the Bronx River Housing into places filled with sound and peace. As one of his friends recalls: “Bam used to put his speakers out of the window and play music all day. He used to live right outside what you’d call the Center. The center of Bronx River was like a big oval. The community center was right in the middle and Bam used to live to the left of it. He used to play his music, and I would ride my bike around all day popping wheelies, you know?...He was like the Pied Piper.”¹⁰⁵ The courtyard of the Bronx River Housing was transformed into a sonic domain. Bambaataa turned a private activity - listening to music in his apartment - into a collective experience. It is here, in these micro-events that music becomes a vehicle for oppressed communities “to talk back”¹⁰⁶ and to re-

¹⁰³ Mark Naison, “From Doo-Wop to Hip Hop: The Bittersweet Odissey of African Americans in the South Bronx.” *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal* 2 (2003): 75.

¹⁰⁴ *Yes, Yes, Y’all: Oral History of Hip-Hop’s First Decade*, 44.

¹⁰⁵ Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 89.

¹⁰⁶ Hebdige, *Cut ‘N’ Mix*, 87.

appropriate and transform urban spaces on the “rusting urban core” of the postindustrial city.¹⁰⁷

“To put the speakers out of his window” was also a tribute to the Jamaican Sound System that in those years “was transplanted” to the South Bronx from Kingston.¹⁰⁸ The sound system is much more powerful than a regular stereo set, but the idea is similar. Also, Afrika Bambaataa, like the other two “godfathers” of hip hop Kool “DJ” Herc and Grandmaster Flash, had Caribbean origins. It was Kool “DJ” Herc, a Jamaican born emigrant to the West Bronx in 1967, who adapted the Sound System technique to the streets of the South Bronx. He grew up in Kingston immersed in the sound system culture listening to U Roy and others DJs. At the same time, in Jamaica he followed black American music in particular R&B and James Brown.¹⁰⁹ When he arrived to the States, he started his own sound system but would notice that black kids would not dance to reggae rhythms, so he decided to add the break beats of funk and Afro-Latin music. It was from this chemistry that hip hop was born. However, it is misleading to look for a linear pattern in the development of hip hop. Hip hop was produced by networks that go in all directions. For example, Greg Tate sees it as diasporization, continuous reconfigurations and transfigurations. It is the “metamorphic nature” of Afrodiasporic culture, reminding us that U.S. based “black radio deejays of the ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘60s, Daddy O Daylie, Poppa Stoppa and especially Douglas “Jocko” Henderson, Ace from

¹⁰⁷ Rose, *Black Noise*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1995, 1987).

¹⁰⁹ Woods, “Sittin’ on Top of the World: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” 66.

Space, whose influence on Jamaican sound system pioneer Coxsone Dobb would make possible the work of Jamaican-born Bronx immigrant Kool DJ Herc.”¹¹⁰ This diasporic sound, to use Paul Gilroy’s words, is a “rhizomorphic, fractal structure.”¹¹¹

Agency Through Records

Paul Gilroy has suggested that “cultural commodities...[like] records...have carried inside them oppositional ideas, ideologies, theologies and philosophies.”¹¹² Bambaataa was introduced to black politics and black international movements by his mother; yet, it was through his mother’s record collection that his Pan-Africanism and black politics was formed. It is the object itself – the vinyl – that acquires political agency “communicating information [and] organizing consciousness.”¹¹³ The importance of music in transmitting black culture has been central to Afrodiasporic struggles because the “slaves access to literacy was often denied on pain of death.”¹¹⁴ In hip hop, the centrality of music as a form of political agency continues but it is the record itself that becomes the principal means of language. Through records the history of African diaspora is continually “revised and extended” (Tricia Rose). The “funk loving street kids” from the Bronx used the technique of the cut ‘n’ mix to rewrite the history of funk

¹¹⁰ Greg Tate, “Yo! Hermeneutics!: Henry Louis Gates, Houston Baker, and David Toop,” in *Flyboy in the Butter-Milk: Essays on Contemporary America* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1992), 156.

¹¹¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1994), 4.

¹¹² Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, 157.

¹¹³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 36.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 74.

music of the 1960s from their own perspectives. They began removing the labels from records of their favorite funk artists with soap in order to create a new text. This was a political act. As Dick Hebdige observes, they did this not because they didn't love the "funk these people played...[but because]...they wanted to undermine the system that had taken artists like James Brown from the ghetto and put them up there out of reach with all the other show business stars."¹¹⁵ Through records, Bambaataa and his friends made imaginary returns to Africa and to the politics of the 1960s, and at the same time started to imagine a better future. They fostered the arrival of hip hop in the South Bronx. As Charles Mudede puts it "[hip hop]...is less "music" per se, and more "about music" – so radical is its difference from previous methods or models of music production."¹¹⁶

Since the early days of hip hop, Afrika Bambaataa has been open to all kinds of music. As DJ at the parties he organized at the Bronx River Community Center, he started "to mix things up." At the record desk he would play "the more obscure records."¹¹⁷ Generally he began with James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone, and George Clinton of the Parliament Funkadelic, then suddenly he would take a heavy metal song and "slow it, or speed it up." During the party people would dance to all kinds of music from funk, soul, hard rock and salsa to the Pink Panther theme, the electronics of the Yellow Magic Orchestra, to commercials. As Bambaataa recalls: "[At parties] [i]t might just be slammin', the people sweating, breaking, everything. And I would just stop

¹¹⁵ Hebdige, *Cut 'N' Mix*, 141.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 152.

¹¹⁷ *Yes, Yes, Y'all: Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade*, 49.

in the middle of the thing and throw on Sweet Georgia Brown, and then everybody'd just start doing that basketball-type dance. I would tell them, I want you to take it back to the day when your mama and papa used to dance.”¹¹⁸

In this archeological digging into sounds, he “discovered the secret of black technology.”¹¹⁹ Inspired by George Clinton he “embraced the space age styles as well as the impulse to escape the wretchedness of daily life through dance music.”¹²⁰ His two hits produced with the Soul Sonic Force, *Renegades of Funk* (1983) and *Planet Rock* (1982), were precursors of electro-funk, proposing a sound that deterritorializes the imaginary of the urban crisis, pushing it beyond the filmic imaginary of the South Bronx, beyond sociological studies of the urban crisis, in a movement that travels from Africa to the New World and from the South Bronx to the outer space. Here we have a sound that celebrates a sense of community, what Gilroy called “a metaphysics of intimacy...that dissolves Eurocentric notions of the disjunction between art and life, inside and outside [and] in the interplay of personal and public histories.”¹²¹ Yet, at the same time it challenges “the idea that ‘authenticity’ in black music must necessarily be tied to ‘keeping it real,’ to ‘the street,’ chaining the essence of ‘blackness’ to the conditions of depressed urban existence with all the stereotypes of sex, violence and drugs.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ John Akonfrah, *The Last Angel of History*, 2004.

¹²⁰ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 32.

¹²¹ Gilroy, *Small Acts*, 39.

¹²² Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Boston: MIT Press, 2010), 202.

Nuyorican Poets and the Changing Same from Africa to the Bronx

The Zulu Nation also promoted cooperation and alliances between the black and Puerto Rican communities of the South Bronx. Blacks and Puerto Ricans have lived next to each other in many neighborhoods of New York City since the early 20th century. Both blacks and Puerto Ricans shared the “negative experience of racial and economic marginalization.”¹²³ Both are part of the African diaspora and this common history has allowed them to create an “alliance of survival.”¹²⁴ For example, as Raquel Rivera reminds us, “the Black Power Movement served as an ideological and organizational example for Puerto Rican activists...[and]...The Young Lords Party...was modeled after the Black Panthers.”¹²⁵ Puerto Ricans have been central to the development of hip hop since its early days. As Afrika Bambaataa puts it: “Now one thing people must know, that when we say Black we mean all our Puerto Rican or Dominican brothers. Wherever the Hip Hop was and the Blacks was, the Latinos and Puerto Ricans was too.”¹²⁶

In the early 1970s a group of poets who called themselves Nuyorican poets touched issues later developed by hip hop artists. It could be argued that Nuyorican poets of the early 1970s anticipated what is generally called conscious hip hop. In addition Felipe Luciano who is one of the founders of the New York section of Young Lords and

¹²³ Clifford, “Diasporas,” 256.

¹²⁴ Andres Torres, Quoted in Rivera, *Nuyoricans from the Hip Hop Zone*, 26.

¹²⁵ Rivera, *Nuyoricans from the Hip Hop Zone*, 27. See also chapter three of my dissertation.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 160.

a poet close to Nuyorican poets, in the early 1970s was a member of the Last Poets, perhaps the first rap band in history. Literary scholar Carmen Hernandez referring to the Nuyorican poets and contrasting them with the more “elitist” beat-nick poets of New York argues: “The [Nuyorican] poets were literally as well as figuratively beat up by their place in the city’s lowest socioeconomic rungs as the children of poor uneducated immigrants who knew no English.”¹²⁷

The name Nuyorican refers to the Puerto Ricans who were born or live in New York. The poets consider themselves New Yorkers but with strong Puerto Ricans ties. They are the daughters and sons of Puerto Ricans immigrants who moved to New York before World War II or after it. Puerto Rico had been a Spanish colony for centuries, but in 1898 Puerto Rico it became a colony of the United States. Nuyorican poets expressed this hybridity through language and descriptions of the everyday experience of the barrios of New York. In Puerto Rican neighborhoods of New York people speak a mix of Spanish and English. Art historian Kobena Mercer calls this type of language a form of code switching that decenters “the linguistic domination of English,” which for Puerto Ricans is “the nation language of master discourse.”¹²⁸ Cultural historian Iain Chambers says that they “speak the languages – linguistic, literary, cultural, religious musical – of the dominator, of the master, but always with a difference. Language is appropriated, taken apart, and then put back together with a new inflection, an unexpected accent, a

¹²⁷ Carmen Dolores Hernandez, *Puerto Rican Voices in English* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 6.

¹²⁸ Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995), 63.

further twist in the tale.”¹²⁹ At the same time they disrupted the concept of authenticity that expected Puerto Rican writers to speak Spanish or refer only to the island of Puerto Rico when resisting the hegemonic discourse of U.S. imperialism. They refute the title “ethnic artists.” South Bronx based poet Mariposa in *Ode to the Diasporican* writes: “some people think I am not bonafide cause my playground was a concrete jungle, cause my Rio Grande de Loiza was the Bronx river.”¹³⁰

Nuyorican poets mixed rap, improvisation, slam poetry, free jazz with mambo, doo wop, and salsa in their poems about the alienated experience of Puerto Ricans in New York. Historian Nikhil Pal Singh called this position as that of being “foreign in a domestic sense.”¹³¹ Sandra María Esteves is not a musician but in her poems sound is central. In it we can hear the rhythms of the city. Sociologists Juan Flores and Raquel Rivera have traced a line between Nuyorican poets, R&B and hip-hop. As Rivera puts it: “In terms of afro-diasporic sources and approaches to creative expression, the practice of writing rap rhymes and MCing by Puerto Ricans has much in common with the school of Nuyorican poetry.”¹³² Flores writes that “the Black and Puerto Rican conjunction in the formation of rap is prefigured in important ways in doo-wop, Latin boogaloo, Nuyorican poetry, and a range of other testimonies to intensely overlapping and intermingling

¹²⁹ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 23.

¹³⁰ Mariposa, “Ode to the Diasporican,” in *Born Broxena* (Bronx, NY: Broxena books, 2001), 7.

¹³¹ Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is A Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 37.

¹³² Rivera, *New York Ricans From the Hip Hop Zone*, 161.

expressive repertoires.”¹³³ Yet, the connection between the Black Arts Movement, Nuyorican poets, free jazz, salsa, doo-wop and hip-hop has been relatively unexplored.¹³⁴

In an interview Sandra María Esteves recalls that she wrote her first poem after attending a community poetry reading at the National Black Theater in Harlem. The poem titled “Black Notes and ‘You Do Something to Me’” could be considered an audio/visual history and collage of afro-diasporic music where the black Atlantic meets Nuestra America on the streets of New York. A kind of “changing same” flying from Africa to the Bronx through black rhythms, Spanish canzon, Rhasaan’s horns, Miles’ trumpet and Monk’s notes.

Jazz-jazzy jass juice,
Just so smooth,
So be-hop samba blue to sweet bump black.
So slip slide back to mama black –
To mamaland base black.
Don’t Matter could be Bronx born basic street black.
Or white ivory piano coast negro dunes bembé black.
Mezclando manos in polyrhythm sync to fingers.
...Flyin across Miles ‘n Sonny, across john, Rhasaan ‘n Monk’s 81,
Across Dizzy blue conga jerry horn.¹³⁵

In “Ode to Celia” Esteves rewrites the history of African diaspora from a Puerto Rican perspective. It begins in 1965 at the tropicoro club on Longwood Avenue in the

¹³³ Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 117.

¹³⁴ For an innovative work on the Black Arts Movement see Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹³⁵ Sandra María Esteves, “Black Notes and ‘You do Something to me,’” in *Bluestown Mockingbird Mambo* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1990), 75.

South Bronx where also new hybrid forms of music like the Boogaloo (a mix of soul, R&B, and mambo) emerged. Then through the sound of Celia Cruz, Esteves returns to Africa and then back to the Americas. In this circular journey there is a dystopian/utopian tension: the terror of the slave ship, displacement, free labor in the tobacco fields, racism in the new plantation system of the modern city, but also the power of music to bring a message of opposition, and the connection between Africa and a creolized Mediterranean where Arabic love songs meets Spanish gypsy guitars. This is the prelude of blues, salsa, jazz, and hip hop in the Americas.

Celia sings and I return to 1965
Dancing sweaty mambos
At the tropicoro on Longwood Avenue
or the Bronx Casino on Prospect
or the Colgate Gardens where La Lupe exposed her soul
to the hustle, ah-peep-peep and boogaloo pachanga of Johnny Pacheco

I may have been an only child from the Bronx but Celia takes me back lifetimes
Before I mastered English in New York City schools,
or Spanish in tobacco fields
even before that middle passage where so many cousins, uncles, and aunts
perished
all the way back to motherland Africa's family shores
with Spanish gypsy guitars empowered by Arabic love songs¹³⁶

In "From Fanon" she translates in poetry Frantz Fanon's critical thought on how colonialism has shaped the idea of race. As Les Back and John Solomon write: "Fanon is particularly concerned with the ways in which colonial institutions and the ideologies

¹³⁶ Sandra María Esteves, "Ode to Celia," in *CENTRO Journal* 2 (Fall 2004): 104-105.

associated with them constructed ideas about race through representations of ‘blackness’, the ‘negro’, the ‘native’ and other notions. Perhaps more importantly he is also concerned with the ways in which the colonized ‘Others’ saw themselves and their position within colonial societies and the struggle against colonialism.”¹³⁷ Esteves writes:

We are a multitude of contradictions
reflecting our history
oppressed
controlled
once free folk
remnants of that time interacting in our souls...¹³⁸

In “For South Bronx,” dystopic/utopic tensions emerge as a constant feature of diasporic population. The first part of the poem describes the desolate buildings as row of despair. There is no life here, like in the movie *Fort Apache, The Bronx* (1981). Yet at night the young graffiti writers invade the train yards to make art, painting graffiti with beautiful colors on the empty and grey walls of train and subway stations. Here, other histories which have been previously repressed emerged under the ruins of the city as a form memory (“colors of dreams crying for existence”) “that flashes up in a moment of danger.”¹³⁹

I live amidst hills of desolate buildings
rows of despair
crowded together

¹³⁷ Les Back and John Solomon, “Colonialism, Race and the Other,” in Les Back and John Solomon, eds., *Theories of Race and Racism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 253.

¹³⁸ Sandra María Esteves, “From Fanon,” in Faythe Turner, ed., *Puerto Rican Writers at Home in the USA* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1991), 181-182.

¹³⁹ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in Hanna Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999, 1955), 247.

in a chain of lifeless shells

Every five minutes the echoing roar
of the racing elevated train
sears thru the atmosphere
floating low over the horizon

But at every moment
like magic the shells breathe
and take the appearance of second cousins
or sometimes even look like old retired ladies
who have nothing more to do
but ride empty subways from stop to stop

At night
hidden away from the city
the youngbloods invade the train-yards
laiden with colors of dreams
crying for existence
on the empty walls of desolation's subway car
for old ladies to read on and on...¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Sandra María Estevez, "For South Bronx," in *Yerba Buena* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1981), 84.

Chapter 2

James Saxophone: Sounds and Histories of Urban Resistance in Naples and the South Bronx

James Senese: Sounds Between Naples and the Black Atlantic

It is not by chance that James Senese locates his sound between Naples and the Bronx (actually the South Bronx), two hybrid locations crossed by planetary currents and embedded in networks of resistance. Naples was a colonial city in the seventeenth century under Spanish rule, while simultaneously “host to some ten thousands foreign slaves.”¹ In 1647 Naples was the second largest city in Europe and home of the first proletarian revolt in the world. The revolt, led by Neapolitan fisherman Masaniello along with market women, sailors, and other poor people (lazzaroni), was also one of the first cases in the modern world of multicultural proletarian crowds organizing together in struggle. Historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker remind us:

One of Masaniello’s advisers had been a slave in Algeria for nineteen years, and another had been a gallery slave. . . . Masaniello had a daughter who was a blackamoor, who sang a song in praise of blackness. . . . During the summer-festival ritual that actually provided the flashpoint of the insurrection, Masaniello led a group of teenagers masked in blackface who attacked a mock fort in the middle of the mercato. Giraffi compared the armed women and girls of Naples and their decisive street-fighting skills to so many amazons.²

¹ Iain Chambers. *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 95.

² Peter Linebaugh, and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 114.

This creolized Neapolitan past did not disappear, it continued throughout the centuries with the arrival in the city “of rarely invited foreigners from Arabs to the Allied forces.”³ About Naples Iain Chambers writes “its culture, its language, its music, its historical identity and destiny are a product of this complex inheritance.”⁴ The multiethnic crowds in colonial Naples and throughout the revolutionary Atlantic that reverberate in the sounds of the South Bronx can also be heard in those of Naples in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1960s, with his best friend and vocalist Mario Musella, James Senese formed various groups such as the 4conny and especially the Showmen, which at that time was perhaps, as suggested in the book *Je sto cca* edited by journalist Carmine Aymone, the only real soul band in Italy.⁵ The Showmen had a few big hits, including a cover of “Un’ora sola ti vorrei” (a famous Italian song of the 1930s) and songs by Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and James Brown. In 1975 Senese together with drummer Franco Del Prete began the musical project Napoli Centrale, which became one of the most influential bands in terms of jazz/progressive rock/R&B in Naples over the last forty years.⁶ The sound of the early Napoli Centrale draws on equal doses of free jazz, blues, funk, rock and Neapolitan popular music.

Napoli Centrale as Blues Matrix

³ Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 45.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Carmine Aymone, *Je sto cca’...James Senese* (Naples, Guida, 2005).

⁶ Ibid. 114.

The name of the band “Napoli centrale” refers to the central railway station of Naples. Although James Senese and Franco Del Prete come from north Naples, they knew the station Napoli Centrale is located in downtown Naples and is a nodal juncture which connects the city center with the periphery. In addition, the area around the station has been a crossroad of cultures since the sixteenth century. Outside the walls of the city around *Porta Nolana* – not far from the actual central station and opposite to the terminal of the *Circumvesuviana*, a light-railway which connects Naples with the eastern hinterland - as Iain Chambers reminds us, “was known as the *moricino*, for it was there that the Moors, or Arab merchants, lived.”⁷

Naples during the sixteenth and seventeenth century attracted masses of people – merchants, peasants, vagabonds, runaway slaves, and bandits. According to historian Fernand Braudel:

Naples had no equivalent in Christendom. Her population – 280, 000 in 1595 – was twice that of Venice, three times that of Rome, four times that of Florence, and nine times that of Marseilles. The whole of Southern Italy flocked to the city, both the rich, often very rich, and the hopelessly wretched poor. The size of the population was one reason why so many luxury goods were produced there. Neapolitan goods in the sixteenth century were what would be called fancy goods today: lace, braids, frills, trimmings, silks light fabrics (taffetas), silken knots and cockades of all colors.⁸

⁷ Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 83.

⁸ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Translated by Sian Reynolds, Abridged by Richard Ollard (London: BCA, 1992, 1949), 250.

Peasants flocked to the city from the provinces and the rest of the Kingdom of Naples. “They were attracted by the arti of wool and silk; by the city’s public works in the time of Pietro di Toledo...by domestic employment in the households of nobles...”⁹ They were also attracted by the large markets in the area of *Porta Capuana* - what today is called the “*ferrovia*” (railway) because it is nearby the main railway stations in Naples. These masses brought with them sounds from rural areas. It was from the mix of popular music from the rural areas, the music of street musicians, Arabs, and the music composed in the houses of the aristocracy that the world-wide famous *canzone napoletana* (Neapolitan Song) emerged between the sixteenth and eighteenth century. Although the *canzone napoletana* is considered an “autochthonous authority” (Iain Chambers), it must be framed in these wider currents of sounds.

The band *Napoli Centrale* was also very much influenced by the sound coming from the hinterland, and by the shout of street vendors rather than from the “classic” tradition of *canzone napoletana*. In the more popular tradition of Neapolitan music, the sounds of the market around *Porta Capuana* are central. The Neapolitan folk band NCCP (Nuova Compagnia Canto Popolare) which in the 1970s revisited Neapolitan folk music made a tribute to this area of the city with a song titled *Porta Capuana*. Similarly Neapolitan jazz drummer Tullio De Piscopo who grew up not far from *Porta Capuana* was inspired by the voices and rhythms of the neighborhood. In this area in the seventeenth century the prison was located. In an interview, De Piscopo explains that one of the sounds most common people could hear on the road that connected the prison to

⁹ Ibid.

piazza Mercato, the square used for public executions (about one mile away), was the dark sound of drums accompanying prisoners to the execution site. The sonic composition of cities leaves historical traces for centuries. So De Piscopo learned to play drum thanks to previous soundscapes which continued to live on in the form of oral narrative.

In the early 20th- century the “*ferrovia*” went through a massive change. In 1884 the outbreak of a cholera epidemic killed more than 7,000 people. The Lower City, which included the slums around the docks, *Mercato*, and *Vicaria* was the area which suffered most from the cholera epidemic. As a consequence of cholera a massive project of slum clearance and urban renewal called the “*Risanamento*” was inaugurated.¹⁰ This project reconfigured the whole area around the port and of what today is called *ferrovia*. It consisted mainly of a slum clearance and the creation of large boulevards, *Corso Umberto*, *Corso Garibaldi*, *Via De Pretis* and the construction of large bourgeois buildings. Yet the “*Risanamento*” did not resolve the problem of public health because behind the *facciata* of wide boulevards and new buildings the slums of the Lower City continued to exist. The coming of the Second World War further changed the geography of the *ferrovia* since it was here that most of the allied air strikes occurred.

The *ferrovia* during the 1970s continued to be a thriving area. Yet, it became a part of the city resembling midtown of Manhattan in the 1970s with offices but also unofficial red light districts and petty crime. Many movie theaters became specialized in

¹⁰ Frank Snowden, *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

the popular genre of sceneggiata (a local version of action movies/musical/melodrama); others either closed down or became garages, supermarkets or turned into porno cinemas. The ferrovia, was and still is a place of transit with masses of commuters taking trains at the central station/*Napoli Centrale* and at the *Circumvesuviana*. The *ferrovia* more than the historic center of Naples is the hub of the whole metropolitan region. Since the 1990s it has become the area of the city with the largest migrant communities – Somali, Dominican, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Senegalese, Shri Lankian, North African and so on. In a sense, this is not new if we consider the creolized past of Naples. In my view, the description that best suits the hybrid dimension of the *ferrovia* has been given by the author Pepe Lanzetta. He writes: “Palermo me sora, Marsiglia me mamma, Dakar me frate... Questa è la ferrovia!” (“Palermo is my sister, Marseille is my mother, Dakar is my brother... That’s the ferrovia”).¹¹

The sound of Napoli Centrale is embedded in this sonic composition of working class neighborhoods of Naples and its hinterland. In their sound we can catch the echo of the shouts of street vendors of *Porta Capuana*, *Porta Nolana* and other markets: the voices of the wretched of the city, homeless, prostitutes, drunks, heroin addicts. The record “Simme iute e simme venute” (We left and we came back) mixes different sounds: The call of a fish vendor shouting “alici, alici alici” (anchovies, anchovies, anchovies)... a street march typical of rituals of festivities, moments of silence, fast drumrolls, Hammond organ, and the screams of James Senese that come close to James

¹¹ Pepe Lanzetta, “Introduction,” in Abdullah Ferdinando Ottaviano Quintavalle, *Grand Hotel Ferrovia* (Naples: Tullio Pironti Editore, 2008).

Brown. A blues line hits like a bullet the body of the listener: “ca sfurtuna ca avimma avuto” (with the bad luck we have had). Suddenly the voice of James becomes a percussive instrument mixing screams and indecipherable words. Gradually the sound becomes softer, just a piano accompanied by a saxophone. This is the jazz that recalls the hard be-bop of New York and the improvisation of the free jazz of Chicago. It also tells us local stories of Naples never seen in the mainstream representation of the city, far away from the stereotypes of journalism. Here we have something that evades representation: a powerful mix between James Brown, Neapolitan popular music of festivities and rituals, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, street vendors, and other found sounds of the city.¹²

The song “Ngazzat Nire” takes a clear position, speaking on the side of the oppressed. This is a record of pure R&B with straightforward and powerful lines penned

¹² On funk music see Rickey Vincent, *Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996); and Anne Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006). On James Brown see Martin Munro, “James Brown, Rhythm, and Black Power,” in *Different Drummers: Rhythm and Race in the Americas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). On funk and punk aesthetics see Greg Tate, “Hardcore of Darkness: Bad Brains,” in *Flyboy in the Butter-Milk: Essays on Contemporary America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992). On Bebop see Eric Lott, “Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style,” *Callaloo* (Summer 1988): 597-605; and Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 115-130. On free jazz, improvised music and the great Collectives of the 1960s and 1970s see Herman Gray, “The Jazz Left,” in *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 117-152; Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 191-239; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); George Lipsitz, “Jazz: The Hidden History of Nationalist Multiculturalism,” in *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, George Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights and the Ethics of Cocreation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). On rituals, chants and popular music in the area of Naples see Roberto De Simone, *Son sei sorelle: Rituali e canti della tradizione in Campania* (Rome: Squilibri Editore, 2010).

by drummer Franco Del Prete, like “chesta Napule riccona che dorme, snobba e fa a padrona vo dico e o penso veramente site a sfaccimma e tutta a gente.” (To the snobbish and rich people of the city, I say and really think that they are the real the scum). This position is underlined in another song titled “Ululu na na” from the 1992 album *Jesceallah*. This is a rebel song in the tradition of reggae and music of the slavery days. The refrain “we don’t feel all right/we don’t feel all right” is like a nightmarish blues in which a “bluesman at the cross-road sells his soul to the devil.”¹³ Yet, it also means that one day through struggle perhaps everything will be as it should be.

The sound of Napoli Centrale emerges from the street, and is possible to draw a parallel between the sound of Napoli Centrale with early hip hop culture and Nuyorican poets. They all draw from previous traditions but they also challenge these traditions. For all of them space is a central issue. They are subaltern practice emerging from the periphery of a postindustrial city. They are modernist practice in the sense of the avant-garde tradition. Yet, contrary to the European avant-garde they are to use George Lewis expression “Afrological” because they are embedded in the racial terror of the slave trade system. Here historical memory and alternative knowledge becomes central. Indeed European avant-gardes themselves drew from African artistic expression.¹⁴ In Napoli Centrale, as in the aesthetic of free jazz, hip hop and Nuyorican poets, sounds become a

¹³ This is a reference to Robert Johnson’s “Crossroad Blues,” quoted in The beautiful documentary about “Afrofuturism” titled *The Last Angel of History*, directed by John Akomfrah (1994).

¹⁴ George E. Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,” in Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 272-284. As Lewis argues: “One important aspect of Afrological improvisation is the notion of the importance of personal narrative, of ‘telling your own story’” (282).

form of calligraphy. They have haptic qualities that challenge the aural/visual dichotomy. They speak in the vicinity and not about people from the periphery. Sound itself becomes part of the urban struggle – and not simply its soundtrack - taking place in Naples since the 1970s. Although these sounds emerge from the streets, as in the blues and its derivatives, here the street is not a stable archive and site of authenticity. Rather, it acquires the form of “a polymorphous and multidirectional juncture.”¹⁵ Just as in black music, in the Neapolitan sounds there is a kind of “utopic/dystopic tension”: this is the instability of living under the volcano, within histories of racism, marginality, lost, the impossibility of paying bills but also the hope of a better future.



Figure 3. “Circumvesuviana” terminal in Porta Nolana in the district of the “ferrovia” (a commuter railroad connecting Naples with the eastern outskirts, vesuvian area and Sorrento). “It is here that Naples truly appears as sequel to *Blade Runner*.”¹⁶ Photo by the author.

¹⁵ Kun, *Audiotopia*, 89.

¹⁶ This phrase is Giuliana Bruno’s. She uses it in another context in her *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2002), 368.



Figure 4. “Circumvesuviana” terminal in Porta Nolana. In the background the new *city* of Naples projected by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange. Photo by the author.

“Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen”: Globalization from Below

The sound of James Senese and Napoli Centrale tells stories of connections. It certainly came out of the encounter between black music and Neapolitan music in Naples during the occupation by the Allies forces from 1943 to 1946, together with the continual American presence in the city during the Cold War. In 1943 the Allied liberated Naples from Nazi troops and Fascism. From 1943 to 1947 the Allies occupied the city. During this time jazz clubs proliferated in Naples. Some of them were improvised clubs in confiscated public structures, local clubs and in some cases even private apartments.¹⁷

¹⁷ My grandmother told me that during the Allies occupation (1943-1946) opposite to her apartment a club was confiscated by the Allies and turned in a disco bar and jazz club. My grandmother who lived on the ground-floor had known confidentially that some officers had put an eye on her apartment because it would

Others were located in Neapolitan theaters like “the Augusteo” which became the “Red Cross” or the “Zig Zag” located in the larger arcade of Naples, Galleria Umberto I. The Shaker club in via Caracciolo by the sea-side became a point of reference for Neapolitan jazz lovers and musicians. Here pianist Renato Carosone who in his long career proposed a fusion of jazz, boogie-woogie and canzone napoletana, made his debut in 1949.¹⁸ Jazz, had already reached Naples during the 1920s thanks to Neapolitan musicians who regularly toured in the United States and to the continuous exchange between Italian Americans and African Americans in New York and other cities. Yet jazz as a stable soundtrack in Naples arrived during World War II and the Allied occupation with the introduction of so called v-disc (vinyl discs produced for the troops in Europe). V-discs were played by disc-jockeys at radio Napoli and introduced the sound of swing and big band jazz in the air waves of Naples.¹⁹

The presence of black soldiers in Naples during World War II is magisterially depicted in Roberto Rossellini’s neorealist cinematic masterpiece *Paisà* (1945). The film follows the liberation of Italy from Fascism beginning from the South with the Allied invasion of Sicily and ending in the north with the guerrilla fighting of Italians brigades of partisans. The second episode of the film is set in Naples. In the best tradition of neorealist films, the camera seeks out the streets of the city focusing on the encounter

have been a good location for a club. I am not sure if this was only a rumor, but for sure I know that my aunt (my grandmother’s daughter) who at that time was a child was terrorized by drunken troops who almost jumped into the apartment.

¹⁸ Marilisa Merolla, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Italian Way: Propaganda americana e modernizzazione nell’Italia che cambia* (Rome: Coniglio Editore, 2011). To my knowledge this book is the most complete account of the American presence in Naples in the Cold War era.

¹⁹ Diego Librando, *Il Jazz a Napoli dal dopoguerra agli anni Sessanta* (Naples: Guida, 2004).

between a Neapolitan “scugnizzo” (street urchin) and an African American GI. They start wandering in a wounded city. They sit on the ruins of bombarded buildings. The black GI is drunk and starts singing the classic blues “nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen.” Then a whistle of a train is heard on the background, the soldier continues to speak in English even if the child does not understand. At this point, the soldier imitating the sound of the train in motion says a train is bringing me back home...going home – going home – going home. He makes the child laugh for the first time, then suddenly he turns serious and says: “I don’t want to go home.” Since he is drunk he falls asleep and the street urchin says in dialect: “Joe if you fall asleep I am going to steal your boots.” The day after Joe meets by chance the street urchin. He’s angry at him because the boy had stolen his boots and he wants them back. The soldier says: “now bring me to your father and mother.” Once they arrived at the street urchin’s home, a shanty town located in a cave, the soldier says first in English and then in Italian “where is your mother and father.” The child replies: “they are both dead under the bombs.” The African American soldier sees the condition of extreme poverty in which the street urchin and other people live. Their suffering is not so different from the one his community faces back home in the South of the United States. Finally he leaves without his shoes. He has realized that Neapolitan poor are closer to him than the white GIs. At that time African American troops were still segregated. In addition African American soldiers returning home to the South could still be killed and lynched by the Ku Klux Klan.²⁰ In this episode, Rossellini

²⁰ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 83-90. On U.S. popular culture in Europe see Reinhold Wagnleitner and

perhaps wanted to show that the Neapolitan working-classes lived in a condition that made them Italian blacks. It is this alliance of survival between black soldiers and the Neapolitan poor that also emerges in the classic E.A. Mario 1944 song *Tammurriata nera*. This song which deals with a dramatic event of the war, following the blues tradition of humor, tells the story of black babies born to Neapolitan girls.

The U.S. presence in the city did not finish with the end of the war.²¹ In 1951 Naples because of its strategic position in the Mediterranean and its large port was chosen as the headquarters of the “Allied Forces Southern Europe,” and of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, becoming the “major subordinate command to be responsible for the defense of NATO’s right flank as it faced the Iron Curtain.”²² The U.S. Sixth Fleet consisted of 50 ships, 25,000 men and over 100 aircraft.²³ The AFSOUTH, initially was located in a hotel on the hill of Posillipo. Yet, in 1954 it moved to a newly multifunctional structure in the western neighborhood of Bagnoli. This was one of the largest structures in the city equipped with a stadium, a theater and offices. In addition the AFSOUTH structures included a large hospital and shopping mall at walking distance from the Bagnoli headquarter; a huge recreational area called “Carney Park” with several sports facilities, barbeques areas and concert spaces in the nearby town of Pozzuoli; a high school with cutting edge facilities in via Manzoni; and the USO club in the city center by the port.

Elaine Tyler May, eds., *The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000).

²¹ Merolla, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Italian Way*, Especially chapter 2.

²² *Uss Mt. Olympus in 1951 to Bagnoli 1961 four U.S. Admirals Commands AFSouth*, “Panorama. U.S. Naval Support Activity, Naples,” June 16, 1961, 4-5. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 27.

²³ Merolla, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Italian Way*, 35.

Around the port were also located many clubs where American bands regularly played blues, jazz and rock and roll. The most famous of these clubs was the Bluebird. It has been estimated that thousands of American sailors attended the club between the 1954 and 1962.²⁴

Black music, as historian Penny Von Eschen puts it, became “a cold war weapon.”²⁵ In Naples jazz was promoted as a symbol of American democracy and freedom. The USIS Naples film library had more than 3.000 films. A special section of the library material was called “The many colored spectrum of American life” which offered a rosy picture of race relations in the United States. The library also organized a special lecture on jazz delivered by a music critic of the New York Times.²⁶ What perhaps the NATO staff did not expect was that the working-classes and youths of Naples would appropriate black music as a form of critique of their presence in the city. Pino Daniele the most famous bluesman in the city was introduced to the blues at clubs around the port not far from the block where he grew up. Pino Daniele on the record “Ce sta chi ce pensa” (1977) makes a connection between the abandonment of the city by local politicians and the privileges that NATO had in the city. The song says that the “Americans” are taking the best places in the city, while in the working class areas of the Sanità and Quartieri Spagnoli communities became poorer and poorer.²⁷ In a live version

²⁴ Ibid., 34.

²⁵ Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

²⁶ Merolla, *Rock 'n' Roll Italian Way*, 31.

²⁷ Pino Daniele, “Ce sta chi ce penza,” in *Terra mia* (1977) EMI Italiana.

of this song Pino Daniele introduces the song saying: “vabbuo nun da retta, facimmece stu blues” (Forget about it, let’s do the blues). The music is a powerful country blues mixed up with Neapolitan folk using mandolin, flute and vocal effects typical of Neapolitan street musicians and actors:

Se ne cadeno 'e palazze e a nuje ce abbrucia 'o
mazzo
'A città è cchiù pulita ma ognuno mette 'o dito
E nce vo' mangnà'
Ma nun dà retta, ce sta chi ce penza
'Mmiez a 'sta gente ce sta chi ce penza
E l'America è arrivata
Nce ha purtato tanti cose
So' tant'anne e tanta storia
E nun se ne v`a
S'è pigliato 'e meglio posti'e chesta città
Mentre nuje jettammo 'o sang'
Dinto 'e quartieri 'a Sanità.²⁸

The cold war propaganda wished to show that jazz was an American art that transcended race. In Naples jazz and black American music in general were embraced by working class musicians who believed Neapolitans were the Italian blacks because they suffered the same form of exclusion when they travelled north. For Neapolitans abandoned by institution America was black, and jazz was an international sound of

²⁸ http://www.angolotesti.it/P/testi_canzoni_pino_daniele_1450/testo_canzone_ce_sta_chi_ce_penza_36376.html (Accessed 1/11/2014).

solidarity. It became part of a “methodology of the oppressed.”²⁹ Black music was not simply appropriated but fused with local sounds which were themselves hybridized. In other words, the arrival of African American music in Naples was more than a simple journey of black music from the United States to Europe, or a kind of ‘blackening of Europe;’ as some scholars suggest.³⁰ Rather, here we have a Black Atlantic that meets an already creolized Mediterranean in a process of cultural globalization from below.³¹ Indeed, the arrival of black music in Europe was part of a broader project of exporting American culture worldwide in the era of Cold War.³² But globalization is a large and multifaceted process. There is a globalization from above (the slave trade system, imperialism, the Marshall Plan, trans-national corporations, global capital) and a globalization from below (revolts, subaltern cultures, rebel sounds, migrations, diasporas, subcultures). They run parallel and are also inter-connected, but the globalization from below has largely been silenced by economical and political interests and their official histories. This is also a slippery field since sometimes the globalization emerging from below has been used by corporations and media conglomerates to sell products, but at

²⁹ I borrow this term from critical theorist and feminist scholar Chela Sandoval. See her *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

³⁰ Heike Rapahel-Hernandez, ed., *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³¹ James Clifford, “Diasporas,” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 276.

³² May Joseph, “Soul, Transnationalism, and Imaginings of Revolution: Tanzanian Ujamaa and the Politics of Enjoyment,” in Monique Guillory and Richard C. Green, eds., *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

other times globalization from below has influenced local social movements.³³ James Senese engaged in such globalization from below by fusing black sounds with hybrid Neapolitan folk and popular music to create a sound which stands side by side with the “wretched of the city.”

“We Don’t Feel All Right”: Sounding Out the Periphery

Napoli Centrale emerged in a specific moment of Naples history. During the 1970s and 1980s with the plan of periphery Naples became a metropolitan region. As we have seen Naples always had attracted masses from all over. In addition, already in the early 20th-century sociologist Francesco Saverio Nitti envisaged a metropolitan area of Naples with a plan for the industrial development of Naples and its hinterland. The Piccinato Master Plan of the 1936-39 also focused on the idea of a greater Naples but paid particular attention to the green areas around the casali (small villages) located around the northern area of Naples. In the postwar decades everything was done to promote a greater Naples but the Piccinato plan was not respected.³⁴ Infact, the hinterland of Naples expanded in all directions without regard for preserving green and rural areas. The 167 Law and the Plan of Periphery of the 1960s had good intentions, namely giving the possibility to families who lived in extreme conditions of poverty in

³³ Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, (London: Verso, 2004), 17-34; Stuart Hall, ‘The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity,’ in Anthony D. King, ed., *Culture, Globalization and the World-System* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1991), 19-39; George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

³⁴ Benedetto Gravagnuolo, “Napoli, progetti e storia,” in Franco Cassano, Maurizio Conte, Daniela Lepore, eds., *Lo spazio della città: trasformazioni urbane a Napoli nell’ultimo secolo* (Naples: Clean, 1981).

the alleys of Naples to move to public housing on the outskirts. In addition in the 1970s with a chronic problem in housing and with earthquake of the 1980, there occurred a massive relocation of families from overcrowded areas of the city, from rural areas of the hinterland, and from areas damaged by the earthquake to public housing located in the periphery of Naples. Most of the interventions in public housing were done around the *casali* in north Naples and east Naples. With the emergency of the earthquake more public housing were built further out from the city limits. The periphery of Naples became much larger and included other towns which previously were largely rural settlements.³⁵ Here the distinction rural/urban overlapped. The tradition of rural societies continued to exist in a new environment. James Senese, as we have seen, was born in Miano. Miano is located in the north of Naples and was annexed to the city in the 1920s. It consists of *casali* (small villages) built during the Bourbon kingdom on the axes connecting Naples with Caserta. When James was a child, around Miano in the areas of Piscinola, Chiaiano, Scampìa there were cultivated fields and cherry trees. During the 1950s this area began to change. It was in this moment that the idea of north Naples took place with the fusion of the villages of Marianella, Piscinola, Miano, Mianella, and San Pietro a Patierno and Capodichino.³⁶ The interventions of public housing first occurred in the early 20th-century in the area of Capodichino. Between the 1945 and 1964 the public

³⁵ See Alessandro Dal Piaz, *Napoli 1945-1985. Quarant'anni di urbanistica* (Rome: Franco Angeli, 1985); Alessandro Dal Piaz, Immacolata Aprenda, Fabrizio Mangoni, Livio Talamona, eds., *Da 'periferia' a 'città': Studi e proposte per Napoli* (Rome: Franco Angeli, 1989); Lilia Pagano, *Periferie di Napoli: La geografia, il quartiere, l'edilizia pubblica* (Naples: Electa, 2001); Gabriella Corona, *I ragazzi del piano: Napoli e le ragioni dell'ambientalismo urbano* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2007); Francesco Ceci and Daniela Lepore, *Arcipelago Vesuviano: Percorsi e ragionamenti intorno a Napoli* (Lecce: Argo, 1997).

³⁶ Corona, *I ragazzi del piano*.

housing of the INA casa and ICISMEI in Miano (where James' family moved in the 1950s and still lives) and Secondigliano were built. In the 1960s just a few miles from James' neighborhood in Piscinola a big complex of public housing called "Rione Don Guanella" was also built. The population of Rione Don Guanella was composed of families coming from very poor areas of the center of Naples. These families moved there with the hope to start a better life. Some of them left very precarious conditions living in single rooms at street level where there was, no separation of toilet from kitchen. Sometimes eight/nine family components occupied these spaces.³⁷ Yet in Rione Don Guanella they found a similar situation if not worse. This neighborhood was not connected to a center, had no sanitary pick up service. At least living in a single room in the alleys of the city center, families were part of a social network, the streets were an extension of the home, everyone knew each other. In Rione Don Guanella children had no other choice but playing in streets infested by rats, without community surveillance because the spaces were too large.³⁸ Between the 1964 and 1989 there were further interventions of public housing with the Law 167 in what today is called Scampia. Part of the 167 consists of the infamous "vele buildings" because of their sail-like shape. This neighborhood had streets twenty meters wide, the buildings were all the same and so huge that it was possible to lose one's orientation. The sound of James Senese is a critical intervention about the chaotic expansion of Naples. It tells stories of people who had grown up in rural areas in the 1950s and then suddenly saw their towns and villages invested by these massive

³⁷ Lello Mazzacane, *I bassi di Napoli* (Naples: Guida, 1978).

³⁸ Marzio Bellacci and Raffaele Ubaldi, "Se Napoli Esplode," *Epoca*, 37-39.

changes. It tells stories of villages around Naples, which in the past were rural centers, and then with installations of factories and the construction of public housing turned in ghost towns populated only by dogs, children and the elderly.³⁹ As ethnomusicologist Roberto De Simone puts it, the saxophone sound and voice of James Senese, move from the underground to push, like a nightmarish demon, on the consciousness of the Neapolitan elite and upper class. The Naples of the “robber barons,” the nouveau riches of the postwar years, the unscrupulous contractors, the speculators of the earthquake, the corrupt politicians who were mainly accountable for unemployment, the creation of ghettos in which the majority of the local population has no choice but to join the camorra or do illegal activities.⁴⁰

³⁹ I am drawing here from Napoli Centrale’s songs “Campagna,” “Viecchie, mugliere, muorte e criaturi,” “A gente ‘e Bucciano.” All these songs are in their first album titled *Napoli Centrale* (1975).

⁴⁰ Roberto De Simone, “Prefazione,” in Aymone, *Je sto ccà...James Senese*, 2005, 12.



Figure 5. Urban struggle for better housing at the “vele” in Scampia (a “housing project” in the district of Scampia – North Naples, 1986. Source: *Storia Fotografica di Napoli, 1985-1993. Dal ‘grande freddo’ degli anni ‘80 alla svolta di Bassolino* (Naples: Intra Moenia, 2001), 45.

The Narrative of the Urban Crisis of Naples

The sound of James Senese links Naples to the Bronx for another reason. The Bronx stands as a dangerous place, a no-go area, a symbol of urban crisis. Racist representation of the Bronx have made the link between poverty, crime and race, blaming black and Puerto Rican working class communities for the devastation of the borough.

Naples has received the same unfair treatment. It is considered a symbol of Italian urban decline. Its poorer population has been racialized and viewed as an internal other, both in Italy and Naples itself.

The urban crisis of Naples became a narrative. Indeed this narrative has a long history, it dates back to the travel diaries of Northern European and American writers such as Goethe, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and others, and to the Italian school of Criminal Anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century. However, it was after the Second World War that in the context of the Cold War and the Marshall Plan studies on the urban poor of Naples and New York overlapped with Oscar Lewis's books *The Children of Sanchez* and *La Vida*, a study on Puerto Rican families in New York and San Juan, and the highly influential ethnographic study of urban poverty in Naples carried out by the late Thomas Belmonte during the 1970s and 1980s.⁴¹ Lewis and Belmonte conceived the culture of poverty as a set of coping mechanisms people created to struggle against discrimination and oppression. Nonetheless, their studies reinforced derogatory interpretations of the urban poor of Naples and New York. One of the elements that Lewis, and to some extents Belmonte, identified as part of the culture of poverty was the female-headed household. In this, as anthropologist Ida Susser suggests, we hear echoes

⁴¹ On the influence of American social science and policies on the "urban poverty" discourse in Naples see Gabriella Gribaudi, "Images of the South: The Mezzogiorno as seen by Insiders and Outsiders," in Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris, eds., *The New History of the Italian South: Mezzogiorno Revisited* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press); Ida Susser "Foreword," in Thomas Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain* (New York: Columbia University, 2005); Victoria A. Goddard, *Gender, Family and Work in Naples* (Oxford and Washington.: Berg, 1996); Enrica Morlicchio, "Exclusion from work and the Impoverishment Processes in Naples," in Enzo Mingione, ed., *Urban Poverty and the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 338-339; Italo Pardo, *Managing Existence in Naples: Morality, Action and Structure* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998.)

of the work of Patrick Moynihan. In his 1965 report to the U.S. government, he blamed the “matriarchal structure” of the African American families during the 1960s for the rise of crime, the diffusion of drugs, and the increase of welfare dependency in the inner-cities of American cities.⁴²

In 1959 the political scientist Edward Banfield wrote a path-breaking and controversial book based on ethnographic research in a small village of southern Italy titled *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*.⁴³ This book which tried to explain southern Italy’s backwardness had a tremendous impact on Italian public opinion. Its argument was subsequently applied to Naples, which symbolized Southern Italy’s underdevelopment. In 1968 Banfield wrote *The Unheavenly City* a book about the urban crisis of US cities in which we find echoes of the argument he developed in *The Moral Basis*.⁴⁴ Referring to this connection, historian Michael Katz observed: “like the Montegransesi, the American urban lower classes remained trapped by a culture that inhibited advancement and perpetuated pathology.”⁴⁵ This book, which along with other studies conducted by scholars and public commentators such as Charles Murray and Irving Kristol shaped the perception of urban crisis of New York in the 1970s, was applied to Naples during the same decade.

⁴² Susser, “Foreword,” In Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain*.

⁴³ Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of Backward Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1958).

⁴⁴ Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968).

⁴⁵ Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*, 30.

As in New York, the construction of the urban crisis of Naples was orchestrated by a variety of voices—anthropologists, sociologists, journalists, filmmakers, politicians and so on – which deeply influenced everyday perspectives of Naples. For example, when American literary scholar Nelson Moe came to Italy to study, his first encounter with the racialized discourse of Naples was not in a seminar room or library but travelling on a train directed towards the South. In the introduction of his book *The View from Vesuvius*, he recalls this episode: “Having recently arrived for a semester of study abroad in Perugia, I had decided to go South for the Easter break. When I told the Florentine woman in my compartment that I planned to stop in Naples, a look of dismay spread across her face. Didn’t I know that this was a filthy, dangerous city, full of hucksters and thieves? Didn’t I know that the south was like Africa? With so many beautiful cities to see in the north, why was I heading to the Mezzogiorno?”⁴⁶

The Counter-Geography of Sound

It is in this context that “The term ‘The Bronx’ as ‘no-man’s-land,’⁴⁷ has been applied to the periphery of Naples – which with the Bronx also shares a high percentage of public housing – to describe it as pathological and “desolate battleground traversed by

⁴⁶ Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) xiii.

⁴⁷ Lydia Lee, “Photographic Approaches to the Discourse of the South Bronx,” in John A. Farmer, ed., *Urban Mythologies: The Bronx Represented Since the 1960s*, (New York, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1999), 10.

human monsters on the very margins of sanity.”⁴⁸ Cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall argues that “meaning can never be finally fixed.”⁴⁹ As we have seen with Afrika Bambaataa, but re-territorialized in the urban reality of Naples, the term Bronx has been re-appropriated by James Senese not as a site of dysfunctional culture but as a site of struggle, opposition and creativity. Against a stereotypical image of the periphery of Naples, we hear in the sound of James Senese and Napoli Centrale a total reconfiguration of official cartographies and histories. Rather than merely replacing a positive with a negative image of the periphery, they disrupt the dichotomy center/periphery. For them the periphery is the center. Their music can be framed by the work of the philosopher Henri Lefebvre. As Lefebvre argues: “The dominant space, that of the space of richness and power, is forced to fashion the dominated space, that of the periphery.”⁵⁰ Like Lefebvre’s idea of “the right to the city,” the ragged, acerbic sound of James Senese and Napoli Centrale, strung out along infinite spirals of blues inflections, tells us stories from the perspective of the periphery and the excluded.⁵¹ These stories are not strictly political, but they are militant because they are about urban survival. Here we find a link that connects Napoli Centrale with the “blues epistemology.” Black feminist critic bell hooks has written extensively on the space of the margins as a site of openness and radical possibilities. In her book *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* she

⁴⁸ Colin McArthur, “Chinese Boxes and Russian Dolls: Tracking the Elusive Cinematic City,” in David B. Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City* (London & New York, Routledge, 1997), 31.

⁴⁹ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other,’” in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London, Sage, 1997), 270.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Rosalyn Deutsche, “The Threshold of Democracy,” in *Urban Mythologies: The Bronx Represented Since the 1960s*, 98.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

writes: “I am located in the margins but I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle.”⁵²

“Historical Knowledge”

Like in rap and other forms of black music, “historical knowledge” is central to the music of James Senese and Napoli Centrale.⁵³ This critical “knowledge,” is most sharply announced and sustained in the fibre and texture of a migrating bluesology. In black American cultural expressions the recovery of history is the consequence of racial terror and oppression.⁵⁴ Napoli Centrale embraces this kind of struggle but they have adapted it to the local circumstances of the hinterland of Naples and to the “Southern Question.” Neapolitans are frequently considered to be “Italian blacks” in Italian racist discourse. While positivistic sociology, mainstream media and the “popular masses of the North” (Antonio Gramsci) have sought to explain the poverty of Naples, and of the South in general, in racial and cultural terms, in actuality, as Antonio Gramsci famously

⁵² bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 153.

⁵³ On afro-diasporic music and historical knowledge see Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1994, 1987), 197-209.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

wrote in his *Prison Notebooks*, "...[Italian] national unity was not achieved on the basis of equality, but as the result of the hegemony of the North over the Mezzogiorno and the territorial relationship of the city to the countryside; the North was an "octopus" that enriched itself at the cost of the South, its industrial and economic progress was in direct relationship to the impoverishment of southern industry and agriculture."⁵⁵

James Senese, talking about his childhood in the neighborhood of Miano when peasant culture was still a component of that area, remembers how women and men sang folk songs while working the land. This was an image similar to those held by American blacks who recalled the singing of work songs in the United States, which later inspired blues and jazz. These Neapolitan versions of work songs about poverty, suffering and oppression shapes Senese's music.⁵⁶ Here, "[h]istory is harvested and collected, to be assembled, made to speak, re-membered, re-read and rewritten."⁵⁷

Such historical knowledge is conveyed through sound itself. It is a kind of "blues continuum" which has its roots and *routes* in the black Atlantic, but is *re-routed* through other destinations.⁵⁸ This blues tradition is continuously adapted to new historical contexts, given local inflections and attached to new acts of resistance. This is a kind of

⁵⁵ Quoted in Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 111.

⁵⁶ Aymone, *Je sto cca*, 15.

⁵⁷ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

⁵⁸ The term 'blues continuum' was coined by Leroy Jones (Amiri Baraka). In his work on black music, Baraka proposes an approach to black music understood as a 'changing same' that adapts continuously to new historical phases of the black experience in America without losing its initial oppositional meaning born during slavery. See Leroy Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from it*, (New York: William Morrow, 1963.)

“changing same” that becomes “a basis for thought.”⁵⁹ It makes us to think about the overlapping histories of imperialism, racism, class and gender. It re-articulates in sonorial waves in C. L. R. James’ argument that “...to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.”⁶⁰

“The Corner of the Corner of the Street”: Sound and Art as Urban Struggle in the Bronx and Naples

Like Afrika Bambaataa and Sandra María Esteves James Senese and the other member of Napoli Centrale, Franco Del Prete, have been actively involved in the life of their neighborhoods, and have strong connections with grass-roots groups and community based organizations in North Naples.⁶¹ They converted into sound the activities of grass-root groups, cultural and community based organizations in northern Naples seeking, since the 1970s, to obtain better housing, services and recreational space for children. Such organizations in North Naples and the Bronx, for example GRIDAS and the Bronx Parents Association, have set up special programs in which youths and children of disadvantaged areas of North Naples and the South Bronx were actively involved in reading groups, film screenings, theater performances, and workshops with

⁵⁹ Leroy Jones, Quoted in Kun, *Audiotopia*, 138.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Gilroy, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, 15.

⁶¹ See the documentary *Canzonette mai!...Napoli Centrale*. This essential documentary is available on you tube in three episodes. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUJHV80aSn0> (Accessed March 14, 2014).

artists and musicians.⁶² Poet Sandra María Esteves referring to the experience of bringing art to the South Bronx communities says: “We want to keep art in the community. Everyone wants fame and fortune, but that’s not our priority. Our priority is to empower our community.”⁶³ Similarly, Napoli Centrale in their song *Napule t’e sceta* (‘Wake up Naples’) warn that “Male ‘e ‘sta città chi ha vo bbene pò parla’, ...ma nun ho permette: A ‘stu nord e l’Italy” [Bad things about this city can be said by people who love it, but I cannot stand for people who don’t live in this reality to say so].⁶⁴ In another song titled *Buona sera Mari* they “sound out” the grounded spaces of the city. Like botanists on the asphalt they rewrite the last fifty years of Naples’ history through the life story of a woman named Maria. “Figliete Totore, sotto terra, l’eroina è cchiù d’ ‘a Guerra...allucanne ‘nmiez’ ‘e piazze” [Your son Totore has been buried...the heroin is worse than a war...Screaming in the squares].⁶⁵ Here we can find a strident similarity with the condemnation of heroin made by the twelve years old Nuyorican poet Jorge López in *About the Rats* (1975).

The rats sell drugs they take it – they use it – they stick themselves with dirty needles...they use it in the Bronx, they get into cocaine like they get into the billiards clubs they are behind the eight ball...the rats sells to the old men, ladies, and to young people like me George López ...but George

⁶² Gridas is a cultural association from the neighborhood of Scampia founded by Felice Pignataro and his wife Mirella Pignataro in the 1970s. It promotes social art. Here it is a link to some of the murals Felice realized across the periphery of Naples between in the 1980s and 1990s http://www.felicepignataro.org/home.php?mod=murales&sub=00elenco_ita&ord=anno%2Ctitolo&pag=0 . Also, to learn more about the association see the general webpage, which has many interesting links to their activities (though this is in Italian): <http://www.felicepignataro.org/home.php>. See also Francesco Di Martino and Il Gridas, *Sulle tracce di Felice Pignataro* (Napoli: Marotta & Cafiero), 2011.

⁶³ Carmen Dolores Hernandez, *Puerto Rican Voices in English* (Westport CT, Praeger, 1997), 60.

⁶⁴ Napoli Centrale, “Napule T’e sceta,” in *Ngazzate nire*, 1994.

⁶⁵ Napoli Centrale, “Buona sera Mari,” in *Ibid.*

López is the DDT against the rats. I am the rat poison that will get into the corner of the corner of the streets...oh man, yeah, man yes there are plenty of rats and we need more cats...the cats will have a war against the rats very soon.⁶⁶

There is no distinction between art and urban struggle in Naples and the Bronx. The work of Sandra María Esteves with writers corp, the students of the Witt High School in the Bronx and of Felice Pignataro the founder of GRIDAS with his wife Mirella all seeking to erase this gap.

Sandra María Esteves was part of the group of poets and writers who organized the “Bronx Writers Corps.” Many of the participants to the workshops were teen-agers who had never written before. Commenting on this experience, Esteves says: “What I do in WritersCorps I do anyway, and have been doing since 1973, when I met Papo. We immediately formed a group and were the cultural wing of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party at the time. Whenever the Party had a political activity, they would bring the poets and musicians to unite folks and stir up people’s thinking. These were struggles, even then, about our purpose, about how to interact with the community.”⁶⁷ Here we can make a parallel between Sandra María Esteves and other community-based activists like Lillian Lopez who launched the South Bronx Library project in which boys and girls participated in workshops with writers such as Piri Thomas author of “Down to these

⁶⁶ Jorge López , “About the Rats,” in Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero, eds., *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings* (New York: William Morrow, 1975), 42.

⁶⁷ Sandra María Esteves, in Mary Herbert, ed., *Not Black and White: Inside Words from the Bronx WritersCorps*, (Austin: Plain View Press, 1996), 135.

Mean Streets” and *plena* musicians from Puerto Rico.⁶⁸ As in the case of Lopez the aim of Esteves was to empower the Puerto Rican community in one of the poorest district of New York City. In Esteves’s words: “So one thing we’re doing, with the help of WritersCorps, is empowering our communities with knowledge of our cultural inheritance, making our community aware of our literature. We have a path and a history that’s been deliberality taken away from us. Part of the colonial plan was to keep the masses ignorant. Maybe if people had a sense of self-worth, they wouldn’t turn to drugs so easily.”⁶⁹

Struggles to empower the community were undertook even by students of De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx through the creation of Clinton comics. In one strip called “Needle Man Context,” we follow the adventure of needle man (a person with the form of a syringe) who is menacing the neighborhood. Needle man goes out in the morning, he takes the bus, knocks on the door of a house, a young boy opens the door...On the next page there is a blank box. Beneath it we read: “Needle man is a villain, we need a superhero to get needle man. What will stop him? Who will stop him? How will be stopped? Can you create the superhero who stops needle man? If you think you can, enter our contest. Draw your superhero in the box on this page. Bring your entry

⁶⁸ See Lillian López Papers, “South Bronx Project,” box 4, folder 6; South Bronx Project Part I and II,” box 6, folder 1; “The New York Public Library’s South Bronx Project,” box 2, folder 6; “Fickle Cucaracha Lures,” box 4, folder 3; “South Bronx Project 1972 LSCA 72-73,” box 6, folder 2; “Programa,” box 6, Folder 1; “Sompsec Dance Workshop,” box 6, folder 1; “Melrose Library, Sept. 24, 1969: Notes of Interest,” box 6, folder 1. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diasporas, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

to Mrs. Kitt in rm. 262 before 2P.M. Friday...”⁷⁰ Fighting heroin with imagination, sometime could be more effective than fighting it with repression.

Another comic is called “Salsa.” Drawn and written by Alfonso Serrano, a student of De Witt Clinton high school. The protagonist of the comic is the student himself. He says that in the Bronx there are many social problems like robberies and heroin addiction. There are not many safe spaces for children to play. Yet, on the street corners he meets with his friend and play drums. One day with his friends decide to go fishing in the Bronx river. Suddenly he imagines he is on the banks of the Rio Grande de Loiza in Puerto Rico. In the next strip we see a tropical beach, palms, and a wonderful sun. Here he meets a kid who asks him “in which part of Puerto Rico were you born?” He replies: “Man, I was born here in New York.” Suddenly we return to the Bronx and as if by magic we hear the sound of a drum. This simple and wonderful story teaches a lot about salsa music as a form of community and struggle in the Bronx barrios.⁷¹ As Young Lords leader and poet Felipe Luciano explains:

Here in New York we are the most oppressed people. You’ve seen the dancers and what I call the cultural priests – the musicians. You’ve seen the joy, the very life, the pulsating rhythms which are our community. But all that belies our political reality. You can see the musicians playing three gigs a night, high on coke, for something like 30 or 40 dollars a night, their lips down to their knees, exhausted trying to support their families ... Every one of those musicians playing on the streets of New York is in his own way a keeper of tradition. There’s not one musician playing conga or trumpet, whether Puerto Rica, Cuban or ‘hispanic,’ who does not understand what the roots of his [sic] culture are. Ours will be the music of

⁷⁰ “Needle Man Contest,” *Clinton Comics*, Created by the students of DeWitt Clinton High School, Bronx, NY, 1975.

⁷¹ “Salsa,” *Clinton Comics*, Created by the students of DeWitt Clinton High School, Bronx, NY, 1975.

the Americas in the 1980s and 1990s. It's the street music that will survive, because there are more street people, poor people. It's the music of the people because it is their conscience. That's what salsa is.⁷²

Felice Pignataro was born in Rome in 1940.⁷³ He grew up in the outskirts of Bari and then moved to Naples in 1958 to study Architecture at the University of Naples. With his wife Mirella he founded a "counter-school" to teach the children of the shantytowns in the neighborhoods of Poggioreale first and Secondigliano later. In 1972 he moved with Mirella to Scampia. Here, in 1981 Mirella and Felice founded the cultural association GRIDAS. Felice and Mirella continued the kind of counter-school they inaugurated in the late 1960s in the shanty-towns. One of the components of this alternative pedagogy was the making of Murals. Inspired by the great Latin American tradition of muralists, Felice realized more than 200 hundreds murals both in the Neapolitan region and Italy. Art historian E.H. Gombrich defined Felice as the most prolific muralist in the world. The work of Felice was collective. He painted the borders of figures and the children put colors in it. The majority of murals represented people who walk in order to give a sense of community to people who felt marginalized by society. Like in the music of Napoli Centrale, the murals are from the perspective of the working-class people, they speak in the vicinity of the movements of the unemployed, the urban movements for housing, and the "wretched of the city." Although James

⁷² Felipe Luciano, Quoted in Cristopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in African American Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 443.

⁷³ Francesco Di Martino and Il Gridas, *Sulle tracce di Felice Pignataro* (Napoli: Marotta & Cafiero), 2011.

Senese and Felice Pignataro never worked together they are both interested in the everyday life of the periphery and the inner-city. Felice's murals are like the graffiti of New York and the early work of Jean Michel Basquiat. There is no ticket to pay to see them, they are part of the city, they cover disadvantaged neighborhoods with wonderful colored walls. These walls are generally in neighborhoods with a high density of public housing. We cannot think of graffiti without thinking of music. Similarly, Felice's murals are forms multimedia art. They are visual but touch other senses too. Felice used the metaphor of the tree of knowledge in order to describe his murals and the other activities carried out at GRIDAS. He said that in order to capture the tree of knowledge we need ears to listen to other sounds which are different from those of the mainstream media and pedagogy; eyes in order to see with our own eyes and not those of television; hands in order to make things; feet to go and see what is going on.⁷⁴ In this way, Felice's murals and activities became a sort of testimony to the everyday life in the neighborhood. Like Senese's saxophone and voice they are a form of inscription. And just as in hip hop and reggae they are the voice of the silenced majority who is tired of injustices.

A mural painted in Ponticelli, a neighborhood in the periphery of Naples which underwent major changes in the postwar decades, is a multitrack piece of social commentary. Ponticelli was a typical working-class neighborhood in East Naples. It, along with San Giovanni and Bagnoli, was the area of the city with the highest numbers of communist party members. In the 1980s it went through a process of deindustrialization. During the same period it became a place with one of the highest

⁷⁴ From the documentary *Felice!* directed by Matteo Antonelli and Rosaria Désirée Klain, 2006.

number of public housing projects in the city. Heroin and crime increased and the neighborhood deteriorated. In this mural we see the neighborhood during the early 1980s through the eyes of the children who collaborated in the making of it. We see a junkie injecting heroin on the street; two muggers snatching a purse from a woman; public housing on the background and more public housing under construction. There is no audio, but we can hear the sound of the construction site, the sound of the scooter with the two muggers, the scream of the woman, the whispering of the junkie asking for small change or the contorted sounds of the city that he hears before and after the fix.



Figure 6. Felice Pignataro. Mural in the district of Ponticelli (Source: GRIDAS online archive <http://www.felicepignataro.org/home.php?mod=murales>).



Figure 7. James Senese in the district of Scampia. A framework from “Sax solo.” *Bestiario Metropolitano* directed by Salvatore Piscicelli, 1980. Source: Francesco Crispino, *Alle origini di Gomorra: Salvatore Piscicelli tra Nuovo cinema e Neotelevisione* (Naples: Liguori, 2010), 51.

This mural evokes another image. Here, James Senese is the protagonist of “sax solo,” an episode of a documentary by Salvatore Piscicelli called “*Bestiario metropolitano* (1980).⁷⁵ Here, we see James Senese walking in a desolated periphery with public housing in the background playing his saxophone. Senese’s saxophone goes beyond words. Although in his songs lyrics are very important, it is through the sound itself – as we have seen a fusion of hard funk, jazz, R&B, progressive rock, Neapolitan popular music influenced by urban noise, the shout of street vendors and by peasant chants and music - that the minor histories of the city are made audible and rendered

⁷⁵ Francesco Crispino, *Alle origini di Gomorra: Salvatore Piscicelli tra nuovo cinema e neotelevisione* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 2010), 45-52.

visible. The saxophone sound of James Senese “invades the body of the listeners.”⁷⁶ Similarly to Felice’s murals, Esteves’s rappin’ poems and Bambaataa’s vodocoder effects, this is a form of inscription that is like a kind of x-ray or movie camera exposing the urban territory.⁷⁷ This affective, sensuous and haptic dimension makes the music of James Senese and Afrika Bambaataa, the visual art of Felice and poems of Esteves a multi sensorial experience that disrupts an hierarchy of senses and above all challenges the aural/visual dichotomy.⁷⁸ The “grain of the voice” of James Senese, his performance and bop language made of “wordless singing, screams...and yells,”⁷⁹ propose an “ever-expanding grammatology”⁸⁰ which “extend[s] communication beyond words.”⁸¹ In this sense, the sound of James Senese can be considered a critique of sociological and historical studies that have sought to explain the city as “a stable archive, housing the accumulation of dead documents and established facts.”⁸²

Perhaps Afrika Bambaataa, Sandra María Esteves and James Senese were not fully aware, but their sound and activism was part of the blues continuum that began with the early revolts of slaves, the Maroon communities in the Americas, the multiethnic revolt of Masaniello in Naples and continued with Pan-Africanism, postcolonial thinking,

⁷⁶ Larry Grossberg, “Postmodernity and Affect,” Quoted in Kun, *Audiotopia*, 118.

⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Annah Arendt, ed., Translated by Harry Zohn, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

⁷⁸ Kun, *Audiotopia*, 117; Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), especially 127-193; Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 2011, especially 22-24 and 147-171.

⁷⁹ Gilroy, *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack*, 213.

⁸⁰ Aldon Nielsen, Quoted in Kun, *Audiotopia*, 117.

⁸¹ Gilroy, *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack*, 212.

⁸² Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 104.

and urban struggles in New York and Naples. The memories of the struggles of the past empowered the everyday struggles of the present. These are sustained by sound waves: spirituals, work-songs, blues, R&B, mambo, doo-wop, tammurriata, salsa, hip-hop, electro-funk, free-jazz, the found sounds of the city, sounds of joy, sounds of protest...a blues continuum that continues to haunt New York City and Naples.

PART II

“ALL YOU SEE IS CRIME IN THE CITY”

Listening To Lillian López and Raiss

The Bronx is one of the five boroughs of New York City. The elegant Riverdale section of the Bronx greatly contrast with what is known as the South Bronx. The South Bronx has 4000,000 inhabitants; the majority of them are Spanish-speaking. In this community there are houses where at times there is no running water, where the sanitary services do not function and where there is not heat. What there is in abundance are unemployment, hunger, desperation, gangs, and drugs.... This is the face of the South Bronx that is visible from the outside. From the inside one sees a different one: the face of thousands of individuals struggling to find a better life.¹

Ce sta troppo rummore troppo casino lascia che 'o raiss ti parli da vicino pe te dicere tienelo a mmente chi È 'o bbuono e chi È 'o malamente... / allora arape ll'uocchie e cervella e tienelo a mmente chi È 'o bbuono e chi 'o malamente / ind'a chistu clima 'e caccia 'o criminale no nun voglio fa' nu tribunale universale /chest' È sulamente n'opinione personale sulo nu giudizio individuale
[There is too much noise too much hysteria, let Raiss speak to you closely and he will tell you who is the good and who is the bad / open your eyes and your brain /keep it in mind who is the good and the bad / within an environment of chasing criminals my intention is not to propose an universal trial/ this is only a personal opinion, only to offer an individual judgment.]²

¹ “South Bronx Project,” Lillian López Papers, box 4, folder 6, The Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

² Almamegretta, “O bbuono e 'o malamente” in the EP *Figli di Annibale*, 1992, Anagramma/CNI. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7a36fCWwgU>

These two quotations, the first from a community organizer in the South Bronx of the 1970s and the second from Raiss, the voice of the Neapolitan dub band Almamegretta, urge us to look beyond mainstream representations of urban decline in the South Bronx and Naples. They do not speak for or about subaltern people but as feminist critic and film-maker Trinh T. Minh-ha observes, “nearby” them.³ They do not deny that in disadvantaged areas of New York and Naples there is plenty of drugs, crime and violence, but they invite us to think about what are the causes of the heroin epidemics, the increased violence, and the robberies in areas which have been forgotten by institutions and destroyed by “urban renewal” and planned shrinkages. In addition, they do not make the classic distinction between deserving and undeserving poor.⁴ For them the so-called underclass is not different from a stable working class. The only difference is that the underclass, labeled by media and sociological discourse as aliens, is in reality, as ethnic studies scholar Ramón Grosfoguel argues, “a redundant... racialized labor force.”⁵ At the same time they do not romanticize the working class. As historian Peter Linebaugh, and more recently, Black studies scholar Robin Kelley have often underlined:

³ Trinh T. Minh-ha, Quoted in Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 164.

⁴ Essential readings on the social construction and labeling of the “underserving poor” are: Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989); Michael Katz, ed., *The “Underclass” Debate: Views from History* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1993); Steve Macek, *Urban Nightmares: The Media, the Right, and the Moral Panic over the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Alice O’ Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). On specific studies on Naples see Enrica Amaturò ed, *Profili di povertà e politiche sociali a Napoli* (Naples, Liguori, 2004); Enrica Morlicchio, *Povertà ed esclusione sociale: La prospettiva del mercato del lavoro* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 2000).

⁵ Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 166.

“the working class occupies many different locations....They are neither devils nor angels...They are simply people whose very survival depends on work or some form of income (i.e., public assistance, charity, unemployment insurance, crime).”⁶

Listening to Lillian López and Raiss, this part reads “in the gaps and fissures” (Miriam Hansen) of the mainstream cinematic images of New York and Naples in the 1970s and 1980s. It begins with the movie *Fort Apache – The Bronx* (Daniel Petrie, 1981) and the protest against it organized by Black and Puerto Rican activists and residents of the South Bronx. It looks at inter-ethnic alliances in the South Bronx at a moment when the “great transformations” of these alliances and the new social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s and rebellions and struggle of the so called “second reconstruction” in the United States were under attack by conservative policies.⁷ It argues that the protest against the movie *Fort Apache* continued at a more local level the struggle of the new social movements of the 1960s and organizations such as the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, creating new alliances between black and Puerto Rican working class. These new alliances, which took place in the postindustrial city represented new racial formations. I argue that these racial formations can only be understood within the context of the South Bronx residents’ struggles, from the work of

⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 12-13.

⁷ On the great transformation generated by the new social movements and inter-ethnic alliances of the 1960s see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, Second Edition (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 95-112. On the retreat of the “second reconstruction” see Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006*, Third Edition, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 146-181.

community organizers and activists to new cultural forms like hip-hop.⁸ These new social movements spoke from “way way below” (Robin Kelley) in the sense that they worked at the grass-roots level outside of official political parties. They acquired form in the daily work of community organizers like Evelina Antonetty López of the Bronx United Parents as well as in the deep visceral pleasure of making art and music from within the forgotten and abandoned periphery of the city. It is from these margins and peripheries that kids started sending messages by painting huge and colorful graffiti on subway trains, organizing jam sessions in public housing courtyard, and dancing on the break-beat of hip-hop imitating robots and zombies in postindustrial spaces and vacant lots.⁹ In this post-apocalyptic landscape graffiti writers “sent their letters” (Paul Gilroy) to city authorities, citizens, and other youths.

A famous 1982 graffiti piece “All you See is Crime in the City”¹⁰ made by writer Skeme and his friends on two subway train cars, poses questions similar to those rapped

⁸ Regarding the new racial formations created in New York through the alliance of black and Puerto Rican in late 1970s and early 1980s in disadvantaged areas of the Bronx I am drawing on Lisa Lowe extension of Michael Omi and Howard Winant conceptualization of racial formations. Lisa Lowe argues that: “racial formation is the dialectical struggle between, on the one hand, the racial state that serves the economy and facilitates its needs for exploitable labor by racializing through the law and repressive apparatuses, and, on the other, the social movements, collective projects, and cultural practices that continually redefine racial meanings in ways that seek to reorganize those racialized and gendered capitalist relations.” Lisa Lowe, “The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique,” in Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman, eds., *The Futures of American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 79.

⁹ I thank Iain Chambers for his comments about my lecture titled “Black Atlantic, Nuestra America, Creolized Mediterranean” at the seminar in “Studi culturali e postcoloniali” (Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, Naples, December 2012). Chambers’ comments have illuminated me on this idea of messages sent by the periphery.

¹⁰ A fragment of the documentary *Style Wars* (dir. Tony Silver, 1983) in which graffiti writer Skeme talk about his piece “All you See is Crime in the City” is available on you-tube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beORPckw-pY> (Accessed on 3/6/2013).

out by Raiss in “who is the good and the bad?” Was graffiti writing, defacing subway cars a crime? Or was it a new form of social art that used the technology of the train system to send a message around the city? And was the protest against the stereotypical representations in the movie *Fort Apache – The Bronx* wrong? Did mainstream media, newspapers headlines and statistics about crime in the city tell us the reality of such neighborhoods or rather did they create an ethnicization of the urban crisis and a moral panic about the inner city and its inhabitants ignoring who is really the good or the bad? And what about message at the heart of the protest against *Fort Apache – The Bronx*? Was the police especially brutal an exception or was that the norm in neighborhoods like the South Bronx?

The messages sent by rappers, B-boys/B-girls, DJs and graffiti writers not only circulated within the city but also reached a global audience. Like the blues, jazz, Latin-jazz and R&B musicians before them, they communicated with afro diasporic communities across the world.¹¹ I will argue that the message of hip hop arrived in Naples in the 1980s in a time of city transformation. As in New York, mainstream representation of Naples urban crisis offered a frozen image of the city. Films like *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* (Lina Wertmuller, 1986), and *Mi manda Picone* (Nanni Loy, 1983), focus on the alleys of the old center of Naples. They drew on the play of Eduardo De Filippo, the novels of Domenico Rea, and Italian post neorealist

¹¹ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1995, 1987), 156.

films like *L'oro di Napoli* (Vittorio De Sica, 1954), and partially ignored the great transformations that had taken place in Naples after the 1970s.

Already in the 1950s as the classic movie of the so called *cinema d'inchiesta* (a cinema that uses the technique of investigative journalism), *Le mani sulla città* (1959) directed by Francesco Rosi shows how, in order to build thousands of new luxury apartments and offices on the hills of Vomero, and in the city center, for example the infamous palazzo Ottieri, a modern fifteen story building wider than the entire side of the historic piazza Mercato (one of the largest square in the city), speculators relocated thousands of people from the old center to new public housing in the periphery of the city, especially in Soccavo (Rione Traiano) and Miano.¹² However, the largest movements within the city occurred in the 1970s with the “Plan of the Periphery” and in the 1980s during the post-earthquake years.

The post-earthquake urban reconstruction was perhaps the largest urban reconfiguration in the history of Italian cities. Part of the old center remained poor and overcrowded with a population density comparable to that of Hong Kong. Public housing was constructed on the outskirts of Naples mostly made with low cost material and in neighborhoods without infrastructure. Naples and its hinterland assumed the form of what sociologist Loic Wacquant calls a “hyper-ghetto.”¹³ At this point, marginalization and poverty were no longer exclusively characteristics of central Naples (the so called

¹² Vezio De Lucia, *Se questa è una città* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2006), 10-15.

¹³ Loic Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

inner-city) but were extended to a vast area on the outskirts of the city. It was here, in the periphery of North Naples that, by the late 1980s the language of hip-hop was appropriated by the band Almamegretta.

The journey of hip hop from New York to Naples did not follow a straight line. It took a detour. Like the circum-Atlantic performance proposed by Joseph Roach and “The Other America” of Édouard Glissant,¹⁴ it centered in the Caribbean, in Kingston and then propagated to Naples in the form of reggae and dub music.¹⁵ Here, the mix of hip-hop and dub (after all, the advent of hip-hop in New York was also strictly connected with Caribbean sounds and migration) fused with local Neapolitan sounds and “arabesque vocalization” (Iain Chambers) became as it had happened with the jazz and R&B of James Senese and Napoli Centrale one decade before, a form of sociology itself. The sensuous sound of the Almamegretta established an intimate and haptic relationship with the city contesting a stereotypical and frozen image of Naples in the age of urban crisis.

¹⁴ I am drawing here on Josh Kun groundbreaking analysis of Langston Hughes’ poems in the context of a post exceptionalist American studies that includes North America, The Caribbean and Latin America as well as other critical and transnational connections, made in his *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁵ On this idea of a comparative history which is not based on the nation state I have been inspired by the groundbreaking work of critical American studies scholar José David Saldívar. See his most recent book *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). I am also drawing on a series of critical interventions in the field of American and Ethnic Studies which redefine the notion of America moving away from the hegemonic appropriation of the term America by the United States. See Kun, *Audiotopia*; Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). See also Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

Chapter 3

“They Call It Fort Apache, We Call It Home”: The South Bronx From Below

“Imperial Eyes:” *Fort Apache – The Bronx*

French architect Francois Bregnac, when visiting the South Bronx in 1990 said: “We know of the Bronx from the movies – the police movies.”¹ The “police movie” that is most often associated with images of devastation in the South Bronx, that has reached a worldwide audience, is *Fort Apache - the Bronx* (1981). Directed by Daniel Petrie and starring Paul Newman (Murphy in the film) as a tough, liberal and veteran cop of the 41st precinct in the South Bronx of the early 1970s, which is nicknamed “Fort Apache” because it is like a fort in hostile territory. Before its release the producers of the motion picture, Time-Life Films, a giant in movie production, took out a two pages in *Variety* magazine describing *Fort Apache - The Bronx* as “a chilling and tough movie about the South Bronx, a 40 block area with the highest crime rate in New York. Youth gangs, winos, junkies, pimps, hookers, maniacs, cop killers and the embattled 41st Precinct, just hanging there.”²

¹ Quoted in Evelyn Gonzales, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 129.

² *Variety*, March 12, 1980, United Bronx Parents Papers, box 8, folder 7, The Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, City University of New York.

The film opens with a bird's eye-view of the South Bronx. Then the camera goes down to the street level as a prostitute (only in the final credits we will know that her name is Charlotte) played by Pam Grier approaches a police car. Visibly under the effect of heroin she starts talking with the two police officers who are in the car, then without any reason she takes a gun from her purse and shoots the two officers. She leaves the scene calmly because nobody is around. Within a few seconds, youths resembling zombies come out from abandoned buildings and begin vandalizing the car, they steal the wallets and guns of the two police officers. This event introduces not only the environment of the South Bronx but also the narrative of the movie. For the entire movie the police will try to find the cop-killer. In the meantime, other stories which are interrelated with each other emerge.

According to media scholars Michael Ryan and Douglass Kellner in *Camera Politica*, one of the features of liberal social problem films is the presence of “a good individual against a fundamentally corrupt society.”³ This is the feeling we have when immediately after the killing of the two police officers the story moves to the precinct. The precinct has been abandoned by institutions. The police officers are demotivated and there is a lot of corruption within the force. Murphy and his younger colleague Corelli are the only two who patrol the streets showing respect for their job. They also try to establish a relationship with the people of the neighborhood. The arrival of a new captain (Connolly) in the precinct is not taken well by the all precinct. The corrupt police officers

³ Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 94.

don't like him because he follows the rules and he is very strict. Murphy and Corelli do not approve of his methods either, since the new captain, in order to find the cop-killer, sets up an operation that will break the daily dynamics of the neighborhood. He gives the order to arrest all prostitutes, gamblers, dope-pushers, and even political activists. After the arrest of the political activists a riot breaks out. During the riot two police officers kill, by throwing him off a roof a kid who was just hanging out there with his girlfriend. In the meanwhile, the only people who are not arrested are the cop-killer Charlotte, who wanders freely in the neighborhood committing other murders, and two Puerto Rican drug dealers. The two dealers, one of them played by Miguel Piñero, are central to the narrative of the film. Charlotte is a habitual client of the shooting gallery run by the two dealers. While Charlotte is lying in the shooting gallery, one of the pushers starts molesting her. Charlotte, who seems not to mind, suddenly cuts his face with a razor hidden between her teeth. The drug pusher without thinking, stabs her to death with a knife. The two pushers also provide with heroin some patients, doctors and paramedics of the local hospital. One of their clients is a Puerto Rican nurse (Isabelle) who is in a relationship with Murphy. Fearing that she will bring Murphy to them, they kill her with a heroin overdose.

From the title itself *Fort Apache – the Bronx*, the film reproduces the trope of the US imperial project connected with the genocide of "Native Americans" and the expansion of American imperialism in the 19th-century that culminated in the colonial

occupation of Puerto Rico in 1889.⁴ The title allows us to think about the tent of the anthropologist set in the middle of the village from which he or she observes "the native" (in this case the Puerto Rican and black communities of "the inner-city" of New York).⁵ Like anthropology, *Fort Apache – the Bronx* does “not let the native speak,”⁶ and as in most documentaries and television programs about the South Bronx, “the natives are very far from friendly.”⁷

⁴ As Laura Briggs in her brilliant study on the intertwining of race, science, gender and U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico puts it: “First, colonialism was not a series of isolated incidents, in which larger powers opportunistically or strategically took advantage of smaller ones. This assumption, although rarely articulated in this way, is nevertheless key to the belief that the U.S. participation in colonial practices – first through continental expansion, later through the seizure of insular possessions was – was lackadaisical, partial, and accidental. Rather the United States was a full participant in what is recognizable as a colonial system – an international economic, political, and cultural system that shared common assumptions, strategies and rules.” Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 21-22. On the “metaphysics of Indian-Hating” see Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building*, (New York: NAL, 1980). In more recent years within the interdisciplinary field of a “non-exceptionalist American studies” there have appeared a series of innovative studies on U.S. imperialism. For an overview and an excellent critical introduction see Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). For specific studies on U.S. imperialism see Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945*, Updated Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Allan Punzalan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). On the general amnesia of Puerto Rico as a colony of the United States see Cynthia Tolentino, “Post-1898 Imaginative Geographies: Puerto Rican Migration in 1950s Film,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 3 (2) (2011), 1-19.

⁵ James Clifford, “Travelling Cultures,” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 20.

⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, “Looking For the ‘Real’ Nigga,” in *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 16.

⁷ *Man Alive*, “The Bronx is Burning,” 1972 (Produced by BBC, 60 minutes.)

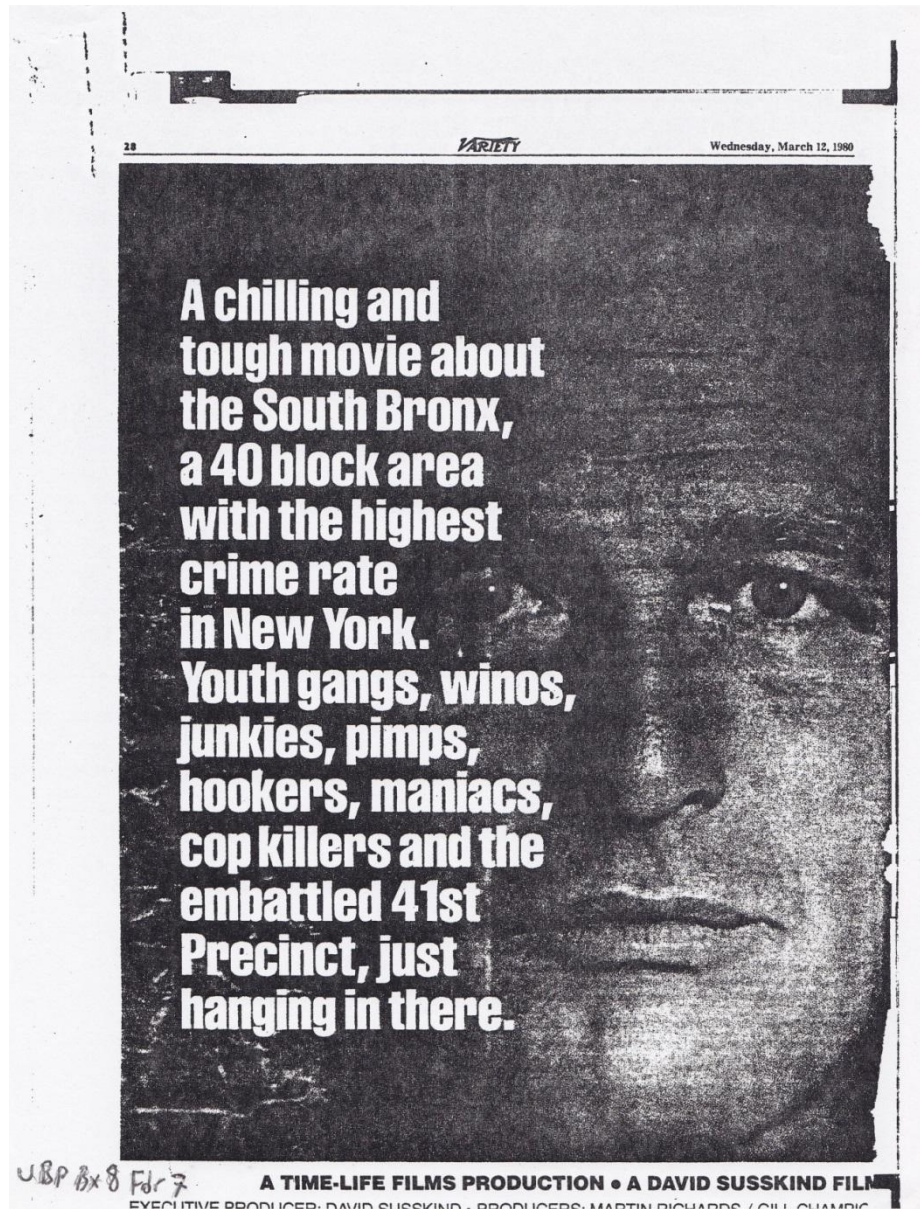


Figure 8. *Variety*, March 12, 1980. United Bronx Parents papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

***Fort Apache, The Bronx* and the Television Discourse**

Fort Apache – the Bronx draws from a very powerful narrative that developed in the 1960s and 1970s. In mainstream media the South Bronx is portrayed as a living hell,

inhabited by monsters. There are similarities between *Fort Apache – the Bronx* and a set of films, documentaries and reports that emerged in the 1970s. In these documentaries and films there are some elements that, without critical and historical analysis, reinforce racial stereotypes that say blacks and Puerto Ricans are prominent engage in crime, drugs and prostitution. The first element is the population shift in the South Bronx from being mostly white working class in the 1950s, to all black and Puerto Rican working class in the 1980s. A relatively small percentage of Puerto Rican and black population did reside in the South Bronx in the 1940s especially in Hunt's Point the former and in Morrisania the latter. By the 1990s the South Bronx it was more than 90% black and Hispanic. In popular imagination the South Bronx stands as a "no go area," a neighborhood to avoid at any cost, where you ended up only by mistake. It was a place that you encountered by getting off at the wrong highway exit, as happens in the novel and movie *The Bonfire of Vanities* (Brian De Palma, 1990). The second element is statistics about crime: "the number of reported assaults in the Bronx rose from 998 in 1960 to 4, 256 in 1969; burglaries rose from 1,756 to 29, 276. "The principal increase in these borough wide statistics came from the South Bronx," says Robert Jensen, the curator of the exhibition *Devastation/Resurrection: The South Bronx*.⁸ Fires, another plague of the South Bronx during the 1970s, also tripled between the 1970 and 1975. In 1975 there was one fire per night, as many articles about the South Bronx remind us. Finally, heroin reached epidemics levels. According to "The United Bronx Parents Youth Drug Abuse Program"

⁸ Robert Jensen, ed., *Devastation/Resurrection: The South Bronx* (Bronx, NY: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1979), 54.

The Hunts' Point area (the neighborhood depicted in *Fort Apache, The Bronx*) contained “13.3% of the total addicts in New York City.”⁹

Many of these documentaries and reports give the police perspective. Some of them touch the issue of police brutality but generally the message is: “The cops do their best to help people, but it’s an hopeless task. There are bad cops...but the good cops will take care of these bad apples.”¹⁰ These documentaries became more real than reality. They attracted to the South Bronx more journalists and film-makers from other boroughs, cities and nations anxious to narrate the real life of the “inner-city.” People watching these images on television saw despair, destruction and poverty but felt safe in their living room far away from the Bronx. In many documentaries and television reports, images of arsons, police at work 24 hours per day, gangs causing panic, prostitutes, drug addicts, and children playing on the streets are accompanied by the “Voice-of-God” saying: “The South Bronx once inhabited by the New York working people – the Italians, the Jews, the Irish, by the mid-1960s turned in an urban nightmares when came a poverty migration, huge numbers of blacks and Puerto Ricans. At this moment welfare replaces work.” In this scenario the poor were trapped in a tangle of pathology.”¹¹

⁹ United Bronx Parents Papers, Box 3, Folder 1.

¹⁰ “Analysis of the Screenplay *Fort Apache – The Bronx*, Committee Against Fort Apache, Lourdes Torres Papers, box 8, folder 8, The Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, City University of New York.

¹¹ *CBS Reports*, “The Fire Next Door,” 1977 (Produced by CBS, 60 minutes).

Silencing The Travel Stories of Black and Puerto Rican Migrations

“What Paul didn’t tell us about Fort Apache – The Bronx,” was the title of an article in the *New York Post* on March 1980.¹² It claims that is exactly by what the movie didn’t tell us that reproduces ideologies of racism and U.S. imperialism. In a crucial dialogue between captain Duggan (played by Sully Boyar) and captain Connolly (Ed Asner), who is going to replace him as new captain of the 41st precinct, Duggan says:

Blame Duggan, that’s the easy way. You got a forty block area with seventy thousand people packed in like sardines, smellin’ each other’s farts, living like cockroaches. And that’s Duggan’s fault, right? You got the lowest per capita and the highest rate of unemployment in the city. That’s my fault...Largest proportions of non-English speaking population. Duggan’s fault...four percent Spanish speaking cops...families that have been on welfare for three generations. Youth gangs, winos, junkies, pimps, hookers, maniacs, cop killers.¹³

At first sight, in this dialogue Duggan leaves open the possibility that perhaps the government and other structural factors are responsible for the condition of poverty and abandonment of the South Bronx, and the subsequent increase of crime, inadequate schools, and heroin diffusion. However, if we look at it closely we will notice that perhaps the viewer, who is not familiar with the history of the South Bronx and relies on the images and storyline provided by the film, will certainly blame Puerto Rican and African American residents. This dialogue, and the movie in general, omit racism, the

¹² “What Paul didn’t tell us about *Fort Apache – The Bronx*,” *New York Post*, March 28, 1980, Lourdes Torres Papers, box 8, folder 8.

¹³ “Fort Apache, The Bronx,” a Screenplay by Heywood Gould, 16.

colonial status of Puerto Ricans, urban renewal, deindustrialization “planned shrinkage,” and “white flight” as the main causes of the condition of poverty in the South Bronx. In addition, it completely obscures the travel stories of Puerto Rican and African American migrants who arrived in the city in the postwar years to take the lowest paid positions in the service and garment industries (the so called Puerto Rican Great Migration and Black Second Great Migration.)¹⁴

This dialogue puts on the same level the experience of previous immigrants – the Italians, the Jews, the Irish, the Germans with the Puerto Rican and Southern-Black migrations to New York City. There is, for instance, a resemblance with Jacob Riis’s description of the Lower East Side of the early 20th-century. Although the Italians, Jews and Irish experienced the prejudice of racism, to evoke such a parallel is unfair because it “obliterates the history of racial/colonial oppression experienced by African-Americans and Puerto Ricans.”¹⁵

The migration of Puerto Ricans and blacks to New York, especially the migration flow between the 1940s and the 1960s, is different from those of Italians and Jews in late 19th-century and early 20th-century. Eastern and Southern European immigrants escaped pogroms and poverty, and of course the United States needed workers for the expanding industry. But the recruitment of these migrants was not part of a larger strategy, as would

¹⁴ On the centrality of race in U.S. history see Shirley Jennifer Lim, *A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women’s Public Culture, 1930-1960* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), As Lim puts it: “From the writing of the three-fifths slave clause in the U.S. Constitution to immigration policy in the twentieth century, race is at the core of the American nation-state.” (1)

¹⁵ Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 162.

happen for blacks and Puerto Ricans in the 1940s, when we have “labor agents, aided by the U.S. Labor department, directly recruiting blacks from the South and Puerto Ricans from the island.”¹⁶

Harlem had been a center for black culture since the early 20th-century and during the same time Puerto Ricans established communities in East Harlem and Brooklyn. The estimated black and Puerto Rican population in New York grew from 300, 000 in 1930 to about 1 million in 1960 for African American, and from 45,000 in 1930 to more than 700, 000 in 1960 for Puerto Ricans. Contrary to Jews and Italians, blacks and Puerto Ricans were already racial and colonial subjects in the United States before moving to New York, and their stories of migration cannot be understood without considering the intertwined stories of racism and U.S. imperialism. The mechanization of agriculture in the South displaced hundreds of thousands of African Americans who migrated to the North and occupied the lowest paid jobs. Puerto Rican migration to New York between the 1940s and 1960s is deeply imbricated in U.S. imperialism and Puerto Rico being an international showcase in the age of cold war.¹⁷

To connect the Puerto Rican migration with earlier European immigrants is also dangerous because it reinforces the idea that while previous immigrants assimilated to U.S. culture and “could make it,” Puerto Ricans were not able to assimilate since there was a problem inherent to their culture.¹⁸ The sentence, “families that have been on

¹⁶ Ibid.,163

¹⁷ Ibid., 109.

¹⁸ Ibid., 197.

welfare for three generations” not only obliterates the traveling stories of the many Puerto Ricans, especially women, who worked in the garment industry of New York during the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁹ It also rearticulates the “culture of poverty” thesis introduced by anthropologist Oscar Lewis to describe poverty “as a way of life passed down from generation to generation along family lines.”²⁰ In this perspective, the culture of poverty was related more to a set of behaviors than to class status and income. It was caused by “apathy,” “hostility,” “early initiation to sex,” “competition for limited goods,” and above all “the lack of effective participation and integration of the poor in the major institutions of the larger society.”²¹ Although Oscar Lewis had good intentions and was fully aware of the “danger that [his] findings might be misinterpreted or used to justify prejudices and negative stereotypes,” conservative social scientists appropriated the culture of poverty thesis to give a new meaning to the classic notion of class culture.²² Political scientist Edward Banfield, for instance, saw the “less future oriented” community as the more dangerous class because it “lives from moment to moment” and “his bodily needs (especially for sex) and his taste for action take precedence over everything else.”²³ Although captain Duggan does not mention African Americans, his conversation shows a convergence between two social science topoi of the 1960s and

¹⁹ Rita Benmayor et al., *Stories to Lives By: Continuity and Change in Three Generations of Puerto Rican Women* (New York: Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, 1987).

²⁰ Laura Briggs, “I like to be in America: Postwar Puerto Rican Migration, the Culture of Poverty, and the Moynihan Report,” in *Reproducing Empire*, 162-192.

²¹ Quoted in Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 18.

²² *Ibid*, 19

²³ Quoted in Steve Macek, *Urban Nightmares: The Media, The Right, and the Moral Panic Over the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 62.

1980s: the culture of poverty and the underclass (initially, the former was generally associated with Puerto Ricans and the latter with African Americans). There is a resemblance between Duggan's words and the description of the urban underclass provided by journalist Ken Auletta in his book *The Underclass*. In a similar vein to *Fort Apache*, Auletta schematizes the underclass in "four distinct categories: a) the passive poor, usually long-welfare recipients; b) the hostile street criminals who terrorize most cities, and who are often school drop-outs and drug addicts; c) the hustlers, who, like street criminals may not be poor and who earn their livelihood in an underground economy, but rarely commit violent crimes; d) the traumatized drunks, drifters, homeless, shopping bag ladies and released mental patients who frequently roam or collapse on city streets."²⁴

Social scientists and film-makers have focused only on the pathological black and Puerto Rican residents in disadvantaged areas. To use Richie Perez's words, their eyes are myopic and see only filth and degradation because they see blacks and Puerto Ricans of the South Bronx as "filthy and degraded."²⁵ For example, in the movie, the South Bronx is a place at the edge of civilization, which can be bypassed thanks to the freeways that crossed through it connecting Manhattan to the wealthier and middle class suburbs of Long Island and New Jersey. Like in the movie *The Bonfire of Vanities* (1990), in *Fort Apache*, to get off at the wrong exit of the highway, is to enter in another world inhabited

²⁴ Quoted in Katz, *The Undeserving Poor* 200-201.

²⁵ "Remembering & Thanking Richie Pérez 1944-2004." Excerpt from a television program on the boycott of Fort Apache, 1980. http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=RHw82EBgBOU, (Accessed on 9/3/2012).

by hordes of animals. Life is at risk. There is a scene in the movie which suggests this fear, amplified by the media and rendered “scientific” by sociological analysis of the underclass. A white man, probably living in the suburbs, realizes his car has a flat tire and so gets off from the expressway in order to repair the tire, but he gets lost and decides to change the tire by himself. While he’s changing the tire, a black woman played by Pam Grier, approaches him and asks if he needs some company. He accepts and they enter into a vacant building. In the following scene we see Pam Grier holding a razor blade between her teeth and cutting his throat. Here is the description of the scene from the film-script:

HIGHWAY – NIGHT. A station wagon with a flat tire wobbles off onto the shoulder. A middle aged paunchy MAN peers over the wheel. His headlights illuminate a sign which reads: ALL DISABLED VEHICLES MUST BE DRIVEN OFF THE HIGHWAY.

EXT. BOULEVARD – HOOKER – NIGHT

There are at least twenty girls, Black and Puerto Rican on both sides of the street, standing under lampposts...the station wagon finally comes to a halt on a dark, deserted stretch of street, poorly lit, and obviously off the beaten track. The man gets out of the car, muttering to himself.

(Muttering) Sonofabitch. (He kicks the flattened tire) Gotta pull off the highway into this jungle....²⁶

A memorable scene of the movie is the final chasing of the Puerto Rican mugger, who symbolizes crime. This scene is strictly connected with white flight; again it operates at the level of the unconscious. There are no references to the suburbs but we can feel all the deep fear and anxiety of the white suburban middle class many of whom

²⁶ “Fort Apache, the Bronx,” 56-57.

identified the city with black and Puerto Rican muggers, and probably left the city because of this fear and anxiety. As historian Eric Schneider notices, white people in large cities in the 1970s and 1980s were particularly frightened by black and Puerto Rican muggers.²⁷ Now, these two aspects, freeway and muggings, evoke the age of white flight. Here, there is a reference to another controversial movie, *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974). In this film the character played by Charles Bronson, after his wife and daughter are raped and murdered by a Puerto Rican gang during a burglary, does not abandon the city. Rather he decides to stay and turns into a vigilante, eventually killing all the Puerto Ricans and blacks muggers he finds. Paul Newman and his partner Corelli are the liberal version of Charles Bronson, so they don't kill the mugger, they chase him unarmed through the rubble of the Bronx. In this scene we don't see a living thing, only garbage, ruins and at one point a group of construction workers getting rid of what remains of the Charlotte street area. The only moment in which we are projected into civilization is when during the chase they reach a bridge on the cross-Bronx Expressway in the neighborhood of Tremont. This is a highly symbolic scene because the Cross-Bronx expressway stands as the first example of the urban renewal which destroyed the South Bronx.

Watching this scene, the viewer is shocked by the deterioration and state of abandonment of the South Bronx. But at the same time, he or she sees the highway as a way of escaping to the tidy streets of the suburbs. There is a kind of binary opposition in

²⁷ Eric Schneider, *Smack: Heroin and the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 117.

this scene, highway = freedom and movement, South Bronx = dump and remaining stuck. This reflects the binary opposition created by conservative social scientist James Q. Wilson, who in his influential 1975 book *Thinking About Crime* argues: “we are becoming two societies – one affluent and worried, the other pathological and predatory.”²⁸ The fact that we don’t see a living thing despite a mugger and two policemen chasing him, reinforces the idea of the South Bronx as an isolated and dangerous place, inhabited by predators where you could get mugged or killed for no reason if you go out. Hence is the title of the film, *Fort Apache: a frontier*.

Just as in the classic Western movies in which the history of Indians is erased, here the history of Puerto Rican and black in the South Bronx is denied, as if the filth of the South Bronx had been caused by them. No traces of the slumlords, urban policies, white racism. In reality, the South Bronx in the 1960s and 1970s was one of the areas which most suffered the color line that divides New York. Blacks and Puerto Ricans were the most affected by the urban decline of this part of New York.

The decline of the South Bronx in the mid-1960s coincided with an increase of black and Puerto Rican populations. By 1980 blacks and Puerto Ricans counted for 91% of the South Bronx population.²⁹ In the popular imagination these groups have been

²⁸ Quoted in Macek, *Urban Nightmares*, 66.

²⁹ There are a numbers of books, articles, and special monographs that are totally devoted to the decline of the South Bronx. Books: Jill Jones, *South Bronx Rising : The Rise, Fall and Resurrection of an American City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Evelyn Gonzales, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Jim Rooney, *Organizing the South Bronx* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). Articles: Thomas Glynn, “The South Bronx: What went Down Should Come up, *The Neighborhood*,” vol 5, August 1982, 3-26; Thomas Glynn, “Charlotte Street the Bronx.” *Special*

identified as the bearers of the crisis, in reality this crisis is more connected with racist, anti-urban bias, and lucrative policies which reorganized the public space in postwar United States along class and race lines.³⁰ In the postwar decade most of the white population left the South Bronx because the Federal Housing Administration offered convenient loans to the veterans, privileging whites, so that they could buy houses in the suburbs.³¹ At the same time, black and Puerto Rican areas in the inner-city were red lined which means that they were marked as poor for investments. In this way local business started to close and the neighborhoods deteriorated. These policies favored the expansion of suburbs without proposing renovation of the South Bronx and other poor neighborhoods of New York.³² They supported highways construction, one of these is the famous example of the Cross-Bronx expressway which cut through the Bronx, allowing commuters to reach Manhattan from the suburbs for the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway large sections of vibrant neighborhoods in Tremont were destroyed. Public housing which during the 1940s gave the opportunity to poorer people to move out from older tenements, by the early 1970s would become degraded places and drug markets disconnected from the social structure of the neighborhood and without control and

monographs : See Robert Jensen, eds., *Devastation/Resurrection: the South Bronx* (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1977).

³⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 286-289; and Raquel Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip-Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 50.

³¹ See Jensen, ed., *Devastation/Resurrection: the South Bronx*, 1977.

³² See George Lipsitz, "Corporate Culture, Conformity, and Commodities: The Fight for Moral Authority," in *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1994), 256-259.

cultural recreational opportunities for the young. As historian Mark Naison argues, they became the places where lived people “too poor, or troubled, to escape to safer areas.”³³

The Committee Against Fort Apache: Grass-Roots Theorizing

We gonna let those movie makers know / That we
won't patronize their show / So long as they see Tarzan
and Jane / Buelah Land and that movie Fame / Amos
and Andy and Charlie Chan / We won't put up with that
shit, man / Cause all these movies try to show / Is that
we are clowns, and we say no!

The Fort Apache Bop (Sung to the music of the Sugar
Hill Gang)³⁴

One of the central elements of the Committee Against Fort Apache, like the poetry of Nuyorican poems was to propose inter-ethnic alliances between black and Puerto Rican working-class communities in a moment of crisis in the inner-city. Through these alliances disenfranchised communities proposed an oppositional gaze that blurred the boundaries between culture and politics. These alliances show the mutual influence of social movements, music, and neighborhood organization. The protest against the movie allows us to think about new racial formations that oppose U.S imperialism, racism, and mainstream sociological formulation which have contributed to the

³³ Mark Naison, “From Doo-Wop to Hip Hop: the Bittersweet Odyssey of African Americans in the South Bronx,” *The Bronx County Historical Society Journal* 2 (2003): 76. See also the oral testimonies collected by Mark Naison and his associates for the Bronx African American History Projects. The interviews are available at the Archive of the Bronx County Historical Society.

³⁴ “A community stands together and makes nation-wide news...,” Diana Caballero Papers, box 12, folder 5, The Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, City University of New York.

racialization of black and Puerto Rican communities. In other words, the protest against Fort Apache is a counter-sociology in which politics and theory are part of the same struggle. This counter-sociology, to use George Lipsitz's words, is a form of grass-roots theorizing that gives a "theorized account of concrete historical reality."³⁵ The protest against Fort Apache was like previous traditions of oppositional politics such as the blues as a form protest music of the early 20th-century, the black women blues movement of the 1920s and 1930s, and all their derivate like street funk, the inner city blues of Marvin Gaye and as we will see the hip-hop movement in New York. The first aim of the black and Puerto Rican activists was to block the film *Fort Apache*, but they had a much larger project in mind which was "to educate the community about the effects of media stereotyping and show links to the overall situation Blacks and Puerto Ricans face."³⁶

The Committee Against Fort Apache agreed that in the South Bronx there were problems. Heroin was at epidemic levels and mugging in the 1970s increased sharply. Yet it argued that these images were part of a larger discourse which had marginalized Puerto Ricans and blacks in housing, education, etc..³⁷ These images silenced the many voices of the South Bronx. The Committee is not preoccupied exclusively with images in a-historical term. The activists of the Committee Against Fort Apache recognized that the South Bronx was in ruins, but like a multisensory organ they travel through the rubble

³⁵ Stuart Hall, Quoted in George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 100.

³⁶ "Chronological History of the Committee Against Fort Apache," Lourdes Torres papers, box 8, folder 7.

³⁷ On the struggle over housing and gentrification in New York see Arlene Dávila, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004).

and enter into the gaps and holes of these ruins, reopening the archive of the South Bronx. Looking at what *Fort Apache* did not say or show, and examining the distortion operated by the film narrative, they recover the repressed territories of the South Bronx. Listening to the voices and stories that have been omitted in the film, they “sounded out” (Iain Chambers) the territory of the South Bronx, moving away from the filmic text. Finally, being totally immersed in the rhythms of the city they proposed an “atlas of emotion” (Giuliana Bruno) from the perspective of the community.³⁸

We might think about the Committee Against Fort Apache as a cinematic/haptic eye operating at the ground level of the city. Its protest sometimes seems a film within a film, as if film in the South Bronx had become more real than reality itself, and so reality assumed cinematic qualities. At the same time, the Committee teaches us the art of listening, where listening is not just about hearing but involves more a “learned activity” and a “cultural practice.”³⁹ Here, listening becomes an alternative “way of knowing” that disrupts the authority of disciplines and the hierarchy of knowledge between the social sciences and critical practices considered not “scientific.” As George Lipsitz reminds us “the most sophisticate cultural theorists in America during the 1980s were neither critics

³⁸ On music, art and cultural politics see Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); and George Lipsitz, “Not Just Another Social Movement: Poster Art and the Movimiento Chicano,” in *American Studies in A Moment of Danger*, 169-184.

³⁹ See Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 88-122, and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). On the concept of ruins and historiography see Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 26-28.

nor scholars, but rather artists” and activists in a broad sense.⁴⁰ Finally, to describe the protest and activities of the Committee Against Fort Apache, we might use the metaphor of the spider introduced by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre and, more recently, developed by sociologist Scott Lash, whose orientation is operated neither by the eye nor by ears, but by a tactile orientation in “the material ruins of the city.”⁴¹

The story of the Committee Against Fort Apache is part of a history that is often left out of history books. Of course these hidden histories rarely appear in the documentaries and films mentioned above. It is a story of a group of Puerto Rican and black activists who decided to organize a protest-group in order to stop the film. In the archive of the South Bronx are hidden histories of inter-ethnic alliances between Puerto Ricans and African Americans. The media and the social science connect these two communities to show that they were trapped in a “tangle of pathology.” This analysis underlines the absence of community organizations and communal structure in their neighborhoods, while the Committee Against Fort Apache teaches us that black and Puerto Rican communities were not dysfunctional, they were communities struggling to live in one of the most disadvantaged areas of New York City. This is not a story of activists who proposed sectarianism and orthodoxy. The Committee Against Fort Apache connects between black and Puerto Rican community organizations, to artists, musicians,

⁴⁰ See Lipsitz’s critical account of American Studies *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, 107.

⁴¹ See Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991); and Scott Lash, *Another Modernity a Different Rationality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 345-346.

gangs, and citizens in a larger social movement – the fight for a better life and a better future.⁴²

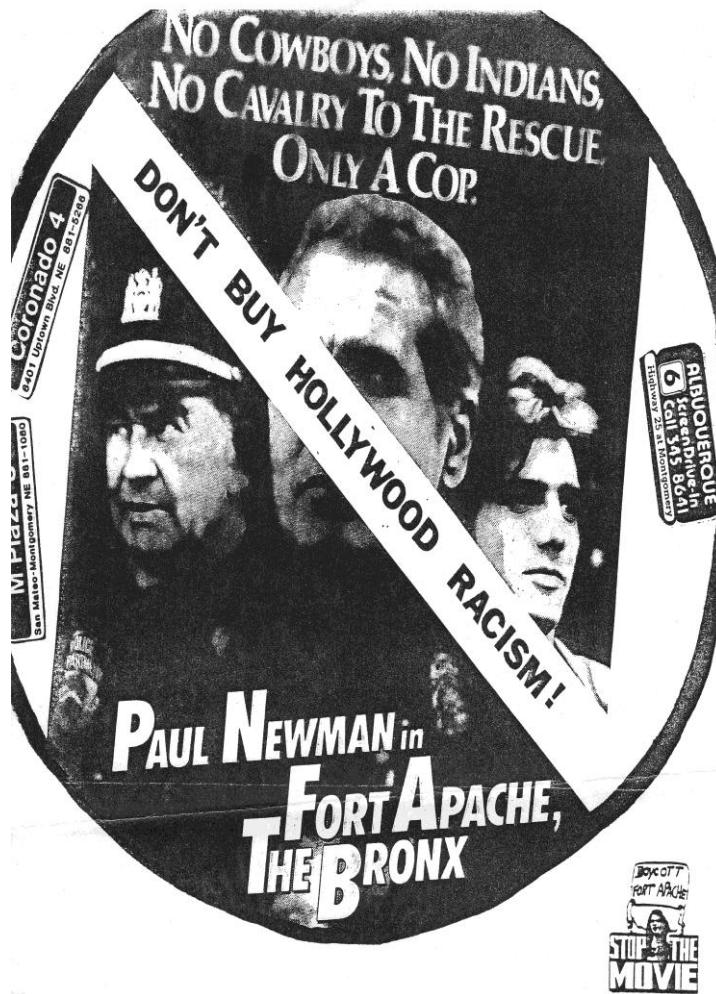


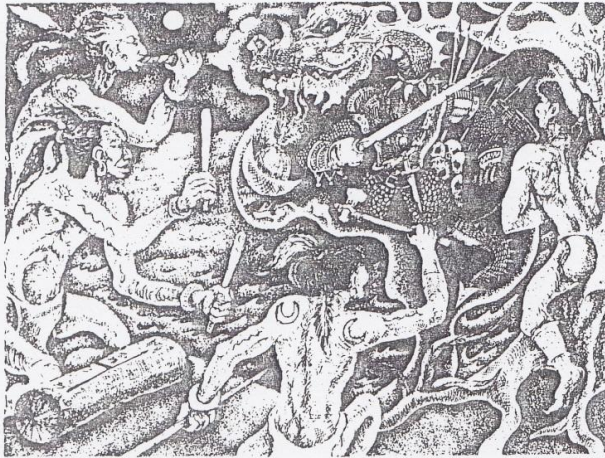
Figure 9. “Don’t Buy Hollywood Racism!” United Bronx Parents papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

⁴² Among the different activities organized by the Committee Against Fort Apache there were “several “Stop Fort Apache” concerts...Black, Puerto Rican and Dominican poets, artists, and musicians” performances. One CAFA member has written a song called “Fort Apache Bop” with references to Sugar Hill Gang’s rap hit “Apache” (Jump on it).

NEW RICAN VILLAGE AND THE COMMITTEE AGAINST "FORT APACHE"

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"LIBRE" AND FRIENDS
CORTIJO DAVE VALENTIN
RAY BARRETTO



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Figure 10. "Stop The Movie 'Fort Apache' Arts Festival, April 21-22-23, 1980." Lourdes Torres papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

Acts of resistance in the South Bronx point to the emergence of something unsaid, distorted or forgotten by the media and public discourse. They re-write history from below “setting the record straight.”⁴³ In this sense, they reverse the dynamics of the anthropologist and film-maker’s gaze. They place the anthropologist in his/her tent or the film-maker behind his/her camera “in the fishbowl under surveillance.”⁴⁴ People from the community, monitor, resist and challenge distorted and stereotyped representations. For them *Fort Apache* was not just a movie. They understood that movies like *Fort Apache* made their struggle even more difficult. It turned more people against the South Bronx. For a community like the South Bronx in the late 1970s, representations mattered because they were connected to broader issues like police brutality, inadequate schools and housing, fewer services. They renewed versions of imperialism, racism, class and gender inequalities. It is from this oppositional gaze that the boycott of *Fort Apache* emerges, a film which the Committee members said “stereotypes the Black and Puerto Rican peoples as savages, and degenerates; which distorts the reality of the Puerto Rican and Black communities; which rewrites the history of the Black and Puerto Rican, slanders our community activists, romanticizes the police and their brutality.”⁴⁵

The committee against *Fort Apache* was formed even before the movie was filmed by a diverse group of activists who knew very well the reality of the South Bronx.

⁴³ Virginia E. Sanchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*, Updated edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xxi.

⁴⁴ Clifford, “Travelling Cultures,” 20.

⁴⁵ “Analysis of the Screenplay ‘Fort Apache – The Bronx,’” Committee Against *Fort Apache*, Lourdes Torres Papers, box 8, folder 8.

Most of them had been previously involved in organizations against police brutality, racism and other grass-roots group. Within a few weeks of its formation, the Committee Against Fort Apache expanded to include many community-based organizations in the South Bronx as well as in the New York metro area such as “the Black United Front, The Black and Latino Coalition Against Police Brutality, The United Tremont Trades (construction workers), The United Bronx Parents, The Coalition in Defense of Puerto Rican Rights, and the Union of Patriotic Puerto Rican, as well as many unaffiliated individuals.”⁴⁶ Initially, the main concern of this heterogeneous group of people was that the film borrowed from the book *Fort Apache* written by Tom Walker, a fourth generation cop who worked in the 41st precinct in the 1970s. This book described the South Bronx “and its people as seen through the eyes of the police.”⁴⁷ For this reason, the Committee Against Fort Apache requested a copy of the screenplay from Time-Life Films. The screenplay was sent by Time-Life to the United Bronx Parents Association, an important community organization who had fought against poverty, the heroin plague and discrimination in education since the mid-1960s. The screenplay was read and analyzed carefully by the Committee and it came out that the screenplay resembled the book in its highly distorted portrayal of the Puerto Rican and Black communities in the South Bronx. It was at this point that the Committee Against Fort Apache announced publicly a boycott of the movie and a series of demonstrations and events to block its filming and broadcasting.

⁴⁶ Richard Pérez. “Committee against Fort Apache,” in *Cultures in Contention*, (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1985), 138.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

In defense of the movie, Time-Life chief producer David Susskind said that by exposing poverty, discrimination and human degradation, “*Fort Apache, The Bronx* is trying to do something about the present urban crisis.”⁴⁸ Paul Newman announced that he had a long reputation “for active participation in the battle against discrimination and social injustice” and would never have accepted a role in a racist film.

Racism, we know, in the media is a slippery issue. The question of replacing a positive with a negative image can be misleading. Racism, in addition, as Stuart Hall reminds us can be overt and inferential.⁴⁹ Overt racism is manifested openly in media texts, while referential racism is harder to identify because “it is often exerted by liberals with an explicitly antiracist intent.”⁵⁰ *Fort Apache*, it could be argued, presented a combination of both – inferential and overt racism. It is a movie from the perspective of police, but Paul Newman in the film plays the role of a liberal and tough cop named Murphy who has “no beef” with the local population of the South Bronx. In the film he helps a fourteen-year-old Puerto Rican girl who lives in cramped quarters in so called “railroad flats” to deliver a baby. He has a relationship with a Puerto Rican nurse named Isabelle (played by Rachel Ticotin) and when he discovers that she is a heroin addict offers “to get heroin for her so that she can kick.” He is concerned with corruption in the

⁴⁸ “Supreme Court of the State of New York County,” Lourdes Torres papers, box 8, folder 8.

⁴⁹ Stuart Hall develops this ground-breaking argument in “The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies in the Media,” in Manuel Alvarado and John O. Thompson, eds., *The Media Reader* (London: British Film Institute, 1990).

⁵⁰ John Fiske, *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 37.

police precinct and he fights police brutality. At the end of the film he is not reluctant to testify against his colleague, Morgan (played by Danny Aiello), who throws a Puerto Rican kid off the roof of a building. Yet, he continues to look at the population of the South Bronx as victims, and his character reflects the imperial projects of the U.S. and other empires of rescuing “Third World” people.

In addition, in the U.S. at the end of the 1970s there was a conservative turn in political and cultural life. This is evident in the social science research of the 1970s and in many ex-socialist and liberal social scientists who embraced conservative policies. Many movies of the 1970s in a sense anticipated the conservative turn of the Reagan era. *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971), *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971), and *Death Wish* (1973) represented a revival of the western genre, only now the Wild West was transposed to the cities in crisis.⁵¹ Even the “liberals” who made Fort Apache, “made public their discontent with the existing situation in America.” A *Daily News* article of 1980 says: “David Susskind, one-time god fly of America’s liberal conscience and TV personality, announced yesterday that he would vote for Ronald Reagan.” Similarly, Paul Newman in the election campaign of the 1980 supported “the conservative pretending to be liberal, John Anderson.”⁵² Anderson represented the interest of big business and not workers and oppressed people.

⁵¹ “Some Examples of the Urban Western,” Lourdes Torres papers, box 8, folder 8. On the conservative turn in U.S. cinema in the 1970s and a revival of “social problem film” see Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 76-104 and 49-52.

⁵² “Some Examples of Urban Western.” Lourdes Torres papers, box 8, folder 8.

The Committee Against Fort Apache prepared a close textual analysis of the screenplay and film. The analysis focuses on three themes: racial stereotypes, gender stereotypes and the police. From the analysis it was evidenced that all the Puerto Rican and black characters especially women derived from a long standing regime of representations that had racialized the figure of blacks, Puerto Ricans and other minorities in Hollywood cinema and beyond. According to the Committee, although *Fort Apache* could have appeared as an anti-cop movie, in reality it gives a romantic account of the police in the South Bronx, a series of neighborhoods with a long history of police brutality towards minorities.

Stereotypes and Beyond

According to the Committee Against Fort Apache, the movie is built around a series of familiar negative stereotypes of blacks and Puerto Ricans. A disabled youth is allowed to play in the precinct because “he’s retarded. He can’t take care of himself out there. They’ll cook him.”⁵³ The two policemen Murphy and Corelli try to establish a relationship with the Hunt’s Point community. They are depicted as local good cops who are familiar with the reality of the neighborhood. For example, they save the life of a Puerto Rican “drag queen,” played magisterially by actor Tito Goya, who wants to commit suicide jumping off from the roof of a building. As Murphy and Corelli arrive, we see the Puerto Rican super of the building calmly reading a newspaper reminding us

⁵³ “Fort Apache – The Bronx,” Screenplay, 3

the classic stereotype of the lazy Hispanic. While Goya's partner, who is obviously crying because of the suicidal intention of her partner, in a version of the screenplay is described as "a diminutive Puerto Rican transvestite, heavily made up and crying hysterically."⁵⁴ The nurse, Isabelle, who seems to be the only Puerto Rican character depicted in a positive way, turns out to be a heroin addict. She is killed by a pusher who fears that her relationship to a cop endangers him. The pusher gives her an overdose of heroin and she dies "in the gutter." In the movie, we find familiar supporting characters also seen in many television shows about cops, like *Baretta*, *Starsky and Hutch*: Mr. Roman a gun dealer, the barmaid Lureen. Like the historical stereotype of "the black mammy," she is friendly and subservient.⁵⁵ There is also a classic pimp, a crazy talking and violent man, strong with the weaker and weak with the stronger. He is "wearing a white fur coat and a maroon fur hat."⁵⁶ Miguel Piñero in the role of a drug dealer is described in the screenplay as "A small, dark, evil-looking man, a DEALER."⁵⁷ Finally in the film we see a young Puerto Rican character, a purse-snatcher, wearing a First World War aviator hat. He symbolizes the increase of mugging in New York City. Murphy and Corelli chase him throughout the whole movie.⁵⁸ The Committee Against Fort Apache read the movie from the perspective of the community. Members of the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 26

⁵⁵ See Donald Boogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films*, Fourth Edition (New York: Continuum, 2008, 1973).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22

⁵⁷ Ibid, 83

⁵⁸ "Analysis of the Screenplay 'Fort Apache – The Bronx,'" Lourdes Torres papers, box 8, folder 8.

Committee warn us that there are other stories, and they teach us how to listen to the voices of the city excluded from official maps.

Building on the capacity of the Committee Against Fort Apache of letting emerge the hidden maps of the city I would like to propose an alternative reading of two characters: Charlotte, played by Pam Grier and the dealer played by Miguel Piñero. As film scholar Charles Ramirez Berg reminds us, stereotypes can be subverted through the performance and extra-textual factors too.⁵⁹ Actors often provide alternative readings of characters. The performance and life stories of two actors, Pam Grier and Miguel Piñero, subvert the stereotypes shown in the film. It could be possible considering the performance and iconic status of Pam Grier and Miguel Piñero, as two characters that exceed and challenge the deep structure of stereotype. This happens not because of the script and the film, but because of their performance and extra-textual factors, notably their iconic status as a black feminist (for Grier) who interpreted Blaxploitation films and a Nuyorican poet (Piñero) as an “out-law.”⁶⁰ Both the screenplay and the film attempted to fix these characters in long standing stereotypes of the junkie and exotic black prostitute in the case of Pam Grier, and of the vicious Puerto Rican drug dealer portrayed by Miguel Piñero. For this reason the analysis done by the Committee Against Fort Apache is illuminating and also helps us to frame the film in a broader discourse of

⁵⁹ Charles Ramirez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 87-108. See also bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectator,” in Robert Stam & Toby Miller, eds., *Film and Theory: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

⁶⁰ On Pam Grier see her autobiography with Andrea Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2010). On Miguel Piñero see Nicolas Kanellos, ed., *Outlaw: The Collected Works of Miguel Piñero* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2010).

racialization and criminalization of black and Puerto Rican communities of the South Bronx. However, I would argue that the performance of Pam Grier and Miguel Piñero produces a movement of the image away from the screen towards the streets, allowing us to make critical connections with urban culture, with black feminism and different responses, even “illegal,” to racialization and the urban crisis. Indeed I am fully aware that there is a difference between actors and characters.

Take for example the following excerpt from the screenplay analysis provided by the Committee Against Fort Apache:

[The movie opens with] Pam Grier, playing a junkie prostitute, staggering down the street. Two policeman comment on her body and watch her as she slinks up to their car. She says: “I got something for you,” pulls a gun out of her purse and empties it into their heads and bodies. Then she walks off. Soon, a group of Puerto Rican youth inch cautiously over the police car and look in. Then they proceed to loot the dead bodies...throughout the movie, neither Pam Grier’s role (she kills for no reason), nor any of the Puerto Rican characters are really developed. We never know their motives, understand anything about them. They are simply criminal, degenerate, and evil. The next time we see Pam Grier, she is luring a middle-aged white man into an abandoned South Bronx building. Inside, she tears his throat open with a razor blade held between her teeth! This graphic scene has its roots in, and reinforces, the racist historical images of black people as cannibalistic savages. The last time we see her, Grier is totally insane, sexually teasing a homicidal Puerto Rican heroin pusher. She suddenly slashes his face with a razor, and he stabs her to death.⁶¹

⁶¹ “Analysis of the Screenplay ‘Fort Apache – The Bronx,’” Lourdes Torres papers, box 8, folder 8.

This is a brilliant analysis making connection with black images in white minds: black as savage, black woman as prostitute with appetite for sex.⁶² Yet the Committee analysis does not make any connection between Pam Grier and her previous roles in Blaxploitation films like *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), both directed by Jack Hill. Perhaps these movies in the 1970s were dismissed either by conservatives or by liberals and even radicals. We are not sure if the producers, directors, and screen writer of *Fort Apache* were familiar with Grier's previous roles as heroine of Blaxploitation, but there are some resemblances between the role of Charlotte and those of Coffy and Foxy Brown. *Fort Apache* tries to exploit Grier's image, proposing and expanding all the negative characteristics that critics of Blaxploitation have attributed to Pam Grier as Coffy and Foxy Brown: violence and exoticization of black women. We know that Coffy and Foxy Brown didn't do drugs. However, in *Fort Apache, the Bronx*, Grier's character is a drug addict and prostitute. She might be Coffy and Foxy Brown a few years later, who, living in the ghetto environment inevitably had become themselves drug addicts and prostitutes. Yet, as in *Foxy Brown* and *Coffy*, Grier's performance in *Fort Apache* resists the stereotype creating a character in control of the image. Already in her hyperbolic performances in *Coffy* and *Foxy Brown*, as American studies scholar Yvonne Sims identifies: "Grier uses the sexual stereotype to her advantage, reclaiming and

⁶² See Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark: 'Race,' Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996); Cameron Bailey, "Nigger/Love: Thin Sheen of Race in *Something Wild*," *Screen* 29 4 (Autumn 1988), 28-40; Jacquie Jones, "The Construction of Black Sexuality: Towards Normalizing the Black Cinematic Experience," in Manthia Diawara, ed., *Black American Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Perspectives in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 171-219; Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

transforming black female sexuality.”⁶³ From this angle, Grier may have framed her character within the radical feminist tradition of black women blues singers of the 1920s and 1930s such as “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith.⁶⁴ Like Bessie Smith, Grier was a “serious artist” and feminist icon among black working-class audiences in the 1970s. While for many critics and the black middle-classes she was either “an exotic oddity” or an actress who promoted a quasi-pornographic image of the black female body.

Reading Pam Grier’s character under a new light, and keeping in mind her previous performances in Blaxploitation movies, I would argue that in *Fort Apache*, Grier’s character is the only one who really resists police brutality, the heroin plague and white male supremacy. She kills two police officers, apparently without any reason. Yet, if we frame Charlotte with Grier’s previous characters of the Blaxploitation era, her action is certainly a symbolic revenge, at the filmic level of course, for police brutality. Similarly, the murderer of the white guy who pulled off from the highway with a flat tire and apparently by chance meets Charlotte on his way, is related to Grier’s performance of Foxy Brown who kills the two white racists who rape her and inject her with many heroin shots as punishment because she almost killed a white white-collar drug trafficker. Finally, in *Fort Apache* Charlotte attempts to kill one of the two drug dealers. This scene

⁶³ Yvonne D. Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), 80. See also Shirley Jennifer Lim brilliant analysis of actress Anna May Wong and the performance of modernity in her *A Feeling of Belonging*, 47-86.

⁶⁴ Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1999). See also Hazel V. Carby, “The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues,” and “Black Women’s Blues, Motown and Rock and Roll,” in *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999).

is reminiscent of *Coffy* who kills the pusher who sold the fatal heroin shot to her sister. Charlotte, like Coffy and Foxy Brown uses her sexuality as a weapon. By casting Grier in the role of Charlotte the film director may have received a performance that contrasted with his intention to depict Charlotte simply as the symbol of the inner city inhabited by black and Puerto Rican heroin addicts who turned to prostitution to buy drugs. Although the movie came out right before the Reagan administration, already occurred a conservative turn in inner city policies that demolished all the efforts undertaken during the Great Society. In addition, the figure of Charlotte is perhaps the first of a recurrent figure of Hollywood cinema of the 1980s and early 1990s: those of the “Welfare Queen” and “crackhead” females who inhabited the inner-city.



Figure 11. Pam Grier. Source: Josiah Howard, *Blaxploitation Cinema: The Essential Reference Guide* (Godalming, U.K.: FAB Press, 2008).

Watching Miguel Piñero as the drug dealer in *Fort Apache* we immediately connect him to hundreds of stereotypical characters seen in Hollywood movies, a mix of “violent and pathologically dangerous bandido” and male buffoon “who cannot master standard English,”⁶⁵ Yet, Piñero’s performance goes beyond *Fort Apache*. As poet Miguel Algarin referring to the language used by Piñero as a poet and play-wright writes:

⁶⁵ Berg, *Latino Images in Film*, 69 and 72.

“We looked for theatrical language that realistically portrayed life on Avenues D, C, B and A unlike the Hollywood versions epitomized by Kojack or Baretta.”⁶⁶ Although Piñero did not write the script of *Fort Apache*, the way he interpreted the lines he is able to bring in that language. In addition, in his autobiographical poem “The Lower East Side Poem,” Piñero plays with these images of the violent and pathologically Puerto Rican living in New York barrios, arguing that this condition is the consequence of racist urban policies and economic interests:

So here I am, look at me I stand proud as you can see
pleased to be from the Lower East
a street fighting man
a problem of this land
I am the Philosopher of the Criminal Mind
a dweller of prison time
a cancer of Rockefeller's ghettocide
this concrete tomb is my home⁶⁷

Another poem by Piñero called “Seeking the Cause” is about people who are seeking the cause and are not aware of that living in a society where they have been abandoned by institutions. They are seeking the cause but they don’t know that they are themselves the cause. In the poem Piñero quote from the Spaniels hit “Goodnite Sweet-Heart Goodnite Sweetheart.” To quote from doo wop it means to include the hundreds of

⁶⁶ Miguel Algarin, Quoted in Jorge Iglesias, “Introduction to the Drama of Miguel Piñero,” in Kannelos, ed., *Outlaw: The Collected Works of Miguel Piñero*, 2010, xxiii.

⁶⁷ Miguel Piñero, “The Lower East Side Poem.” See also the biopic film titled *Piñero* (2001) directed by Leon Ichaso and starring Benjamin Bratt. For a stunning performance of Miguel Piñero reading his poem “Seeking the Cause” see the video on you-tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQxaMLTK7Ok> (accessed on 3/13/2013). This poem and performance is on you-tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxyTWfVifNE> (accessed on 3/13/2013).

vocal harmony groups of New York as people who were seeking the cause. Like the urban proletariat who is not aware of having a politics, doo-wop music is often presented as not political, in reality this music can tell us a lot about urban politics, life-stories, and resistance in postwar New York (1950s) when thousands of black and Puerto Ricans flocked to the city. Doo-wop is one of the first examples of black/Puerto Rican and white ethnic (especially of Italian origins) interactions and could be seen as a precursor of hip hop.

Miguel Piñero is also the author of the award winning play *Short Eyes* (1974), based on his personal experience as inmate in the Sing Sing prison. There is also a film adaptation of *Short Eyes*, directed by Robert Young (1977), starring Miguel Piñero and his friend Tito Goya who also has been an inmate in Sing Sing and plays a double role in *Fort Apache* as the Puerto Rican “drag queen” who tries to commit suicide and as a detective. Both Piñero and Goya, before their tragic and premature death, were activists who fought for better living conditions in prisons and against racial discriminations. There is a wonderful and touching documentary about a concert organized at Sing Sing. Here, Tito Goya who hosted the concert introduced the gospel/R&B all female band The Voice of East Harlem in this way: “We’re getting ready now, men / You gotta be cool, men / I’m gonna leave you know / and let’s have a tremendous confidence / Hey The voices of East Harlem / The voices of East Harlem / brothers.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Video available on you tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxyTWfVifNE> (Accessed March 14, 2014).

Fort Apache and the Social Sciences

The lower-class individual lives in the slum and sees no reason to complain. He does not care how dirty and dilapidated his housing is either inside or out, nor does he mind the inadequacy of such public facilities as schools, parks and libraries; indeed, where such things exist he destroys them by acts of vandalism if he can. Features that make the slum repellent to others actually please him.⁶⁹

Social scientists have always focused on the failure of the Puerto Rican community, since the 1940s Puerto Ricans have been a problem to be studied, analyzed, and fixed in pathological urban culture.⁷⁰ Oscar Handlin's *The Newcomers*, and Natham Glazer's and Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* focus on the "political apathy" and "lack of associational life" of Puerto Ricans in New York.⁷¹ Oscar Lewis considered Puerto Rican communities in New York trapped in a "culture of poverty" which was passed from generations to generation. This is evident in *Fort Apache – The Bronx* when Murphy (Paul Newman) and the nurse, Isabelle (Rachel Ticotin) go out on their first date in a bar. They play a game, deciding that Isabelle will tell Murphy about himself and Murphy will tell Isabelle about herself. The winner will pay for the drinks. When Murphy's turn arrives, he says: "OK. Poor family. You're the oldest. A lotta of brothers and sisters. You got a brother in the joint. You're mother's sick. You got a scholarship to

⁶⁹ Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1968). Banfield is quoted in Macek, *Urban Nightmares*, 63.

⁷⁰ See Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 133-199.

⁷¹ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 162-192.

nursing school, and you did real good, but you can't get a job anywhere else...you smoke a little reefer, fool around a little. You ought get married, but there's not much of a selection around this neighborhood. How am I doin' so far?"⁷² At the end, the nurse wins the game and Paul Newman pays the drink, but this passes completely unnoticed in a movie which confirms what Newman said. The nurse turned out to be a heroin addict who at the end of the film dies for an overdose.

Fort Apache exploited the poverty that blacks and Puerto Ricans in the South Bronx were facing day by day and, instead of helping residents, turned people against the community. This is evident, as I suggested above, from the total absence of the work of community organization that took place in the South Bronx except for making fun of them. In a crucial part of the movie, to find the cop-killer, who we know from the first scene is Charlotte, the police make a series of arrests. Among the people brought in to the precinct, there are members of a revolutionary movement called "Third World Action Group" who are ridiculed in the movie:

It's a bunch of guys with a storefront on Fox Street. They make a lot of hate cop noises, preach armed revolt and all, but they spend most of their time ballin' chicks from Scarsdale.

The young men, all Puerto Rican, all wearing some variation of the fatigue jacket, blue jeans combination, are struggling and cursing and yelling to the crowd.

It consists mostly of kids, going along more for the fun than the politics.⁷³

⁷² "Fort Apache, The Bronx," Screenplay, 49.

⁷³ "Analysis of the Screenplay 'Fort Apache – The Bronx,'" Lourdes Torres papers, box 8, folder 8.

There is a clear reference, here, to the Young Lords who actually had their Bronx branch on Kelly Street, two blocks from Fox. The movie, following the tradition established by Oscar Handlin in his book *The Newcomers* (1959), looks at the Young Lords more as “political agitators” than as a revolutionary movement or a community-based organization. According to Handlin, in Puerto Rican communities there was a lack of “communal organization.” Yet, we have to keep in mind that, as Laura Briggs notices, “Handlin had to write off some fairly extensive organizations – the Nationalist Party, the socialist and communist groups...Philanthropist Arturo Schomburg...Handlin did not consider the Nationalist and socialist groups...legitimate political organizations, but rather they acted as agitators, preying on a narrow, self-defeated hatred of the outsiders.”⁷⁴

Paradoxically this view is confirmed by Paul Newman himself who in an interview about the protest of the Committee Against Fort Apache, argues that the South Bronx community approved the movie except for a small group, who Newman defines very “vocal.” In another interview Newman referred to the protesters of the film as “whores.” He said: “In the final analysis they are the whores. Maybe they are looking for a political base or to call attention to themselves and their community.”⁷⁵

The Young Lords and The Committee Against Fort Apache

⁷⁴ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 176.

⁷⁵ “Paul Newman Declared ‘Persona Non-Grata’ in Puerto Rican and Black Community,” Lourdes Torres papers, box 8, folder, 9.

In reality, there is a link between the Young Lords and the Committee Against Fort Apache. The leader of the protest against *Fort Apache* was Richie Perez, who was a member of the Young Lords Organization and Party from 1970 to 1976. The Committee Against Fort Apache was inspired by the Young Lords, particularly by their struggles to address immediate community needs. For example, one of the first initiatives of the Young Lords in New York City was the “garbage offensive” in East Harlem in 1970. In 1970 there were piles of uncollected garbage in the streets because of reduced sanitation services in the neighborhood. The Young Lords joined the community and helped them clean the street. They contacted the Sanitation Department asking for receive a better service, or at least instruments like brooms and trash bags, but the Sanitation Department ignored their requests. At this point, the Young Lords and people from the community “closed the streets of Third Ave. From 110th, across to 112th and down to Second Ave. on Sunday, July 27”⁷⁶ As the Lords and the residents of East Harlem blocked the streets, police showed up and later in the day they sent a garbage truck to collect the garbage.

The Young Lords and the Committee Against Fort Apache also shared an interest in media power and practices. One of the goals of the Committee was to “educate the community about the effects of media stereotyping and show links to the overall situation

⁷⁶ “Young Lords Block Street with Garbage,” in Enk-Wanzer, ed., *The Young Lords*, 185. On the Young Lords see also Johanna Fernández, “The Young Lords and the Postwar City: Notes on the Geographical and Structural Reconfigurations of Contemporary Urban Life,” in Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter, eds., *African American Urban History Since World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*; Miguel Melendez, *We Took the Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003). On Puerto Ricans social movements in New York City see Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez, eds. *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); and Sonia Song-Ha Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

Black and Puerto Rican face.”⁷⁷ Their intent was to bring media and political theory out from college classrooms into the street. This approach shares, certainly, methodologies with the project of cultural studies in Birmingham in England and anticipated the critical paradigms of ethnic studies and women of color in the U.S.⁷⁸ Theory was not just academic word playing. Its aim was “to develop ability to use media [and theory] for our community’s best interests.” This “grassroots theorizing” on the overlapping issues of class, gender and race also produced alliances between black and Puerto Rican communities. These alliances were not new. Blacks and Puerto Ricans shared the same neighborhood spaces, the same jobs, and had danced on the same dance-floor with *boogaloo* rhythms and the Latin craze of the 1960s. However, this was the first time that these strategies of alliance could be theorized.

⁷⁷ Lourdes Torres Papers, box 8, folder 7

⁷⁸ See Kuan-Hsing Chen, “The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual: An Interview with Stuart Hall,” in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 485-503; and George Lipsitz, “Like Crabs in a Barrel: Why Interethnic Anti-Racism Matters Now,” in *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 117-167. See also Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). On the interactions between race, class and gender in the critical intervention of “women of color” scholars, activists and writers in the US, see Lisa Lowe, “Angela Davis: Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA. Interview with Lisa Lowe,” in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds., *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 303-323; Karin Ikas, “Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa,” in Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 25th Edition, Fourth Edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 267-284; and Chandra T. Mohanti, “Introduction - Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism.” In Chandra T. Mohanti, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). Although the “women of color” alliance dates back at least to the early 1960s, the book which introduced to a broader audience these issues is the collection edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 1983.

If Oscar Handlin dismissed Puerto Rican political organizations as “agitators” preying on a “narrow, self-defeated hatred of the outsiders,”⁷⁹ the Young Lords stressed that the problem was not “the white folks” but a “system created by white people, a capitalistic system that has run away from them to the point that it is now killing white people, too.”⁸⁰ They called for a “change of constellation,” to which interrupt the single homogeneous time created by imperialism and official historiography.⁸¹ In this shift, other voices emerged. They speak the language of the master, but “they are not prepared to give up” their Puerto Rican identity. They recognize that there are many differences between the Puerto Rican and African American communities, but they also realize that they share a long history of oppression, first as colonial/racial subjects in the periphery of empires and in plantation systems, and then in the racialized “contact zones” of New York City.⁸²

The black and Puerto Rican communities in the “inner-city” that emerged from the Young Lords critique of capitalism and imperialism were very different from the ones described by social scientists. Sociologist William Julius Wilson individualized the underclass as “the groups...left behind” who were “collectively different from those that

⁷⁹ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 176.

⁸⁰ Pablo “Yoruba” Guzman, “Before People Called me a Spic, they Called me a Nigger,” in Darrel Enk-Wanzer, ed., *The Young Lords: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 43.

⁸¹ See Iain Chambers, “Waiting on the End of the World?”, in Morley and Chen, eds, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*.

⁸² See Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 144-173.

lived in these neighborhoods in earlier years.”⁸³ In this view, black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods in inner-cities are isolated and their communities have “completely alien values.”⁸⁴ The Young Lords, in contrast with this view, considered the black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods as heterogeneous. They tried to unite what they called the *lumpen* and the working class.⁸⁵ The antagonism between these two groups is also the consequence of the negative label attributed to the so called “underclass” by social science and the media. For this reason, following ethnic studies scholar Ramon Grosfoguel it would be better to abandon the term black and Puerto Rican underclass and using the term “redundant colonial/racialized labor force.”⁸⁶ After all, the blacks and Puerto Ricans excluded from work did not have options other than inventing strategies to survive, either legal or illegal.

The South Bronx is often associated with the heroin epidemics of the 1960s and 1970s in New York. The film exploited this plague making it a central theme. However, it tells only part of the story. In the South Bronx the diffusion of heroin was epidemic. In the 1960s and 1970s there were thousands of heroin addicts.⁸⁷ But what were the causes of the heroin epidemic in the South Bronx? Urban renewal and the displacement of Puerto Rican families are completely overlooked in the film. Ironically, one of the

⁸³ Quoted in Michael Katz, ed., *The Underclass Debate: Views from History* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 17.

⁸⁴ Robin D.G. Kelley, “Looking For the ‘Real’ Nigga.” 17.

⁸⁵ Guzman, “Before People Called me a Spic, they Called me a Nigger,” in *The Young Lords: A Reader*, 42.

⁸⁶ Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 166.

⁸⁷ See Schneider, *Smack*. 2009.

comments made in the film by Murphy (Paul Newman), about the urban heroin catastrophe of the South Bronx, is that the city council should bulldoze all the area. The Committee Against Fort Apache made a different comment: “Nowhere in the film is it mentioned that our community had to physically fight to establish drug-free detoxification programs, like Lincoln Detox; and that this and other similar programs have been closed by the government and prevented from carrying out their original functions.”⁸⁸ The Young Lords also “were stalwart anti-drug advocates because they saw first-hand the impact of heroin on the people of their communities.”⁸⁹ With images like the one proposed by *Fort Apache*, it became harder and harder for community organizations to explain to governmental agencies, that the South Bronx did not need only funding for methadone clinics as a method of control but also more structures in order to establish addiction programs that included cultural activities and bi-lingual advising.⁹⁰ Inspired by the Black Panthers, in the early 1970s the Young Lords, sought to discourage youth from taking heroin, “telling people that drugs are a continuation of the slave master’s attempts to keep you on the plantation.”⁹¹

“I am Not Government, I am Community”: Evelina Lopéz Antonetty and The United Bronx Parents Association

⁸⁸ Lourdes Torres Papers “Analysis of the Screenplay ‘Fort Apache, The Bronx,’” Lourdes Torres papers box 8, folder 8.

⁸⁹ Enck-Wanzer, ed., *Young Lords: A Reader*, 218.

⁹⁰ “Youth Drug Abuse Program,” United Bronx Parents papers, box 3, folder, 1.

⁹¹ Iris Morales, “Palante, Siempre Palante!, Interview with Richie Pérez,” *CENTRO Journal* xxi no. 2 (Fall 2009): 185.

The association which started regular programs, based on prevention and transmission of positive values, was the United Bronx Parents.⁹² The United Bronx Parents was founded in 1965 by Evelina Lopéz Antonetty, who was born in Puerto Rico but moved to East Harlem in 1935. Before moving to the Bronx she worked for Vito Marcantano, “who although was not Hispanic, was admired as a champion of civil rights in the Hispanic community.”⁹³ Richie Pérez, the leader of the Committee Against Fort Apache, in an interview said that Evelina Lopéz Antonetty was a big inspiration to him. He considered her, the mother of all the movements in the South Bronx from the Young Lords to the Committee Against Fort Apache.⁹⁴

⁹² On the activities of the United Bronx Parents Association see “The Educational Needs of the Puerto Rican Child in New York City,” United Bronx Parents Papers, box 4, folder 4; “Week end Outing and Music Shop,” box 3, folder 4; “All the Children Should Read,” box 3, folder 3; Lillian López Papers, “Keep Heritage Alive: The United Bronx Parents,” Lillian López papers, box 4, folder 3, The Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, City University of New York.

⁹³ “Gov hails Puerto Rican heroine,” Lillian López papers, box 4, folder, 3.

⁹⁴ Morales, “Palante, Siempre Palante!, Interview with Richie Pérez,” 144.

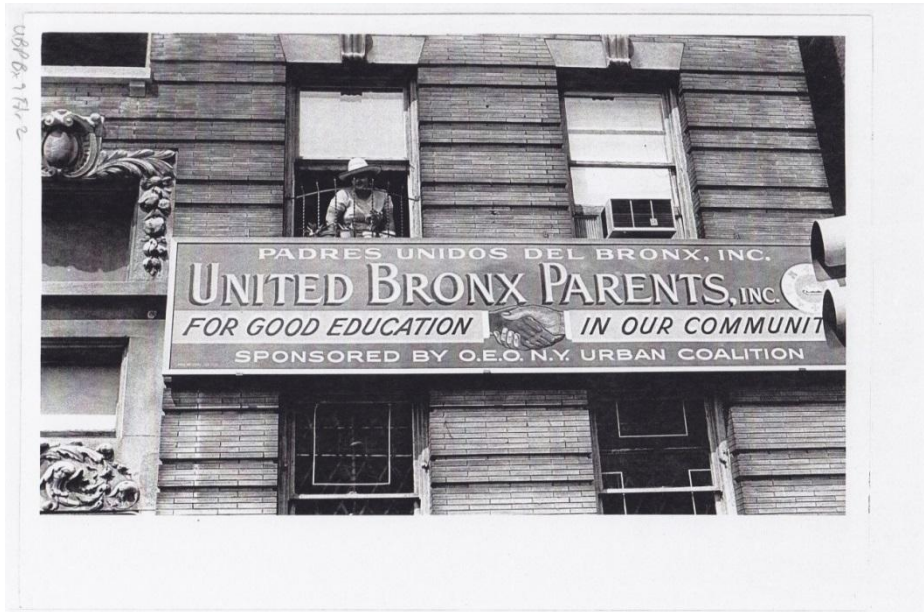


Figure 12. Evelina Lopez Antonetty, founder of the United Bronx Parents and mother of all the movements in the South Bronx since the 1960s. United Bronx Parents papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

As was the case for the Young Lords, the headquarter of United Bronx Parents was not far from the film set of *Fort Apache*. Yet, even in this case, this association was completely ignored by the film. It began its activities as a grass roots self-help organization for parents in the community. Initially the organization focused on problems with the school system, such as the rigidity of school administration, qualitative inadequacies in the school curricula, and the needs of children in school. By the late 1960s the organization, thanks to small grants from the department of Health, Education and Welfare, went beyond its original focus, to include health services, housing issues,

welfare, juvenile justice and so on.⁹⁵ They also offered a wide range of services to the community of the South Bronx, such as child care, youth programs, classes, and inmate and ex-inmate services. And they organized the narcotic guidance group with meeting designed to help people internalize positive values.⁹⁶

In the Narcotic Guidance Group Drugs Programs, involving people from the neighborhoods in the South Bronx was essential, as for example, other youth, people who in the past had drug problem, musicians, artists and writers. Youths who used drugs and attended the meetings did not feel isolated or rejected, but rather encouraged to identify with the community.⁹⁷ Such groups did not exist in the neighborhood depicted in *Fort Apache*. In the movie the neighborhood is so dangerous that the only place where kids and elderly people could play and relax was the police station!

The Young Lords, the Committee Against Fort Apache, United Bronx Parents, and other community organizations of the 1970s and early 1980s were different from each other, but they had one thing in common: they “speak from the people rather for them.”⁹⁸ So too, as we shall see, did the hip hop community of artists.

⁹⁵ United Bronx Parents Papers, “The Organization,” United Bronx Parents papers, box 6, folder 2.

⁹⁶ United Bronx Parents Papers, “The Program: Bilingual Narcotic Guidance Council,” United Bronx Parents papers, box 6. Folder 2; “Addiction Services Agency – Research and Evaluation, March 15, 1974,” Box 6, Folder 12.

⁹⁷ “Bilingual Narcotic Guidance Council,” United Bronx Parents papers, box 3, folder, 1.

⁹⁸ George Lipsitz, “Foreword, ” in Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), xii.

The streets belong to the People! Social Movements, Hip Hop, and New Racial Formations

It is quite odd that a movie which wanted to help the community of the South Bronx completely overlooked the activities of the many organizations and grass-root groups that took place in the South Bronx during the 1960s and 1970s. These organizations disturbed the homogenous and racist view proposed by the media and mainstream social science. They did speak “from way, way below”⁹⁹ because they did not make any distinction between a “respectable” working-class and a “class below the working class.” They also disrupted the hierarchy between high culture and popular culture by launching programs like the South Bronx Library project created by Lillian López in which boys and girls attended workshops with writers such as Piri Thomas author of “Down to these Mean Streets,” Latin Jazz and *Plena* concerts, *Bomba*’s interpretations, Black Theater Workshop with readings from “The Gift of Love” – speech by Martin Luther King, poetry by Pablo Neruda, Langston Hughes, James W. Johnson, narration of Puerto Rican folktales by Pura Belpré, and film programs.¹⁰⁰ They also set up a dance group in which “boys and girls danced African and West Indian numbers and interpreted jazz and American Spiritual songs. Polly Rogers was the choreographer and

⁹⁹ On history from “way, way below” see Kelley, *Race Rebels*.

¹⁰⁰ “South Bronx Project,” Lillian López papers, box 4, folder 6; “South Bronx Project Part I and II,” box 6, folder 1; “The New York Public Library’s South Bronx Project,” box 2, folder 6; “Fickle Cucaracha Lures,” box 4, folder 3; “South Bronx Project 1972 LSCA 72-73,” box 6, folder 2; “Programa,” box 6, folder 1; “Sompsec Dance Workshop,” box 6, folder 1; “Melrose Library, Sept. 24, 1969: Notes of Interest,” box 6, folder 1.

demonstrated great artistry in the presentation of the entire program. The group also interpreted “plenas,” “danza,” etc. from the Island of Enchantment.”¹⁰¹

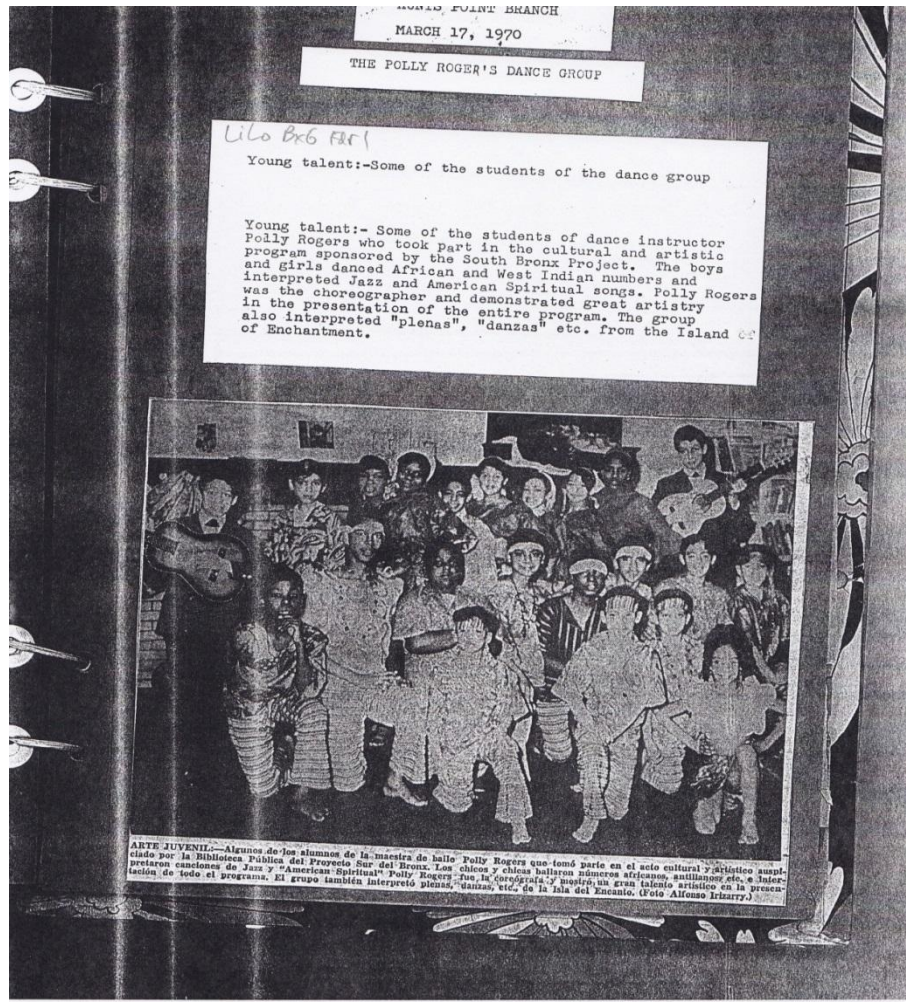


Figure 13. “The Polly Roger’s Dance Group, March 17, 1970.” Lillian López papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

¹⁰¹ “Hunts Point Branch, March 17, 1970: The Polly Roger’s Dance Group,” Lillian López papers, box 6, folder 1.



Figure 14. "Latin Jazz Workshops, presented by The South Bronx Project." Lillian López papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

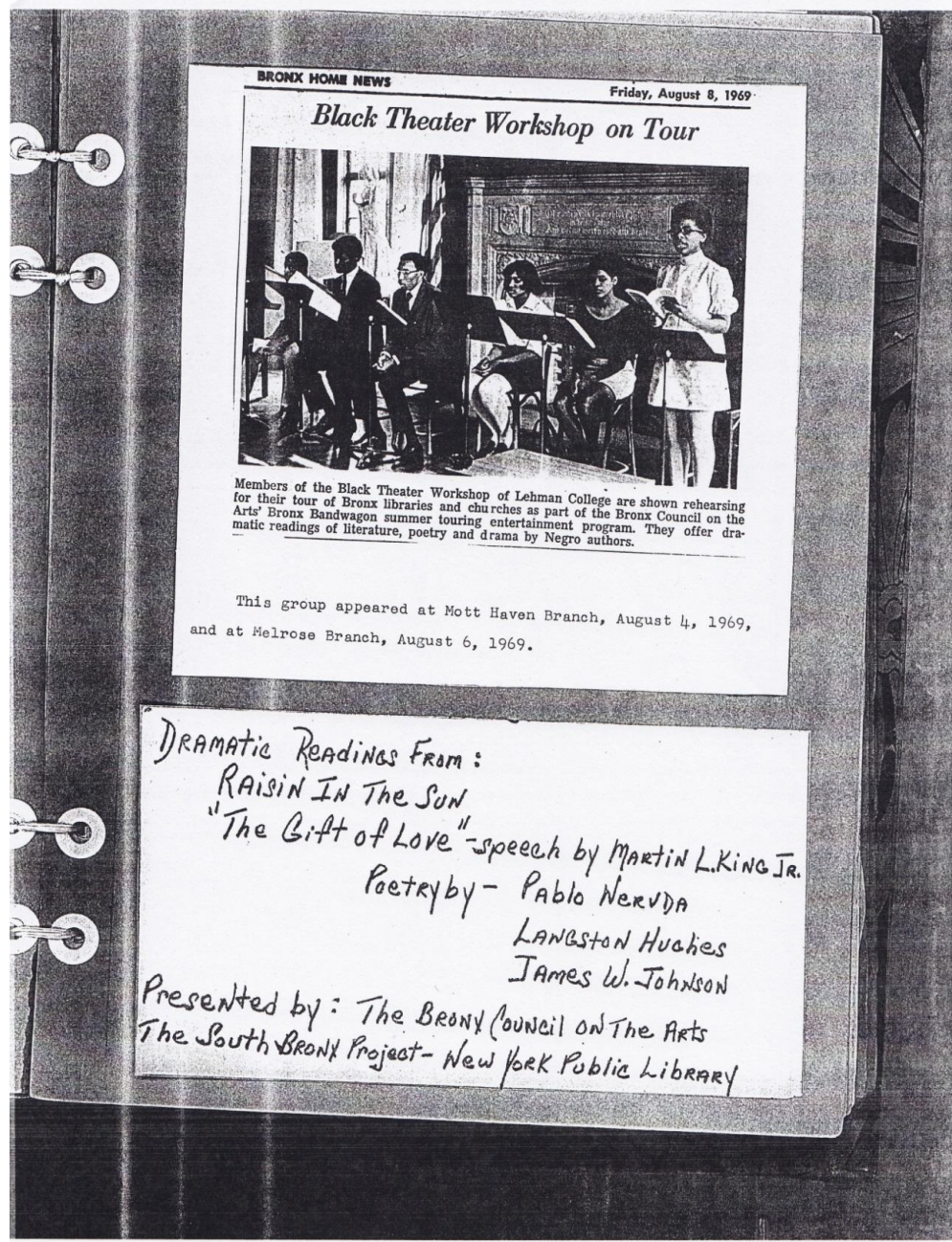


Figure 15. "Black Theater Workshop." Lillian López papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

Bronx Borough Office
Sunday, November 7, 1982
Daily News



Reading all about it

Youngsters attend the Reading Skills Center that has been established at the New York Public Library's main Bronx branch, 2566 Bainbridge Ave. Sponsored by Con Edison, the program is intended to improve reading skills of school-aged children by using staff librarians and concerned parents and books purchased for Con Ed's contribution to the program. Shown with the children are (standing) Edward Carey, vice president of Con Ed's Bronx Division; Lillian Lopez, coordinator of Bronx Libraries and (seated) Yolando Bonitch, children's librarian.

Lilo Bx 4 Fr 3

Figure 16. The Reading Skills Center established by the South Bronx Project. Lillian López papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York City.

Community organizations like The United Bronx Parents and Lillian López's South Bronx Project worked side by side with gangs like the Ghetto Brothers, Savage Skulls and the Turbans.¹⁰² The new directions taken by gangs towards community organizations were central to the advent of hip-hop culture in the South Bronx. *Fort Apache – the Bronx*, rather than listening to these voices, listened to a mainstream public discourse. It looked at the city from the perspective of the white middle classes in suburbs, as represented in the movie *The Out-of-Towners* (1970), or from the perspective of governmental agencies and programs like the Youth Services Agency and other so called “poverty pimps.” As a member of the gang The Turbans said, during the television program the *51st State* broadcasted in 1972, “people that are supposed to help the community” are using “all the big money that are coming down for the youth and put that money in their pocket.”¹⁰³

The Young Lords, the Black Panthers, and community organizers like Evelina López Antonetty definitely influenced gangs in a positive way, which in turn influenced early hip-hop culture. In the early 1970s, gangs in the South Bronx became more interested in social issues and turned their territoriality into community service and forms of collective solidarity. Young Lords kept saying “The streets belong to the people!”¹⁰⁴ Like the Young Lords, hip-hop took back the streets, it transformed the “rusty urban

¹⁰² See the television program *51st State*, “Youth Gangs in the South Bronx,” 1972. Produced by Thirteen/WNET, New York, 97 Minutes. Ending clips 1 and 2 available on You-tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEyAH53VmYI&feature=channel&list=UL> http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=OFgm2ANw32U (Accessed on 8/31/2012).

¹⁰³ *51st State*, Ending Clip 1.

¹⁰⁴ “Young Lords Block Street with Garbage,” in *The Young Lords: A Reader*, 186.

core” (Tricia Rose) of the South Bronx, where, according to *Fort Apache* there was no life, into a utopian space. If the media insisted that the South Bronx was inhabited by aliens, hip-hop culture appropriated this idea and transcoded its derogatory meaning in to positive one. Like living in a city of the near future, kids began dancing like robots, manipulating previously recorded music, and painting ugly subway trains with colors never seen before. They became, to use Iain Chambers’ words, “the active formulators of metropolitan aesthetics and life styles, reinventing the languages and appropriating the streets of the master.”¹⁰⁵ Under such pressure the stereotypes proposed by films like *Fort Apache* were disrupted and the authority of social science was “turned inside out and dispersed.”¹⁰⁶

Perhaps the movie that best describes the early hip-hop movement in the South Bronx is the semi-documentary film *Wild Style* (1983), directed by Charlie Ahearn. The movie narrates the chronicles of the futuristic city created by graffiti writers, break-dancers and DJs with names evoking science fiction and comic strips. It follows graffiti writers like Lee Quiñones, Lady Pink and others invading the train-yards at night, painting “with color of dreams crying for existence on empty walls of desolation’s subway car.”¹⁰⁷ It allows us to listen to DJ Grandmaster Flash at the turntable creating like a magician his “web of sound,”¹⁰⁸ and MC Rubie Dee rapping about Puerto Ricans and African American interactions. In a crucial scene of the film we follow Puerto Rican

¹⁰⁵ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 23.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Sandra María Estevez, “For South Bronx” in *Yerba Buena*, 1981.

¹⁰⁸ Dick Hebdige, *Cut ‘N’ Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (London: Routledge, 1990), 142.

Quiñones as he travels on the subway in order to find inspiration. We see images of destroyed buildings, ruins and rubble, but we also hear in the background Grandmaster Caz from The Cold Crush Brothers rapping about the South Bronx: “Look Past the garbage, over the train, under the ruins, through the remains, around the crime and pollution, and tell me where I fit in, South Bronx New York, That’s where I dwell, to a lot of people it’s a livin’ hell, Full of frustration and poverty, but wait that’s not how it looks to me, It’s a challenge and opportunity, To rise above the stinkin’ degree, You gotta start with nothing and then you build, Follow your dream till it’s fulfilled.”¹⁰⁹

Here, as historian Tricia Rose puts it, hip-hop becomes “urban renewal.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ “South Bronx Subway Rap,” Cold Crush Groove, from you tube, accessed on September 4, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CD2yp55yrYQ>

¹¹⁰ Rose, *Black Noise*, 61.



Figure 17. The Fantastic 5, 1980. Copyright Charlie Ahearn. Source: Source: The Experience Music Project, *Yes, Yes, Y'all: Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 253.

Perhaps, this film offers a romanticized idea of resistance, but I would argue that it also offers a shift from the history of hip-hop to hip-hop as history. “South Bronx Subway Rap” by The Cold Crush Brothers becomes a study in urban history. The song listed a series of features well known in the South Bronx: garbage, ruins, crime and so on, but then proposes a radical reinterpretation of the Bronx as a space of opportunity where dreams can become true. This is not the “classic American dream” but the utopia/dystopia tension of diasporic and inter-ethnic social movements. Like DJs, The Cold Crush Brothers re-assemble and re-write the history of the South Bronx, looking in the gaps and holes of history. Although not mentioned in the lyrics, their parents began

the struggle after being excluded from the work-force by de-industrialization. The same parents and relatives begin the poem “Puerto Rican Obituary” by Pedro Pietri. They continue the life stories of the protagonists of Pietri’s poem:

Juan
Miguel
Milagros
Olga
Manuel
All died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow
passing their bill collectors
on to the next of kin
All died
waiting for the garden of eden
to open up again
under a new management
All died
dreaming about america
waking them up in the middle of the night
screaming: Mira Mira
your name is on the winning lottery ticket
for one hundred thousand dollars
All died
hating the grocery stores
that sold them make-believe steak
and bullet-proof rice and beans...¹¹¹

Unlike “Puerto Rican Obituary,” the song “South Bronx Subway Rap” suggests that rap as social movement can appropriate the technologies of the master that

¹¹¹ Pedro Pietri, “Puerto Rican Obituaries,” in *The Young Lords. A Reader*, 72-73. For an excellent reading of Pedro Pietri’s poem in the context of the urban crisis of New York and U.S. imperialism see Ramón E. Soto-Crespo, *Mainland Passage: The Cultural Anomaly of Puerto Rico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 119-123.

marginalized Puerto Ricans in New York and produce music that, as cultural studies scholar Iain Chambers argues, “taking the simplest and most widely available devices in the recording chain - turntables and microphones - and transformed them into musical instruments in their own right.”¹¹² Hip hop then becomes not just a musical form, a way of dancing, and visual art but an alternative way of knowing and a form of social movement.

Hip hop also redefines the meaning of race. On the one hand, it excavated in to the rubbles of history and through a collage of sounds made history return to the present like a flash. It reconfigures the racialization of blacks and Puerto Ricans creating a new racial formation and subjectivity. This is a new race that decenters the black and white binary connecting the afro- US American and the Afro-latin@ people. In their groundbreaking work *Racial Formation in the Unites States*, ethnic studies scholars Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that after the great transformation produced by new social movements of the 1950s and 1960s the new racial formations and inter-ethnic alliances which emerged from these movements were undermined by the new right and conservative policies of the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹³ However as cultural critic Lisa Lowe argues it is in the continuous struggle between racialized policies, the state apparatuses, social movements and cultural practice that new races are formed.¹¹⁴ If, as sociologist

¹¹² Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan 1985), 190.

¹¹³ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 1994), 95-112.

¹¹⁴ Lisa Lowe argues that: “racial formation is the dialectical struggle between, on the one hand, the racial state that serves the economy and facilitates its needs for exploitable labor by racializing through the law

Ramon Grosfoguel says “the racialization of Puerto Ricans was entangled with the racialization of African-Americans,”¹¹⁵ hip hop artists understood that African Americans and Puerto Ricans shared a common history of diaspora, colonialism and exploitation. They have shared the same space in forgotten neighborhoods and public housing. In other words the inter-ethnic alliances created by the new social movements in the 1950s and 1960s did not end but took new forms.

Hip-hop not only is a continuation of the new social movements of the 1950s and 1960s but re-writes the history of African American and Puerto Rican in New York as a political act. While many scholars continued to make a distinction between politics and popular culture, hip hop blasted these distinctions away. The interactions between blacks and Puerto Ricans are reworked. This re-working is constructed through sound and doing so disturbs and challenges the “ocularcentrism” of the social science and dominant visual representation of the urban crisis of New York City. As ethnic studies scholar Josh Kun reminds us: “Race remains a visual idea, a set of meanings, stereotypes, assumptions, and lies, all rooted in differences that are experienced and indexed most commonly by the eyes.”¹¹⁶ The racialization of black and Puerto Rican has been constructed through the visual: the figure of the mugger, the ruins of Charlotte Street in the South Bronx are the index of the crisis and it is always marked by the racial difference of black and Puerto

and repressive apparatuses, and, on the other, the social movements, collective projects, and cultural practices that continually redefine racial meanings in ways that seek to reorganize those racialized and gendered capitalist relations.” Lisa Lowe, “The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique,” in Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman, eds., *The Futures of American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 79.

¹¹⁵ Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 151.

¹¹⁶ Kun, *Audiotopia*, 116.

Rican working class.¹¹⁷ Most films about New York in the 1970s and 1980s relied on the reality effect of the visual representation.

In a scene of *Wild Style* we watch at a jam session in which there is a battle between MCs and Djs. One of the band performing are the Fantastic Five. The MC of Fantastic Five is the Puerto Rican Rubie Dee. When it is his turn in the battle he raps: “I’m Rubie Dee and I’m Puerto Rican. You might think I’m black from the way I speak.” In doing this he makes a shift from the visual perception of race “indexed most commonly by the eyes” to an aural perception of race based on the power of language.¹¹⁸ Like “jive talk” and “bop language” in the 1940s, the language of the MC in the early 1980s became a strategy of alliance between blacks and latinos/as. Contrary to the stereotype of the black “crazy-talking” created by Hollywood cinema, the MC is extremely articulate.¹¹⁹ Rubie Dee re-writes the history of Puerto Rican and black connections not through the visual but through sound, rearticulating the black and Puerto Rican alliances that took place on the street corners in doo-wop in the 1950s with groups like Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers,¹²⁰ in jazz with the military band of the all black

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Murray Forman, *The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 35-67.

¹¹⁸ Kun, *Audiotopia*, 116.

¹¹⁹ On the stereotype of the “crazy talking” see Stuart Hall, “The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies in the Media” in Manuel Alvarado and John O. Thompson, eds., *The Media Reader* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 16. On bop language as politics of opposition and strategy of resistance see George Lipsitz, “Corporate culture, Conformity, and Commodities: The Fight for Moral Authority,” in *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 274-275.

¹²⁰ Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers has been one of the most successful vocal harmony/doo-wop group from New York City in the 1950s with hits like “Why do fools in Love” and “I’m not a juvenile Delinquent.” They began singing at the street corners of Washington Heights in upper Manhattan. The

unit of 369th Infantry which recruited Puerto Rican musicians, and on the dance floor with the *boogaloo* craze of the late 1960s. These encounters which happened in the past return like a flash allowing us to re-read the past under a new light.¹²¹ Connections in the apparently trivial world of popular culture acquired a political meaning and provoke “critical associations” that enable the struggle against the urban crisis in the present.¹²² The South Bronx was perhaps “like a jungle sometime, with broken glasses everywhere”¹²³ but the sound of Frankie Lymon’s doo-wop harmony and the Cold Crush Brothers’ hip-hop disturb and subvert the “broken window” theory.¹²⁴ If the “broken window” theory tried to “suppress the city” (Henri Lefebvre), and contributed to the racialization of Puerto Ricans, hip hop and the other sounds acted like a weapon through which “the dominant space, that of the space of richness and power, is forced to fashion

members of the group were Frankie Lymon, Herman Santiago, Jimmy Merchant, Joe Negroni and Sherman Garnes.

¹²¹ I am drawing on the Iain Chambers’ reading of Walter Benjamin’s famous theses on the philosophy of history in the context of afro-diasporic sounds. See Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean blues: Musiche, malinconia postcoloniale, pensieri marittimi* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012), 30-31.

¹²² On black and Puerto Rican connections in doo-wop, R&B, jazz and hip hop see: Juan Flores, “Cha-Cha with a Backbeat: Songs and Stories of Latin Boogaloo” and “Puerto Rock: Rap, Roots and Amnesia.” Both in Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). On black and Puerto Rican interactions in jazz, salsa and rap from a transnational perspective see George Lipsitz, “Salsa: The Hidden History of Colonialism,” in *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); On Puerto Ricans contribution to the hip-hop scene in New York see Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip-Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2003). See also Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Oye Como Va!: Hybridity and Identity in Latino Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); and Ruth Glasser, *Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹²³ Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message,” 1982.

¹²⁴ For a critique of the “Broken Window theory” introduced by criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling in their 1982 article on *The Atlantic Monthly*, see Rosalyn Deutsche, “The Threshold of Democracy.” in *Urban Mythologies: The Bronx Represented Since the 1960s*.

the dominated space, that of the periphery.”¹²⁵ The South Bronx of the 1970s and 1980s was a war-zone after all. Zorro (graffiti writer Lee Quiñones) says to one of his friends in *Wild Style*: “Being a graffiti writer is taking the chances, taking the risk, taking all the arguments with police and transports... you got go out, you got do the action... it is being called an out-law at the same time” (*Wild Style*).

¹²⁵ Quoted in Deutsche, *Ibid.*, 98.

Chapter 4

“Chi È 'O Bbuono e Chi È 'O Malamente”?: The Voice of the Silenced Majority

Naples Like New York

During the 1980s the Italian mainstream press launched a series of articles about the urban crisis of Naples. In many of these articles journalists and commentators made connections between the urban crisis of New York and Naples. The local newspaper *Il Mattino* wrote: “is Naples ungovernable?”¹ Similarly, a famous book about New York was titled *The Ungovernable City*.² Other articles in the major local newspaper *Il Mattino* and the Neapolitan edition of *La Repubblica* made a parallel between urban crime, uncollected garbage strikes, heroin diffusion, mugging and crazy traffic in New York and Naples.³

¹ *Il Mattino*, “Ma Napoli è davvero ingovernabile (Speciale Cronaca),” March 6, 1985.

² Vincent Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and his Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

³ “Napoli in tv sembra New York,” *La Repubblica*, March 2000; “Napoli vuoi vederla? Sta in tutti i cinema,” *La Repubblica*, November 5, 1985; “Nei vicoli dove si vende morte,” *Il Mattino*, May 12, 1985; “Rifiuti, è invasione continua,” *Il Mattino*, 1985; “E’ in via Marina è sempre ingorgo,” *Il Mattino*, May 4, 1985; “Fra cinque tonnellate di rifiuti,” *Il Mattino*, January 4, 1985; “Dossier su morte da rapina,” *Il Mattino*, January 3, 1985; “Il vacillante esercito della NU,” *Il Mattino*, January 3, 1985; “Igiene, traffico e casa: emergenza su tre fronti,” *Il Mattino*, January 2, 1985.

The narrative of Naples as urban problem has a long history and dating back at least to the sixteenth century when the city attracted masses of people from all over the Kingdom of Naples. Yet it is not a coincidence that a racialization of Naples occurred with the unification of Italy (1860). During this time Italy began its colonial adventure in Africa and more and more studies initiated to make connections between Southern Italians and Africans. In any case, Naples before the unification was the capital of a kingdom (Il Regno delle due Sicilie) and among the largest cities in Europe (in the seventeenth century, along with Paris, it was the largest). In the seventeenth century it became an overcrowded city due to the massive immigration of peasants from all over the kingdom and the presence of slaves, runaway slaves and laborers. It contained large pockets of poverty and the worst slums in Europe. However it was an important economic and cultural center with a powerful royal court, a leading world university, the largest merchant fleet in Italy. It also had among the highest number of theaters, magazines, and newspapers in Europe. In the safes of its banks there was more money than in all the other Italian cities combined. In 1837 it was the first Italian city to have public street lights, and in 1839 the first railway station in Italy was inaugurated. Traditionally, Naples was not an industrial city but a city of services and consumption, and a military center. However, in the nineteenth century, the Bourbons began a process of industrialization with the construction of a large shipyard in the eastern outskirts, and the installation of metallurgical industry in the eastern part of the city. They also inaugurated a model industrial village in San Leucio with many textile mills and a silk

factory. Naples, in other words, as sociologist Domenico De Masi argues, was well equipped to expand and become an industrial city by the end of the nineteenth century.⁴

With the unification of Italy in 1860 Naples lost its status as capital city and began to decline. Some historians have argued that the decline of Naples was destined to come with the unification because manufacturers were “almost entirely dependent on the sovereign’s benevolent protection.”⁵ Only those who had contacts with the court were privileged. However, the unequal governmental policies of the unified Italy had a tremendous impact on the economy and social life of Naples. The new State efforts concentrated on the industrialization of the North at the expense of the South, channeling the capital and resources of Naples and its kingdom to the North. Naples still remained the largest city in Italy, but compared to other cities in the North, like Milan and Turin, its growth was much slower. In the decades after the unification unemployment increased and there was a massive wave of emigration from Naples and the ex-kingdom to the Americas. It has been estimated that between 1885 and 1905 more than two million people left the South. At the same time, the condition of the “Lower City” deteriorated. According to a survey of 1883, in the overcrowded section of Porto-Pendino-Mercato about 130,000 people lived in a condition of extreme poverty in a square kilometer, making it the most densely populated area in Europe and perhaps in the world.

⁴ Domenico De Masi, “Il palazzo e la tribù” in Domenico De Masi, ed., *Napoli e la questione meridionale, 1903-2000* (Naples: Guida, 2004), 171-174.

⁵ Paolo Macry, “The Southern Metropolis: Redistributive Circuits in Nineteenth-century Naples,” in Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris, eds., *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press), 66.

In 1884 the outbreak of a cholera epidemic killed more than 7,000 people. As a consequence of cholera a massive project of slum clearance and urban renewal called “Risanamento” was inaugurated. The years following the cholera are a crucial moment in the history of Naples and there is a link between that moment and the postwar decades. First of all, by that time Naples epitomized the city in crisis transformed from a capital city to an urban problem. It also marked the beginning of the dependence of Naples on the North and the central government. Naples started to be perceived as a cancer and its lower classes as aliens. Famously, the Italian Prime Minister Agostino De Prestis referring to the urgency of a slum clearance project, exclaimed: “We must disembowel Naples!” The “Risanamento” was the first of a long list of special Laws for Naples issued by the State that in most of the cases instead of resolving the problems of the city. It increased a colonial style dependency of the South on the North, the inequalities between North and South, and the racialization of the urban crisis of Naples. The plan of the “Risanamento,” as historian Frank Snowden argues, “presented a surgical solution to the problem of public health...[proposing] ...a great incision slicing in a direct line through all four infested neighborhoods. The planners envisaged a great boulevard- the “rettifilo”, later named Corso Umberto I, 2 km long and 30 mt broad.”⁶ However, like urban renewal in New York City, the creation of wide boulevards was also a strategy for controlling the masses and further isolating the urban poor. The “Risanamento” did not resolve the problem of public health because behind the surface of great boulevards the

⁶ Frank Snowden, *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 185.

slums of the Lower City continued to exist. The new buildings erected on the boulevards were destined for the middle class, so the “Risanamento” turned from a State intervention into a business operation giving power to private developers. The lower classes who lived in that area could not afford to move into the new buildings so they were evicted from their neighborhoods and relocated in newly developed areas in the eastern part of the city and on the hill of Vomero. These actions made the “Risanamento” the first example of the “capitalistic use of territory” that would characterize the history of urban planning in Naples in the postwar years.⁷

In the decades after the unification the camorra (Neapolitan organized crime) expanded. The camorra, unlike the Sicilian mafia, is an urban phenomenon born in the prisons and slums of Naples during the seventeenth century. The Bourbons had used the camorra for law enforcement and to control the masses in the 1800s and in 1860 the new State opened the prison of Naples and used the camorra to maintain “law and order.” The camorra had been characterized by a capillary control of urban space through inflicting racket extortion for “protection” on prostitutes, shopkeepers, street vendors, and even beggars, but at this moment it began to make contacts in the world of construction, finance and politics.⁸ The expansion of the camorra created a new discourse about Neapolitans that explained the rise of crime in racial terms. Cesare Lombroso, founder of the discipline of criminal anthropology, gave a racial explanation for the rise of the

⁷ On the continuity between *Risanamento* and urban planning throughout the 20th-century see Ugo Rossi, *Lo spazio conteso: Il centro storico di Napoli tra coalizioni e conflitti* (Naples: Guida, 2009), 58-65.

⁸ On the origin of Camorra see Paolo Macry, “The Southern Metropolis: Redistributive Circuits in Nineteenth-century Naples,” in Lumley and Morris, eds., *The New History of the Italian South*, 72-75.

camorra, arguing that its prevalence in Naples was “fundamentally due to African and Oriental elements” in Neapolitan culture.⁹

In 1903 sociologist Francesco Saverio Nitti in his book *Naples and the Southern Question* urged the Italian State to intervene in Naples with an industrial policy to balance the inequality that it had created after the unification by channeling all the resources to the North. Stemming from this research there emerged the 1904 special Law for the industrialization of Naples.¹⁰ The result of this Law was the inauguration in 1909 in the western part of the city of the largest and most modern steel plant in Italy, called *Ilva*, as well as the expansion in the 1920s of the industrial area in the eastern part of the city with the establishment of two petro-chemical plants, cotton manufactures, and food-processing industry.

With the industrialization of the western and eastern parts of the city, during the fascist regime the city expanded annexing the towns of San Giovanni, Barra and Ponticelli in the east; Secondigliano and Chiaiano in the north; and Pianura in the west. During the 1930s the process of “Risanamento” continued interventions of urban renewal in the old center with the construction of the new central post office, the headquarter of the province, and other buildings mostly designated for offices.¹¹ This process was also extended to other parts of the city reinforcing the strategic alliance between the

⁹ Quoted in Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape, and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 72.

¹⁰ Francesco Saverio Nitti, “Napoli e la questione meridionale” in De Masi, ed., *Napoli e la questione meridionale, 1903-2005*.

¹¹ Ugo Rossi, *Lo spazio conteso*, 62.

municipality and private builders. According to architect Benedetto Gravagnuolo, in the western neighborhood of Fuorigrotta more than 15, 000 residents were evicted in order to commence a profitable operation of urban renewal.¹²

In 1939, in the context of urban expansion, Luigi Piccinato elaborated the City Plan which favored the alliance between public administration and privates. This plan, as Gravagnuolo notices, still gave too much power to private builders; however it was the most innovative plan in the history of Naples. In terms of vision this plan was innovative because it anticipated the idea of a metropolitan area of Naples beyond the municipal territory.¹³ It was also very sensitive to environmental issues, preserving and protecting green areas in the city and rural areas in the hinterland around the city in order to avoid both urban speculation and the creation of an urban *unicum* between Naples and the surrounding towns. With the coming of the war, however, the 1939 plan was not approved.

World War II was a major turning point in the history of Naples with repercussions in the postwar years up until the 1980s. During the war Naples faced more destruction than any other Italian city. In the summer of 1943 it was subjected to heavy air strikes by the Allies which destroyed and damaged hundreds of buildings and left more than 200,000 homeless. At the same time, the Germans who had occupied the city sabotaged and destroyed many infrastructures when withdrew from the city in June after

¹² Benedetto Gravagnuolo, "Napoli, progetti e storia," in Franco Cassano, Maurizio Conte, Daniela Lepore, eds., *Lo spazio della città: trasformazioni urbane a Napoli nell'ultimo secolo* (Naples: Clean, 1981), 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

a four days uprising of the local population and the arrival of the Allies troops.¹⁴ After liberating the city the Allies occupied it from 1943 to 1946. The Allied government, as political scientist Percy Allum argues, was not the best example of democracy and transparency.¹⁵ Not only did it establish a government inspired by the British colonial administration, opposing elections of socialists or communists mayors and traditional worker unions, it also favored the flourishing of contraband and the black market.

It is well known that the U.S. Navy secretly collaborated with the mafia “in the preparation leading up to the Allied invasion of Sicily.”¹⁶ This signaled the intensification of connections between Neapolitan camorra, Sicilian mafia, and Italian American mafia. During the allied government, New York mafia boss Vito Genovese, who had returned to Italy in 1936 to escape a murder trial and had become a collaborator of the fascist regime, controlled the contraband and black market in Naples. It has been estimated that “60 per cent of the merchandise unloaded in Naples during this period ended up on the black market.”¹⁷ Shortly after the war in many other European cities the black market vanished or diminished while in Naples it became “one of the city’s principal economic activities.”¹⁸ In 1946 Lucky Luciano (the head of the Italian American mafia of New York) was released from a U.S. prison and deported to Italy. He

¹⁴ Eirene Sbriziolo, “Occasioni perdute e ritrovate,” in Franco Cassano, ed., *Lo Spazio della città: Trasformazioni urbane a Napoli nell’ultimo secolo* (Naples, Coopertativa Libreria Editrice), 40-41.

¹⁵ Percy Allum, *Napoli punto e a capo* (Naples: L’ancora del mediterraneo, 2003).

¹⁶ Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 100.

¹⁷ Tom Behan, *See Naples & Die: The Camorra and Organized Crime* (London & New York: Tauris, 2002), 55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

chose as his destination Naples where he remained until his death in 1961. With the presence of Lucky Luciano Naples became “a convenient staging post for mafia activities.”¹⁹

Conditions were terrible in Naples in the immediate postwar period. More than 100,000 housing units destroyed and about 15,000 damaged, yet the City Plan of 1939 was not approved because there were other priorities. However, as many historians have argued, there were other reasons why the 1939 Plan was not approved.²⁰ First of all, it was a plan proposed during fascism and though it had little to do with fascism it was rejected because people wanted to forget that period. Secondly, and perhaps more important, precisely because the plan sought to preserve green areas, it posed a serious problem to constructors who saw a profitable business in the reconstruction of the city.

Immediately after the war neighborhood organizations played a major role in the reconstruction of the city. In 1946 a new City Plan was drawn up which, besides the essential work of reparation and reconstruction in the area around the central station and the port, proposed the construction of new neighborhoods in the sections of Chiaia and Vomero. Thus began the devastation of Naples under the right wing administration of the populist mayor Achille Lauro in the 1950s and under the hegemony of Democrazia Cristiana in the 1960s. Within these two decades the alliance between administrators, urban planners, and unscrupulous builders gave rise to one of the worst examples of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rossi, *Lo spazio conteso*, 63.

urban speculation in Europe.²¹ Every space available in the city was filled with cement.²² Between 1951 and 1960 more than 300,000 housing units were constructed. During this period, the city was without a proper City Plan and worked with modified versions of the 1939 plan. For example, the idea of the greater Naples was exploited by unscrupulous builders who covered the Naples hinterland with cement erasing most of the rural areas which would have remained rural under the 1939 plan. Similarly, within the city limit all the areas destined to remain green or with a low density of population were engulfed with buildings higher than allowed by legal limits. In the district of Vomero between 1951 and 1971, the population rose from 81,074 to 167, 095.

The old center remained overcrowded but instead of being renovated many buildings were left in a ruined state and urban renewal remained in the logic of urban speculation such as the ugly fourteen floor block of flats called “palazzo Ottieri” after the name of the constructor in the historical Piazza Mercato. Another famous case of urban speculation in the center is that of the new district San Giuseppe Carità. In the 1930s, adjoining this area the Fascist regime had begun a process of urban renewal with the construction of the central post office and other buildings like the province headquarter, the house of the war veteran, and buildings designed mostly for offices. The idea was to build up the business and commercial district of Naples but then the plan was put aside because of the war. In 1953 this plan was re-launched by the Lauro administration, and extended to the area of San Giuseppe Carità, which was a densely populated area, mostly

²¹ Vezio De Lucia, *Se questa è una città: La condizione urbana nell'Italia contemporanea* (Rome: Donzelli Mediterranea, 2006).

²² Eirene Sbriziolo, “Occasioni perdute e da ritrovare,” in Cassano, ed., *Lo Spazio della città*, 39-45.

working and lower-middle class. The residents were evicted and relocated in public housing in the periphery and this old working-class neighborhood was transformed into one of the most horrible examples of speculative construction in the world, with buildings of twelve and fourteen floors very close to each other.²³

In the meantime, the central government led by Democrazia Cristiana took up Nitti's ideas of unequal development between the North and the South and initiated a series of state interventions with the funds of "the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (Development Fund for the South of Italy)." However, this series of Special Laws, as historian Gabriella Gribaudi observes, "exacerbated the South's dependency on central government intervention," making visible once again old stereotypes of the South and Naples in particular.²⁴ As we have seen, the United States hegemony in Naples was very strong during the war and in the immediate postwar period. With the end of occupation this hegemony did not terminate. Not only did the United States chose Naples as the Southern Mediterranean headquarter of the NATO and as well as of the Sixth Fleet, but also it was central to "the development of state intervention in the South." The state intervention of the "Cassa per il Mezzogiorno" was inspired by Roosevelt's "development areas" and often set up through a collaboration between Italian and American economists and sociologists. As Gabriella Gribaudi observes, "the proud championing of the historic role of the South was, replaced by the request for aid and the

²³ De Lucia, *Se questa è una città*, 10-15.

²⁴ Gabriella Gribaudi, "Images of the South: The Mezzogiorno as seen by Insiders and Outsiders," in Lumley and Morris, eds., *The New History of the Italian South*, 103.

assumption of a subordinate role.”²⁵ As part of the special Law for Naples, the Alfa Romeo factory was installed at Pomigliano D’Arco, the still works in the west expanded and changed its name from Ilva to Italsider, and the petrol chemical industry Q8 and Mobil settled in the eastern part of the city. However, people who controlled the industry were from North or from abroad. Similarly, people in charge of the “Cassa per il Mezzogiorno” were from Rome and the North.

Like New York City, Naples, by the late 1960s was a city divided along class lines. The majority of the houses constructed during this time was built on the hills of the Vomero, Posillipo, Colli Aminei and designed for the middle and upper classes. While the middle and upper classes, attracted by the opportunity of living in new neighborhoods, fled to the hills of Vomero and Posillipo, the old center was deteriorating. In the 1960s the poorest sections of the old center had a population density comparable to that of Hong Kong and an unemployment rate at 42 per cent. One out of 10 people lived in “bassi” (single room apartments on the street level) in condition of extreme poverty. In the past, the old center, was diverse and it was common that in the same building lived poor and rich families (following a vertical structure: lower floors for working and poor artisanal classes and top floors for wealthy families). Now it was an area with a high concentration of poverty. In this regard the “inner-city” of New York and some neighborhoods of the old center of Naples were similar. According to sociologist William Julius Wilson, at least 40 per cent of the population was poor. In some sections of the city, there were still shanty towns created for people who had remained homeless

²⁵ Ibid.

after the war. Although some families were able to obtain an apartment in public housing constructed in the neighborhoods of Soccavo and Secondigliano, about five thousand of them continued to live in precarious conditions in different shanty towns located around the city.²⁶

Even the new public housing projects of “Rione Traiano” in Soccavo built in the 1950s and “Rione Don Guanella” in Piscinola/Secondigliano built in the early 1960s were inadequate. These “housing projects” lacked basic infrastructures like roads, bus stops, and safe recreational spaces for children. In “Rione Don Guanella” only a few years after the projects were built, housing stock was in a terrible condition because of the poor quality of materials used, and the area was infested with rats and garbage because sanitation maintenance was scarce. To make matter worst, families who were relocated from densely populated and lively areas of the old center felt isolated in these public projects without stores and the social network of the alleys.

In the poorer sections of the city living conditions were dramatic because the high density of population was not balanced by good municipal services. It has been estimated that 16 out of 19 municipal sections of the city had a demographic density of 45,000 people per square kilometer with peaks of 80,000. In the more disadvantaged areas of Naples, according to the weekly magazine *Epoca* of 1972, out of 1000 children born alive, 52 died before the first year compared with a national average of 22.7. Diseases like hepatitis and typhus were endemic in Naples and cases of infections between 1967

²⁶ Enrica Morlicchio, “Exclusion from work and the Impoverishment Processes in Naples,” in Enzo Mingione, ed., *Urban Poverty and the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 338-339.

and 1969 were three times higher than before. The monthly income in Naples was among the lowest in Italy: 662. 026 Lire compared to 1. 029. 722 in Rome and 1. 424. 423 in Milan.²⁷

In 1973 Naples suffered a cholera epidemic. Only twenty people were killed, but the outbreak of cholera revealed that the project of “Risanamento” undertaken almost a century before had failed. It also showed that the urban speculation of the 1950s and 1960s had undermined the territory of the city. Almost a century after the cholera epidemic of 1884, a vast part of the center still existed in the same condition but with the trade and traffic of a late-twentieth century city. Besides the old center, deterioration extended to other areas in the periphery and hinterland, which by the 1950s had turned mainly rural or small towns into urban areas. As historian Tom Behan observes: “Small towns close to Naples registered a population increase of between 60% and 200%.”²⁸ As they grew, the towns around Naples became part of the city. Around Vesuvius, a risk area in the case of an eruption of the volcano, a massive urbanization transformed the area between the coast and Mt. Vesuvius into a big conurbation with the highest density of population in Europe. As sociologist Enrica Morlicchio argues: “The diffusion of poverty and social under privilege in neighborhoods not included in the inner-city, and in fact the concentration of some of the more serious forms of exclusion such as exclusion from the labour market in the peripheral quarters also suggests the possibility of using the

²⁷ Marzio Bellacci and Raffaele Uboldi, “Se Napoli Esplode,” *Epoca*, 1973, 37-39.

²⁸ Behan, *See Naples & Die*, 65.

concept of hyperghetto, as Wacquant uses it, also for areas like the Neapolitan metropolitan area, even though the social and institutional context is different.”²⁹

Despite these urban transformations Naples still relied on the sewer system projected after the cholera epidemic of 1884 and constructed in 1915. This sewer system was not able to serve all the new areas of the Vomero and North Naples which used as a sewer the same drain channels employed when these areas were semi-rural. On rainy days in Naples sewer systems inevitably overflowed and the fecal waters invaded the streets of the city. In addition, both the drain channels and the sewer system transferred fecal waters and the industrial waste of petrol chemical and other factories directly into the sea of the bay. As a consequence, the Bay of Naples in the 1970s was the most polluted sea in Italy and perhaps in Europe.³⁰ This situation provided an ideal home for rats. It has been estimated that within the sewer system of Naples there was a population of more than seven million rats.³¹

In the early 1970s one of the main activities among urban poor was the selling of mussels. Initially people thought that the cholera was transmitted through infected mussels that were cultivated in the Bay of Naples not far from sewers. Tons of mussels produced from farm cultivation were destroyed and many people remained without jobs. Subsequently, it turned out that the disease was not transmitted by mussels but arrived in

²⁹ Morlicchio, “Exclusion from work and the Impoverishment Processes in Naples,” 337.

³⁰ Gennaro Esposito, *Anche il colera: Gli untori di Napoli* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1973), 219-226.

³¹ See “Bambini a Napoli: un quadro significativo. La salute di questi bambini, quella di un’intera città sono assediata da mille pericoli” (from *Amica* April 1974). 10 anni di iniziativa politica e culturale nella città, la mensa dei bambini proletari Rassegna stampa 1973-1983, The Archive of the “mensa bambini proletari, Naples,” 57-64.

Naples on a ship coming from Tunisia. At the same time that mussels vendors were without jobs, Naples was in a process of deindustrialization and, as a consequence, cigarette contraband, which was already widespread in Naples in the immediate postwar period, skyrocketed. It has been estimated that almost 400,000 people in the whole metropolitan area of Naples survived thanks to the contraband of cigarettes market.³²

As a consequence of cholera, racism towards Neapolitans increased.³³ The national and international press and television covering the cholera epidemic stressed the unhealthy conditions of the “slums” of Naples, comparing the city to African and Asian cities. In public discourse Naples became synonymous of underdevelopment, and Neapolitans as the “Others” within Italy. Racist attitudes were also manifest within the city itself. Besides a racism that we can call external, namely of people who came from the North, there was also an internal racism of middle and upper classes towards the so-called Neapolitan underclass and poor artisanal classes. Although, as we have seen, racism towards Neapolitans emerged during the nineteenth century, it was during the 1970s that the urban crisis of Naples was racialized. Cholera, garbage crisis, unemployment, and crime were not seen as a consequence of urban policies, corruption and the capitalistic use of territory, but as a consequence of the lack of civilization among Neapolitans, especially the lower classes.

³² See the documentary “Contrabbando di sigarette a Napoli” (1978), Un’inchiesta del nucleo di ideazione e produzione – Cronaca. See also “Napoli. Il contrabbando come assistenza indiretta,” *Ombre Rosse* (26) December 1978, pp.63-73; Conrad Lay, *Napoli. Il terremoto quotidiano: Miserie, disoccupazione e lotte sociali negli anni '70* (Naples: Loffredo Editore, 1981); Marisa Figurato and Francesco Marolda, *Storia di contrabbando. Napoli 1945-1981*(Naples: Tullio Pironti Editore, 1981).

³³ Paolo Mieli, ed., “1973: Napoli ai tempi del colera: Un’inchiesta degli allievi della Scuola di Giornalismo “Suor Orsola Benincasa” di Napoli,” *Desk* (16) May 2009.

The cholera outbreak of 1973 was not the only problem caused by the urban speculation of the postwar period. Already at the end of the 1960s some streets had collapsed because of the massive building constructions on the hills of the Vomero and Corso Vittorio Emanuele. As a consequence of these disasters a new City Plan was elaborated in 1972. Its first priority was to terminate urban speculation. However, immediately after it was approved the spreading of cholera revealed further problems, such as the pollution of the sea, unemployment, and the requalification of the old center. Although the cholera spread in different districts of both the center and the periphery, the old center came to symbolize urban decay. In addition, urban speculators immediately saw a profitable operation in restructuring the old center. As in the past, they proposed a slum clearance of a large part of the old center, but luckily these plans were never approved.³⁴

Under the municipal administration led by the communist mayor Maurizio Valenzi the focus of urban planning would move towards the periphery inaugurating a massive project called “the plan of the periphery.” As we have seen, during the 1950s and 1960s, the periphery of Naples expanded in all directions with a mix of interventions from public housing, condominiums built by urban speculators, commercial activities, and industrial warehouses. The 1939 City Plan had proposed the expansion of Naples especially towards the north where there was more space available, but urban speculators exploiting this plan and turned the area into a chaotic conurbation. The whole periphery around Naples was historically built around “casali,” that represented the epicenter of

³⁴ Eleonora Puntillo, *Le catastrofi innaturali* (Naples: Tullio Pironti, 2001).

small villages. The aim of the plan of the periphery was the requalification of the “casali” which not only were important hubs built during the Bourbon period connecting the city with the inner region, but also represented an important cultural and social testimony of previous architecture. The first intervention which was not part of the plan, but directly related to its execution was the destruction of more than four hundred illegal buildings and the confiscation of ten thousand housing units built without license. The proper plan of the periphery aimed at a requalification of more than five thousand housing units including the “casali” and other deteriorating housing stock. A substantial part of the plan also regarded the construction of public housing in the peripheral quarters for a total of six thousands housing units. The construction of public housing was an old plan projected in 1962; it was called 167 after the number of legal enactment, but it was never totally approved until 1972.³⁵

The plan of the periphery was a turning point for Naples both in positive and negative ways. First of all for the first time people realized that poverty and decay was not only concentrated in the old center but existed in many areas on the outskirts of Naples. Secondly, that the construction of public housing would partially resolved the housing question in Naples, if we think that many people still lived in shantytowns and the old center was overcrowded. Finally, in the quarters of Secondigliano, Ponticelli, and Barra the urban landscape would be totally transfigured by the construction of huge housing projects. Naples is the metropolitan area in Italy with the highest number of

³⁵ Alessandro Dal Piaz, *Napoli: Quarant'anni di urbanistica, 1945-1985* (Rome: Franco Angeli, 1985), 116-125.

public housing units. In Secondigliano, where already in the late 1950s the “Rione Don Guanella” was built, between the 1970s and 1980s 176 “housing projects” were built, consisting mainly of high rise tower blocks, for a total of 75,000 inhabitants. The largest of these projects consisted of seven buildings called “vele” or “sails” because of their sail ship shape. Each building of the “vele” contained 250 apartments and more than 1,000 people. Throughout the 1980s the “vele” became a symbol of urban malaise and the largest drug market in Europe.³⁶ However, as we will see, it was also a place where urban struggles for better housing, education, health and safe space emerged.

By the early 1980s, despite the plan of periphery, the housing issue in Naples remained central. Urban studies scholar Attilio Belli, comparing Naples with Palermo, which is another large city in the south where housing conditions are precarious, notices that in Palermo only 8% of the population lived in overcrowded apartments while in Naples the number was 68.97%.³⁷ This emergency was accentuated by another disaster. In 1980 the provinces of Avellino, Naples and Potenza were hit by an earthquake. Although in Naples the casualties were much less than the Avellino and Potenza provinces, the earthquake had disastrous consequences because of the existing housing situation and the precarious condition of the poorer neighborhoods. As a consequence of the earthquake hundreds of streets were closed, and thousands of people remained homeless. The most overcrowded and poorest districts in the old center like Montecalvario, Mercato-Pendino, San Giuseppe-Porto, Vicaria, and Stella were the most

³⁶ Francesco Ceci and Daniela Lepore, *Arcipelago Vesuviano: Percorsi e ragionamenti intorno a Napoli* (Naples: Argo, 1997), 37-40.

³⁷ Attilio Belli, *Napoli nella crisi* (Naples: Cooperativa editrice Economia e Commercio, 1980).

damaged. In Mercato-Pendino more than half of the population had to leave their houses and many streets were closed. Even the poorer sections of the wealthier quarters like Posillipo, Chiaia and Vomero were damaged. In 1981 the Naples city council estimated that 175,000 people had been evacuated from their homes and the buildings not legally habitable were 7,000. In a moment of de-industrialization in the traditional working class sections of San Giovanni, Barra and Bagnoli, the earthquake dramatically affected the artisanal activities in the old center. According to historian Sandro Dal Piaz, more than 33 per cent of artisans declared that one year after the earthquake there was a decrease of 30 per cent in activities, while the 13 per cent declared a decrease between the 30 and 50 per cent, and 11 per cent denounced a decrease of more than 50 per cent.³⁸ In the years following the earthquake the partial closing of the steel plant in Bagnoli, the resurgence of organized crime (in the single year of 1982 there were 265 deaths related to camorra), the diffusion of heroin which was devastating in some areas of the city, and the political corruption in the business of the reconstruction, seriously undermined the texture of an already wounded city.

The Cinema of the Urban Crisis

Naples depicted as urban problem became a media spectacle during the 1980s.³⁹ Inspired by the hundreds of articles, reportages, and books, Italian and Neapolitan film-

³⁸ Dal Piaz, *Napoli: Quarant'anni di urbanistica*, 125-126.

³⁹ See Giorgio Bocca, *L'inferno: Profondo sud, male oscuro* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1992).

makers became more and more interested in making films about urban decline in Naples.⁴⁰ The brilliant comedy *Così parlò bellavista* (1984) directed by Luciano De Crescenzo, opens with the arrival in Naples of a new general manager of the auto-industry “Alfa Sud” located in the Neapolitan hinterland. The new manager is from Milan and on his way from the airport to his new apartment gets stuck in a terrible traffic jam.⁴¹ The exhausted taxi driver pulls the car over and invites the manager to stop in a caffè until the traffic jam subsides. Here, the manager has his first impact with a city on the verge of catastrophe: a traffic warden, instead of directing the crazy traffic, calmly sits at a table drinking a coffee and reading the newspaper. The patrons of the caffè, as soon as they find out that the new manager of the Alfa Sud is in the caffè, ask him if he can hire their relatives who are all unemployed.

Mi manda Picone (1983), directed by Nanni Loy is another film of this series about urban problems in Naples. It is a bitter comedy starring Giancarlo Giannini and

⁴⁰ Between the late 1970s and the very early 1990s, the peak of the urban crisis of Naples, came out many mainstream films – many of them directed by famous Italian directors and starring very popular actors and actresses - which focus on crime, heroin plague, underground economy, unemployment, traffic conditions, garbage crisis, corruption and organized crime in the Neapolitan area. They covered all the film genres from comedy to drama and even musicals. Here it is a brief list: *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti*, dir. Lina Wertmuller, 1985; *Giallo Napoletano*, dir. Sergio Corbucci, 1979; *La mazzetta*, dir. Sergio Corbucci, 1978; *Il mistero di Bellavista*, dir. Luciano De Crescenzo, 1985; *Mi manda Picone*, dir. Nanni Loy, 1983; *No grazie, il caffè mi rende nervoso*, dir. Lodovico Gasparini, 1982; *Scugnizzi*, dir. Nanni Loy, 1989; *Se lo scopre Gargiulo*, dir. Elvio Porta, 1988; *Stangata napoletana*, dir. Vittorio Caprioli, 1983; *Il camorrista*, dir. Giuseppe Tornatore, 1986; *Cafè Express*, dir. Nanni Loy, 1980; *Io speriamo che me la cavo*, dir. Lina Wertmuller, 1992; *Così parlò Bellavista*, dir. Luciano De Crescenzo, 1984; *Pacco, doppio pacco e contropaccotto*, dir. Nanni Loy, 1992. On images of Naples in film see Maria Cristina De Crescenzo, et al., eds., *Napoli, una città nel cinema* (Naples, Libreria Dante & Descartes, 2009); Adriano Aprà, ed., *Napoletana: Images of a City* (Fabbri Editore, 1993); Mirco Melanco, *Paesaggi, passaggi e passioni: Come il cinema italiano ha raccontato le trasformazioni del paesaggio dal sonoro ad oggi* (Naples, Liguori Editore, 2005); Dario Minutolo, “Dal ‘miracolo economico’ al terremoto: cinema napoletano e immagini della città,” *Nord e Sud* (July August 2000): 124-143.

⁴¹ This scene is available on you-tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvFz9gFM-WI> (accessed on February 28, 2013)

Lina Sastri. Nanni Loy was not from Naples but he was fascinated by the city. He became famous in the 1960s for having created an Italian version of a candid camera called “Specchio segreto.” This television program became a cult in Italy revealing through comedy the contradictions of Italian society in the 1960s, suspended between the dream of the Italian economic miracle and an archaic culture. Nanni Loy transposed his surreal comedy and television *verità* style to his movies. Of course he was attracted by Naples because it is a city where everything can happen. Naples is a symbol of the so called art of getting by, which is the power of human creativity applied to survival in a hostile environment. At the same time Naples also meant box office success because it was a media spectacle: earthquakes, ruins, “no go areas,” garbage, crime and so on.

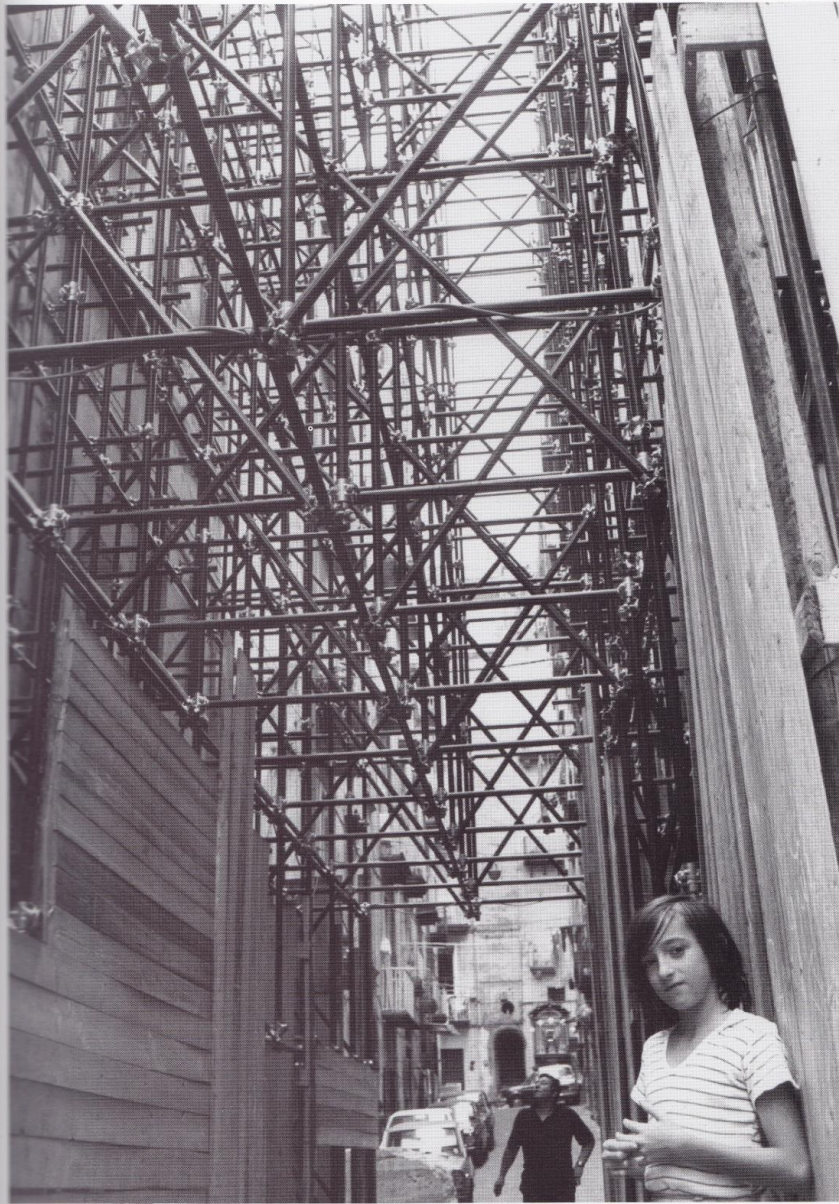
Mi manda Picone opens with a factory worker of the Italsider - the second largest steel plant in Italy which in the 1980s was in the process of closing down - who is protesting because he has lost his job. Suddenly he takes a petrol tank and sets fire to himself. In the great confusion after this desperate gesture, an ambulance arrives, picks up the corpse and disappears. The police and the man’s wife will never find the body and the whole film plays around the presence-absence of this factory worker called Picone. An improvised detective played by Giancarlo Giannini offers to help the worker’s widow (played by Lina Sastri) find her husband. In the following scene Giancarlo Giannini goes to the morgue looking for the body. When he tells the doctor that he is looking for a dead body giving a vague description of the person, the doctor replies that all kinds of dead bodies killed in car accidents or by muggers, camorristi, and so on arrive at the morgue every day.

The name Picone becomes a mystery. Giannini realizes that the name Picone is a code related to extortion, drug trafficking, pimping and so on. He finds a note book, which belonged to Picone, with a list of names on it and then decides to replace Picone. Each time he mentions the magic words “mi manda Picone” (Picone sent me) he will get money from store owners, prostitutes, drug dealers and others. Yet, by mentioning the word “mi manda Picone” he can get into serious trouble too. At a certain point, the film literally transports us underneath the city. In a key scene, Giannini goes down in the sewer system where he finds a little boy who is a heroin courier. The city in *Mi manda Picone* becomes a metaphor for the urban crisis. Everyone in one way or another is involved in the underground economy and illicit activities. *Mi manda Picone* and all the other movies about urban decline in Naples were widely seen in Italy, and although most of them had good intentions and wanted to show the conditions in Naples, they also increased racism toward the city by associating Naples exclusively with unemployment, crime, garbage problems, crazy traffic, the heroin plague, and deteriorated neighborhoods.

The movie that perhaps shows all these elements and shares similarities with *Fort Apache – The Bronx* is Lina Wertmuller’s film *Un complicate intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* (1985). Like *Fort Apache* this is a kind of social problem film but with some elements of Italian comedy from a liberal and left-wing perspective. The film was inspired by the real story of a group of women who organized themselves against heroin

diffusion in their neighborhood.⁴² The founding group of the so called “madri contro la droga” (mothers against the drug) was formed in the Quartieri Spagnoli in central Naples. Quartieri Spagnoli is the same neighborhood that presumably (we don’t know this for sure because anthropologists changed with fictitious names the sites of their fieldwork) anthropologist Thomas Belmonte conducted his fieldwork for his classic study on urban poverty, *The Broken Fountain*. Quartieri Spagnoli is the symbol of the inner-city of Naples. Although located nearby the elegant and shopping district of via Toledo/Roma and via Chiaia and the residential area of Corso Vittorio Emanuele, it is one of the poorest areas of Naples and in popular imagination is associated with prostitution, underground economy, drug peddling, petty and organized crime. Being not far from the port, during the Allied occupation it was a center for prostitution and contraband. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century during the Spanish domination, it was the area where Spanish troops were quartered (Quartieri Spagnoli). Its characteristic grid shape, composed of narrow streets intersecting with each other, is very like Manhattan grid shape in miniature. It has been for centuries a poor area, although on its edges there are many historic buildings which belonged to the Neapolitan aristocracy.

⁴² On the mothers against heroin (madri coraggio contro la droga) see “Eroina e Camorra: Moltecalvario si mobilitano,” *Il Mattino*, May 13, 1985; “In corteo le madri del vicolo eroina”, *Il Mattino*, May 16, 1985; “In ‘missione’ contro la droga e mala,” *Il Mattino*, May 16, 1985; “Droga, guerra su due fronti”, *Il Mattino*; “Ora le madri anti-droga controllano il vicolo” *Il Mattino*; “Il grande buio dei quartieri” *Il Mattino*; “A Napoli le madri coraggio catturano il boss dell’eroina”, *La Repubblica*, May 15, 1985; “Le madri coraggio dicono a Pertini ci devi aiutare”, *La Repubblica*, May 30, 1985; “Picchetti di madri coraggio davanti alle scuole”, *La Repubblica*, November 11, 1987; “I giorni delle madri coraggio ora sono un film per le scuole”, *La Repubblica*, December 5, 1987; “Vi scongiuro arrestate mio figlio”, *La Repubblica*, December 14, 1985; “La droga ci ruba i figli noi combattiamo da sole” *La Repubblica*, May 16, 1985.



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Figure 18. Post-earthquake Naples. Source: *Storia Fotografica di Napoli, 1971-1984. La città tra speranza di riscatto e drama del terremoto*, Second edition (Naples: Intra Moenia, 2000), 223.

Architect Giovanni Laino, a scholar and community organizer, who has dedicated his research to the Quartieri Spagnoli, describes the social composition of the neighborhood using the metaphor of two famous Neapolitan playwrights: Eduardo De Filippo and Raffaele Viviani. Laino divides the population of the Quartieri Spagnoli in to three categories: The first group called “gli eduardiani” (the social class generally depicted in Eduardo De Filippo plays) are parts of a stable working class. These families according to Laino only rarely are involved in acts of deviancy. The second group called the “vivianiani” (the social class depicted in Raffaele Viviani plays) are members of the so called sub-proletariat. These families are the bulk of the Quartieri Spagnoli population and, generally, are involved in illicit and underground economy. Some of these families are directly affiliated with camorra clans. The third group, those of the lower middle class, are less numerous in the neighborhood. By the 1980s there was a new demographic component in the neighborhood: immigrants, especially from Latin America and Sri Lanka. Of course today Quartieri Spagnoli has gone through a process of gentrification and is attracting people from the middle and upper middle class who bought apartments there at convenient prices.⁴³ In the early 1980s Quartieri Spagnoli was one of the neighborhoods highly affected by the earthquake and the heroin plague in the city.

The struggle of the “madri coraggio” against heroin is the major theme in Lina Wertmuller’s movie. Yet we have a very different picture of the real life story of this small grass-root group. While in real life the majority of the mothers against heroin were

⁴³ Giovanni Laino, “Il cantiere dei Quartieri Spagnoli di Napoli” *Territorio*, 19, 2001, 25-31, The Archive of the “Associazione Quartieri Spagnoli,” Naples.

members of the Neapolitan proletariat, who woke up early every morning to work as cleaning ladies in the apartments of the Neapolitan upper-class or to selling contraband cigarettes on the street corners or working in other sectors of underground economy, in the movie, they are depicted following the cliché of the working-class Neapolitan women of the 1950s post-neorealist cinema. For example Sophia Loren in *L'oro di Napoli*. This was an image that very much appealed to the Hollywood idea of Naples, an image represented in hundreds of images and films.

In real life, these women never committed murders related to the heroin plague. In the movie, the mothers against the drug kill heroin dealers, who sell heroin to their children by sticking a syringe in their genitals. After the movie was released a group of mothers against heroin wrote an open letter to Lina Wertmuller saying that they did not identify themselves in the movie.⁴⁴ The mothers who fought this struggle against heroin were in a small grass-root group so their protest against the movie never got much attention. Lina Wertmuller is considered an untouchable of the Italian cinema. She is a director who in her movies has denounced gender and class inequalities. In addition, although she is not from Naples, she has a strong interest in Neapolitan culture. *Un complicato intrigo* received very good reviews and opened in 1986 with a special screening at the teatro San Carlo of Naples, one of the most important and beautiful opera houses in Europe.⁴⁵ The special screening was attended by journalists, politicians,

⁴⁴ See “Ho inventato una favola terribile e appassionata e la dedico a Napoli”, *Il Mattino*, 22.

⁴⁵ See Claudia Cascone, *Il Sud di Lina Wertmuller* (Naples: Guida, 2000), 74-83; Adele Ammendola, “Presentazione del film *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* al San Carlo di Napoli,” Teche RAI,

film-makers and city' authorities. The ending of the movie, shot in a documentary style, shows a group of women (some of them were the real mothers against the drug) marching all together in the streets of the Quartieri Spagnoli. Yet, this single scene is not enough. In my view the film erases "the dead lives and labor" (Iain Chambers) of the Neapolitan working class inscribed in the asphalt of the Quartieri Spagnoli and other forgotten neighborhoods of the city. As film scholar Giuliana Bruno suggests: "Lina Wertmuller adopted a formula that typecasts the "native" culture, helping to turn the city into both a frozen and a serial image."⁴⁶ For this reason, as Giuliana Bruno said of the work of the late and mourned Neapolitan comedian Massimo Troisi, to tell the story of Naples in the age of urban crisis, it is better to begin from scratch.

Napoli 23/1/86; Pasquale Nonno, "Disperato l'intrigo, non Napoli," in Ermanno Corsi, ed., *Pasquale Nonno: Napoletana* (Naples: Edizioni Sintesi, 1989).

⁴⁶ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2002), 363.



NAPOLI Il cortile sul retro del convento delle suore Carmelitane ha il cancello sempre aperto. Una scialletta di ferro dà in uno stanzone trasformato in cucina, i tavoli coperti da incerate a quadretti e sui tavoli le sedie capovolte: la mensa per i poveri. C'è ancora l'odore del pranzo di mezzogiorno mentre intorno a un tavolo siedono e discutono alcune donne e qualche ragazzo. Non ospiti attardatisi, ma componenti dell'associazione «Mamme contro la droga», sfrattata dal numero 9 di via Marittima, poco distante dal convento, e momentaneamente qui ospitata nel pomeriggio.

Le voci fluttuano sugli argomenti di ogni giorno e oggi anche sul dopo referendum sulla droga. «Siamo tornati indietro di vent'anni», è il sintetico e non pacato giudizio alla vittoria del sì che dà Assunta Esposito, presidente dell'associazione. C'è rabbia, sconforto e delusione per il risultato del 18 aprile, le previsioni sono le più terribili ora: «Sì bruchiammo di più, moriranno di più e noi non potremo fare niente». È il commento di tutte, di Maria Rosaria, di Lucia, di Concetta, di Pasqualina, di Rossa, di Liana, di Anna, le Mamme Coraggio che hanno mandato i propri figli in carcere, perché era l'unica, forse l'ultima strada per toglierli alla droga.

La signora Carmela è una di loro. È seduta anch'essa al tavolo con le altre, accanto a Franco, il figlio che lei ha denunciato. Franco ha 25 anni, si droga da quando ne aveva 13: è un bel ragazzo bruno e abbronzato, confessa senza pudore che si drogava perché gli piaceva. La mamma lo ascolta ancora paziente, solo un gesto di tanto in tanto rivolto alle amiche sollecita comprensione per una storia che tutte conoscono, simile alla loro. Franco si è poi ritrovato in carcere a Capigliari e questo era meno piacevole: esposto a brutalità sconosciute ha acconsentito ad entrare in

Madri Coraggio, protesta dopo il «sì»

«Come prima e più di prima»

VALERIA CHIANESE

una comunità terapeutica. «Ci vuole la linea dura, con il permissivismo non si ottiene niente -- la signora Assunta è convincente e appassionata --. Gli diamo troppo, perciò si drogano». Lei al figlio di 27 anni, drogato da 10, ha imposto di scegliere: o la droga o la famiglia. Lui è andato via di casa, vive a Rimini con la moglie e il figlio di 3 anni e continua a drogarsi e ruba per farlo. «Ha bi-

sogno di 500 mila lire al giorno solo di droga, altri soldi gli servono per mantenere la famiglia e quindi ruba negli appartamenti -- racconta la signora Assunta --. È scappato già cinque volte da San Patrignano. L'ho denunciato, ma i carabinieri mi hanno risposto che se non lo prendono sul fatto, in galera non ce lo mandano.»

Gli effetti del referendum a Napoli

Comunità: in Veneto un albo per saperne di più

VENEZIA. (F.D.M.) L'albo regionale delle comunità terapeutiche del Veneto non tutela soltanto i tossicodipendenti, ma anche le loro famiglie. «Si ha finalmente conoscenza delle metodologie terapeutiche seguite dalle 23 comunità che sono state iscritte all'albo -- precisa Paolo Stocco che presiede il coordinamento di 20 centri del Veneto -- Di queste comunità si sa tutto, perché la Regione mantiene un costante controllo sulla loro organizzazione, sulla qualità dei servizi, sulla preparazione professionale degli operatori, oltre che sulle metodologie».

L'iscrizione nell'albo regionale è data dal rispetto degli elevati standard di prestazione richiesti dalla Regione. L'iscrizione è la condizione essenziale per poter esercitare. Il riconoscimento della Regione Veneto, con relativa assegnazione delle rette (da 50 a 100 mila lire), varrà per categorie. Un centro, oltre all'accoglienza, fa ricerca clinica a Villa Renata di Venezia. Per Stocco che la dirige «le famiglie sono da considerarsi una risorsa. È convinzione delle comunità che aderiscono all'albo che non ci possa essere reale cambiamento del giovane, se non si accompagna a quello della sua famiglia, entrambi possibilmente all'interno di un medesimo progetto». Una metodologia che diventa ancora più necessaria quando il tossicodipendente è sposato ed ha figli. Villa Renata sta operando da tempo per attivare una struttura d'assistenza dei nuclei familiari, ma l'impresa è difficile dal punto di vista organizzativo. Il Veneto, infatti, non ha strutture residenziali per questo scopo.

già cominciano a vedersi: all'associazione vengono meno drogati «perché sono convinti che ora si possono "fare" tranquillamente», dicono le mamme, preoccupate anche per la «restituzione al medico della libertà terapeutica» come ha deciso il sì del referendum. Questo vorrà dire, spiegano, che girerà legalmente più morfina. «Più ne muoiono meglio è questo significa, questo è il ragionamento che s'è fatto, che faranno i medici», commenta aspro Gianni, 40 anni, di cui 20 passati a drogarsi.

«Siamo stanche. Non vogliamo i figli in carcere, vogliamo le strutture, vogliamo il lavoro per i ragazzi che tornano dalle comunità, vogliamo gente competente a preoccuparsi di loro», la signora Assunta esprime il pensiero di tutte. «Abbiamo considerato la legge Jervolino-Vassalli una vittoria, ora abbiamo perso. Aspettiamo che il dopo referendum faccia il suo corso e se davvero i medici cominceranno a prescrivere morfina, tutto quello che abbiamo fatto non sarà servito a niente. Ci rovineranno i figli, scenderemo in piazza».

C'è una nuova storia di droga e famiglia -- ma è sempre la stessa, infinitamente uguale ad altre -- proposta da una mamma disperata e impaurita, in cerca di un consiglio e forse di una soluzione per la sua famiglia che non vive più bene e per il figlio Antonio, che è poco più che adolescente e insiste di lasciarlo andare via e si lamenta che la madre lo vuole tenere legato a sé. Qualche sorriso sui volti delle donne accompagna il racconto confuso e ancora incredulo della mamma e gli sbuffi del figlio. Mettono i brividi quei sorrisi che non hanno niente di giocoso e solo indicano la consapevolezza di quanto stanno ascoltando. Guardano l'imbronciato Antonio e dicono che non è pronto a lasciare la droga. Franco invece insiste a dire: «Io voglio vivere». È questo e l'unico sostegno alla loro speranza.

La rabbia e lo sconforto: «Dopo il referendum siamo tornati indietro di vent'anni»

«Il carcere era l'ultima, forse l'unica strada per toglierli dalla piazza. Adesso li vedremo solo morire»

Figure 19. “The mothers against heroin.” Associazione Nazionale Genitori Lotta Contro la Droga (ANGLAD) Archives, Piazza Mercato, Naples.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Assunta Esposito, the founder and director of ANGLAD, has been a member of the “mothers against heroin” in the 1980s.

From the “Other America” to the “Black Mediterranean”: The Echo of Dub as Sound of Solidarity

The protest against *Fort Apache – The Bronx* opened up another history of connection that included inter-ethnic alliances between blacks and Puerto Ricans, the theoretical work of Chicano and Asian American scholars, the cultural interventions of the Young Lords and Black Panthers, the work of community activists like Evelynna Lopez Antonetty, and hip-hop culture. As Paul Gilroy argues referring to the social movements emerged as response to racism, imperialism, and colonialism: “They have communicated directly to blacks and their supporters all over the world asking for concrete help and solidarity in the creation of organizational forms adequate to the pursuit of emancipation, justice, and citizenship...”⁴⁸ Black music from blues, R&B to reggae and hip-hop has played a central role in the transmission of oppositional ideas and rebellions. In Part one we have seen how Afrika Bambaataa transformed the anonymous courtyard of the Bronx River Housing into a sonic domain, and how black power themes travelled from the black Atlantic to a creolized Mediterranean through the sound of the Afro-Neapolitan musicians James Senese.

It was music itself under the impulse of transnational social movements and new racial formations extending from the Americas to the Mediterranean that challenged and deviated stereotypical images in the media first in New York and then Naples. In New York it was hip hop with its messages from the periphery that moved across the city on subway trains painted with graffiti, through sound vibrations propagated by speakers and

⁴⁸ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 156.

created by DJs in the act scratching records on turntables, or through the synthetic and robotic voice of Afrika Bambaataa electrified by the vocoder effect.⁴⁹ In Naples in the very early 1990s the echo of hip hop reached the periphery of the city transforming in sonic domains the gray and alienating public housing projects that had been built during the 1970s and 1980s in places like Secondigliano, Afragola, Ponticelli, Barra and so on. These are the places ignored in *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti*, a film which insisted in proposing an image of the city that no longer existed. For example, the mothers against the drug did not come exclusively from the overrepresented alleys of the city center depicted in 1950s cinema but also from what sociologist Loic Wacquant called the “hyper-ghetto” of the greater Naples.⁵⁰ In the aftermath of the earthquake a substantial number of families were transferred from Quartieri Spagnoli and other central neighborhoods to public housings which sometimes were in other municipality on the outskirts of Naples.

The name of the band Almamegretta comes from an old dialect in the moment when vulgate was replacing Latin. It means “anima migrante” (migrant soul).⁵¹ The sound of Almamegretta chronicles the “multidirectional fractal flow” (Paul Gilroy) of sound and culture. Following Amiri Baraka’s (Leroy Jones) work *Blues People*, Almamegretta’s sound was part of a “blues continuum,” that like a network, does not

⁴⁹ On the vocoder effect see Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ Loic Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008). On the concept of “hyper-ghetto” applied to Naples see Morlicchio, “Exclusion from work and the Impoverishment Processes in Naples,” 338-339.

⁵¹ Carmine Aymone, *Sound 'E Napoli* (Naples: Guida, 2008), 277.

follow a straight line, it moves across Africa, the Americas, and the Mediterranean. Take for example Almamegretta's first single "Figli di Annibale" (Hannibal's Children):

Africa, Africa, Africa
Annibale, Annibale, grande generale nero
Annibale, Annibale, grande generale nero
Con una schiera di elefanti attraversasti le Alpi e ne uscisti tutto intero
A quei tempi gli europei non riuscivano a passarle neanche a piedi
Ma tu Annibale, Annibale, grande generale nero, tu le passasti con un mare di elefanti.
Lo sapete quanto sono grandi grossi e lenti gli elefanti?
Lo sapete quanto sono grandi grossi e lenti gli elefanti?
Eppure Annibale gli fece attraversare le Alpi con novantamila uomini africani
Annibale sconfisse i Romani e restò in Italia da padrone per quindici o vent'anni
Ecco perché molti italiani hanno la pelle scura
Ecco perché molti italiani hanno i capelli scuri
Ecco perché molti italiani hanno gli occhi scuri.⁵²

Africa, Africa, Africa
Hannibal, Hannibal, great black general
Hannibal, Hannibal, great black general
With a host of Elephant you crossed the Alps and came through in one piece
Back then Europeans couldn't even cross them on foot
But you Hannibal, great black general, were able to cross them with a horde of elephants.
Do you know how big and slow elephants are? Do you know how big and slow elephants are?
And yet Hannibal got them across the Alps with ninety thousand African men
Hannibal defeated the Romans, remaining in Italy as a ruler for fifteen or twenty years.
That's why many Italians have a dark skin
That's why many Italians have dark eyes
That's why many Italians have dark skin⁵³

⁵² Almamegretta "Figli di Annibale" 1992. Lyrics from Iain Chambers, *Le molte voci del Mediterraneo*, translated by Sara Marinelli (Milan: Cortina Editore, 2007), 51.

⁵³ Lyrics from Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 48.

“Figli di Annibale” must be read as a metaphor, since “Hannibal’s troops were most likely largely recruited from the rebellious populations of Spain and Italy.”⁵⁴ Still, the song tells us about forms of globalization that preceded the European hegemony. A black and creolized Mediterranean existed before the black Atlantic. Only later, with the expansion of Europe and the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century, was the history of the black Mediterranean repressed and silenced.⁵⁵ Before this historical erasure Islamic culture was part of a world system that stretched from India to West Africa and part of the Mediterranean.⁵⁶ The Iberian peninsula was named Al-Andalus.⁵⁷ It is in this “cultural mélange” (Iain Chambers) that we can trace the origins of the blues. Of course the blues is part of a precise history that took place in the United States and Texas/Mexico borderlands: “Slavery, ten years of freedom, the overthrow of Reconstruction and the beginning of ninety-five years of what has been called “the second slavery.”⁵⁸ Yet, Almamegretta proposes an extended idea of the blues. As the late African bluesman Ali Farka Touré explains, the blues took form thanks to the melodies

⁵⁴ Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 48.

⁵⁵ On the repressed histories of Islamic culture in the aftermath of the European domination initiated with the so called Spanish Reconquista, see Chambers, *Ibid.*, 1-22; and Anouar Majid, *We Are All Moors: Ending Centuries of Crusades against Muslims and Other Minorities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

⁵⁶ See Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: On Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 1-36.

⁵⁷ On Africans and the Islamic world see Michael A. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29-55.

⁵⁸ Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in the Mississippi Delta* (London: Verso, 1998), 16.

and rhythms of Muslim African slaves who were themselves influenced by the Islamic Middle East.⁵⁹

The idea of a black Mediterranean travelled to the Americas too. Poet Langston Hughes embraced a concept of the blues more as Afro-diasporic music than as an exclusively African U.S. American expression. He was struck by the similarities between the blues and Flamenco during his stay in Spain,⁶⁰ and made connections between the blues and Afro-Cuban *son*, a music which Ethnic studies scholar Josh Kun associates with the “poor and working class blacks and mulattos in Havana’s most disenfranchised and downtrodden neighborhoods.”⁶¹ Kun’s is an extended idea of blackness encompassing “an outernational cartography that runs across the Americas,”⁶² and, I would add, the black Atlantic and a black Mediterranean. Hughes makes these connections in his poem on blackness and Puerto Rican identities entitled “Note to Puerto Ricans (On American Confusion).”

Aw, come on –
Who cares if you
Are half Negro.
Or 2/3 or 1/10 white
Or all black?
Who cares if Africa
Is a distant shadow
Behind your back –
Or if you’re pure
Spain?

⁵⁹ Ali Farka Touré, Quoted in Chambers, *Mediterraneo Blues*, 2012, 7.

⁶⁰ Maria Frias, “Nights of Flamenco and Blues in Spain.” In Heike Raphael – Hernandez, ed. *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 146.

⁶¹ Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 181.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 164.

(The shadow
Fell there, too,
In Moorish days)
So who cares?
Puerto Ricans
In the U.S.A
Let's be friends
Whatever
Others Say⁶³

The black Mediterranean proposed in “Figli di Annibale” refers to more recent histories too, specifically to the blackening of Naples with the arrival of black GIs during World War II and the Allied occupation of the city. African American soldiers brought with them records, formed their bands, and attended jazz and blues concerts first in improvised clubs created in requisite structures and then later during the Cold War, when the American presence continued in Naples with the Sixth Fleet and the NATO Headquarters, in clubs in center city nearby the port and areas such as Campi Flegrei, Lago Patria and Villaggio Coppola where the majority of NATO staff and Sixth Fleet employees lived. Inspired by the African American presence in Naples, as we have seen in the chapter on bluesology, Neapolitan composer E.A. Mario wrote a song in 1944 titled ‘Tammurriata Nera’ (‘Black Drumming’). This song speaks of black babies born to Neapolitan girls during World War II. The rhythms of the black ‘black drums’ that came out by the encounter of the “tammurriata,” a music and dance style, reminiscent of the African drums, Arabic vocal modulations and local peasant rituals and festivities, mixed

⁶³ Langston Hughes, “Note to Puerto Ricans (On American Confusion),” in *Good Morning Revolution: Uncollected Writings of Social Protest by Langston Hughes*, ed. Faith Barry (New York: Citadel Press, 1992), 164

with the African American rhythms of jazz, and blues, continued to pulse in the saxophone and screams of James Senese, in the drums of Franco Del Prete, in the pure R&B of Mario Musella, in the grain of the voice of Pietra Montercorvino, and in the Latin Blues of Pino Daniele. So, Almamegretta began their musical journey in an environment already saturated with African American music. If the arrival of black music in Naples in postwar years fostered the encounter between the black Atlantic and an already creolized Mediterranean, the arrival of dub and hip-hop in Naples in the late 1980s produced the encounter between “The Other America,” the black Atlantic and a black Mediterranean.⁶⁴

The sound of Almamegretta has been called “trip-hop” which is “a slower and dub influenced version of African American hip-hop.”⁶⁵ Here we have a New York-Naples connection via Jamaica. It is the “Other America” of poet and critic Édouard Glissant that, as I argued above, had already fascinated Langston Hughes and decentered the hegemonic idea of the United States as America, driven to Naples. After all Caribbean sounds had themselves already played a central role in African American music in general and hip hop in particular. Central to the sound of Almamegretta is the heavy signature of the bass, the echo, reverberations, electronic effects and sensuous atmospheres of dub. At the same time the voice of Raiss is menacing like those of roots reggae singers. This is a rebel music and its intention is “to get people in power scared.”

⁶⁴ On hip-hop, dub and reggae in Italy see Goffredo Plastino, *Mappa delle voci: Rap, raggamuffin, e tradizione in Italia* (Rome: Meltemi, 2000).

⁶⁵ Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes & Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

Like in the Kingston depicted in the movie *The Harder they Come* and in the South Bronx of Afrika Bambaataa the grain of the voice of Raiss is the “voice of the majority,” of the “regular people who are suffering and who don’t have what they want.”⁶⁶ The slow, heavy and dark sound of the bass, the drumrolls of Gennaro T and the pre-recorded effects of D-Rad produced an interruption, a pause in which the time stops for a second and then restarts (Paul Gilroy). In these fissures and holes the traumatic events of Naples are composed and recomposed. The effect of the echo, as explains ethnomusicologist Michael Veal, is associated with memory but “can also evoke the vastness of outer space.”⁶⁷ In this sense, the music of Almamegretta chronicles the internal migration of working-class Neapolitans from neighborhoods of central Naples to the vastness of the periphery where reality is like science fiction. The majority of people who were relocated in the aftermath of the earthquake that hit Naples in 1980 came from the alleys of the historic center. They moved to the huge public housing of the so called 167 of Secondigliano/Scampia, or in the rione Salicelle in Afragola, and the numerous housing projects in Ponticelli, Melito and Cardito in the 1970s and 1980s. This massive relocation saw thousands of families suddenly projected in a completely new environment, in places with streets twenty meters wide, in buildings so huge it was possible for them to lose orientation or never learn exactly which were the windows of their apartments when they looked from the street. It is here in the anonymous and huge space around the public housing complex of Scampia, the so called “vele” or sails because of their shape, that

⁶⁶ “Toots” Hibbert, Quoted in Veal, *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁷ Veal, *Ibid.*, 198.

junkies wandered in the streets after a fix or shot heroin in public while walking or in improvised shooting galleries.⁶⁸

A few miles north-east of Scampia was another symbol of the chaotic reconstruction and urban planning of Naples of the last thirty years: A narrow asphalt line that no one knows exactly where it begins and where it ends.⁶⁹ This is the elevated expressway called “asse mediano” that runs through the conurbation of north Naples overhanging buildings, what remains of cultivated fields, illegal trash and toxic dumps, and slums inhabited by Rom people. This Naples resembles a neighborhood of a near future described by Octavia Butler in her novel *Parable of the Sower*: “The neighborhood wall is a massive, looming presence nearby. I see it as a crouching animal... But my stepmother is there and she isn't afraid... I look up at the stars and the deep, black sky. ‘Why couldn't you see the stars?’ I ask her. ‘Everyone can see them. “City lights,” she says. “Lights, progress, growth, all those things we're too hot and too poor to bother with anymore.”⁷⁰

Going back to where we began: A drumroll, a funk rhythm, an electrified blues guitar responds to a light touch of an Hammond organ, the sensuous atmosphere of dub,

⁶⁸ On Scampia see *Francesco Di Martino, Il Gridas, Sulle tracce di Felice Pignataro* (Naples: Marotta&Cafiero, 2010), The book comes out with and the documentary titled “Felice!” directed by Matteo Antonelli and Rosaria Désirée Klain. See also *Scampia Trip: Restare e (r)esistere a Scampia* (Naples: Ad est dell’equatore, 2010).

⁶⁹ On the “Asse mediano” see Giuseppe Montesano and Vincenzo Trione, eds., *Napoli assediata: Al termine della periferia* (Naples: Tullio Pironti Editore, 2007).

⁷⁰ Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993), 5.

the dark and heavy bass line and the menacing voice of Raiss who in Neapolitan dialect warns us:

/No nun pozzo supportà chi nun riesce a capì addò stà 'o bbuono e 'o malamente/⁷¹ /I cannot stand who is not able to understand who is the good and who is the bad.



Figure 20. “Le vele.” Scampia, Naples. Photo by Themis Chronopoulos.

⁷¹ Almamegretta, “O bbuono e 'o malamente” in the EP *Figli di Annibale*, 1992, Anagramma/CNI (Lyrics from <http://www.musicstory.it/musica/Almamegretta>, Accessed on 3/17/2013).

PART III

INNER CITY BLUES

Bluesology

Dah, dah, dah, dah
dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah
Rockets, moon shots
Spend it on the have nots
Money, we make it
Fore we see it you take it
Oh, make you wanna holler
The way they do my life
Make me wanna holler
The way they do my life
This ain't livin', This ain't livin'
No, no baby, this ain't livin'
No, no, no
Inflation no chance
To increase finance
Bills pile up sky high
Send that boy off to die
Make me wanna holler
The way they do my life
Make me wanna holler
The way they do my life
Dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah
Hang ups, let downs
Bad breaks, set backs
Natural fact is
I can't pay my taxes
Oh, make me wanna holler
And throw up both my hands
Yea, it makes me wanna holler
And throw up both my hands
Crime is increasing

Trigger happy policing
Panic is spreading
God know where we're heading
Oh, make me wanna holler
They don't understand
Dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah

Mother, mother
Everybody thinks we're wrong
Who are they to judge us
Simply cause we wear our hair long

The classic Marvin Gaye's song "Inner City Blues"¹ can be taken as a starting point for this Part. The song tells us how blues themes were transferred to northern cities during the 1960s, how R&B interacted with counterculture and psychedelia, and how global events intertwined with local policies. Here the term blues is certainly a reference to the musical style born in the post-slavery musical cultures of the South of the United States. It is also related to African American struggle past, present, and future. It is a form of affect (the affect of trauma and loss), but also a mode of alternative knowledge which we might call bluesology. Utopian and dystopian tensions in this song cannot be separated. The hypnotic and continuous sound of bongos are on the one hand, the rhythms of alienation, of the impossibility of paying the bills, centuries of oppression, and of the atrocity of war. On the other, the bongos are the sound of counterculture and "Third World" liberation movements, of urban revolts and of drums carried to the Americas through the ocean waves. The falsetto voice of Marvin connects with the delta

¹ Marvin Gaye, "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)," in *What's Going On*, Tamla 1971.

blues of Skip James, with the street vocal harmony groups of the 1950s, street funk of the 1970s and with all the “blue notes” of Afro-diasporic music which have hybridized and put in question hegemonic western modernity.² The falsetto also denotes the importance of voice as instrument in an environment where there is not enough money to buy instruments.³ In other words it is a voice that moves from underground.

Following Marvin Gaye in this Part I listen to the inner city blues of New York and Naples in the 1970s and 1980s. As in Gaye’s song, this blues is a form of globalization from below that runs parallel and contests forms of globalization from above.⁴ It is grounded in the present and in the immediacy of the city but also bears the traces of a multi-directional fractal flow and network of resistance extending around the black Atlantic from Central Africa to West Africa, and then the Mediterranean, the Americas and the Mediterranean and Africa again. Being grounded in histories of struggle and oppression it proposes a dystopic view of the city. Yet, realizing that people living in the inner-city, more than others need alternative images of the future it proposes utopic and futuristic images of the city.⁵ To use Graham Lock’s expression, the inner city

² Iain Chambers, *Mediterraneo Blues. Musiche, malinconia postcoloniale, pensieri marittimi* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012), 30.

³ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1987), 211.

⁴ On vernacular modernities see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Miriam Hansen, “Vernacular Modernism: Tracking Cinema on a Global Scale,” in Natasa Durovicova and Kathleen Newman, eds., *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁵ Mark Dery, “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose,” in Mark Dery, ed., *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 190.

blues of New York and Naples is like a blutopia: “forming a crossroads in the creative consciousness where visions of the future and revisions of the past become part of the same process, a ‘politics of transfiguration’ in which accepted notions of language, history, the real and the possible are thrown open to question and found waiting...signaling a utopia tinged with the blues, an African American visionary future stained with memories.”⁶ This transcultural blues is not strictly a musical genre, it is a “syncopated temporality – a different rhythm of living and being.”⁷ A bluesology coming from “the lower frequency” of the city space pervading our entire body and for this reason it disrupts any hierarchy of the senses – sight over ear, touch over smell, and so on.⁸ It includes sounds that came out in a certain way from blues like R&B, jazz, funk, dub, and new wave, and from music that apparently has nothing to do with blues, from cinema, other cultural practices and urban struggles. It is a form of subaltern knowledge that in some cases apparently is not political but in reality is political in the sense that enables us to struggle for a better life and imagine a better future. Although many in the middle classes consider these cultural practices vulgar, unsophisticated, and subversive these practices have the ability of being critical like a form of sociology.

Bluesology emerges from people living in a state of invisibility, abandoned by institutions and subject to racism. From this condition of invisibility, bluesologists have

⁶ Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 2-3.

⁷ Paul Gilroy, *the Black Atlantic* (London: Verso, 1993), 202.

⁸ On the disruption of the hierarchy of the senses see Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 115-118.

produced sounds, images, and thought that disturb the linear sense of history and geographical borders/maps. They move freely across time and space, going up and down history (like sound waves) connecting past and present, local and global and imagining a better future. As Ralph Ellison eloquently explains in his futuristic novel *Invisible Man*: “Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you’re never quite on the beat. Sometimes you’re ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead...”⁹ It is living underground, where for society you don’t exist except as crime or unemployment statistics. Underground the body can better perceive and be pervaded by the vibration of the blues and its extensions: “There is a certain acoustical deadness in my hole,” Ellison writes, “and when I have music I want to feel its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body. I’d like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing ‘What did I do to be so Black and Blue’ – all at the same time...Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he’s made poetry out of invisibility.”¹⁰

This Part starts once again by tracing a form of call and response between Naples and New York in the late seventies and early eighties. A Neapolitan poet and actor, Peppe Lanzetta, repeatedly draws on the Bronx signifier in order to convey the feeling of a city like Naples that by the 1980s with the expansion of periphery and its outskirts formed a large conurbation with a population of about four million. A city which was no

⁹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2001, originally published 1952), 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

longer a picture perfect postcard, as in the Italian cinema and Hollywood films of the nineteen fifties and sixties, but which, already in the seventies, had turned ‘black and blue’ as showed in the popular cinema of the cine-sceneggiata, a low-budget action cinema which resemble the cinema of Blaxploitation in New York. This Part, then proceeds to recall the enduring power of the Naples/New York connection in the nineteen eighties by means of a concert and a film. The concert, Harlem meets Naples, takes place at the Apollo Theatre in New York, where Neapolitan new wave musicians, heavily inspired by American black music play together with African American musicians. The film, *Blues metropolitano*, portrays a traumatized Naples, a few years after the major earthquake that changed the physiognomy of the city. In the film, New York, but also the United States in general, oscillates between being the real presence of American NATO forces permanently deployed in the city, but also, in the character of the Black musician flying from New York to play: an imaginary identification forged through music, cinema and style with the minor America of the black diaspora.

Like a bluesologist, I will listen to the “small voices of history” narrated in Bobby Womack’s *Across 110th Street* and Mario Merola’s *Tammurriata blu (Blue Drums)*, imagining watching a blaxploitation movie in a theater in the Harlem of the 1970s or walking the streets around the central station in Naples, a neighborhood from which the star of the cine-sceneggiata, Mario Merola, came. Then I will move to the “minor Bronx” of Naples listening to the story-teller of the periphery of Naples, Peppe Lanzetta, whose narratives are suspended between the violence of the movie *Taxi Driver*, an imaginary Bronx, the area of the “ferrovia” in Naples, and the chaotic conurbation around Naples

which by the 1980s, after the urban changes of the post-earthquake, had assumed the semblance of a dark metropolis of the near future. Remaining in the 1980s, I will walk through Piazza Cavour, a blues crossroad located between different districts like the *Sanità, Cavone, Porta San Gennaro* and “*Buvero di Sant’Antonio*” which were badly damaged by the earthquake of 1980. It is from this blues crossroad, in particular the subway station of Piazza Cavour that a music documentary about a group of Neapolitan musicians invited to play at the Apollo Theater in Harlem begins. Then my journey will continue in the post-earthquake Naples of the early 1980s, in a city on the verge of catastrophe. I will follow Solomon, the black character in the film *Blues metropolitano* (1985, dir. Salvatore Piscicelli), who, like the black soldier of the movie *Paisà* (1946, dir. Roberto Rossellini) from thirty years before in a destroyed postwar Naples, is lost in the city. I will conclude my journey in Harlem, with another black character, the protagonist of the film *Brother from Another Planet* (1984, dir. John Sayles) who is lost in New York, having escaped from another planet to find refuge in Harlem, a nodal point of black diaspora and capital of every ghetto town.

Chapter 5

“Harlem is the Capital of Every Ghetto Town”: Blaxploitation and Cine-Sceneggiata as Historiography

Subterranean Encounters

A subterranean dialogue between Naples and New York took form in the 1970s through the popular genres of Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata. Blaxploitation and sceneggiata both emerged in the 1970s in a moment of crisis both in Hollywood and Italian cinema. In the 1970s a proliferation of crime dramas were made in the U.S. and Italy, films like *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971), *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971) and others in the U.S. and *Milano Spara* (Umberto Lenzi, 1974), *Napoli spara!* (Mario Caiano, 1977), *Napoli violenta* (Umberto Lenzi, 1977) in Italy.¹ At the same time, in a moment of financial crisis of the film industry, there emerged a series of films first in the U.S. called Blaxploitation, then in Italy called cine-sceneggiata in Naples that took the idea from these crime dramas and exploitation cinema but targeted at specific audiences.² After the success of the independent movie *Sweet Sweetback's*

¹ See Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); Salvatore Castellana, “Il cinema ribelle: i seventies e i settanta,” in Darius James, *Blaxploitation: Il cinema e la cultura dei neri americani* (Milan: A-change, 2002), 222-271; George Lipsitz, “As Unmarked as their place in History: Genre Anxiety and Race in Seventies Cinema,” in *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 185-210; Roberto Curti, *Italia Odiata: Il cinema poliziesco italiano* (Torino: Lindau, 2006).

² On Blaxploitation cinema see Mickel J. Koven, *Blaxploitation Films* (Harpending: Kamera Books, 2010); Stephane Dunn, “Baaad Bitches” & Sassy Supermamas: *Black Power Action Films* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Paula J. Massood, *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experience in Film*

Baadasssss Song (1969) directed by Melvin Van Peebles, the U.S. movie industry understood that black audience in the inner city wanted to see images of blacks that contrasted with the so-called social problem films of the 1960s. They were especially intended in films that reversed the stereotypes presented in films like *Dirty Harry* and the *French Connection*, in which the white cop always wins and blacks always loose. In Italy, the generic formula of the *poliziottesco* was transferred to Naples and mixed with the theater genre of *sceneggiata*, a very successful form of popular theater that described the low life of the Neapolitan underclass (a mix of melodrama and musical). Between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s more than thirty movies called cine-sceneggiata were

(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); Mark Reid, *Redefining Black Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Darius James, *Blaxploitation: Il cinema e la cultura dei neri americani* (Milan: A-change, 2002); Stephane Dunn, “*Baad Bitches*” & *Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Yvonne D. Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006); Manthia Diawara, “Black American Cinema: The New Realism,” in Manthia Diawara, ed., *Black American Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Peter Stanfield, “Walking the Streets: Black Gangsters and the ‘Abandoned City’ in the 1970s Blaxploitation Cycle,” in Lee Grieveson, Esther Sonnet, and Peter Stanfield, eds., *Mob Culture: Hidden Histories of the American Gangster Film* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Jonathan Munby, *Under a Bad Sign: Criminal Self-Representation in African American Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). See also Eric Charles Pierson, “The 1970s as Hollywood’s Golden Age: A Critical Interpretative Analysis of the Blaxploitation Cinematic Movement,” PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2000. On cine-sceneggiata see Pasquale Scialò, ed., *Sceneggiata: Rappresentazioni di un genere popolare* (Naples: Guida, 2002); Marcello Ravveduto, *Napoli...serenata calibro 9: Storia e immagini della camorra tra cinema, sceneggiata e neomelodici* (Naples: Liguori, 2007); Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Stefano Masi and Mario Franco, *Il mare, la luna, i coltelli: Per una storia del cinema muto napoletano* (Naples: Tullio Pironti Editore, 1988); Alberto Castellano, “La sceneggiata degli anni settanta e ottanta tra evoluzione e contaminazione,” *Nord e Sud* (July-August 2000): 158-161; Stefano Masi, “Il cinema regionale della sceneggiata fra marginalità e autodistruzione,” *Cineforum* 5 (May 1979): 266-281; Romolo Runcini, “Il tempo libero e cultura popolare a Napoli: Il caso della ‘sceneggiata,’” in Giovanni Bechelloni, ed., *Il mutamento culturale in Italia* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 1989).

produced.³ In these films, protagonists from Neapolitan working-class always win. Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata films turned out to be big box office successes, especially with black and Neapolitan inner-city audiences. According to film historian Ed Guerrero, the classic Blaxploitation film *Superfly* (Gordon Parks, Jr., 1972) which “was made for less than \$500,000 did an astounding \$1 million gross in its first week in two New York City theaters alone.”⁴ Similarly, for the opening of the cine-sceneggiata film *Zappatore* (Alfonso Brescia, 1980), starring Mario Merola, the largest movie theater in Naples was sold out.⁵

According to some critics, these movies were successful in the U.S. and Neapolitan inner-city because they were a form of “revenge” films where the black and Neapolitan working-class heroes triumph over “Whitey” and the upper-class. As cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall suggests, Blaxploitation films, “carried through one counter strategy with considerable single-mindedness – reversing the evaluation of popular stereotypes.”⁶ Many intellectuals dismissed Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata as low

³ *Sgarro alla camorra* (1973) dir. Ettore Maria Fizzarotti; *L'ultimo guappo* (1978) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Napoli...serenata calibro 9* (1979) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Il mammasantissima* (1979) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Napoli...la camorra sfida e la città risponde* (1979) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *I contrabbandieri di Santa Lucia* (1979) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Da Corleone a Brooklyn* (1979) dir. Umberto Lenzi; *Sbirro, la tua legge è lenta... la mia no!* (1979) dir. Stelvio Massi; *Zappatore* (1980) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Carcerato* (1981) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Lacrime Napulitane* (1981) dir. Ciro Ippolito; *Napoli, Palermo, New York: Il triangolo della camorra* (1981) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Giuramento* (1982) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Tradimento* (1982) dir. Alfonso Brescia; *Guapparia* (1984) dir. Stelvio Massi; *Attenti a quei due napoletani* (1980) dir. Mario Gariazzo; *Onore e guapparia* (1977) dir. Tiziano Longo; *I figli non si toccano* (1978) dir. Nello Rossati.

⁴ Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 95.

⁵ Stracult, *The Sceneggiata* (Stracult is a television program devoted to Italian film genres like Italian horror, *commedia all'italiana* of the 1970s, *sceneggiata*, *poliziottesco*, and so on).

⁶ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the Other,” in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 271.

grade films and bad imitations of action movies. Some scholars and critics saw Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata as exclusively financial operations exploiting the black and Neapolitan urban poor in order to make money. Finally, these popular action movies were accused of glamorizing the illicit underground economy and crime. For example, *Superfly* was condemned for its celebration of dope pushing. In a speech, NAACP leader argues that Blaxploitation movies had to be stopped: “We will not tolerate the continued warping of our black children’s minds with the filth, violence and cultural lies that are pervasive in current productions of so called black movies. The transformation from the stereotyped Stepin’ Fletchit to Super Nigger on the screen is just another form of cultural genocide. The black community should deal with this problem by whatever means necessary.”⁷

Cine-sceneggiata was similarly criticized by intellectuals in Naples and members of the middle class. When in 2006 one of its most famous interpreter and so called king of the sceneggiata Mario Merola died, thousands of people came to his funeral in the historic “piazza del Carmine.” In that occasion the local newspaper *il Mattino* fostered a debate after the Mayor of Naples of the time, Rosa Russo Jervolino, said that Merola had incarnated the figure of the “guappo buono” (the good outlaw) because in his films he defended people living in poorer neighborhoods of Naples from “the bad outlaws” or criminals who during the 1970s were responsible for bringing heroin in the streets of the city or exploited people of the neighborhoods without any respect for the poor. Generally

⁷ Quoted in Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 101.

Mario Merola in his film plays the part of a “contrabbandiere” (cigarette smuggler) fighting against the new camorra, international mafia, and the police.⁸

Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata have been often considered by commentators as two genres that depict the “authentic” culture of the black ghetto and Neapolitan *vicoli* of the 1970s. This belief was influenced by social scientists who described the U.S. black ghetto and the Neapolitan “vicoli” as isolated, authentic, and characterized by backwardness. They constructed a culture of poverty that is naturalized because it follows family lines across generations. Urban anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, in his study on black ghetto culture in the U.S., recognizes that “statements in the ghetto community are in line with mainstream America.” Yet he underlines the fact that “there is a ghetto specific imagery in support of equally ghetto-specific modes of action.”⁹ Similarly, anthropologist Thomas Belmonte in his ethnographic study of the inner city of Naples titled *The Broken Fountain* contends that in Naples “those who are born poor, die poor and no man can expect to rise above his assigned station in life.”¹⁰ According to Belmonte, In Naples, similarly to the U.S. ghetto dwellers, “The majority [of poor] remain trapped in the rubble of five centuries of silent class warfare and foreign or northern domination.”¹¹ I would like to offer a reading of these two popular genres that breaks with the idea of Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata either as authentic portraits of

⁸ See the series of articles from *Il Mattino* covering Mario Merola’s death (November 13, 2006).

⁹ Ulf Hannerz, *Soul Side: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, Originally published in 1969), 188.

¹⁰ Thomas Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain*, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 133.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

inner city or as perpetuating of stereotypes and glamorization of crime. In what follows this reading moves across time and space and goes back and forth in history, connecting the past to the present and future, the local to the global. Based on the premise that once a cultural form enters the social world it produces unexpected encounters my analysis, goes beyond the authorial intent of film producers and directors. I argue along with historian Robin Kelley that Blaxploitation, and by extension cine-sceneggiata, can tell us more than sociological studies about the hidden histories of the urban crisis of New York and Naples, the racialization of black and Neapolitan working class, and about the hybrid, modern, and international character of the inner city of New York and Naples.¹²

Blue drums: The Wretched of the City

In the soundtrack of *Across 110th street* (Barry Shear, 1972) Bobby Womack sings “Harlem is the capital of every ghetto town.”¹³ On the one hand this line might suggest that Harlem is the place where you can find authentic black urban culture with hard-core ghetto dwellers and paradigmatic figures such as the pimp, the junkie, the criminal. This is also an exotic view of the ghetto. It has old roots in colonialism, in anthropology, in travel writing, in cinema and ethnographic studies about urban poor of

¹² Robin D.G. Kelley, “Looking for the ‘Real’ Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto,” in *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 16. On the international, hybrid and diasporic character of cultural expression, in the context of dance culture in antebellum America, see April F. Masten, “The Challenge Dance: Black-Irish Exchange in Antebellum America,” in Daniel T. Rogers, Helmut Reimitz and Bhavani Raman, eds., *Cultures in Motion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹³ Bobby Womack, *Across 110th Street*, United Artists, 1972. Soundtrack of the “blaxploitation” film by the same title released in 1972 and directed by Barry Shear.

the 1960s. Yet if we look at this line from below, Harlem is the capital of all slums and ghettos in the world included the colonized cities in the Global South. This is a Harlem that rarely has appeared on tourist guides and history text-book.¹⁴ One that connects Harlem with the black liberation movements, with anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles. Here, Fidel Castro chose to stay at the Theresa Hotel when in 1960 visits the UN as a sign of solidarity with black struggles in the United States. It is from this Harlem that in 1961 black crowds reached the UN building to protest Patrice Lumumba's murder in Belgian Congo.¹⁵ This is also the Harlem that, as Robin Kelley reminds us, "attracted visits from African leaders such as Sekou Touré of Guinea and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana."¹⁶ Black history, Robin Kelley suggests, has been always international since the beginning. It cannot be separated from capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. Scholars like Eric Williams and Oliver Cox saw in the slave trade system the beginning of capitalism.¹⁷ Drawing from Marx but also decentering the euro-centrism of Marxism they argued that slavery represented a form of primitive accumulation which allowed to start the Industrial Revolution in Britain.¹⁸ The slave trade system was an extremely lucrative

¹⁴ Robin D.G. Kelley, "Disappearing Acts: Capturing Harlem in Transition," in Alice Attie, ed., *Harlem on the Verge* (New York: The Quantuck Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Kevin Gaines, "A World to Win: The International Dimension of the Black Freedom Movement," *OAH Magazine of History* 20 (October 2006): 16.

¹⁶ Kelley, "Disappearing Acts," 15.

¹⁷ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970). See also Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture* (New York: Verso, 1996); and Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ As Marx puts it: "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and

business. Between the sixteenth century and the nineteenth century, as historian Michael Gomez states: [The slave trade has been] one of the extensive mass movement in history, a displacement to beat all displacements.”¹⁹ Africans were literally kidnapped and deported to the Americas. Since the beginning blacks felt like aliens in an alien land and they have anticipated global revolts against colonialism, imperialism and capitalism. Historian Marcus Rediker has compared the slave ship to the factory in which there is a rationalization of space.²⁰ The Middle Passage has been one of the most traumatic experiences in history. Yet, even in the brutality of this system emerged hidden histories of cooperation from below between slaves and sailors.²¹ Once arrived to the Americas the terror and displacement continued. A number of slaves moved continually across the Americas. The slave field also anticipated factory works. As C.L.R. James writes, the slaves in San Domingo, which in the eighteenth century was the most profitable colony in the world, lived so close to each other like workers in factories.²² Since the beginning slaves organized revolts and rebellions. These rebellions were diasporic, global and

plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production.” Karl Marx, *Capital, vol. 1* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 915. Quoted in Singh, *Black is a Country*, 235.

¹⁹ Michael A. Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 63.

²⁰ Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007).

²¹ Ibid.

²² C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Second Edition Revised (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

multiethnic in nature. The early slave revolts, Maroon communities, and the Haiti Revolution of the late 18th –century had all a global dimension.²³

As we have seen in Part one, the advent of the cotton field in the South needs to be framed in a global history of U.S. imperial expansion since the early 19th-century through the genocide of Native Americans, the purchase of Louisiana in 1803 which gave the chance to the U.S. to control the Caribbean, the Mexican-American war of 1846-1848 and the annexation of what today is the south west United States.²⁴ In a similar vein, as Nikhil Pal Singh has argued, *Plessy vs Ferguson* which, after the betrayal of Reconstruction sanctioned segregation inaugurating Jim Crow Laws, racial terror and mob violence, coincided with “the formal entry of the United States into the world imperialist competition in the Spanish American war of 1898.”²⁵ In other words the imperial expansion abroad and black segregation at home were part of the same process.

The Jim Crow Laws aimed to segregate African Americans denying them access to public places, transportations, schools, restaurants and so on. Indeed African Americans in the South challenged the racial segregation and terror of Jim Crow laws in many ways. As Robin Kelley reminds us they were able to “turn segregation into congregation” through daily acts of resistance and through the blues as a weapon of the

²³ On slave revolts, Maroon Communities and the Haiti Revolution of the late 18th century see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2000, 1983) and Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990). See also Peter Linebaugh, and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

²⁴ Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), Kindle Edition.

²⁵ Singh, *Black is a Country*, 29.

weak.²⁶ Another way to challenge Jim Crow was to leave the South and move up North. This is how Langston Hughes in his poem “One Way Ticket” urged blacks to pick up their life and move to the land of hope.

I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws,
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me
And me of them

I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket-
Gone up North
Gone West
Gone!²⁷

The Black Great Migration has been one of the largest internal migrations in human history. It has been estimated that between the end of nineteenth century to World War I about 400, 000 African Americans moved to North, between World War I and the 1920s another migration flows of about 1 million with a peak in the 1920s.²⁸ The Great Migration of the early twentieth century gave the chance to rural black migrants to

²⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, “We are Not What We Seem: The Politics and Pleasures of Community,” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994), 45.

²⁷ Langston Hughes, “One Way Ticket,” Quoted in Farah Jasmine Griffin, “Who Set you Flowin’?” *The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 45.

²⁸ See Joe William Trotter Jr., “Blacks in the Urban North: The ‘Underclass Question’ in Historical Perspective,” and Michael B. Katz, “Reframing the ‘Underclass’ Debate,” both in Michael B. Katz, ed., *The ‘Underclass’ Debate: Views from History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). See also Joe William Trotter Jr., ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); and James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

experience urban modernity.²⁹ Cities like Chicago and New York became important centers for blues and jazz. Blacks in the North did not face lynching and Jim Crow laws but they continued to face mob-violence and segregation. Indeed even in the North they fought back and the riots of 1919 that spread in Northern cities are the testimony of this resistance. They found job in factories and services. Yet they continued to face discrimination on the job market, they found the worst jobs and were excluded from union. Hate strikes of white workers opposing the hiring of blacks was widespread as well as violence against blacks moving to white neighborhoods. Although Since the beginning of the Great Migration urban black dwellers fought against racism, housing and job discrimination, national policies did not help blacks in their struggles. For example, the 1935 Wagner Act did not stop racial discrimination and exclusion in the union and work floor. Similarly, in the 1930s began the practice of “red-lining.” The color red corresponded to the worst grade of desirability of neighborhoods.³⁰

From the 1940s to the early 1970s other 5 million blacks migrated to North and West. This migration called the Second Great Migration changed the geography of Northern cities. In postwar segregation patterns in industrial cities increased dramatically. In 1944 the servicemen’s Readjustment Act contributed to change the racial geography of cities.³¹ This Act part of the G.I. Bills, provided loans to whites who served

²⁹ Griffin, “*Who Set you Flowin’?*”, 100-141.

³⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Grabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 203.

³¹ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 52-53.

in army in World War II in order to buy at convenient prices houses in suburbs. Although blacks served in the army abroad and women contributed to the expansion of manufacturing at home they were mostly excluded from loans. This is a turning point in racial history of the United States. Firstly, not-yet-white-ethnics (especially Southern and Eastern European) became fully white.³² Secondly, inner cities were constructed as no-go areas. The arrival of black migrants coincided with a decline of cities. Two factors contributed to the decline of central cities. First, the relocation of heavy industry, docks, and manufacturing out of the city in suburbs, in sunbelt areas, and abroad where the price of manufacturing was cheaper.³³ Blacks were particularly affected by these changes because from being the largest rural population in the US they had become by the 1960s the largest urban population. Second, Urban policies contributed to the expansion of black ghettos. These policies as we have seen in previous chapters promoted highway construction, suburbanization and urban renewal which further marginalized and displaced blacks.³⁴ Urban renewal has been called by black activists “Negro Removal.” In New York thriving neighborhoods of Manhattan which were ethnically mixed were

³² See Karen Brodtkin Sacks, “How Did Jews Become White Folks?,” in Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek, eds., *Race* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

³³ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³⁴ George Lipsitz, “Corporate Culture, Conformity and Commodities: The Fight for Moral Authority,” in *Rainbow at Midnight, Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 256-258. See also George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the “White” Problem in American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 47 3 (1995): 369-387; Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, With a New Foreword (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

torn down in order to build financial districts, luxury apartments, and other structures. Blacks were relocated in already overcrowded tenements or public housing of the South Bronx, Harlem, and Central Brooklyn.

Black radicals have challenged since the beginning segregation at home making connection with colonial oppression abroad.³⁵ Through Pan-Africanism, Ethiopianism, Garveyism, Civil Rights and Black Power movements African Americans established a sense of solidarity with colonized people in Africa, Asia and Latin America.³⁶ In the 1930s and 1940s with the advent of Fascism and Nazism, black intellectuals and scholars initiated to make connection between imperialism and fascism. They suggested that fascism was the direct consequence of imperialism.³⁷ In postwar years two events made African Americans among the most fervent anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist: The Bandung Conference of non-aligned nations in 1955 and the publication of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1963.³⁸ The success of the Bandung conference

³⁵ See Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

³⁶ See María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001); Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); and Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom Beyond America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

³⁷ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Translated by John Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, 1955). See also Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 172-181.

³⁸ On the Bandung Conference of 1955 see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2008), 31- 49. On the influence of the Bandung Conference on African American culture in the 1960s see Kelley, *Ibid.*, 81-82. On the influence of Pan-African revolts on anticolonial and black freedom struggles see C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012, Originally Published in 1938).

among African Americans shows how global and local intersected. In the United States one year before Bandung the landmark decision *Brown vs. Board of Education* initiated the juridical dismantle of Jim Crow laws. Indeed this decision was the consequence of decades of struggles undertaken by black freedom activists, yet it was also accelerated by cold war strategies. During World War II the United States forces fought against Fascism and Nazism and proclaimed to be anti-imperialist. Yet this was a contradiction. The entire world was aware of Jim Crow laws, lynching, and segregation in the South. The US force was still segregated during World War II. Fifty-six US black soldiers were killed in the South by Ku Klux Klan when they returned from war in Europe.³⁹ In a moment in which the US was establishing global hegemony replacing Great Britain as world leader it did everything possible to show to the world a rosy picture of race relations.⁴⁰ This was evident in the work of the USIS offices around the world in Cold War years.⁴¹ As we have seen in chapter two, a special section of the USIS library in Naples was called “The many colored spectrum of American life.”⁴² In reality a de facto segregation in the United States continued and black activists identified more with liberation movements in the Third World than with American images of democracy. Even Martin Luther King who was took as an example of American democracy by white liberals in 1959 during a trip in India stated: “The strongest bond of fraternity was the

³⁹ Singh, *Black is a Country*, 164.

⁴⁰ Mary L. Dudziack, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴² Marilisa Merolla, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Italian Way: Propaganda americana modernizzazione nell’Italia che cambia* (Rome: Coniglio Editore, 2011), 35.

common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racism and imperialism.”⁴³

The passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965) completed the juridical battles against Jim Crow laws initiated by the *Brown* decision and culminated with the March on Washington in 1963 and the beginning of the War on Poverty launched by President Johnson.⁴⁴ In 1965 sociologist Patrick Moynihan, then Assistant Secretary of Labor, prepared a confidential memo for President Johnson titled *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action*. This memo simply known as the Moynihan report recognized that the legacy of slavery greatly affected black families and that unemployment rates among African American men was extremely high. Yet, According to Moynihan the higher rates of poverty, crime, and narcotics usage was not the result of structural forces – the persistence of segregation, racism, and job discrimination – but it was connected with the rise of a matriarchal culture created during slavery.⁴⁵ In a most cited passage he writes: “In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a

⁴³ Martin Luther King Jr., “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” in *Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 24. Martin Luther King is quoted in Singh, *Black is a Country*, 185.

⁴⁴ Singh, *Black is a Country*, 5.

⁴⁵ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983, 1981), 13.

crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well.”⁴⁶

This “tangle of pathology” was passed from generation to generation along families line. The Moynihan report greatly influenced the culture of poverty thesis which in some way or another was embraced by sociologists, anthropologists and consequently the War on Poverty in mid 1960s. Although the War on Poverty created important programs such as the Legal Service Corporation, the Community Action Program, Head Start and partially reduced poverty, it still relied on the idea that the problem among black urban poor was related to culture and behavior rather than to economy and racism. For this reason the War on Poverty despite all the efforts and the possibility which gave to community based organization, “sought to correct poor people behavior or improve their social skills.”⁴⁷ In this way black inner cities communities were seen as a monolith to be studied, helped, and controlled. Terms like “pathological,” “broken families,” “dysfunctional,” and “disadvantaged,” became synonymous of black urban poor. Black ghettos were considered by mainstream social scientists as isolated from the rest of society. Black liberation movements overturned this idea of the black ghetto as isolated and they made broader connections underlining that social policy, urban renewal, and racism isolated black ghettos from the rest of society. In 1945 Du Bois prophetically said

⁴⁶ Quoted in Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 27.

⁴⁷ Vincent Harding, Robin D.G. Kelley, Earl Lewis, “We Changed the World: 1945-1970,” in Robin D.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, eds., *To Make Our World Anew. Volume Two: A History of African Americans since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 248.

that colonies were “the slums of the world.”⁴⁸ The black ghettos of Harlem, Watts and Detroit strikingly reminded the slums of the colonies of the South of the world. In a famous passage of the *Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon contrasts the native towns and European towns in colonial cities. He writes:

The “native” sector is not complementary to the European sector. The two confronted each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they follow the dictates of mutual exclusion: There is no conciliation possible, one of them is superfluous. The colonist’s sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel. It’s a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers. The colonist’s feet can never be glimpsed, except perhaps in the sea, but then you can never get close enough. They are protected by solid shoes in a sector where the streets are clean and smooth, without a pothole, without a stone. The colonist’s sector is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things. The colonist’s sector is a white folks’ sector, a sector of foreigners. The colonized’s sector, or at least the “native” quarters, shanty town, the Medina, the reservation, is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people... The colonized’s sector is a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light. The colonized’s sector is a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate. It’s a sector of niggers, a sector of towelheads.⁴⁹

Black Power movements like the Black Panthers formed in Oakland in 1966 stand by the side of the colonized’s sector, which in the United States was the black ghetto. Indeed the idea that African Americans lived in an internal colony is a provocation. Yet, as this quotation shows the materialist aspect of racism and its global dimension were interconnected. The Black Panthers are generally associated with militant action, but this

⁴⁸ Quoted in Singh, *Black is a Country*, 220.

⁴⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004, 1963), 4-5.

view overlooks the grassroots dimension of this black power movement.⁵⁰ First of all they abolished from their vocabulary terms like pathological, dysfunctional, tangle of pathology. They established inter-ethnic alliances with Puerto Rican, Chicano, and Native American social movements like the Young Lords, Brown Berets and Indian movement. They fought against medical, job, and educational discrimination. They organized breakfast programs. They strongly opposed gender inequalities and the huge quantities of heroin that arrived in black ghettos. They reached people that social scientists considered dangerous, pathological and dysfunctional like inmates, street corners men, and prostitute. Here, again Fanon's influences was pivotal in his description of "the lumpen-proletariat...the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed and the petty criminals." In Fanon's view these people could be "rehabilitated in their own eyes and in the eyes of the humanity."⁵¹

⁵⁰ See Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Donna Murch, *Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Singh, *Black is A Country*, 174-224; Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 117-218.

⁵¹ Quoted in Singh, *Black is A Country*, 193. In this regard two books which are very helpful in order to make connections between proletarian Diasporas in early modern Atlantic and the wretched of the earth in 20th-century Mediterranean port cities are Peter Linebaugh's and Marcus Rediker's *The Many Headed Hydra* and Brent Edwards' *The Practice of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). As we have seen in previous chapters Linebaugh and Rediker extend the idea of Atlantic World to the Mediterranean seeing it as a hybrid space during early capitalism. In a similar vein, Brent Edwards introduces in his account cities like Marseille and Barcelona, linking the idea of early proletarians Diaspora discussed by Linebaugh and Rediker in their book to the lumpen-proletarians of the 20th-century Mediterranean. What is more interesting is that Edwards, like Linebaugh and Rediker, moves away from a traditional Marxist view of the proletariat seen only as composed of people from working class with a strong class consciousness. Edwards, in a chapter on the novel *Banjo* written by Claude McKay in 1929, following the authors of *The Many Headed Hydra* it expands the concept of proletariat including in it the forgotten people of cities, the marginal and vagabonds. In his words: "Marx's unforgiving characterization of those who do not fit, or who reject the logic of the class struggle as defined in the mid nineteenth

From the Black Panthers and other black liberation movements perspective Harlem is a signifier for all ghetto towns, including those far away from New York, it is in this sense that in the 1970s the inner city of Naples was the Italian Harlem. As we have seen in chapter four, Italian cinema portrayed life in Naples according to the stereotypes and discourses which marked a racialized social science. It produced a city characterized by a cultural and social backwardness that induced crime. In the case of Naples, backwardness was not signified through the racialized stereotypes of black otherness, but resonates with the representations of a pre-modern kind of life, exemplified by the “economy of the alley.” This idea about the inner city of Naples as isolated from mainstream society resonates with Patrick Moynihan description of black urban youth living in the ghetto. In Moynihan’s words black youth “growing up in the urban ghettos has probably less personal contact with the white world than any generation in the history of the Negro American.”⁵² Yet, urban life in Naples emerged not simply through mainstream cinema and its othering gaze, but also through locally-produced popular films and music forms of self-representation or representation from below. As an example of such practices of self-representation or representation from below in Naples, and the way they implicitly and explicitly resonate with the image of “Harlem as capital of all ghetto towns” appears in a film of the cine-sceneggiata genre interpreted by the immensely popular Neapolitan singer Mario Merola: *I contrabbandieri di Santa Lucia (Santa Lucia’s Smugglers)*, 1979, directed by Alfonso Brescia.

century – has always represented a problem area in Marxist theory, for the few intellectuals who have chosen simply to toss lumpen around as a broad term of sectarian denigration” (p. 201).

⁵² Patrick Moynihan, Quoted in Katz, *The Underserving Poor*, 27.



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Figure 21. Cigarette vendors in Naples. *Storia Fotografica di Napoli, 1971-1984. La città tra speranza di riscatto e drama del terremoto*, Second edition (Naples: Intra Moenia, 2000), 207.

In this film Merola sings of the dangerous life of men who in the 1970s made a living by smuggling cigarettes across the Mediterranean. Merola sings of fast, dark, blue boats, crossing the Mediterranean sea at night, evading the control of the border police, in order to reach larger ships ('the mothers') moored out in the gulf of Naples, where they pick up cartons of contraband cigarettes. In one of these songs, *Tammurriata blue*, Merola gives a new twist to a classic Neapolitan song *Tamurriata nera* (*Black Drumming*). The song was written in 1944, right after the Allied forces entered Naples, inaugurating that long presence of the U.S. Army Base in the Neapolitan territory, written by E.A. Mario, it speaks of black babies born to Neapolitan girls, who try to justify their mixed race offspring by referring to the look of the black US soldier as capable of impressing itself onto the pregnant mother. The song dramatizes the US presence in Naples, by referring specifically to the presence of black US soldiers in the aftermath of the war, and the new breed of Afro-Neapolitans (like James Senese) or even Native American Neapolitans (as in the case of the vocalist Mario Musella of James Senese's first band The Showmen). The 'black drums' of the *Tammurriata Nera* of 1944 becomes in 1976 the 'blue drums' of *Tammurriata blue*.⁵³ A new affect has been cast on the Neapolitan-African-American connection: it is the affect of ghetto life, of poverty, of marginalization.

By referring to the blues, that is by turning the "black drums" of post -WWII war Naples into "blue drums," Mario Merola moved away from the actual presence of Black

⁵³ Mario Merola, *Tammurriata Blue*, Soundtrack of *I Contrabbandieri di Santa Lucia*. The clip is available on youtube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQF_qypCOU (Accessed on 11/19/2012).

American soldiers in the city to a more immaterial connection with the United States: the affect of the color and the sound of black America. This was not the modernist jazz, born in Harlem, which feeds the young James Senese's musical imagination. It was a more visceral connection revolving around a common experience of poverty, struggle for survival, traumatic memories, and marginalization. It had to do with the content of urban experience of the 1970s, in both cities. Across the distance that separated the two cities, and the two bodies and melodies, there is much in common between Mario Merola's blue drums accompanied and Bobby Womack's soul:

“Ce sta chi rischia a vita tutt e sere pechè nun trova a fa nato mestiere”
“People who risk the life every night because they cannot find other jobs”

(Mario Merola, *Tammurriata blu*)

“I was the third brother of five / Doing whatever I had to do to survive / I'm not saying what I did was alright, / Trying to break out of the ghetto was a day to day fight.”

(Bobby Womack, *Across 110th street*)⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Bobby Womack, *Across 110th Street*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxCsIX6iU5o> (Accessed 11/19/2012).



Figure 22. Mario Merola. Source: Peppe Avallone, "Immagini dall'ultima sceneggiata," in Pasquale Scialò, ed., *Sceneggiata: Rappresentazioni di un genere popolare* (Naples: Guida, 2002).

Transnational Dialogue From Below

There is a scene from the classic movie *The Harder They Come* (Perry Henzell, 1972) which is relevant to my discussion on Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata. The protagonist, Ivan (played by Jimmy Cliff) moves from rural Jamaica to Kingston. His first encounter with urban life is through cinema. We see him in a crowded movie theater, The Rialto, watching a spaghetti Western.⁵⁵ Film director Perry Henzell explains that the “Spaghetti Western was an obsession in Jamaica for years, before Kung Fu.”⁵⁶ Centuries of oppression of black people in the Americas and centuries of marginalization of the Neapolitan urban poor have created alternative ways of making community. More recently, popular mass culture has been used by marginalized communities as a site from where it is possible to challenge authority. As historian Robin Kelley argues referring to African American folk narrative like the “baad Man” and the “trickster,” create “an imaginary upside-down world where the oppressed are the powerful.”⁵⁷ In this sense, in Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata occurred a simultaneous communication between the inner city of Naples and New York, and also between all the peripheries of the world. We have a transnational exchange of images between marginalized sector of societies. It is not by chance that Bobby Womack in the soundtrack of *Across 110th street* sings “Harlem is the capital of every ghetto town.” Like Ivan (Jimmy Cliff), watching a spaghetti western in a film theater downtown Kingston, the audiences of Blaxploitation

⁵⁵ Barbara Mennel, *Cities and Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2008), 170-172.

⁵⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁷ Robin D.G. Kelley, “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics: ‘Gangsta Rap’ and Postindustrial Los Angeles,” in *Race Rebels* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 187.

and cine-sceneggiata films identified with a protagonist who “doesn’t really want to fight but they push him and push him and push him until he starts to fight.”⁵⁸

Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata films are a mix of crime movie with other formulaic genres, such as the western, kung fu, and film noir. They also look back to previous black and Neapolitan popular culture. Progenitors of Blaxploitation films can be found in the blues, the “baad man” tales of the late nineteenth century, pimp narratives, and race films of the 1920s.⁵⁹ These previous cultural expressions were condemned by the black elite and middle class, as was Blaxploitation in the 1970s, because they did not participate in the process of “uplifting the race.” In this regard, Blaxploitation cinema can be put squarely within the tradition of an alternative culture which as Robin Kelley contends was “forged within the context of struggle against class and racial domination.”⁶⁰ These insubordinate acts, even when apparently apolitical, acquire a political meaning because were based on the tension between dystopia (memory of oppression) and utopia (hope of a better future). Patrons of b-grade movie theaters in Harlem waiting in long lines outside the theater to watch *Superfly* (1972), *the Mack* (1973) or *Foxy Brown* (1974), were continuing, in a de facto segregated inner-city, as

⁵⁸ Quoted in Mennel, *Cities and Cinema*, 171.

⁵⁹ I draw on Kelley’s argument of historicizing Gangsta Rap. See Kelley “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics,” 187. See also Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Eithne Quinn, “‘Pimpin’ Ain’t Easy’: Work, Play, and ‘Lifestylization’ of the Black Pimp Figure in Early 1970s America,” in Brian Ward, ed., *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); and Munby, *Under a Bad Sign*, 2011.

⁶⁰ Kelley, “We are Not What We Seem: The Politics and Pleasures of Community,” in *Race Rebels*, 44.

had the patrons of the alternative culture of blues club in the South in the 1920s as Kelley writes, the African American working class “turned segregation into congregation.”⁶¹

The roots of the cine-sceneggiata of the 1970s are in the theater of the sceneggiata which developed right before World War, and in a previous version of cine-sceneggiata of the 1920s especially in films directed by Elvira Notari who was the first female Italian film producer and director. Like the cine-sceneggiata of the 1970s, these earlier examples of filmic and theatrical sceneggiata narrated “the difficult life in the belly of Naples.”⁶² Theatrical versions of the sceneggiata existed until the 1970s and were regularly performed in theaters of the “ferrovia” (the section around the central railway station of Naples). Audience identification with stories and characters of the sceneggiata was so strong that some of these theaters, like *Il duemila*, had to install protection nets around the stage to prevent people jumping on stage to defend their favorite characters or assault the “bad guys and women.”⁶³ The ferrovia is central to sceneggiata’s development. First of all, some of its finest interpreters like Mario Merola came from this area. Secondly, the ferrovia is the theatrical area closest to the province of Naples and so attracted many people from surrounding towns. Thirdly, many sceneggiatas are set in this historic area. The ferrovia is a series of districts in the eastern part of the city center around the central station. Most of these neighborhoods such as *Mercato*, *Poggioreale*, *Porta Capuana*, *Porta Nolana*, *Forcella*, *Arenaccia*, *il borgo di Sant’Antonio* are low income areas.

⁶¹ Ibid., 45.

⁶² Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*, 171.

⁶³ Ibid, 172.

Throughout Naples, even inside one neighborhood you can pass from a wealthy to a poorer street. Until recently in the same building proletarians lived on the lower floors, while the wealthier classes lived on the upper floors. However, many parts of the city center of Naples, contrary to other Italian cities and more like the U.S. cities, are “...characterized by a long-standing and massive presence of *lumpenproletariat*.”⁶⁴ The ferrovia is also a cinematic place. Already at the end of the nineteenth century in this area there were many movie theaters and places for film exhibition. In early twentieth century, Naples was the largest Italian city and the capital of Italian cinema with more movie theaters than Rome and Milan. As Giuliana Bruno suggests, city crowd, dark alleys, and bustling traffic “suit the cinema – the spectacle of the motion picture.”⁶⁵

Cinema and Alternative Histories

In her brilliant book on cinema and black urban modernity, film historian Jacqueline Stewart maintains that the advent of classical narrative cinema in the 1920s did not “fully extend to Black spectators” because it “functioned alongside other exclusionary practice to support racial hierarchy.”⁶⁶ Although Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata emerged in the 1970s, and at first sight appear to be as two genres that follow the convention of classical narrative and style, they rejected this style which is

⁶⁴ Ibid, 164.

⁶⁵ Giuliana Bruno, “City Views: The Voyage of Film Images,” in David B. Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 46.

⁶⁶ Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 109-110.

embedded in a Eurocentric idea of spectatorship and “sought to minimize audience awareness of theater space and to encourage the absorption of the spectator into the narrative space of the film text.”⁶⁷ Indeed the birth of cinema is connected with imperial expansion, racist practice, and the anthropological eye.⁶⁸ However recent studies of the new film history developed by scholars like Miriam Hansen, Tom Gunning, Giuliana Bruno, Jacqueline Stewart, Ranjani Mazumdar and others demonstrate that early cinema also gave the impulse for the creation of an alternative public sphere which was multiethnic, proletarian and transnational.⁶⁹ In addition they chronicle the passage from early cinema to classical narrative cinema (which according to film historiography took place around 1917 with the films of D.W. Griffith), not as a complete break. Forms of early cinema and modes of reception associated with the cinema of attractions continued to exist underground. In the light of this new scholarship, Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata can also be viewed as genres that share many features with so-called primitive cinema or early cinema adapted to the new context of the late twentieth century Naples and New York.

⁶⁷Ibid., 109.

⁶⁸ On the connection between cinema, Imperialism and racism see Ella Shoahat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), Especially 55-166. For an excellent study on the parallel between the anthropological eye and the eye of the camera as forms of inscriptions, see also Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

⁶⁹ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991); Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant Garde,” in Robert Stam and Toby Miller, eds., *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*; Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*; Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwarts, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine’s Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape, and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

Film theorist Tom Gunning relates early cinema to a kind of cinema he calls “cinema of attractions.”⁷⁰ Cinema of attractions emerged from vaudeville and variety shows, yet it was the technological novelty and the film itself that most attracted the crowds watching these short movies. For the first time audience could see things that it was impossible to see with naked eye because they were too fast or small to perceive them. Rather than narrative these films emphasized display: city crowd, trains arriving in a station, amusement parks, and so on. These early forms of cinema totally transformed the experience of the city and by that time the city could only be grasped in association with its cinematic representation. Cinema became an integral part of the city. Urban travelogues became the new attraction of city masses because they “convey the sensation of travelling by means of a mobile camera.” A 1897 review of a short film taken by a camera riding in a subway tunnel of New York City claimed that “the spectator was not an outsider watching from safety the rush of the cars. He was a passenger on a phantom train ride that whirled him through space at nearly a mile a minute.”⁷¹ We can apply this description to the chasing scenes and “urban panoramas” in blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata moving across familiar city spaces for the local audience. Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata are a continuation of this early cinema in which the city is not only a background but the central component of the film. Like in early films, in Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata, the distinction between documentary and fiction is blurred. These films from *Superfly*, *Across 110th-street*, *The Mack* (Michael Campus, 1973) to *I*

⁷⁰ This term has been coined by Gunning in his “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant Garde.”

⁷¹ Quoted in Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 32.

contrabbandieri di Santa Lucia, Napoli...la camorra sfida la città risponde (Alfonso Brescia, 1979), and *Giuramento* (Alfonso Brescia, 1982), open with city views that remind actualities and urban travelogues. In some scenes people from the audience recognize themselves or see someone familiar on screen. In this way the film is not merely a representation of the city but part of the city itself. There are signs that denote the importance of specific places for the audience: *Porta Capuana*, the neighborhoods around the *ferrovia, forcella, mergellina* in Naples; Apollo Theater, Studio Museum, Marcus Garvey Boulevard, forty second street in New York. These are signs important not only to the local audience but also to the diasporic black and Neapolitan populations who watch these films in other parts of the world. To see familiar places is extremely important for local inner city audience. Generally these places appeared only on the news. They were historical sites now in decline or exotic or touristic places in documentaries from the perspective of middle class audience but rarely they were presented from the perspective of the communities who lived there. Moreover, the neighborhoods depicted in cine-sceneggiata and Blaxploitation have been constructed through the discourse of social science and mainstream media as authentic places, or as communities isolated from the rest of the city.⁷² Global diasporic populations who see these iconic images of black and Neapolitan culture take imaginary journeys to Harlem and Naples. Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata challenge the images of the inner city proposed by mainstream media, offering a counter-reading of the stereotypes presented

⁷² Kelley, "Looking for the 'Real' Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto," in *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!*, 15-42.

in the news and Hollywood style feature films about New York and Naples. To use Miriam Hansen's words Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata "mix news with memory and fantasy, factuality with desire."⁷³ Or as Giuliana Bruno referring to the city films of Elvira Notari argues realism and excess intertwined.⁷⁴

Blaxploitation and Cine-Sceneggiata as Third Cinema

Popular genres like westerns and kung fu movies which were so popular during the 1970s and 1980s in black and Neapolitan inner-city fused with real stories that took place in the inner city. Stories that took place in the inner city were presented by mainstream news as "bad." This term was transcoded and acquired a more positive or at least more complex meaning in cine-sceneggiata and Blaxploitation. Because of the lack of "positive" characters in mainstream movies about blacks or the Neapolitan working class, the protagonists are built around the heroes of westerns or kung fu movies. These characters are adapted to iconic figures of the black and Neapolitan working class such as the pimp, the baad man (Blaxploitation) "il guappo," "il contrabbandiere" and so on (cine-sceneggiata). These hyperbolic figures will move in a noir atmosphere fighting against the "Man" who both in New York and Naples is represented by the police, and by organized crime which with the help of corrupt politicians brought heroin into the community. The noir atmosphere, the city crowds, the excess, and the continuous

⁷³ Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 1991, 48.

⁷⁴ Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*, 161-186.

movement within city space of the protagonists, Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata epitomized urban modernity and an idea of film reception characterized by “unexpected juxtaposition of violent stimuli.”⁷⁵

This visceral reception of the filmic text and its connection with the reality of the neighborhoods produced an “active spectatorial involvement” in Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata. As I have noticed above, already in the theatrical version of sceneggiata “the mode of reception does not belong to the hegemonic model of atomization and privatization of forms of spectatorship.”⁷⁶ The cine-sceneggiata of the 1970s, like early cinema, stimulated the nerves, senses and the entire body of the spectator. The same happened with Blaxploitation films in Harlem theaters (or other theaters of inner-city in other US cities). As Stephane Dunn argues in her study on black women heroine of Blaxploitation era: “The experience of collectively seeing ‘70s black action films enhanced the pleasure of moviegoing for black viewers. One of the features of this experience appears to have been the call and response nature of interaction between audience members and the screen...At such theaters as New York City’s Art and Cinerama, the Victoria, the Apollo on 125th street...black moviegoers talked back to the screen, rooting for their superfly anti-heroes or superwoman heroine.”⁷⁷

Unlike classical narrative cinema during which the spectator keeps a certain distance from the images of screen, Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata images and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 172.

⁷⁷ Dunn, “*Baad Bitches*” & *Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films*, 20.

sounds acquired a tactile quality. Such cinema “hit the spectator like a bullet, it happen[ed] to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality.”⁷⁸ This kind of reception came from the urban setting of Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata and was anticipated by sociologist George Simmel when he argued that in the metropolis we are exposed to a “fast telescoping of changing images.”⁷⁹ The stimuli generated by cinema and city life created a space where there was no time for reflection. As Benjamin states, in big cities we consume images in a state of distraction.⁸⁰ Yet, the tactile qualities of cinematic images and sounds, of Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata in this case, were also meant to be a response to the marginalization of inner city population and consequently the need to feel closer to the city space and community which appear on screen.

This does not mean that Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata are authentic representations of neighborhoods and city life, rather it means to see film history not as a straight development from early cinema to classical cinema ignoring other forms of reception. If cinema in its early stage was, as Miriam Hansen suggests, a form of alternative public sphere, the concept of classical narrative brought back cinema closer to

⁷⁸ Walter Benjamin, Quoted in Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 49.

⁷⁹ George Simmel, Quoted in Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*, 54.

⁸⁰ This is developed by Walter Benjamin in his classic essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999). As Benjamin argues: “The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation. . . Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.” 231-234.

a bourgeois and deeply Eurocentric public sphere.⁸¹ A kind of universal language which excluded alternative cultures and Third World culture. In this regard the cinema of Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata for the meaning it acquired for their audience, like Third World Films, is “a cinema of mass participation, one enacted by members of communities speaking indigenous language.”⁸² The active participation of audience in film theaters for Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata continued this tradition of art as collective experience and art defined in terms of context rather than defined exclusively in aesthetic terms. As Teshone H. Gabriel contends:

The Western experience of film viewing – dominance of the big screen and the sitting situation – has naturalized a spectator conditioning so that any communication of a film plays on such values of exhibition and reception. The Third World experience of film viewing and exhibition suggests an altogether different route and different value system. For instance Americans and Europeans hate seeing a film on Africans screens, because everybody talks during the showings; similarly, African viewers of film in America complain about the very strict code of silence and the solemn atmosphere of the American movie-theaters.⁸³

The persistence of a film reception closer to early film and Third World film in blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata might be a response to issues of segregation and oppression. The Neapolitan working class did not experience the segregation of African Americans, but they have been subjected to the racism from both Italian people and the

⁸¹ On cinema as an alternative Public Sphere see Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 90-125.

⁸² Teshone H. Gabriel, “Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films,” in Stam and Miller, eds., *Film and Theory*, 301.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 306.

Neapolitan middle and upper classes. It is common still to hear that the problem of Naples is the “popolo,” the underclass and sub-proletarian. Although they have distinctive local idiolects, Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata are part of a transnational exchange of images from below.⁸⁴ As I stated in the introduction of this chapter this exchange moves in an invisible space, it remains underground.

Minoritarian Cities

Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata are based on a mix of realism and excess. The main characters are hyperbolic figures that, although grounded in the streets of the neighborhood, remind us of the heroes of science fiction, western and kung fu movies. In this sense, these movies reject the stereotyped notion of Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata that tie them “to the street, the ghetto, and superficial notions of realism.”⁸⁵ It is possible to see a futuristic impulse in blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata. Paul Gilroy in his article on the history of urban space through record sleeve, shows a picture of a George Clinton record in which he is on a space ship but we don’t understand if he is leaving from or arriving to the ruins of a black ghetto.⁸⁶ This utopic desire of escaping

⁸⁴ On transnational exchange of images see Barbara Mennel’s excellent reading of the movie “The Harder they Come” in her *Cities and Cinema*, 170-174.

⁸⁵ Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Boston: MIT Press, 2010), 246.

⁸⁶ Paul Gilroy, “Wearing your Art on your Sleeve: Notes towards a Diaspora History of Black Ephemera,” in *Small Acts* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), 253.

from oppression is a constant of black diasporic culture.⁸⁷ The heroes and heroines of Blaxploitation seem to have arrived from another planet, they are beautiful, strong, they fight like Bruce Lee, and they are seen as aliens from black nationalists group even though they collaborated together. In this sense Blaxploitation can be seen as a visual response to social science studies on the culture of poverty and ghetto. Between the 1960s and 1980s studies on urban ghettos proliferated. The American anthropologist Oscar Lewis coined the term “culture of poverty.” The culture of poverty is perpetuated from generation to generation along family lines. Culture in this view it is naturalized and behavior is seen as the principal causes of the increase of crime and poverty among black and Puerto Rican. The famous Moynihan report considers the pathology of the black family and the poverty among black communities as the consequence of the matriarchal family. But it ignores other structural factors like racism, social inequalities, and the white flight towards suburbs.⁸⁸ Harlem Youth Report in 1964 wrote: “The murder rate in central Harlem is six times higher than in New York City and in one

⁸⁷ On Afro-futurism see Mark Dery, “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate and Tricia Rose,” in Mark Dery, ed., *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994) 179-222. For an excellent summary of Dery’s interview see Mauro Zanda, *Back in Black: Razza, classe e cultura popolare nell’America nera contemporanea* (Camucia, Arezzo: Tuttle Edizioni, 2005), 145-155. See also Alondra Nelson, ed., *Afrofuturism: Special Issue, Social Text* (June, 2002); and Adilifu Nama, *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 148-172.

⁸⁸ The best critique of Oscar Lewis’s and Patrick Moynihan’s position is in Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, And U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Especially the introduction and chapter six, “I like to be in America: Postwar Puerto Rican Migration, The Culture of Poverty and the Moynihan Report.” For a general critique of social science construction of the black ghetto see Kelley, “Looking for the Real Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto,” in *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!*. For an excellent article connecting the culture of poverty, the Moynihan report and urban poverty in Naples, see Ida Susser, “Foreword: The Anthropologist as Humanist,” in Thomas Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain*, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

neighborhood – fifteen higher!...Some 40% to 60% of the drug addicts in the U.S. live in New York City. For the past seven years, the central Harlem drug addiction rate was ten times higher than in the rest of the city...The venereal disease rate in central Harlem is six times higher than in the rest of the city.”⁸⁹

Blaxploitation, through its excess, lets this minoritarian city emerge, a city which has been abandoned by institutions, impoverished by planned shrinkages, benign neglect and white flight. This is a city of the near future close to a science fiction movie. Yet, it is also a black city in which icons of African American community will lead black people towards what historian Manning Marable has called “the Second Reconstruction.”⁹⁰ Paraphrasing George Clinton, via Paul Gilroy, in his street funk classic “Chocolate City”, in this black city of the future,” Mohamed Ali will be the President, Richard Pryor will be the Minister of Education, Stevie Wonder the Secretary of Fine Arts , and Aretha Franklyn the First Lady.⁹¹ In this continuous reference to an oppressive past and the utopian desire of a better future we have a form of blutopia in which visions of the future and revisions of the past becomes part of the same process.⁹²

⁸⁹ “The Voice of Harlem Youth Unlimited, Harlem Youth Report # 5: Youth in the Ghetto and the Blueprint for Change. Illustration and color, Sam Huger. Story by Wim Robinson,” 1964. Olivia Frost papers, box 7, folder 3. Manuscripts, Archives & Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

⁹⁰ Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, First Edition in 1984).

⁹¹ Parliament/Funkadelic, “Chocolate City,” Casablanca (1975). Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 1987, 181.

⁹² Graham Lock, *Blutopia*

The utopian desire to escape racism, marginalization and oppression suggests us to think about the relation of oppressed people with technology. Blacks have been depicted always in terms of authenticity, backwardness and so on. In reality since historically they haven't had equal access to things, they have used available technology in order to express themselves. In black culture – which has been formed through centuries of oppression, the terror of slave trade system, and segregation – from the early writings of Du Bois, to electrified blues, dub, and hip hop, technology has been central.⁹³ Black cultural practices have used technology and proposed futuristic themes moving from the underground and alternative space, not oppositional like the avant-garde, but they have sometimes anticipated or reworked themes of the avant-garde.

In the inner city of Naples happened something similar in particular during the development of cine-sceneggiata. As stated above, Neapolitan lower classes haven't shared the same degree of segregation of black people, yet they have been marginalized and been object of racism. Like blacks their culture has been associated with authenticity and backwardness. In contrast with this image, Neapolitan lower classes, like in black popular culture have used available technology to express themselves. This is evident in the fascination for cinema since its early days and in the modernity of cine-sceneggiata. For example, many of the interpreters of cine-sceneggiata were also popular singers.⁹⁴ In cine-sceneggiata itself, as I showed in the section on the blue drum of Mario Merola,

⁹³ See Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture* (Macmillan, 1985), 187-192; and Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁹⁴ Popular interpreters of cine-sceneggiata are the already cited Mario Merola, Mario Da Vinci, Sal Da Vinci, Nino D'angelo, Angela Luce and others.

songs are central to all the films of this movement.⁹⁵ Actually some parts of these films are like musicals with the protagonist staring at the camera and singing famous Neapolitan songs or pieces composed exclusively for the film. *Carcerato* (“The Inmate”) begins with a close up of Mario Merola behind the bars of a prison singing the life of those in prison whose mothers are ill at home. Some movies of the cine-sceneggiata are shot on location between Naples and New York. In the film *Lacrime Napulitane* (Ciro Ippolito, 1981) (“Neapolitan Tears”) Mario Merola emigrates to New York City after he finds out that his wife has a relationship with a boss of camorra. In one scene there is a jump cut from Naples to New York and we see Mario Merola on the Brooklyn promenade singing the classic Neapolitan song “Lacreme Napulitane” (Liberio Bovio).

This America is costing us many tears,
for us Neapolitans.
For us that is missing Naples' sky,
as bitter is this bread.⁹⁶

Here the trope of Neapolitan emigration toward New York which reached its peak in early 20th-century is applied to the Naples of the early 1980s.⁹⁷ Naples was still poor but the camorra still existed. Yet, now the big market was heroin and to paraphrase Peppe Lanzetta the street urchins now were called junkies.

⁹⁵ See Ravveduto, *Napoli...serenata calibro 9*, 2007, 16-75; and Goffredo Plastino, *Cosa nostra social club: Mafia, malavita e musica in Italia* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2014).

⁹⁶ English lyrics from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uYLkyVTcs> (accessed 2/4/2014).

⁹⁷ Excerpt available on youtube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLJNILvSOXA> (accessed 2/4/2014).

Many of the songs performed in cine-sceneggiatas became big hits in working class areas of Naples. These songs and films were endlessly broadcasted by private radio and television stations located in working class areas. In the 1970s and 1980s these private television and radio stations became extremely popular and each neighborhood or even a single block had its own private and often pirate station that transmitted exclusively Neapolitan music connected with cine-sceneggiata.⁹⁸

We can argue that if in Blaxploitation and cine-sceneggiata images were like a bullet for the audience, music in combination with images became a sort of weapon.⁹⁹ It was an instrument that allowed artists to send messages from the periphery toward the center. A kind of counter-voice to explain the condition of suffering and the reason of crime in the inner city.¹⁰⁰ *Superfly* opens with images of Harlem: two young junkies walking on the streets planning a purse snatching for a fix. In the background we hear the theme song “Little Child Running Wild.” Bongos, electric guitars reminding the strident sound of the city, the echo of a sax. Curtis Mayfield singing of “Broken homes, Father gone, Mama tired, So the child is all alone.” The Moynihan report, news headline about

⁹⁸ Salvatore Piscicelli Interview available on the 2011 DVD edition of the *Occasioni di Rosa* (1981).

⁹⁹ On music in Blaxploitation movies see Richard Dyer, “Music and Presence in Blaxploitation Cinema,” in *The Space of a Song: The Uses of Song in Film* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 156-174; Kodwo Eshun, “From Blaxploitation to Rapsploitation,” in Johnathan Romney and Adrian Wootton, eds., *The Celluloid Jukebox* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 52-59.

¹⁰⁰ On Counter-voices in popular culture see Jimmie L. Reeves and Richard Campbell, *Cracked Coverage: Television News, The Anti-Cocaine Crusade, and the Reagan Legacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 258.

Harlem of the 1970s materialize in front of our eyes.¹⁰¹ Then there is a twist in the song, a change of direction, the rhythm becomes heavier, the sound of a sax solo penetrates our body and Mayfield reminds us: “Where is the mayor Who'll make all things fair/ He lives outside/ Our polluted air.”¹⁰² This is the life in Harlem in the early 1970s for street kids, like the protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, they live underground in a state of invisibility, but at the same time in a state of high visibility concerning newspaper headlines and social science research. Yet, Harlem, as the beginning of the film shows, is not a place isolated from society but a place where everything can happen, it is utopian and dystopian at the same time and for this reason a place that could be a source of inspiration for science fiction novels. As novelist Samuel Delany reminds us his science fiction novels are not so much inspired by the outer space but by the streets of Harlem.¹⁰³

In Naples the movie *Quel ragazzo della curva B* (Romano Scandariato, 1987), opens with a group of supporters of the Napoli soccer team who meet up in the “Quartieri Spagnoli” (one of the symbols of Naples inner-city) to go to the stadium by car. On their way to the stadium the leader of the group (played by actor and singer Nino D’angelo) sings “Napoli, Napoli, Napoli.” This song is about the love for the team of Napoli manifested by young people from the inner-city. “C’mon Napoli...in the eyes of these

¹⁰¹ Newspapers article I have in mind here are: Mary Breasted, Police Drive Stalks Heroin Dealers in Harlem, *New York Times*, January 30, 1977; See, also, Irving Kristol, “The Negro Today is Like the Immigrant Yesterday” *New York Times*, September 11, 1966.

¹⁰² Available on you tube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oid_QFQ2Kw (Accessed March 13, 2014).

¹⁰³ Greg Tate, “Ghetto in the Sky: Samuel Delany’s Black whole,” in *Flyboy in the Butter-Milk: Essays on Contemporary America* (New York: Fireside, 1992), 160.

kids who forget their troubles and they began singing /C'mon Napoli.”¹⁰⁴ In his debut song of 1976 called “A storia mia... O scippo” (“My story...the purse snatch,”) Nino D’Angelo tells the story of a young boy who is arrested after a purse snatch.¹⁰⁵ He says to the policeman who caught him: “Yes, I snatched the purse of this woman/I didn’t have other choices/I don’t have father, I have my mother’s surname/She has only and is ill/She needs the money for milk and medicine.” In another movie interpreted by Nino D’angelo called *Uno scugnizzo a New York* (“A street urchin in New York”), directed by Mariano Laurenti (1984), D’angelo emigrates to New York. Here his best friend will become an African American who works as a delivery boy. Nino D’angelo in many interviews has underlined that Neapolitans are blacks.

¹⁰⁴ Available on you tube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yU_usYYtLo (Accessed March 13, 2014)

¹⁰⁵ “A storia mia O scippo” is available on youtube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_SQ3OtGrhY (Accessed March 13, 2014).

Chapter 6

“I Went to the Crossroad”: Metropolitan Blues

Earthquake Blues

The post-apocalyptic feel that links images of urban decay in Naples and New York City has, of course, different trajectories, albeit also common trends. On the one hand, it was produced in both cities by major social, political and economic changes affecting urban life in the nineteen seventies and eighties in both cities. However, if the post-apocalyptic scenarios of the Bronx and Harlem, were the product of invisible forces that shaped the urban future of America, in Naples the catastrophe had a name and a place: the 1980 earthquake.

On November 23rd, 1980, the city of Naples and its surrounding region were hit by a major earthquake. The epicenter was in the region of Avellino about 50 miles south east of Naples, where entire villages were destroyed and the number of dead exceeded 3000 people. In Naples, a ten-story building collapsed in the area of Poggioreale causing 57 deaths, the majority of whom were children attending a party.¹ However, even if the city did not suffer a large number of casualties, the earthquake seriously damaged houses and buildings that were already in precarious conditions. In many areas of the city, the damage inflicted by the earthquake effected social and urban conditions for the worse for

¹ See Fabrizio Bancalè's documentary *Terremoto 80: La scossa che ha cambiato l'Italia*, 2010.

at least ten years. In the immediate days after the earthquake entire blocks were evacuated, streets closed as more than 2500 homeless Neapolitans occupied schools. The other 3000 were relocated in prefab housing units.



Figure 23. “C’mon Napoli...in the eyes of these kids who forget their troubles and they began singing /C’mon Napoli.” Source: *Storia Fotografica di Napoli, 1985-1993. Dal ‘grande freddo’ degli anni ‘80 alla svolta di Bassolino* (Naples: Intra Moenia, 2001), 49. Here, I am borrowing from the lyrics of Nino D’angelo’s song “Forza Napoli,” (C’mon Naples) 1987.

Although the earthquake was a punctual event, its effects on urban life consolidated slowly. Commentators have called the earthquake of Naples a “cold earthquake,” meaning that the damage exploded gradually throughout the whole decade of the eighties.² In the end, it was estimated that more than thirty-five thousands buildings were damaged, and more than 150.000 people relocated to other parts of the city and its hinterland. More than twenty thousand new houses were built on the outskirts of Naples. This was the largest urban relocation and urban intervention in Italian history.³ Because of the many streets closed and the precarious buildings, the earthquake affected the already heavy traffic of the city. In addition, unemployment rose, and the unemployed organized themselves in groups called “organized unemployed”. The emergence of the earthquake and of the housing shortage led to the creation of another big group of protesters called “senza casa” or the “homeless.” Artisanal activities in old districts of Naples had to close, and many jobs were lost. During the same time one of the major steel factories in Italy, Italsider, gradually closed down. During the 1980s, demonstrations of the unemployed groups in Naples, who demanded jobs, and the homeless, who demanded decent housing were held on a daily basis.

In the early 1980s, organized crime experienced a resurgence as well and a reorganization in the hands of boss Raffaele Cutolo. In some districts, in some way or another many people had no choice but to join the camorra even if indirectly. The camorra also had a primary role in the post-earthquake reconstruction imposing products

² Andrea Geremicca, interviewed in *Tetteremoto 80*.

³ Vezio De Lucia, *Se questa è una città* (Rome, Donzelli Editore, 2006, originally published 1989), 156.

like cement, and tools, and thus contributing to the chaotic expansion of the city toward the north – the areas of Marano, Giugliano, and other towns. As in the postwar years, the hinterland of Naples expanded but it was in the post-earthquake years that Naples became a metropolitan region. As documented in Francesco Rosi's famous film *Le mani sulla città* (1962) (*Hands on the City*), Naples had been the object of a large speculative investment in housing since the postwar period. And yet, as large as this effort was, it pales when compared to the intensification of those same processes in the post-earthquake years. Indeed, for some contemporary scholars, the 'reconstruction of Naples' after the earthquake constituted the first instance of a 'state of emergency' calling for the suspension of the law and facilitating the massive speculations and accumulation of capital that was to repeat itself in the following years.⁴

In the 1980s, organized crime ('Camorra') stipulated agreements with politicians, engineers, and technicians to impose their controlled supply of primary resources like cement, tools, and even choice of location in the reconstruction of Naples in the 1980s. The contraband of cigarettes on the street which had dominated the 1970s, continued during the 1980s, but now the big business was heroin and seemingly legal activities like construction, garbage and politics. Heroin affected all the social classes but working class sections were particularly vulnerable to the diffusion of the drug. Many families saw their daughters and sons become addicts. As result the city became more dangerous. There was an increase in violence.

⁴ See the volume edited by Alessandro Petrillo, *Biopolitica di un rifiuto* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2009).

Anthropologist Thomas Belmonte who did field research for his book on urban poverty in the 1970s, returned to the Naples in the early 1980s to write the afterword to the book. He noticed these big changes in the same neighborhoods he had lived in during the 1970s. The city looked darker, literally evoking images of New York. During this visit, he met with some of the people he had interviewed in the seventies. He writes:

I invited him [Pepe, one of the protagonists of his ethnographic work *The Broken Fountain*] to walk with me down via Roma toward the Galleria, where we could have a coffee in one of the sidewalks cafes. The crowds on the sidewalk were robotic, hard and rushing, as they tend to be in Naples and New York...His skin was pale and poor looking. He stopped, immobile and mute in the middle of the sidewalk. Why was I ever born, Tommaso? How should I respond?...but before I could answer him, he blurted, "I'm a drug addict. I'm a junkie....It began sometime after the earthquake of 1980, when he was sixteen, and no longer at the Istituto. It grew very serious, very quickly, involving the consumption by injection of 1.5 grams of heroin per day...I need at least 150, 000 lire a day to shoot up the way I like. I snatch purses. I'll let a faggot get close and then kick the shit out of him to get his wallet. Or I'll go up to where all the engaged couples park at night, and pull a gun on 'em while they're goin' at it. I don't like to do it. I always explain that I'm a junkie and that I have to have the money..."⁵

Harlem Meets Naples

The connection between New York and Naples was felt in the first place as a kind of visual resonance or cinematographic resemblance. In 1987 a group of Neapolitan musicians including, Tullio De Piscopo, James Senese, Toni Esposito and others were invited to play at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, as part of a project called "Naples Meets

⁵ Thomas Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain*, Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 149.

Harlem.” The homonymous documentary produced and broadcasted by the Italian public television network Rai, in fact, begins with the subway station of Piazza Cavour. In the winter of 1985, in such a post-earthquake Naples, I remember exiting from the Piazza Cavour subway station on my way to school and feeling, like Neapolitan poet and novelist Erri De Luca, the "cold in the bones."⁶ There were urban legends circulating about this square. People said that drug dealers freely entered in the huge grey school building facing the square to force school children to inject heroin and turn them into addicts. As in New York City neighborhood, drugs were a major sign of some kind of urban catastrophe hitting the urban disenfranchised. These urban legends acted as framing stories for the urban crisis. Perhaps these were legends but “nonetheless [were] created and sustained through concrete human history, through real life.”⁷ Unlike the postcard, iconic image of Naples, a site like Piazza Cavour with its tall, grey building recalls Walter Benjamin’s famous dystopic image of Naples, contrasting the reality of mismanaged urban development with the ‘fantastic reports of travelers’: “In reality it is gray...tenement blocks of six or seven stories ...appear against the villas as skyscrapers.”⁸ At the same time, Piazza Cavour is more than an image of urban decay and crime, it is a cross-road between the old center (bordered by the long Via Foria) and the historical popular districts of Salvator rosa/Montecalvario and Rione Sanità. It is like the x of the

⁶ Erri De Luca, *Il cronista scalzo* (Naples, Prismi, 1996), 39.

⁷ Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 11.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Naples,” in Peter Demetz, ed., *Reflections*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 165.

cross-roads that inspired the blues: “polymorphous and multidirectional, scene of arrivals and departures, place betwixt and between....”⁹

In the documentary, Piazza Cavour acts literally as a switching point, connecting Naples and New York in ways that turn a visual resonance into an explicit cinematic montage. Drummer Tullio de Piscopo and saxophonist James Senese enter the subway station in Piazza Cavour and buy two train tickets to New York.¹⁰ Of course there is no train connecting Naples and New York and this journey is symbolic—two cultures, the Neapolitan and black, with shared histories of racism and suffering and two locations, Naples and New York, with a rich cultural heritage suffering social and economic decline. The idea to organize a concert where Neapolitan musicians of the so called “Vesuvio Wave” of the 1980s and stars of soul, R&B and free jazz like James Brown, The Temptations and Lester Bowie would play together on the stage at the Apollo, came to Ruggero Miti, a television director and entrepreneur, while he was preparing a documentary for the Italian television on the Harlem Renaissance.¹¹ Miti links Naples and Harlem as international musical and cultural centers. And yet, it is not simply a generic link that is activated here, as this dissertation tries to demonstrate. More specifically, he renews the connection between the modernist Harlem of the 1920s, a moment of rupture and experimentation, to the art scene in Naples in the 1980s. At the

⁹ Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 7.

¹⁰ *Harlem Meets Naples*. The Documentary about this concert is available on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ug0pgl2OcR4> (accessed 11/19/2012).

¹¹ “Canta Napoli (ma a Harlem),” *La Repubblica*, Dec. 1, 1987, 36.

Apollo Theater, the joint performances of Neapolitan and African American musicians connected black modernism, soul music, free jazz, Neapolitan music and pop art to the post-earthquake Naples. In the 1980s, in fact, art dealer Lucio Amelio brought to Naples artists like Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys and others. It was in the early 1980s that Andy Warhol made his famous artwork based on the first page of the local paper *Il Mattino* the day after the earthquake titled “Fate Presto.” (“Hurry Up”).¹² Modernist Harlem, the tradition of Neapolitan music, The Harlem and Naples of the urban crisis, music and pop art, all suggest a continuous dialogue between these two “world cities.”

Minor Bronx

This imaginary identification of Naples with the United States, and specifically with African Americans, becomes a central theme of Neapolitan culture in the 1980s. The simultaneous urban crises of the 1970s produced a whole imaginary of ethnicized urban decay and crime in American popular culture – a popular culture that as we know has had a global reach and influence. In the nineteen eighties, thanks to films such as *The Warriors*, *Fort Apache*, and *The Bronx Warriors*, the Bronx in particular came to stand for the crisis of inner cities, for youth crime, and for the devastating effect on community lives of drugs such as heroin and, later, crack.

¹² It is possible to see a copy of this artwork in the pedestrian subway passage connecting the metro subway station of Piazza Cavour with those of Museo. On the Andy Warhol’s visit in Naples see the clip on youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWyrYQhoMvo> (Accessed on 11/19/2012).

In his short stories written during the eighties, and later 1993 collected in a book entitled *Figli di un Bronx minore* (*Children of a Minor Bronx*), the Neapolitan poet, novelist and actor Peppe Lanzetta explicitly links the Bronx to Naples. For Lanzetta The Bronx signified a place from which there is hardly no escape. The identification of Naples with “the Bronx” is a recurrent theme in Lanzetta’s poetic production. One poem in particular, “Bronx Napoletano” (Neapolitan Bronx) creates an analogy between the American city in the 1920s, and African American urban life in the 1980s.

Chisto è o bronx napulitano
estorsioni e robba ‘mmano
e’ l’America d’o 1920
a 16 anni vanno a dinto

7 scippi 3 rapine
je me vendo ogni matina
laccettine a buon mercato
pe ‘st’America ‘nguaiata.

Ma addo’ è juta napule è
cu l’addore d’ ‘o ccafè
e ‘scugnizze so’ cagnate
mo’ se chiammano drogate.

E’ ‘n’esercito ‘e guagliune tutte quante tale e quale
‘e giubbine e ‘e motorine
pe’ nu grammo d’eroina

Chisto è ‘ bronx napulitano
Songhe nire e nun ‘o sanno
Vanno a scola pe’ capi’
Ca ‘e caccia l’ogne pe’ nun muri’.

This is the Neapolitan Bronx

Extorsion and purse snatching
It's 1920s America
You go to jail at 16

7 snatchings and 7 robberies
I am selling every morning
Cheap golden necklaces
For this troubled America

But where is the Napoli
With the smell of coffee
The streetkids have changed
Now they are called junkies
It is the kids' army
They all look the same
With their jackets and motorbikes
For a gram of heroin

This is the Neapolitan Bronx
They are black and they don't know it
They go to school to understand that you need claws not to die.¹³

In Peppe Lanzetta's poems Naples is both black and blue.

This imaginary connection with the Bronx significantly revolves around the devastating effects of drug-use in the two cities, and especially heroin. In this sense, the Bronx becomes not only a signifier of decay but also of possible ways out. In the early nineties, in fact, Lanzetta will start together with a group of ex heroin addicts an association called "Figli del Bronx" which will deploy specifically theatre and drama as a way out. Significantly, in the 2000s, the "Figli del Bronx" will also start a

¹³ Peppe Lanzetta, "Bronx napoletano," in *Ridateci i sogni. Ballate* (Rome: Feltrinelli, 2002), 84.

cinematographic collaboration with Bronx-born, director Abel Ferrara, resulting in the production of the film *Napoli, Napoli, Napoli* (2009).

Peppe Lanzetta's Naples is far from the iconic image of the bay of Naples. We do not see, as in Merola's film, the historic Palazzo Donn'Anna which dominates the coast of Posillipo. It is a blue Naples, in which the blues represents the sadness which is haunted by the memory of a trauma. Naples in the 1980s, then, was a city where the felt connection with the United States, and especially with urban life of the African American poor, was reinforced and emphasized repeatedly in music, film, poetry and popular culture at large. The images of an impoverished, dangerous city in ruins resonated with the popular representations of New York's African American and Puerto Rican neighborhoods in such a way as to reinforce a sense of connection.

Blues Metropolitanano

Blues metropolitanano (Salvatore Piscicelli, 1985) is a musical film that explores these post-earthquake years in ways that demonstrate once again the importance that the sounds and images of Black urban America played in a city on the other side of the planet that was looking for new ways to think about itself and its history.

The plot of *Blues Metropolitanano* is simple: all the characters gravitate around the organization of a concert where new voices of Neapolitan music will play together in the chaotic post-earthquake city. Other stories emerge from this central story which revolves around the organization of a concert. The story is set back in the 1980s, the omnipresent

sound of the radio which sets the rhythm to the images reminds us that a season is dying and something new is emerging. The organizer of the concert, who has a very low budget, is helped by a visionary artistic director who makes continuous reference to the volcano (his strange idea is to give the concert on Vesuvius) which dominates the city and symbolizes the idea of catastrophe. This sense of catastrophe has accompanied Naples for centuries and with the earthquake of the 1980s the myth seemed to have become a reality. In the movie there are no signs of the earthquake. It is a future in which people await a final and more destructive earthquake.

Blues Metropolitano is testimony to a rupture which began in the 1970s and was accelerated by the earthquake. In his previous movies *Immacolata and Concetta* (1977) and *Le occasioni di Rosa* (1979) Piscicelli explored the transition from rural to urban life in the outskirts of Naples that reaches from Pomigliano D'Arco to Scampia, and other areas in north Naples.¹⁴ Already underway with the planning of the periphery in the early 1970s, this transformation continued in the 1980s. During those years, Piscicelli argued in an interview taken in occasion of the DVD edition of *Le occasioni di Rosa* in 2011, Naples became like any other metropolis in the world. From this context new sounds emerged.¹⁵

The movie is also an investigation of the American presence in Naples. Although the Allied troops only occupied Naples between the 1943 and 1947, US presence in

¹⁴ *Le Occasioni di Rosa* opens with Rosa walking on the streets in the new urban public housing development of Scampia. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOF_gypCOU (Accessed on 11/19/2012).

¹⁵ Interview available on the DVD edition of the *Occasioni di Rosa* (2011).

Naples remained very strong until the 1980s with end of the Cold War. As it did other parts of the world, the US State used music in Italy as a form of propaganda to show that American democracy was based on liberty in contrast to the Soviet Union's communist and austere regime.¹⁶ Already during the war many structures were confiscated by the Allies to create jazz and blues clubs. In the decades of the Cold War new clubs were opened, especially in downtown Naples and in the area of Campi Flegrei around the NATO headquarters, as Diego Librando charts in his book on jazz in Naples.¹⁷ During the Allied occupation the US government launched a program including V-discs. The V-discs were discs produced for the troops in Europe. It has been estimated that more than 900 V-discs were produced and many of them circulated in Naples.¹⁸ The encounter between Neapolitan music and Afro-American music was not new. Earlier in the 20th-century, as music historian Simona Frasca has argued in her book *Birds of Passages*, Italian American musicians were influenced by and in turn influenced black musicians in New York.¹⁹ However, not until the postwar years was American music broadcast regularly on radio Napoli and later on the radio of NATO. With the end of the Cold War the strategic presence of American troops diminished. However, Naples still remained NATO's the South European headquarters, as well as of the US Sixth Fleet.²⁰ In

¹⁶ See Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Diego Librando, *Il Jazz a Napoli dal dopoguerra agli anni Sessanta* (Naples: Guida, 2004), 30.

¹⁸ *Idem.*, 31.

¹⁹ Simona Frasca, *Birds Of Passage: i musicisti napoletani a New York (1895-1940)* (Lucca: LIM, 2010).

²⁰ Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 113.

downtown Naples until a few years ago there were many sailors attending in numerous music clubs. *Blues Metropolitan* tells the story of the American presence in Naples especially in terms of music between actual presence and imaginary identification. Americanization is everywhere in the movie, from the names of the characters – Tony and Tex – to the setting: from the music clubs around the port and the brothel run by Tony’s adopted mother who is an old prostitute who became rich during the 1960s and 1970s, most likely doing business with American sailors. Tony, her adoptive son, is totally Americanized mixing Neapolitan and American English, driving a Cadillac and wearing boots. Yet, this is not a hegemonic or nationalist depiction of Americanization.

The film depicts what film critic Miriam Hansen has called Americanization from below.²¹ This is the Americanization typical in Hollywood B movies which influenced Neapolitan popular cinema like the *cine-sceneggiata* of the 1970s. It is a filmic depiction of the low life of the city. In an interview Salvatore Piscicelli²² stated that he was much more attracted to the popular genres of Neapolitan melodrama and *cine-sceneggiata* than to the so called “cinema d’inchiesta” (a realist film genre aiming at producing a form inquiry about social problems). He makes a distinction between “cinema meridionalista” and “cinema del sud.” Cinema meridionalista is a cinema made by Southern intellectuals who were part of an *elite* emigrated to Rome (for example, Francesco Rosi author of “Hands over the city”). This film was a sociological and political inquiry in a cinematic form. Although this kind of cinema has made excellent investigations of political and

²¹ Miriam Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Cinema,” in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds., *Reinventing Film Studies*, (London: Arnold, 2000), 334.

²² Interview available on the DVD edition of *Immacolata and Concetta*.

social life of Naples, it looks at the city from above and consequently there is a certain “orientalist” gaze in it. Edward Said discussed ‘orientalism’ as a mode of representation of the Other which relies on a fixed set of stereotypes to create a binary opposition between us and them.²³

To this cinema, Piscicelli opposes the ‘cinema del sud’ (cinema from the south) a way of making films that draws from lower genres, popular traditions like melodrama and the cultural practice of the poor artisanal class and so called “underclass.” Cinema meridionalista is overtly political whereas cinema del sud apparently is not consciously political, but perhaps is more political because it stands by the side of the working people and “urban poor.” Although *Blues metropolitano* could appear as an art movie it is more interested in cultural practice from below like cine-sceneggiata.

Blues metropolitano is thus a film that draws on popular culture, but a popular culture that is quite distant from the national conception of popular culture. It willingly constitutes a mix of the local (Neapolitan popular cinema) and the global (African American culture). This mixture is not an invention of the film as such, as much as a result of an ongoing process of hybridization that expressed itself specifically through music. In the film we hear different kinds of sounds derived from the blues, that become roots and *routes*: the blues Mediterranean rock of Pino Daniele, the Neapolitan jazzy sounds of Tullio de Piscopo, the Neapolitan new-wave of Anthrax, Radio, 666, the funk/R&B of the Ascenn, and the Caribbean inflected sounds of Antonio Capone.

²³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1995, originally published 1978). See also Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998).

Blues Metropolitano opens with a clip from a famous concert of local blues musician and singer Pino Daniele at the Mostra D'Oltremare in 1984. Pino Daniele is perhaps the artist who has best narrated the years of the earthquake. In his songs there are continuous references to ruined buildings, to the blues as a way of life of Neapolitans. He is one of those indescribable artists whose music touched the catastrophic moment affecting Naples and at the same time the hopes for a better future. When I was about twelve years old, I asked an older friend of mine why he liked Pino Daniele so much. The only answer he gave me was: “pecchè chill è blues” (because he is blues).

In the mid-1980s Pino Daniele was the most well-known musician in Naples. He articulated the sound of the blues fused with the local Neapolitan tradition, Mediterranean music and Latin Jazz. In the early sound of Pino Daniele the creolized Mediterranean meets the black Atlantic and “Nuestra América.” He collaborated with a wide range of blues and jazz musicians from Africa, Latin America, and the United States. In the initial clip of *Blues metropolitano* we hear Pino Daniele mixing English and Neapolitan dialect, singing: “Yes I know my way, ‘e guaie mie e’ saccio i” (I know my own trouble) “ma si haje suffrì caccia a currea” (but if you have to suffer use the belt)...”²⁴ Pino Daniele, like other musicians of his generation who embraced black music, began playing in clubs around the port in the early 1970s. To begin a film with a clip from a Pino Daniele concert not only set the tone of the film – the blue vein of the post-earthquake city – but also the topic of Americanization from below in Naples.

²⁴ Pino Daniele, “Yes I know My Way” originally published in the Album *Vai Mo*, 1981 (EMI italiana). The clip from *Blues metropolitano* is available on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KX-aQUjNCCM> (accessed 11/19/2012).

In the movie music itself is the protagonist. We can hear for almost the whole movie the soundtrack in the background. The second part of the movie revolves around the live performances of the artists who participate in the concert. In this incessant flow of sounds and rhythms emerges a history of Naples from below. During the concert Tony stands with his girlfriend beneath a sculpture representing a big female head. In the middle of the conversation Tony stops for a second and says “but anyway, what does this head represent?” His girlfriend replies, “she is the head of Naples.” Tony is surprised by the answer and says “really? And who was the head of Naples?” His girlfriend replies that the only thing she knows is that she was a female. Even the encounter with American troops is not narrated through the official history of the Allies presence in the city and the formation of NATO, but through the night-life of the clubs around the port. It is not by chance the last song in the movie, Pino Daniele’s “Lazzari felici” is about the workers in the port of Naples who brought heavy boxes on their shoulders and they were not able to inhale the sea breeze. This song is also a tribute to all “the lumpen-proletariats” of Naples, who accepts all kind of jobs even if they have (“mal’ e rin”) back pain.

So, as I have argued in the previous chapters, certainly the blues was born out and propagated in a specific moment of U.S. history: “Slavery, ten years of freedom, the overthrow of Reconstruction and the beginning of ninety-five years of what has been called “the second slavery.”²⁵ Yet, if we think in terms of *longue durée* we can trace the

²⁵ Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in the Mississippi Delta* (London: Verso, 1998), 16.

roots of the blues in the unofficial histories which have moved between Africa, the Mediterranean and the black Atlantic. Looking for the roots of the blues, Blues scholar Paul Oliver goes to Africa but does not trace a direct line from West Africa to the Americas. Rather, he follows what Jose Saldivar calls the “zigzags of ...outernational contact zones” between The Sahara desert, West Africa, the Mediterranean and the Americas.²⁶ He argues that:

Certainly the ornamentation of the Tuaregs reaches a degree of enrichment that exceeds any in the blues and comes very close to that of *cante hondo* and *flamenco*. In the singing of many of the parkland and semi-desert peoples the use shadings and falling notes that approximate to those of the blues can be widely heard. Father Jones has spoken in general of ‘the outline of an African tune’ which he likens to ‘a succession of the teeth of a rip-saw; a step rise (not usually exceeding a fifth) followed by a gentle sloping down, and so on.’²⁷

If we think about a multiplicities of histories involved in the evolution of the blues, the past is transformed by music itself and it returns in the present as a flash in a moment of danger.²⁸ Music itself becomes sociology that opens up the “house of history” producing unexpected connections between Africa, a creolized Mediterranean and the Americas.²⁹

²⁶ José Saldivar, *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xxvii.

²⁷ Paul Oliver, “Savannah Syncopators,” in Paul Oliver, et al., eds., *Yonder Come the Blues: The Evolution of a Genre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 69.

²⁸ Iain Chambers, *Mediterraneo blues* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012), 30.

²⁹ Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 27.

In *Blues metropolitano* the moment of danger that returned the blues to Naples was the earthquake and the social collapse of the city. The dissonant and flattened note of the blues underlines the destruction, the disintegration of life through heroin, the inevitable condition of loving Naples only if you are away from it. Yet, the blue note has also the ability to deviate the course of history through struggles in the present and future. This transformation happens to Tex, a key character in the film, who decides to quit his heroin addiction. While he is making this decision, he opens his apartment's window, it is dawn outside, a dawn tinted with blue.

Brothers from Another Planet

The trauma of Naples is connected with the trauma of the middle passage and slavery. If the traumatic experience of the slave trade system can be compared with the science fiction trope of alien kidnappings, the history of Naples, characterized by foreign invasions, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, diseases, pollution, precarious transportation system, racism, unemployment, resembles the trope of post-apocalyptic environment of science fiction. Above all, *Blues metropolitano* underlines that for Neapolitans America is black. Neapolitans are considered the Italian blacks. The Unification of Italy in 1860 it occurred during the same time of what historian Eric Hobsbawn called the age of empires and it followed similar dynamics with imperialism where a civilized north rescue uncivilized south. Shortly after the unification of Italy positivist criminologists like Cesare Lombroso, Alfredo Niceforo considered Neapolitans as nonwhite. As historians

Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter write in their introduction to Lombroso's *Criminal Man*: "Lombroso...emphasized the importance of race for explaining high rates of violent crime. Having been conquered over the centuries by a number of foreign peoples – including North Africans Arabs – the south was inhabited by a racially mixed people, who in Lombroso's view, shared a propensity for murder with their nonwhite ancestors."³⁰ Racism toward Neapolitans has continued to exist up until today.

One of the main characters in *Blues Metropolitan* is a black saxophonist named Solomon, who arrives to Naples from the United States. This character represents the history of the black American music in Naples introduced by black GIs during the Allied occupation in the 1940s. Initially the role of Solomon was to be played by the black Neapolitan saxophonist James Senese, but then the African American musician James Sampson was chosen.³¹ In one scene he performs a jazz tune in a club called Red One (this is a reference to many music clubs attended by American sailors located around the port). Although we are in the 1980s, the atmosphere reminds us of Fassbinder's films about the arrival of jazz in Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War. Solomon also represents "the blues" and in one of the key scenes he plays a solo blues tune on the sax at night on a deserted popular beach in Naples called *Mappatella*³² with the flow of

³⁰ Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter, "Editor's Introduction," in Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, edited and translated by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 18. See also Vito Teti, *La razza maledetta: Origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale* (Rome: Manifesto libri, 1993).

³¹ Francesco Crispino, *Alle origini di Gomorra: Salvatore Piscicelli tra nuovo cinema e neotelevisione* (Naples: Liguori, 2010).

³² "Mappatella" is a free beach on the Naples seaside. It is called mappatella beach because during summer when the wealthier Neapolitans leave the city for vacation or go to the exclusive private beaches and clubs

life in the city at night in the background. The area around *Mappatella* beach, called Mergellina, is a classic site for sceneggiata cinema and Neapolitan popular music. In the 1970s it was a center for cigarettes smugglers. In its bay it was common to see the border police in boats chasing the fast blue boats of the smugglers.

in Posillipo, the poorer attend this beach regularly. Traditionally, families going to this beach brought with them kind of lunch boxes (“mappatelle” in Neapolitan dialects). Although the sea in Naples (especially in the center and eastern sections of the city and the coast around Bagnoli, Cuma and Licola) is extremely polluted, people who want to go to the beach without spending money don’t have other choices that go there.



Figure 24. Via Caracciolo, around “Mappatella” beach, 1976. Source: *Storia Fotografica di Napoli, 1971-1984. La città tra speranza di riscatto e drama del terremoto*, Second edition (Naples: Intra Moenia, 2000), 123.

Mergellina is also a site of night life, especially for people who come from the periphery of Naples and from working-class neighborhoods of all over the city, but also for locals since Mergellina is an area where poorer and wealthier have historically shared the same spaces. In Mergellina, there are bars and café called chalets and many kiosks selling traditional Neapolitan snacks, ice cream, soda, and beer. There is a sort of excess in this area at night, neon lights, cars playing loud Neapolitan or disco/techno music from their stereos. This is a sonic city produced by the bass line of the stereo car. These vibrations, coming out from the street – also in the sense of being subaltern – are part of a “base culture.” They are rhythms that make audible “the lower frequencies of the city.”³³ The chalets are extremely crowded at night on weekends and in summer, and people can imagine being in Miami because of the palms tree behind the chalets. Historian Robin Kelley has identified blues clubs and “jook joints” patronized by the black working-class in the South of the United States during the 1920s, as a form of alternative cultures. Mergellina, too, especially at night, is more an alternative than an oppositional place.³⁴ Although the chalets in Naples and the “jook joints” in the States are completely different, most people who attend the chalets escape from the daily difficulties of living in parts of the periphery of Naples dominated by huge public housing projects or in sections of the “inner-city” abandoned by institutions. It is here that the Neapolitan blues meets black American blues. Blues is not so much a musical

³³ On the connection between “bass” and “base” culture see Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 12-19

³⁴ Robin D.G. Kelley, “We Are Not What We Seem: The Politics and Pleasure of Community,” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 47.

genre but a feeling, a ritual for survival. In this sense, a movie like *Blues metropolitano*, embraces cultural practice from below, as does sceneggiata, the Neapolitan cinema and music. It shares with blues the imagination of broken hearts but also the traumatic experience of poverty and racism.



Figure 25. "Mergellina." Photo by the author.

The black saxophonist Solomon connects the film to other genres as well. There is a kind of mystery around his character. We don't see Solomon arriving in Naples, we only know that he arrives at the airport and gets lost in some part of Naples, where Tony offers to pick him up. In other words, Solomon could be an "alien" arriving to Naples from another planet to teach Italians the secret of the blues. In the movie there are science fiction themes, like the radio saying that this would be a new season, a sort of

post-apocalyptic rebirth. Many scenes are shot in the volcanic area of the Solfatara and on Vesuvius. Although we know that we are in the eighties, it is certainly a futuristic city. There are overlapping traumatic experiences: the slave trade system represented by the blues, the condition of Naples as a city on the brink of destruction because of the presence of the volcano, and the possibility of an earthquake. Although the film was shot after the earthquake of the 1980, in the movie we know from a dialogue that the earthquake is still to come. There is a tension between dystopic and utopic elements. The sense of catastrophe and trauma is balanced by the utopian presence of Solomon, who presumably has escaped from another planet after being kidnapped during the slave trade. Solomon will fall in love with Luna, the singer of the band Anthrax. Luna is not attracted to Tony and his machismo but rather by the sweetness of Solomon. She also performs the most significant song in the film in which she sings “I’m lost.” Solomon brings the blues to Naples, but in the film his blues evolves into other sounds from electro funk, new wave, Neapolitan blues and Latin jazz. It is about the “metamorphic nature of black culture.”³⁵

The figure of Solomon resembles the protagonist of the independent science fiction film *Brother From Another Planet* (1984), directed by John Sayles. In this movie, a black alien simply named Brother “who escapes slavery from another planet,”³⁶ seeks refuge in 1980s Harlem. He becomes friend with the patrons of a bar that he enters by

³⁵ Greg Tate, “Yo! Hermeneutics!: Henry Louis Gates, Houston Baker, and David Toop,” in *Flyboy in the Butter Milk: Essays on Contemporary America* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1992), 158.

³⁶ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The Black Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 45.

chance. Once they discover he has supernatural qualities (he can repair videogame machines and television sets by touching them) they help him find a job in a videogame arcade. Like Solomon in *Blues Metropolitan*, Brother arrives at a Harlem in decline. He sees how drugs are devastating young lives in the neighborhood. So he removes his eye from its socket and uses it as a video-recorder and finds out that the heroin trade in Harlem is controlled by executives, white people working downtown.

Music is central to the film. In a key scene, Brother makes a tour of Harlem at night guided by the “dub poet” Virgil (this is obviously a reference to Dante’s hell).³⁷ In this night tour the music we hear in the background is dub and in the movie the soundtrack is mainly reggae. Referring to dub, music critic David Toop argues: “When you double or dub, you replicate, reinvent, make one of many versions.”³⁸ In this scene there is a new version of the urban crisis of Harlem which is made audible through the “long echo of dub.” Like the bluesologists evoked by Ellison in the beginning of this chapter, Brother moves across space and time and can see how the terror of the slave trade it continues in Harlem. Through the pause of dub, its reverberation, echoes, Brother is able of thinking through the history of Harlem and African diaspora. Yet, like dub music itself, this is not a linear history. It is a fractal history of “things dropping out and coming back in, really reclaiming this whole sense of loss, rupture and repair that is very

³⁷ This clip is available on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wq1JJvxjbYc> (accessed 11/19/2012).

³⁸ David Toop “Replicant: on Dub” in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 355.

common across the experience of black people in the diaspora.”³⁹ This is a history of “unspeakable terrors” (Paul Gilroy) but it is also a history of passion that allows us to “look backward to look forward.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Arthur Jafa, Unpublished keynote address from Organizationn of Black Designers Conference, Chicago, Illinois, 1994, Quoted in Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes & Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 205.

⁴⁰ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 31.

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