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# The Archaeology of Made in Italy in Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra*

**Marco Ruggieri**

Globally, the Made in Italy sign conjures an image of deep-rooted tradition and outstanding aesthetic and artisanal quality. However, if a sign is, in Umberto Eco's words, "everything that can be used to lie,"[1] then it becomes necessary to ask what this sign stands for, namely, to bring to light its referent and its concrete and material reality. This need seems particularly pressing today. The growing public awareness of ethical and environmental issues surrounding industrial production, along with a troubling number of scandals involving the supply and production chains of companies long considered paragons of Made in Italy, has negatively affected the international perception of this label and prompted numerous investigations, particularly regarding labor exploitation.[2] In 2025, the case involving Loro Piana sparked an international debate on the Made in Italy brand. Loro Piana is an Italian luxury fashion company founded in 1924 in Northern Piedmont, an area renowned worldwide for its textile manufacturing since the fourteenth century.[3] Since 2013, the company has been owned by the French corporation LVMH, the largest luxury goods conglomerate in the world. Among its holdings, LVMH also owns Italian fashion brands even more widely recognized, such as Bulgari and Fendi. Even more than these, the quiet-luxury brand Loro Piana grounds its prestige in ideals of tradition, strong local identity, and craftsmanship—values central to the notion of Made in Italy that underpins its communication strategy.

Loro Piana's credibility was undermined, triggering a broader debate about Made in Italy, when the company was placed under judicial administration for failing to exercise adequate oversight of its supply chain.[4] Investigations revealed that part of Loro Piana's production had been outsourced to a workshop in the suburbs of Milan, where workers—mostly of Chinese nationality—were systematically subjected to physical abuse, exhausting work rhythms, and underpayment. A previous inquiry had already uncovered that Loro Piana sourced its most expensive wool (vicuña wool, imported from Peru) through ethically questionable practices, particularly in light of the stark disproportion between the wages paid to Peruvian workers and the retail price of the final products.[5] Arguably, such practices are not unique to Loro Piana, nor to Italian companies, nor even to the luxury industry as a whole. Why, then, did the Loro Piana case attract such extensive media attention in Italy and abroad? And, more importantly, why did it spark a proliferation of reflections on the entire Made in Italy system?[6] In short, because no other "Made in" can rely on such a powerful mythological apparatus—a network of deeply ingrained ideas and stereotypes—as Made in Italy, and because Loro Piana, even more than better-known Italian brands (e.g., LVMH's Bulgari and Fendi), fully embodies that apparatus.

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[1] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, 1979), 58.
[2] See Alessandra Pellegrini De Luca, "Lo sfruttamento nella filiera delle grandi aziende si può evitare," *Il Post*, August 25, 2025; and Bella Webb, "Can 'Made in Italy' survive its scattered supply chains?" *Vogue Business*, October 24, 2024.
[3] See "Biella," *UNESCO*, accessed December 1, 2025, https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities/biella.
[4] See Emilio Parodi, "Classic cashmere purveyor Loro Piana placed under court monitoring over worker abuse," *Reuters*, July 14, 2025.
[5] See "The Vicuñas and the $9000 Sweater," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, March 13, 2024.
[6] Chloe Mac Donnell, "'Made in Italy': Is the label just another luxury fashion illusion?" *The Guardian*, July 25, 2025; Isabella Naef, "Made in Italy under scrutiny: A call for transparency and credibility," *Fashion United*, July 29, 2025.

The scholarship on the interaction between this mythological apparatus and national and transnational market dynamics is extensive, particularly within the field of Fashion Studies—although fashion is only one of the three areas traditionally regarded as Italian specialties: food, fashion, and furnishing.[7] These studies suggest that what ultimately sustains the Made in Italy brand's success is not just the reputation for manufacturing and aesthetic excellence, but an even more entrenched perception of the nation and its culture—where culture is understood as "a way of life as a whole," after Raymond Williams.[8] Indeed, discussing how stereotypes of Italianness shape social media campaigns of Italian high-fashion brands, Piancazzo, Noris, Sabatini, and Cantoni write that by "perpetuating esthetics reminiscent of the *dolce vita* and embracing a series of stereotypes associated with Italian culture," these campaigns "contribute to constructing an Italian identity."[9] As a consequence, cases such as the Loro Piana scandal are particularly destabilizing, both abroad and in Italy: they do not merely challenge "the representation, the reputation, the stereotype that consumers associate to the products of a specific country";[10] they challenge a narrative that constitutes a founding myth of Italian identity.

In this context, the present article proposes a new reading of Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra: Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (*Gomorrah: A Journey through the Camorra's Economic Empire and Domination Dream*) that considers its contribution to current debates on Made in Italy.[11] The 2006 book, which established its author as one of Italy's most influential intellectuals, is a hybrid text suspended between fiction and non-fiction and narrates the global business operations of the Neapolitan criminal organization Camorra. Saviano depicts Camorra as running its enterprises through a managerial approach far removed from the classic stereotypes of the Italian mafia (the "Godfather stereotype").[12] At the same time, he exposes its violence, environmental crimes, labor exploitation, and, more broadly, its pervasive presence and cultural influence in the Naples area (and the Campania region). While the Camorra is undoubtedly the novel's central focus, *Gomorra* can also be fruitfully read as a narrative about the production, circulation, and sale of goods within Italy and from Italy to the world. This perspective has often been overlooked in the existing scholarship—which has tended to prioritize questions of form and intellectual engagement[13]—

[7] Lucio Cappelli et al., "Are Consumers Willing to Pay More for a 'Made in' Product? An Empirical Investigation on 'Made in Italy'," *Sustainability* 9, no. 4 (2017): 2. See also Lucia Savi, *A New History of "Made in Italy": Fashion and Textiles in Post-War Italy* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023); Vittoria Veronesi and Martina Schiavello, *The Evolution of Made in Italy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); and Valerio Temperini et al., "The Brand Made in Italy: A Critical Analysis," *Management Studies* 4, no. 3 (2016).

[8] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Penguin, 1961), 272.

[9] Flavia Piancazzo et al., "Italy, an Extraordinary Commonplace? Stereotypes and Imaginaries of Italianness in Online Communication by Fashion Brands," *Fashion Theory* 28 (2024): 756.

[10] Cappelli et al., "Are Consumers Willing to Pay More," 3.

[11] Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra: Viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (Mondadori, 2006). The English translations of the passages from the novel quoted in this article are taken from Roberto Saviano, *Gomorrah: Italy's Other Mafia*, trans. Virginia Jewiss (Macmillan, 2008).

[12] See Francesco Calderoni, "Although there is little truth behind the 'Godfather' stereotype, mafia infiltration remains a serious problem in Italian politics," *LSE European Politics and Policy Blog*, November 1, 2012. For a wider account, see Roberto M. Dainotto, *The Mafia: A Cultural History* (Reaktion Books, 2015).

[13] Regarding the discussion about formal aspects of the novel, see the debate on *Gomorra* in the special issue of the journal *Allegoria*, no. 57 (2008). For a summary of this debate—in which well-known Italian literary critics such as Carla Benedetti, Franco Petroni, Gilda Policastro, and Antonio Tricomi took part—see Luca Pocci, "'Io so': A Reading of Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra*," *MLN* 126, no. 1 (2011): 227–32. On questions of *impegno* (engagement) in Saviano's *Gomorra*, see Raffaello Palumbo Mosca, "Prima e dopo *Gomorra*: Non-fiction novel e impegno," in *Postmodern Impegno*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug (Peter Lang, 2009); Pierluigi Pellini, "Lo scrittore come intellettuale. Dall'affaire Dreyfus all'affaire Saviano: modelli e stereotipi," *Allegoria* 63 (2011).

despite being suggested from the novel's very outset. According to the dust jacket of the Italian edition:

> Questo incredibile, sconvolgente viaggio nel mondo affaristico e criminale della camorra si apre e si chiude nel segno delle merci, del loro ciclo di vita. Le merci "fresche," appena nate, che sotto le forme più svariate—pezzi di plastica, abiti griffati, videogiochi, orologi—arrivano al porto di Napoli…. E le merci ormai morte che, da tutta Italia e da mezza Europa, sotto forma di scorie chimiche, morchie tossiche, fanghi, addirittura scheletri umani, vengono abusivamente "sversate" nelle campagne campane.
>
> (This incredible, shocking journey into the business and criminal world of the Camorra opens and closes under the sign of commodities, of their life cycle. The "fresh" goods, newly born, arrive in the most varied forms—plastic parts, designer clothes, video games, watches—at the port of Naples…. And already dead goods that—from all over Italy and much of Europe, in the form of chemical waste, toxic sludge, mud, even human skeletons—are illegally "dumped" in the countryside of Campania.)[14]

This, then, is the perspective that the article adopts in its analysis of Saviano's novel. It should be clarified that *Gomorra* is a novel strongly rooted in a specific territory. If so, how can it be used to examine a question of national scope, with transnational implications, such as that of Made in Italy? The choice is justified, in the first place, by the need to move beyond the homogenizing construct of Italy within Made in Italy, which obscures the country's vast and long-standing internal diversities. *Gomorra* makes a significant contribution to the overcoming of this homogenizing view of Italy encapsulated in the brand, as the following section will demonstrate. At the same time, this choice finds further justification in the need for, in Ruth Glynn's words, a "rejection of historical discourses that view Naples as diverging from national norms and a desire to showcase instead the continuities between Naples and Italy in order to reframe the relationship between the city and the nation."[15] More specifically, in her study of *Gomorra*, Glynn writes that Saviano's book continues to be interpreted as one "about criminality in Naples, with critical discussion and screen adaptation alike reinserting the city in familiar narratives about Naples' supposed deviance from a national norm," despite being one that, quite to the contrary, "traces the multiple connections between the local context in Naples, the national context of Italian industry and the Made in Italy brand and the international context of global capitalism."[16] If *Gomorra* is a narrative about commodities, to be read as the depiction of a nationwide reality, then it is essential to ask how it challenges prevailing perceptions of Made in Italy and how it responds to ongoing debates on the subject. As noted, these debates have often focused on supply-chain issues. What appears to have generated particular concern is that the Made in Italy chain, much like a corrupt semiotic relation between sign and referent, leads to a *where* and a *who* quite different from those evoked by the brand itself. Through a kind of archaeological procedure, *Gomorra* digs beneath the construct of Made in Italy, identifies its (supposedly) real referents—the actual sites of production and the actual workers who produce these goods—and publicly denounces their exploitation.

In order to examine Saviano's archaeology of the Made in Italy brand, the following section of this article will focus on the *where*, highlighting two complementary trends in his

[14] Saviano, *Gomorra* [dust jacket]. The translation is mine.
[15] Ruth Glynn, *Naples and the Nation: Image, Media and Culture in the Second Republic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), 7.
[16] Glynn, *Naples and the Nation*, 180.

novel: first, *Gomorra* shows the impossibility of identifying a single *where* for the Made in Italy brand, given the rhizomatic structure of production systems within the global capitalist context. Second, the *where* suggested by Made in Italy is depicted as strikingly different from what is commonly imagined. This article will subsequently consider the representation of the *who* in *Gomorra*. Human characters receive little narrative attention, reflecting a dehumanizing industrial context; yet one character stands out, the tailor Pasquale, who embodies the ideals of passion, competence, and tradition that are typically associated with the Made in Italy brand. His tragic fate, however, reveals the complete devaluation of these attributes. Lastly, the concluding section questions whether Saviano's investigation actually uncovers the *truth* behind the myth of Made in Italy or whether, as some critics argue, in attempting to reveal the irreducible complexity beneath stereotypical visions of Italy—and of the South in particular—the novel ultimately offers an equally reductive perspective, albeit in opposition to the glorifying narratives.

Finally, it is worth noting that this article will not discuss the two popular screen adaptations of *Gomorra*. The first is the 2008 film *Gomorra*, directed by Matteo Garrone; the second is the TV series *Gomorra – La Serie* (*Gomorrah – The Series*), which aired from 2014 to 2021 over five seasons and fifty-eight episodes overall. There are two main reasons for this: the very scope of the present article and the fact that a discourse on Italian industrial production plays a seemingly less prominent role in both adaptations. That said, a comparative analysis of how Made in Italy is represented across the original novel and its adaptations would certainly be a fruitful avenue for future research. More than the television series, Garrone's film gives significant space to the tailor Pasquale, a central figure in this article, and to the character of Franco, an entrepreneur who performs illegal dumping of toxic waste for the Camorra. The focus on Franco offers significant insight into the production of agricultural goods in Campania.

## Made in Italy, Where?

An analysis of *Gomorra* reveals the impossibility of associating a clearly defined *where* with Made in Italy, despite the importance that the Country of Origin (COO) holds within the dynamics of the global market. Cappelli et al. describe the "COO effect" as one that "influences the consumer's decision-making process" and "is dominant when," as in the case of Italy, "the consumer associates the manufactured goods with the tradition of production."[17] The novel emphasizes, instead, the *glocal* dimension of Made in Italy—one that scholar Elisa Segnini sees as prominent both in *Gomorra* and another recent notable Neapolitan literary work, Elena Ferrante's *L'amica geniale* (*My Brilliant Friend*).[18] Yet this dimension reveals an unresolved tension. *Gomorra* seems to draw the label Made in Italy so far apart from both ends that it finally tears: on one side, the global dimension, the mechanisms of transnational capitalism and the multiplicity of countries and economies (including the Camorra's criminal economy) that in various ways contribute to the creation and commercialization of Made in Italy; on the other, the local reality—namely that of Naples and Campania—which contradicts widespread ideas, both in Italy and abroad, of Italian local production, therefore challenging dominant perceptions of Italy overall. Hence, it situates the *where* of Made in Italy in the sub-national and the supra-national, rather than in the national.

The emphasis on the global nature of Made in Italy in *Gomorra* occurs above all through the macro-organization of the novel into chapters. Its eleven chapters are organic to the overarching narrative representation of the Camorra's business-criminal system even as they constitute units with mutual narrative independence and different settings. The journey begins

[17] Cappelli et al., "Are Consumers Willing to Pay More," 2.
[18] Elisa Segnini, "From Scampia to Rione Luzzatti: Marginality and its Language in the Age of Convergence," *Comparative Critical Studies* 18, no. 1 (2021): 29.

at the port of Naples, a site of openness to global capitalism, then moves inland, into the city's suburbs that are home to textile workshops and illegal landfills. Here, the protagonist witnesses the absence of the state and structural labor exploitation, but also excellence in Italian production—epitomised by the tailor Pasquale, whose story will be considered later. However, while describing this local reality, the novel continually shifts toward the global, from countries with underdeveloped economies where Italy sources raw materials and low-cost labor, to the wealthier countries that receive its exports—whether legally, through the classic Made in Italy supply chains, or illegally, through criminal organizations.

The first two chapters insist on the commercial relationships between China and Italy through Naples. Saviano's novel has been criticized because of its depiction of Chinese individuals in Italy—especially in the representation of Chinese food: "non era solo la puzza a disgustare, ma anche le immagini che quella puzza ti sprigionava in mente. Involtini primavera in putrefazione nei loro stomaci e riso alla cantonese macerato nei succhi gastrici" ("it wasn't just the stench that disgusted me, but the images it evoked. Spring rolls putrefying in their stomachs and Cantonese rice steeped in gastric juice").[19] More careful examination, however, suggests that Saviano's central claim is that Made in Italy fully depends on the import of Chinese raw materials and on Chinese labor operating within Italian territory. As a consequence, China appears only partially as an external threat to Italian industry, since it is already inextricably within it. Likewise, *Gomorra* shows that Made in Italy cannot in any way be considered in opposition—whether aesthetic, qualitative, or ethical—to Made in China. However, China is not the only *elsewhere* that in *Gomorra* becomes part of Italy itself—an *elsewhere* toward which the narrative continuously shifts until the boundaries between *here* and *there* lose their meaning.

Two chapters of the novel, in fact, bear titles that recall the American film industry: "Angelina Jolie" (Chapter 2) and "Hollywood" (Chapter 9). In the first of these, the focus is on exports. Saviano describes the far-from-idyllic reality of the industrial plants on the outskirts of Naples, run with the support of the Camorra, where luxury garments for the American market are produced. *Gomorra* highlights the stark contrast between Southern Italy's industrial zones and the glittering world of Hollywood, recounting how clothes worn by American actors are made in the textile workshops in the Neapolitan hinterland. Through this contrast, the book seeks to expose the *real* Italy according to Saviano, as opposed to the imagined Italy promoted by the Made in Italy label in the markets where these products are exported. The ninth chapter shifts the focus to imports from the United States and considers the paradox of Italy importing stereotyped versions of itself. Saviano shows, for instance, how Camorra bosses commission villas modelled on those of gangsters of American cinema, and how young Southern Italian criminals sometimes imitate the manners of Hollywood mobsters.[20] Saviano suggests that circulating narratives do not correspond to reality, with the relationship between sign and referent distorted once again. It is not so much American cinema that draws inspiration from Italian criminality, nor is it true that what Hollywood portrays is entirely fake and stereotypical. Paradoxically, Southern Italian criminals often absorb and reproduce—rather than give rise to—stereotypes of Italy, Southern Italy, Italianness, and mafia disseminated globally through the media.

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[19] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 20; *Gomorrah*, 11–12. For a critique of the Chinese food metaphor in *Gomorrah*, see Alessandro Dal Lago, *Eroi di carta* (Manifestolibri, 2010), 48–49. Valentina Fulginiti examined in depth the image of China and Chinese people in *Gomorra* and questioned Dal Lago's interpretation in Valentina Fulginiti, "Il 'Regno del Quasi': Icone cinesi nelle rappresentazioni partenopee di Ermanno Rea e Roberto Saviano," *California Italian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012): 13–14.

[20] Garrone's 2008 film adaptation of *Gomorra* weaves together four distinct storylines. Among these, the story of Marco and Ciro—two young criminals obsessed with Brian De Palma's *Scarface* (1983)—offers a particularly powerful portrayal of these dynamics. In this regard, see also Roberto Saviano's third novel, *La paranza dei bambini* (Feltrinelli, 2016).

*Gomorra*'s geographical and epistemological search for the referent, for the truth behind the sign, invariably yields unexpected and unsettling results. The book moves restlessly from one place to another, revealing the interconnectedness of every place with every other within the global capitalist system. *Gomorra* can thus be defined as a rhizomatic novel, according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the rhizome, as it "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances."[21] Before Deleuze and Guattari comprehensively elaborated the rhizome model in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they had used the concept to read Franz Kafka, whose writing, in the words of scholar Rony Klein, "is not oriented along an axis of top and bottom; rather, it is a resolutely horizontal space, where everything unfolds within a field constructed like a labyrinth, a rhizome" with "entry and exit points sometimes located in unexpected places" ("n'est pas axé selon le haut et le bas; il s'agit plutôt d'un espace résolument horizontal, où tout se déroule dans un champ bâti comme un labyrinthe, un rhizome…portes d'entrée et de sortie situées parfois à des lieux inattendus").[22] This definition provides a useful lens for reading Saviano, for whom a novel that narrates Italian production dynamics cannot but be rhizomatic and transnational. This approach to writing is an overarching characteristic of Saviano's narrative and is also found in his 2013 novel *Zero Zero Zero*, where it is employed to depict the international production, trade, and use of cocaine.[23]

If the overall structure of *Gomorra* highlights the inescapable global dimension of Made in Italy, the specific events narrated underscore its local aspects: on the one hand, the novel's rhizomatic framework places these within the broader system of global economic and commercial mechanisms; on the other, the descriptions and narrations of localized specificities are characterized by dynamism and movement that disrupt established narratives about Italy, Southern Italy, and Naples in particular. These is no longer a place of "lentezza proverbiale" ("proverbial slowness") opposed to the fast-moving capitalistic North-West[24]—a perception that, on the one hand, generated the stereotype of laziness and, on the other, that of "slow" production exalted by organizations such as Slow Food and the "slow movement" more broadly.[25] *Gomorra*'s Italy is rather one of frenetic trade and labor exploitation. Furthermore, the Naples area is no longer the Campania Felix whose particular morphological and climatic conditions favored agriculture but a land where "i frutti spuntano malati, le terre divengono infertili" ("plants sprout diseased, and the land grows infertile").[26] The author never openly denies that the traits of Italy that the Made in Italy brand emphasises exist. Rather, he shows how the label performs a massive generalization, in which the *where* is treated as a monolithic construct devoid of internal complexity and differentiation. Simultaneously, he shifts this *where* to a scenario very different from the one commonly imagined—typically the industrial districts of the wealthier North of Italy. As Glynn writes, Saviano sheds light on "a distinctive national economic dynamic, in which the South of Italy serves as 'la discarica abusiva dell'Italia industrializzata' (the illegal dumping ground for the rich, industrialized North)."[27] To obscure such complexities means, for Saviano, allowing these critical issues to persist and grow in the shadows.

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[21] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7.
[22] Rony Klein, "Deleuze et Guattari, *Kafka, pour une littérature mineure*: Kafka au carrefour du désir et de la Loi," *Études Germaniques* 69, no. 1 (2014): 138. The translation is mine.
[23] Roberto Saviano, *Zero Zero Zero* (Feltrinelli, 2013).
[24] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 13; *Gomorrah*, 5.
[25] See Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig, *Slow Living* (Berg, 2006).
[26] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 326; *Gomorrah*, 296.
[27] Glynn, *Naples and the Nation*, 197–98. The quotation in Italian is taken from Saviano, *Gomorra*, 316; *Gomorrah*, 287.

This deconstruction of Made in Italy's *where* can also be traced in more specific sections of *Gomorra*. The novel opens with the chapter "Il porto" ("The Port"). What any reader might have expected to be a narrative rooted in a highly geo-culturally specific reality—Naples and Campania—triggers instead a sense of estrangement through the description of an entirely de-localized and anti-static place. Images of transnational movement and ideas of travel, passage, and hybridity characterize this description:

> Tutto quello che esiste passa da qui. Qui dal porto di Napoli.… Punto finale dei viaggi interminabili delle merci.… Il solo porto di Napoli movimenta il 20 per cento del valore dell'import tessile dalla Cina, ma oltre il 70 per cento della quantità del prodotto passa di qui.… ho la sensazione di vedere da dove passano tutte le merci prodotte per l'umana specie…. I prodotti hanno cittadinanze molteplici, ibride e bastarde. Nascono per metà nel centro della Cina, poi si completano in qualche periferia slava, si perfezionano nel nord est d'Italia, si confezionano in Puglia o a nord di Tirana, per poi finire in chissà quale magazzino d'Europa.
>
> (Everything that exists passes through here. Through the port of Naples…. The end point for the interminable voyage that merchandise make…. The port of Naples handles 20 percent of the value of Italian textile imports from China, but more than 70 percent of the quantity…. I feel as if I'm seeing the port of entry for all the merchandise that mankind produces…. Products have multiple, hybrid, and illegitimate citizenship. Half-born in the middle of China, they're finished on the outskirts of some Slavic city, refined in northeastern Italy, packaged in Puglia or north of Tirana in Albania, and finally end up in a warehouse somewhere in Europe.)[28]

Saviano's description aligns with recurring representations of Naples as a liminal and porous port city, a frontier space.[29] Yet, in these latter interpretations, such liminality is understood as a somewhat positive identity trait and an opening toward a world other than the capitalist West. In *Gomorra*, by contrast, it represents an emptying out of identity and a surrender to the dynamics of the global market. In Saviano's depiction, the city becomes a cog within this system: "lo scalino in discesa che dal gradino del mercato illegale porta forze ossigenate all'imprenditoria legittima" ("[the step going down that] pump[s] oxygen from illegal markets into legitimate businesses").[30] Naples' liminality—along with Italy's—results not in richness but in depletion and drain.

The idea of descent in this last quote is pivotal to the overall structure of *Gomorra* and mirrors Saviano's narrative approach, which can be defined as archaeological. As noted, the novel begins at the port of Naples then moves backward in the second chapter ("Angelina Jolie") to the inland areas where textile manufacturing industries are located. Only subsequently, in the third chapter, "Il Sistema" ("The System"), does it reach the roots of organized crime that sustain the business networks presented in the first two chapters: "era il Sistema," Saviano writes, "ad aver alimentato il grande mercato internazionale dei vestiti, l'enorme arcipelago dell'eleganza italiana" ("the huge international clothing market, the vast archipelago of Italian

[28] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 12–15; *Gomorrah*, 4–6.
[29] See Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008); Anna Maria Rao, "Napoli e il Mediterraneo nel Settecento: frontiera d'Europa?" in *Il Mediterraneo delle città: scambi, confronti, culture, rappresentazioni*, ed. Franco Salvatori (Viella, 2011).
[30] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 75; *Gomorrah*, 64.

elegance, is fed by the System").[31] This does not, for Saviano, deny the excellence of Italian fashion or the existence of skills that fully justify its prominent global role. Indeed, he writes that the areas he portrays are in fact "territori che da decenni producevano i migliori capi della moda italiana. E quindi i migliori del mondo" ("[areas that] "for years… produced the best Italian fashion. And thus the best in the world") [32]—using, if anything, a deliberate hyperbole that underscores this excellence even at the risk of sounding somewhat provincial. Rather, by placing the first chapter about organized crime after one on the manufacturing of Italian textiles—arguably the most recognized symbol of Made in Italy worldwide—the author seeks to show that "'il volto dell'Italia nel mondo' ha i lineamenti di stoffa adagiati sul cranio nudo della provincia napoletana" ("'the face of Italy in the world' wears fabric draped over the bare head of the Naples suburbs"),[33] which is sustained, in turn, by organized crime. In looking beneath the face of Italy in the world, *Gomorra* performs an archaeology of Made in Italy.

The final chapter "Terra dei fuochi" ("Land of Fires") further validates the idea that the journey of *Gomorra*'s author-narrator can be read as a form of archaeology. Here, Saviano describes how industrial waste from all over Italy was illegally dumped for years in Campania's landfills, seen as "l'emblema più concreto di ogni ciclo economico" ("the most concrete emblem of every economic cycle").[34] In Saviano's archaeology, this is the ultimate, buried reality of *Made in Italy*:

> Le campagne del napoletano e del casertano sono mappamondi della monnezza, cartine al tornasole della produzione industriale italiana. Visitando discariche e cave è possibile vedere il destino di interi decenni di prodotti industriali italiani....È come camminare sui residui di civiltà, stratificazioni di operazioni commerciali, è come fiancheggiare piramidi di produzioni, tracce di chilometri consumati.
>
> (The countrysides around Naples and Caserta are veritable maps of garbage, litmus tests of Italian industry. The destiny of countless Italian industrial products can be seen in the local landfills and quarries….I feel I'm moving among the remains of civilization or the strata of commercial transactions, flanking pyramids of production or the record of distances travelled.)[35]

This passage reinforces the view of the reality depicted in the novel as the true *where* of Italian industrial production—what appears to be for Saviano the real, overlooked referent of the Made in Italy sign. Moreover, Saviano's use of terms such as "cave," "destino," "residui di civiltà," "stratificazioni," and "piramidi" reinforces an archaeological interpretation of *Gomorra*. This idea evokes Foucault's archaeology of knowledge.[36] As in Foucault, Saviano's narrative exploration of the "viaggi interminabili delle merci" ("interminable voyage that merchandise make") through Naples and Camorra continually emphasizes the centrality of products. Like Foucault's archaeology, *Gomorra* shifts the human subject away from the center of the narrative. This decentralization surfaces, for instance, in the following passage where the protagonist-narrator speaks of himself and, by extension, of the type of investigation he undertakes:

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[31] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 48; *Gomorrah*, 38.
[32] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 27; *Gomorrah*, 18.
[33] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 34; *Gomorrah*, 25.
[34] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 310; *Gomorrah*, 282.
[35] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 313; *Gomorrah*, 284–85.
[36] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (Routledge Classics, 2002).

> Non riesco a non pensarci. Ho sempre questo vizio. Come qualcuno che guardando Vermeer pensasse a chi ha mescolato i colori, tirato la tela coi legni, assemblato gli orecchini di perle, piuttosto che contemplare il ritratto. Una vera perversione. Non riesco proprio a scordarmi come funziona il ciclo del cemento quando vedo una rampa di scale, e non mi distrae da come si mettono in torre le impalcature il vedere una verticale di finestre.
>
> (I can't stop thinking about it. It's a bad habit. Like someone in front of a Vermeer painting who, instead of contemplating the portrait, thinks about who mixed the colors, stretched the canvas, and made the pearl earrings. A real perversion. When I see a flight of stairs, I simply cannot forget how the cement cycle works, and a wall of windows can't keep me from thinking about how the scaffolding was put up.)[37]

This attention to the materiality of the referent, buried beneath discursive formations, aligns with Foucault's new model of history—archaeology—which centers "silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past."[38] In the case of Made in Italy, rather than "contemplare il ritratto," *Gomorra*'s archaeology foregrounds the things, places, and material traces beneath the brand. For Saviano, such a search for a referent—what Foucault calls "a history of the referent… [the] effort to uncover and free these 'prediscursive' experiences from the tyranny of the text"[39]—is simultaneously a moral necessity, the core of his idea of *impegno*, and an obsession ("Non riesco a non pensarci" / "I can't stop thinking about it").

**Made in Italy, Who?**

Part of the public outrage surrounding the Loro Piana case stemmed from the revelation that the company's proudly Italian products were, at least in part, made by Chinese workers (in Italy). The underlying assumption seems to be that Italian workers, by virtue of their nationality, possess intrinsic qualities or an essence that, per se, make their products exceptional. The scandal thus becomes a kind of collective *anagnorisis*: a recognition that, beneath the Made in Italy label, it is not the skilled Italian artisan but the Chinese laborer who sustains production—an unsettling realization, since the latter is commonly imagined as embodying traits opposite to those of the former.[40] The fact that Made in Italy workers, regardless of their origin, are often

[37] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 235; *Gomorrah*, 214.
[38] Foucault, *Archaeology*, 8.
[39] Foucault, *Archaeology*, 52.
[40] On the COO effect of Made in China—virtually the opposite of that of Made in Italy—see Dirk Holtbrügge and Annalena Zeier, "Country-of-origin Effects in a Global Market: The Case of China," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Managing Continuous Business Transformation*, ed. Horst Ellermann, Peter Kreutter and Wolfgang Messner (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). On how this *anagnorisis* often unfolds in public discourse with racist overtones, see for instance this article from *Il Sole 24 Ore*, Italy's leading financial newspaper, which states: "Centinaia di borse Prada allineate in perfetto ordine sui banconi…. Apri la porta del capannone e queste sono le prime immagini che ti colpiscono…. Ma quando cerchi *le mani degli artigiani toscani*, che da sempre hanno scolpito queste bellezze, alzi gli occhi e ti trovi di fronte quelli di decine operai che toscani non sono. Sono tutti cinesi. Queste perfette *macchine da guerra umane* hanno ormai soppiantato gli artigiani italiani. Tra Prato e Firenze il Made in Italy c'è ancora ma è fatto quasi esclusivamente da *mani asiatiche*" (Hundreds of Prada bags are lined up in perfect order on the workbenches…. You open the door of the warehouse, and these are the first images that strike you…. Yet when you look for *the hands of the Tuscan artisans*, who have long given shape to these beauties, you raise your eyes and find instead those of dozens of workers who are not Tuscan. They are all Chinese. These perfect *human war machines* have by now ousted Italian artisans. Between Prato and Florence, Made in Italy is still there but it

subjected to exploitation does not always appear to play a central role in public discussions on this topic. Moreover, the core assumption underlying the Made in Italy construct is that Italian laborers embody a historical tradition, a heritage, developing seamlessly from a mythical past to the present. This temporality places Italian labor—and thus Made in Italy—outside the contemporary time of capitalism and within a presentified past, a kind of exaggerated version of Homi K. Bhabha's notion of disjunctive temporality, which highlights the misalignment between the temporalities of the colonizer and the colonized. In other words, Italian workers—the *who* to which the Made in Italy label refers—are themselves subjected to a process of mythologization, heritagization, and ultimately commodification, which obscures their real identity and lived experience within Italy's industrial system and thus global capitalism at large.

In *Gomorra*, the *who*—the human referent of the Made in Italy sign—is embodied by the tailor Pasquale. In the second chapter, Pasquale emerges from the grey, industrial landscape of Naples's Northern outskirts, where garments destined for export worldwide—the pride of the *genio italico* (Italian genius)—are produced. This area is depicted in tones that starkly contrast with the idealized versions of Italy, especially those of the South: "chilometri di catrame, di strade enormi…. Strade fatte non per auto ma per camion, non per spostare cittadini ma per trasportare vestiti, scarpe, borse" ("miles of tar, wide thoroughfares…. Roads built not for cars but for trucks, not to move people but clothes, shoes, purses").[41] Beyond this aesthetic contrast between the ideal *where* of Made in Italy and what Saviano presents as its real *where*—the bleak Neapolitan periphery—two elements here are consistent with what was discussed in the previous section. First, we see the recurrence of road imagery and movement, marked by an idea of rhizomatic interconnection between the global and the local and, at the same time, a sense of drainage and emptiness. Second, the human figure is completely effaced, overshadowed by the global market and the gleaming allure of the Made in Italy brand. *Gomorra* seems to mirror this effacement rather than redress it within the narration: characters are described minimally, with little insight into their personalities, emotions, or reflections on the economic and power systems—the global market, the Camorra, etc.—of which they are part. Of the Made in Italy workers in the factories North of Naples, Saviano writes succinctly: "in queste fabbriche non ci sono sguardi che fissano il terreno. Sanno di lavorare sull'eccellenza, e sanno di avere stipendi infimi" ("No one acts ashamed here. They know they're doing top-quality work, and that they're being paid a pittance"); "non avevano nulla che potesse essere altro dal lavoro, dalla macchina per cucire, dalla piccola fabbrica, dal pacco imballato, dalla merce spedita…. Ogni altra cosa era superflua" ("they had nothing but work, nothing but their sewing machines, small factories, wrapped packages, and shipped goods…. Everything else was superfluous").[42]This lack of psychological depth could be seen as one of *Gomorra*'s shortcomings. Saviano seems not to capitalize on the novel-form's potential to illuminate individual stories within broader narratives. In other words, *Gomorra* does not truly bring to light the characters' distinctive, ever-shifting subjectivities within the *sistema*—whether that system is the Camorra or capitalism as a whole. With few exceptions, individuals are somewhat static and left largely as part of the background. Yet this absence seems consistent with *Gomorra*'s archaeological project. As in Foucault, the human is not placed at the center of history. There is, rather, a mimetic impulse aligned with the idea of "veridicità testimoniale"

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is almost exclusively made by *Asian hands*). Italics and translation are mine. Roberto Galullo and Angelo Mincuzzi, "Capannoni da incubo a Firenze: il made in Italy è fatto da mani cinesi," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, May 16, 2019.

[41] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 26; *Gomorrah*, 17. Note the assonance between Saviano's portrayal of Naples's industrial periphery and those offered by other Italian authors in their depictions of the industrial areas of the Po Valley; on this topic, see Serenella Iovino, "Un viaggio non sentimentale. Itinerari ecologici e narrativi nel paesaggio della Pianura padana," in *Viaggiare: percorsi e approdi di genti e saperi. Studi in onore di Gianni Perona*, ed. Laura Bonato, Enrico Lusso, and Elena Madrussan (L'Harmattan Italia, 2014).

[42] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 36, 27; *Gomorrah*, 26, 18.

identified by critics as the novel's main goal, "anche quando, a una più attenta analisi, risulta alquanto inverosimile" (testimonial veracity… even when, upon closer analysis, it proves rather implausible).[43]

Against this background, the figure of the tailor Pasquale stands in sharp relief. The author introduces Pasquale through a quite detailed physical and psychological description that signals the emphasis placed on him and his symbolic value. Saviano then goes on to underscore the tailor's extraordinary skills resulting from years of experience:

> Tra gli operai dell'imprenditore vincente ne incontrai uno particolarmente abile. Pasquale…. Lavorava su capi e disegni spediti direttamente dagli stilisti. Modelli inviati solo per le sue mani…. Una faccia ficcata sempre tra forbici, tagli di stoffe, polpastrelli strusciati sulle cuciture…. Quando parlava dei tessuti sembrava un profeta…. Era capace di prevedere la durata della vita di un pantalone, di una giacca, di un vestito. Il numero esatto di lavaggi che avrebbero sopportato quei tessuti prima di ammosciarsi addosso.
>
> (One of the winning contractor's workers was particularly skilled: Pasquale…. The stylists sent designs directly to him, articles intended for his hands only…. A face that was constantly buried in fabric, fingertips that ran along seams…. He was like a prophet when he spoke about fabric…. He could predict the longevity of a particular style of pants, jacket, or dress, and the exact number of washings before the fabric would start to sag.)[44]

The unparalleled skills Pasquale has developed over years of experience, his deep knowledge of fabrics, and his passion and attention to detail make him an embodiment of the imaginary *who* foregrounded by Made in Italy narratives. Here too, Saviano positions himself between two dominant narratives. He suggests that glorifying views of Made in Italy are not entirely false—Italian excellence does exist—and that counter-narratives risk obliterating or misrepresenting its human referent. Nevertheless, this referent (the *who*) does not exactly match the one imagined by those glorifying narratives. As we will see, Pasquale is a *who* that is humiliated, commodified, and alienated from the value derived from his own craftsmanship, one whose story, as Glynn notes, "illustrates the extreme dissociation between the glamorous image of the fashion industry and the extremely poor conditions and reward endured by its workers."[45]

Two scenes in the novel are particularly significant in this regard. The first is when Pasquale goes to a factory run by the Chinese entrepreneur Xian, "un vero e proprio imprenditore della moda italiana" ("a serious player in the Italian fashion business").[46] Here, he teaches Chinese workers how to handle fabrics to produce high-quality goods that will be sold nationally and internationally as Made in Italy products. Xian hired Pasquale because he has a very clear commercial objective in mind:

> fare diventare gli operai esperti dell'alta moda, capaci di lavorare in Italia sull'eccellenza. Imparare dagli italiani… divenire non più produttori di paccottiglia ma referenti nel sud Italia delle griffe. Prendere il posto, le logiche, gli spazi, i linguaggi delle fabbriche in nero italiane e cercare di fare lo stesso lavoro. Solo a un po' di meno e a qualche ora in più.

[43] Pellini, "Lo scrittore come intellettuale," 155. The translation is mine.
[44] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 39–43; *Gomorrah*, 29–33.
[45] Glynn, *Naples and the Nation*, 194.
[46] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 41; *Gomorrah*, 31.

> (they [the Chinese workers] had to become fashion experts, capable of doing top-quality work [in Italy]. They had to learn from the Italians… to go from being junk manufacturers to the brands' trusted suppliers in southern Italy. They had to take the place of the Italian underground factories, appropriate their logic, workspaces, and language. They had to do the same work, but for a little less money and in a little less time.)[47]

Saviano does not dwell on the effects of the so-called Chinese threat to Pasquale, who is shown passionately and calmly demonstrating how to work on a garment's seams in front of a camera, as the images broadcast with simultaneous Chinese translation throughout the factory. Rather, Pasquale's relationships with Xian and the other Chinese workers are depicted as relaxed, respectful, and collaborative. In this sense, *Gomorra* appears to suggest that the Chinese threat is real but not a primary concern for Italian Made in Italy workers. Pasquale seems fully aware that the main, real threat lies in the dynamics of capitalism, which alienates him from the material and immaterial value he produces. This is symbolized in the way he arrives at Xian's factory: entirely consensually, he is loaded into the trunk of the Chinese entrepreneur's car, as if he were a commodity himself. Camorra-related Italian entrepreneurs do not want him to pass his skills to Chinese workers. As a consequence, someone had previously fired a warning shot at the car carrying him. *Gomorra*'s representation of the tailor being turned into a portable object offers an unsettling representation of Made in Italy. Nevertheless, Pasquale himself seems to remain largely unaffected by the situation, as if this were the unquestioned norm within Italian manufacturing.

The major development in Pasquale's character occurs shortly afterwards. The tailor is at home with his family, watching television, when he sees the American actress Angelina Jolie wearing, at the Oscar awards ceremony, a white suit he himself had sewn. This sight causes great shock for Pasquale and his wife:

> Gli avevano detto solo: "Questo va in America." Pasquale aveva lavorato su centinaia di vestiti andati negli USA. Si ricordava bene quel tailleur bianco. Si ricordava ancora le misure, tutte le misure. Il taglio del collo, i millimetri dei polsi. E il pantalone. Aveva passato le mani nei tubi delle gambe e ricordava ancora il corpo nudo che ogni sarto immagina…. Era andato a prendersi la stoffa al porto, lo ricordava ancora bene quel giorno. Gliene avevano commissionati tre, di vestiti, senza dirgli altro. Sapevano a chi erano destinati, ma nessuno l'aveva avvertito.
>
> (All they'd say to him was "This one's going to America. Pasquale worked on hundreds of outfits going to America, but that white suit was something else. He still remembered all the measurements. The cut of the neck, the circumferences of the wrists. And the pants. He'd run his hands inside the legs and could still picture the naked body that every tailor forms in his mind…. Pasquale still remembered the day he'd gone to the port to pick up the fabric. They'd commissioned three suits for him, without saying anything else. They knew whom they were for, but no one had told Pasquale.)[48]

[47] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 41–42; *Gomorrah*, 31–32.

[48] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 44; *Gomorrah*, 34. The reference appears to be to the *Dolce & Gabbana* gown worn by Angelina Jolie at the 2001 Academy Awards ceremony. No evidence is available to support, even partially, the veracity of the story of this dress as recounted in *Gomorra*.

This passage emphasizes Pasquale's agency in his work, his sensory experience, and the way crafting that suit has been imprinted in his memory—in short, the human aspects of production. Yet, seeing his creation reach perhaps the most visible stage in the world, Pasquale's humanity emerges as anger. The cause is found in the semiotically misleading mechanism of Made in Italy, where the sign loses contact with its referent, in contrast with what happens elsewhere: "in Giappone il sarto della sposa dell'erede al trono aveva ricevuto un rinfresco di Stato; un giornale berlinese aveva dedicato sei pagine al sarto del primo cancelliere donna tedesco…. in cui si parlava di qualità artigianale, di fantasia, di eleganza" ("In Japan the tailor of the bride to the heir to the throne had had a state reception given in his honor. A Berlin newspaper had dedicated six pages to the tailor of Germany's first woman chancellor, pages that spoke of craftsmanship, imagination, and elegance"). [49] Here too, Saviano's account may appear somewhat naïve or hyperbolic, since the mechanisms described, as *Gomorra* itself highlights, are not limited to Southern Italy or even Italy at large but pertain to global capitalism. Nevertheless, this hyperbole seems particularly effective as it underscores the complete detachment of the successful image of Made in Italy from the work and the people behind it. The passage continues as follows:

> la soddisfazione è un diritto, se esiste un merito questo dev'essere riconosciuto. Sentiva in fondo, in qualche parte del fegato o dello stomaco, di aver fatto un ottimo lavoro e voleva poterlo dire. Sapeva di meritarsi qualcos'altro. Ma non gli era stato detto niente…. Non poteva dire "Questo vestito l'ho fatto io." Nessuno avrebbe creduto a una cosa del genere. La notte degli Oscar, Angelina Jolie indossa un vestito fatto ad Arzano, da Pasquale. Il massimo e il minimo. Milioni di dollari e seicento euro al mese.
>
> (satisfaction is a right, and merit deserves recognition. Deep in his gut he knew he'd done a superb job and he wanted to be able to say so. He knew he deserved something more. But no one had said a word to him…. He couldn't say "I made that suit." No one would have believed that Angelina Jolie would go to the Academy Awards wearing an outfit made in Arzano, by Pasquale. The best and the worst. Millions of dollars and 600 euros a month.)[50]

The emphasis on Pasquale's anger for being unable to say "questo vestito l'ho fatto io" ("I made that suit") seems to pinpoint the root of the problem, which can be understood in terms of alienation. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx draws the concept of alienation from G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy to describe the estrangement of the worker from the world under the capitalist industrial system.[51] He distinguishes four levels of alienation: from the product of labor; from the act of working itself; from the worker's own human condition; and from other workers. The last of these does not seem to apply to Pasquale: he shows solidarity with his colleagues, even with the (supposedly) much-feared Chinese co-workers. Nor does the tailor appear dehumanized or estranged from the act of performing his work, even though, as the novel repeatedly stresses, the conditions in which Pasquale works are far from optimal and do not match his skills. What allows him to continue without feeling alienated from his work, his humanity, or his fellow workers is his *passion*—a term as elusive as it is recurrent in discussions, even academic ones, about Made in Italy and Italianness in

[49] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 44; *Gomorrah*, 34.
[50] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 44–45; *Gomorrah*, 34.
[51] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts Of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Dover, 2007).

general.[52] Saviano's words from another passage, which describes the bleak environment of Naples' periphery, seem particularly apt for Pasquale: "penso che sia necessario dare fondo a tutta la propria passione per riuscire a star bene in mezzo a tanto schifo" ("I think you must have to really unleash a lot of passion to feel good in such a disgusting setting").[53]

But it is a fragile balance, and even Pasquale ultimately succumbs to the realization—symbolically triggered by seeing Angelina Jolie wearing the suit he made—of the total alienation that Made in Italy enforces between worker and product, the first of the four levels described by Marx. This is primarily material alienation: "milioni di dollari e seicento euro al mese" ("millions of dollars and 600 euros a month"), as noted in the passage above. Made in Italy benefits from the excellence of Italian artisans, but "senza una ricchezza definibile collettiva" ("[with no] wealth that can be considered collective"), Saviano writes, and is, hence, "una ricchezza saccheggiata, presa con fatica da qualcuno e portata nel proprio buco" ("plundered wealth, taken by force from someone else and carried off to your own cave").[54] Yet Marx himself acknowledges that higher wages alone would not resolve alienation, since they would "be nothing but better payment for the slave, and would not conquer either for the worker or for labour their human status and dignity."[55] It does not appear to be the gap between the final product's price and the worker's compensation that angers Pasquale—a gap that, as noted in the first section of this article, was central to the emblematic Loro Piana scandal. What provokes Pasquale's anger is the awareness of the structurally mystifying and alienating mechanism of Made in Italy. Its human referent, its *who*, is not the *real* Pasquale, underpaid, threatened by organized crime, working in bleak factories surrounded by illegal dumps, whose labor and talent are inadequately recognized; rather, it is a simulacrum built by selectively highlighting certain features (passion, tradition, skill) that a person like Pasquale embodies, while erasing the real referent's complexity, identity, and reality. Consequently, the tailor abandons his work:

> Rividi Pasquale due mesi dopo. L'avevano messo sui camion. Trasportava ogni tipo di merce—legale e illegale—per conto delle imprese legate alla famiglia Licciardi di Secondigliano. O almeno così dicevano. Il miglior sarto sulla terra guidava i camion della camorra tra Secondigliano e il Lago di Garda…. sono sicuro che, guardando quel capolavoro che ha creato con le sue mani, Pasquale è felice. Una felicità rabbiosa. Ma questo non lo saprà mai nessuno.
>
> (I saw Pasquale two months later. They'd put him on truck detail. He hauled all sorts of stuff—legal and illegal—for the Licciardi family businesses. Or at least that's what they said. The best tailor in the world was driving trucks for the Camorra, back and forth between Secondigliano and Lago di Garda…. I'm sure that he's happy as he looks at the masterpiece he created with his own hands. A rabid happiness. But no one will ever know.)[56]

This concludes Pasquale's story. The only character with noticeable psychological depth and understanding of the production system returns to the flat background of *Gomorra*, dominated

[52] See Gaetano Aiello, Raffaele Donvito and Tiziano Vescovi, *Global Branding and Country of Origin: Creativity and Passion* (Routledge, 2016). For a remarkable example of how, in public discourse, the concept of *passion* is stereotypically perceived outside of Italy as the essence of Italianness, see Dianne Hales, *La Passione: How Italy Seduced the World* (Crown Archetype, 2019).
[53] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 29; *Gomorrah*, 19.
[54] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 27; *Gomorrah*, 18.
[55] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 65.
[56] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 46–47; *Gomorrah*, 36–37.

by commodities and by the systematic removal of any human element, just as the universe it aims to portray.

## Conclusions: Strengths and Limits of *Gomorra* for Reconceptualizing Made in Italy

The previous two sections show how Saviano presents a version of Made in Italy that diverges from dominant narratives. In particular, the Made in Italy brand is seen as a sign that simplifies—if not outright erases—the multidimensionality of its referent. Whereas Made in Italy narratives rely on idealized and monolithic versions of the COO Italy, Saviano's *Gomorra* connects the sign to different geographical and human referents (*where* and *who*): the industrial outskirts of Naples and Campania, and Italian and non-Italian workers who are victims of an exploitative system run by organized crime, respectively. In doing so, it suggests that the Made in Italy label casts a shadow on the considerable internal, geocultural and socioeconomic diversity of the country, which is, in turn, part of an inextricable network of connections—the rhizome of global capitalism. Additionally, the book posits that the standardized and essentialized notion of Made in Italy, with its familiar narrative of a sunny, passionate country and artistically and industrially gifted population somehow outside of capitalist temporality, cannot be sustained once it is confronted with the lived experience of Italy's actual inhabitants.

This raises two questions. First: does the alternative referent for the sign Made in Italy uncovered through *Gomorra*'s archaeological approach risk reiterating already existing stereotypes about Italy—and the South in particular—such as mafia, inefficiency, or counterfeiting? Second: does *Gomorra*'s attempt to reveal this alternative referent risk, instead of showing the multidimensionality of the Made in Italy construct, simply replace an overly positive image with an overly negative one? These questions connect directly to many of the criticisms addressed to Saviano, within academia and even more so in public debate, after the publication of *Gomorra* and throughout his subsequent journalistic and literary work. Over the years, politicians such as former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, along with several figures from across the political spectrum, accused Saviano of damaging the image of Italy—and of Naples and the South in particular—abroad.[57] Likewise, a banner publicly displayed in the city in 2016 described *Gomorra* as "mud" thrown at Naples; a similar one was displayed in 2025 by the artisans' association of San Gregorio Armeno, a Naples neighborhood famous for its handcrafted terracotta nativity figurines since the eighteenth century—an excellent example of Made in Italy.[58]

Although softened and critically nuanced, this view also surfaces in the scholarship. In an early review of *Gomorra*, scholar Jason Pine wrote that "Saviano's book may have replaced the usual Neapolitan folklore of pizza, Pulcinella and Vesuvius (voluptuousness, obsequious theatricality and uninhibited passion) with another well-worn set of tropes."[59] In truth, Saviano critically engages with these well-worn tropes: he suggests that mafia does exist in Italy, but it has little or nothing to do with the "well-worn set of tropes" through which it has long been represented (the so-called "Godfather stereotype"). Pine is more persuasive, however, when he argues more generally that *Gomorra* performs an iconoclastic operation while simultaneously creating new icons. In other words, it replaces a sign, which it recognizes as simplifying or

[57] See Adriana Pollice, "Scontro De Magistris-Saviano: 'Sei un brand e speculi su Napoli,' 'Nascondi la polvere sotto il divano,'" *Il Manifesto*, January 7, 2017; and Barbara Spinelli, "Il dovere del verbo," *La Stampa*, April 18, 2010.

[58] See Daniela De Crescenzo, "Striscione alla Sanità contro Saviano: 'Napoli non ha bisogno di fango' 'Fango è uccidere, non raccontare,'" *Il Mattino*, November 13, 2016; and Pierluigi Frattasi, "Anche San Gregorio Armeno contro la serie tv *Gomorra Le Origini*: 'Non vogliamo riprese qui,'" *Fanpage*, March 24, 205.

[59] Jason Pine, "Icons and iconoclasm: Roberto Saviano's *Gomorrah* and *La Denuncia*," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 13, no. 3 (2008): 434.

obliterating, with another sign that is equally simplifying or obliterating. This perspective is developed in greater depth by Alessandro Dal Lago.[60] According to Dal Lago, Saviano aims to read capitalism altogether "*sub specie camorrae*," to borrow the phrase of another *Gomorra* critic, Gilda Policastro.[61] In doing so, for Dal Lago, Saviano presents a reductionist view of capitalism, beneath which he locates a sort of absolute evil—the Camorra, and more generally organized crime—seen as the ultimate foundation supporting the entire capitalist universe.

Although scholars have underscored the shortcomings of Dal Lago's reading,[62] it is not entirely unfounded. With its hyperbolic drive—aimed at being "a punch in the readers' stomach, the Italian readers' stomach but also that of many other readers around the world"[63]—*Gomorra* can indeed be read as a novel that, in trying to dismantle mystifying narratives and foreground complexity, ends up flattening reality and reducing everything to *evil*. From the perspective adopted in this article, it is therefore reasonable to argue that *Gomorra*'s archaeology of the Made in Italy sign eventually replaces an idealized referent, an inadequate description of the COO, with one that is likewise inadequate to the complexity of the Italian productive system. As shown, the novel is structured and unfolds as a rhizome. Yet it ultimately identifies not an irreducible set of factors and co-causes—or, indeed, a rhizome—but a single, undifferentiated principle at the foundations of Italian industrial production: the malign global capitalist system, backed by the Camorra, that drains Italy and Naples of all material and immaterial wealth. Made in Italy thus appears reduced to a wholly false narrative that conceals—and, in concealing, amplifies—a state of absolute corruption, a biblical Gomorrah.

That said, *Gomorra*'s most meaningful contribution appears to lie elsewhere. It lies in the very decision to undertake such an archaeology—treating Made in Italy as a sign, or, to use Foucault's terms, not as a document but as a monument: a discursive formation shaped by the power dynamics of a particular historical moment, a representation that distorts, emphasizes, and erases rather than merely reflecting.[64] This perspective also helps explain why the novel has had such a controversial impact on Italian society. Made in Italy functions as a kind of national monument in which Italians can recognize themselves. From this monument, they can derive both nationalist pride and economic profit, however unevenly distributed. What is truly scandalous or unsettling in *Gomorra*, and simultaneously its main contribution, is not so much what its archaeological excavation brings to light—the corruption of global capitalism, a critique that is in fact culturally, socially, and politically widespread—but the very act of contesting the monument. Much like the "heretical" Pier Paolo Pasolini to whom the novel explicitly alludes, with the narrator-protagonist visiting the latter's grave in Friuli, *Gomorra* overturns the dogma, perhaps even at the risk of creating new dogmas of its own.[65] Yet, again like Pasolini, Saviano performs a heretical archaeology because he rejects the Made in Italy dogmatic construct and exposes the mismatch between sign and referent—its fundamentally mythological nature.

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[60] Dal Lago, *Eroi di carta*.
[61] Gilda Policastro, "Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra*," *Allegoria* 57 (2008): 185.
[62] Pellini, "Lo scrittore come intellettuale," 149–56; Adriano Sofri, "Perché Saviano non è un eroe di carta," *La Repubblica*, May 28, 2010.
[63] Pocci, "'Io so,'" 225.
[64] Foucault, *Archaeology*, 7–8. See also Remo Ceserani, "The Difference between 'Document' and 'Monument,'" in *Literature as Document: Generic Boundaries in 1930s Western Literature*, ed. Carmen Van den Bergh, Sarah Bonciarelli, and Anne Reverseau (Brill, 2019).
[65] Saviano, *Gomorra*, 232–35; *Gomorrah*, 211–14. On Pasolini as a "heretic" and on the twofold outcomes of his "heresy," see Antonio Catalfamo, "Pasolini 'eretico' e la lezione inascoltata di Gramsci," *Testo e Senso* 23 (2021).