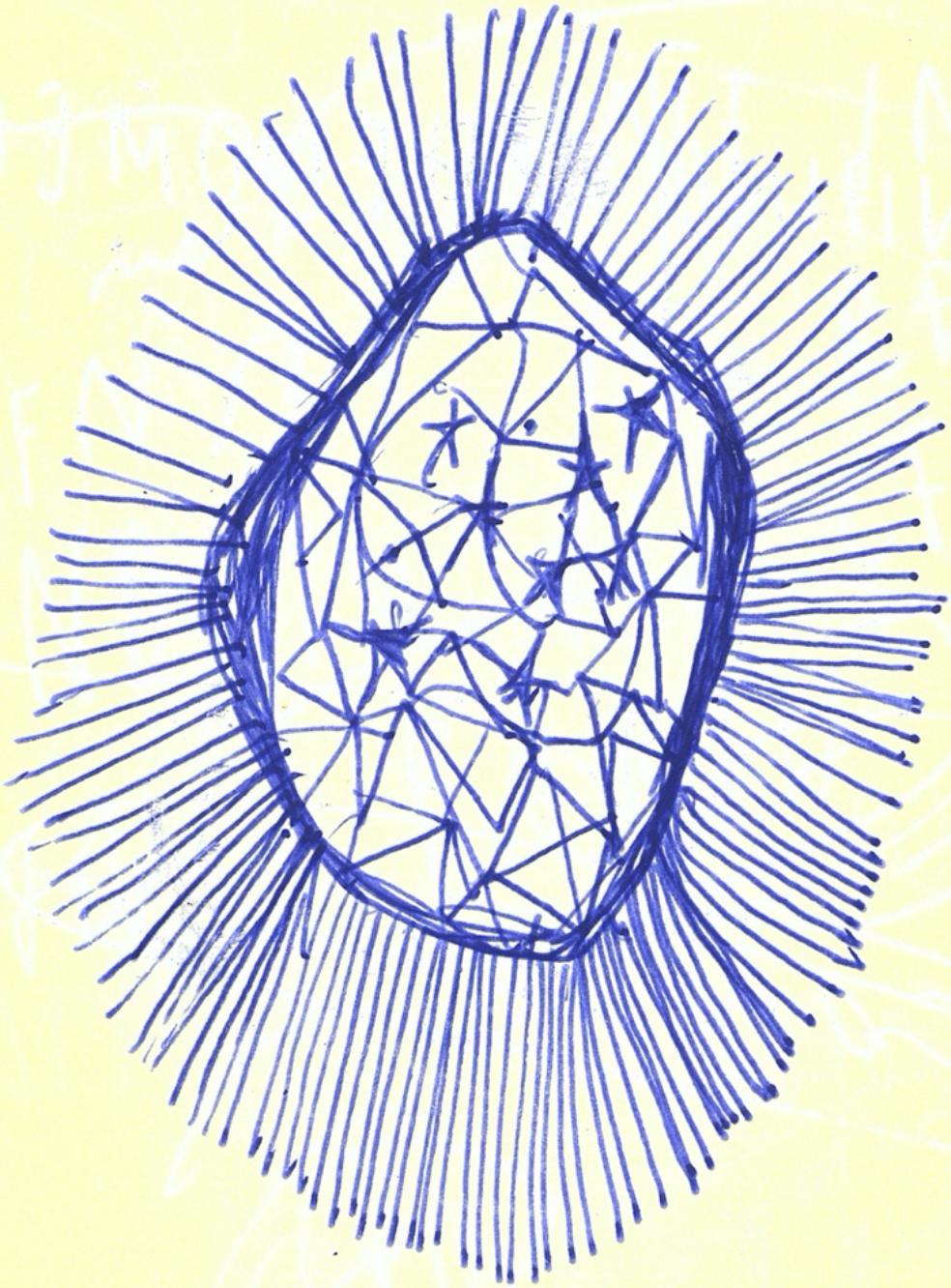

POETHICA PANTESCA

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POETHICA PANTESCA: *LIMINAGRAPHY* AS DECOLONIAL FEMINIST PRACTICE FOR CULTIVATING KNOWLEDGE WITH THE ISLAND OF PANTELLERIA

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Ai miei nonni

ABSTRACT

This research project responds to the call for a 'decolonial island studies' (Nadarajah and Grydehøj 2016) by proposing the epistemic practice of *liminagraphy* (Sheik 2021) as a ~~methodology~~ to be adopted within the field. Through a consideration of literary and philosophical texts set on islands, I argue that islands collapse the divide between geographies of the earth and geographies of the mind and reveal a Western desire to define and possess. To avoid reproducing discourses of conquest and colonial tropes in the study of real islands in real seas, it is urgent to shift away from the intent of making knowledge *of* and *about* islands and islanders, and towards cultivating knowledge *with* them (Baldacchino 2008). To this end, I explore the epistemic and ethical implications of activating the decolonial feminist practice of *liminagraphy* – which foregrounds a relational notion of subjectivity, the involvement of the body in the process of theorising, and the urgency of decolonising the senses – in the Italian island of Pantelleria.

Between 1 and 9 March 2024, I visited Pantelleria – a volcanic island situated in the Strait of Sicily, between Italy and Tunisia – in the intent of cultivating knowledge *with* it through a practice of *liminagraphy*. In this thesis, I frame my encounter with the island through Édouard Glissant's concepts of poetics of Relation, the slave ship and the plantation as matrixes of modernity, opacity, and aesthetics of (relating to) the earth (Glissant [1990] 2023). Following Glissant's call to develop a poetic attitude towards the world, I engage in poetic writing to reflect on the processes which led to the emergence of knowledge and on the implications of practicing an ethics of relational accountability (Wilson 2008) during my time on the island. Seeking to move away from the colonial subject/object construction (Quijano 2007) and plunge into the island's relational field, I flesh out my experience of becoming sensually attuned to the particularity of Pantelleria and to the sensing capacities of my body. Through this process, I come to perceive the presence of the past as inscribed in Pantelleria's landscape, reckon with colonial impulses, and feel the ethical demands of desire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to all the relations which have led me here.
Alla mia famiglia, Stella e Matteo, mamma e papà.
To my friends, my colleagues, and my shipmates.
A Lucia e Cristina.
To Zuleika and Theron, for your visions.
A Filippo, al vulcano, a Pantelleria.

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This work is interspersed by drawings I made alongside thinking and writing.
Unless stated, images are my own creation.

INTRODUCTION

Thinking of islands is thinking of dualities: dry and wet, liquid and solid, land and sea. Understood as portions of land fully surrounded by water,[1] islands emerge in the geography of the mind as finite objects. Maps represent them as outlined by clear outer boundaries: the shore is shown as neatly containing a dry body against the blue sea.[2] Yet, islands are not as easy to grasp as it may seem. The line where land and water meet is continuously redrawn by the movement of both – in the constant flow of waves, the daily oscillation of sea levels, the shifting of sand, the progressive erosion of rock. The boundary of the island trembles – and it expands. Islands are neatly defined only if imagined as seen by a gaze which comes from above. There is a lot which is not visible about an island: all that which exists in the depths. Below the surface of the water, the body of the island extends all the way to the point where it meets the seafloor. Deep down, islands and continents are part of the same geological continuum.[3] Thinking of the continuous change which occurs in the transitional zone between the different materialities of water and land and extending our thinking below the sea's surface disturbs the conception of the island as a definite object.

Islands collapse the divide between the geographies of the earth and those of the mind: real or imagined, they have long figured in the history of Western thought. The first island of Western philosophy appears in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias*.[4] Since then, multiple islands have been conjured up by thinkers and authors. In the first chapter of this thesis, some of these are explored. Considering islands present in works of literature and philosophy written within the European context since the modern period, I argue that the trope of the island reveals a compulsion to define, grasp, and possess. English philosopher Gilbert Keith Chesterton conceives islands as comparable to ships, in that they each are seen as bounded, self-contained objects existing in the middle of a vast body of water. As ships carry cargo to be sold as property stored in their hold, islands contain within their shores resources to be extracted: they are conceived as repositories of potential possessions.[5] Many tales

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[1] Katerina Kopaka, "What is an Island? Concepts, Meanings and Polysemies of Insular *Topoi* in Greek Sources," *European Journal of Archaeology* 11(2-3) (2009): 179-197.
[2] Angus Cameron, "Splendid Isolation: 'Philosopher's Islands' and the Reimagination of Space," *Geoforum* 43 (2012): 741-749.
[3] John Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
[4] Mackay, Robert. "Philosophers' Islands." *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development* 6 (2010): 431-457.
[5] Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands," *The Chesterton Review* 16(3-4) (August/November 1990): 175-179.

set on islands – including Shakespeare's *The Tempest*,[6] Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*,[7] Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island*,[8] and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*[9] – begin in the same way: with a shipwreck. The destruction of the vessel on which the protagonists of the stories were travelling is instrumental to their encounter with the island. This implies a temporary loss of control and facing the possibility of death by drowning. Water is encountered as a life-threatening materiality – and the arrival on the island's shores, as a chance to begin again.

The notion of the island as a territory where to start anew is epitomised by one particular trope: that of the desert island. In the text "Desert Islands," Gilles Deleuze proposes the notion of the desert island as ideal ground for thought – a place where humans can best come to approximate an ideal of humanity.[10] Deleuze's island is not a desert: it can contain life, both human and nonhuman. But to become the ideal place for a new beginning of humanity's consciousness, it must be thought of as deserted: the life which exists on it must be done away with, together with its past. I argue that this intellectual gesture enacts the sort of erasure which was imposed by European and Euro-American colonisers in the Americas, Africa, and Australia between 1450 and 1900. Conceiving of an island as deserted despite the life which thrives on it is comparable to the declaration of a land as *terra nullius* – a strategy used to legitimise colonisers' appropriation of territories and their genocidal suppression of Indigenous peoples' lives and knowledges.[11]

Thinking of islands implies the risk of reproducing discourses of conquest, and colonial logics of extraction and erasure. Within the burgeoning scholarly field of island studies – which is dedicated to studying islands' ecologies, economies, culture, politics, and more – many recent interventions have been dedicated to arguing for the urgency of developing decolonial perspectives on islands.[12] The

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[6] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Minneapolis: First Avenue Editions [1623] 2015).

[7] Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, (Minneapolis: First Avenue Editions, [1719], 2016).

[8] Jules Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, (Pesaro: Intra Edizioni, [1875], 2021).

[9] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (Minneapolis: First Avenue Editions, [1883] 2015).

[10] Gilles Deleuze, "Desert Islands," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 9-14.

[11] Alex Zukas, "Terra Incognita/Terra Nullius: Modern Imperialism, Maps, and Deception," in *Lived Topographies and their Mediational Forces*, eds. Gary Backhaus and John Murungi (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 45-79.

[12] See Carol Farbotko, Philippa Watson, Taukiei Kitara, and Elaine Stratford, "Decolonising Methodologies: Emergent Learning in Island Research," *Geographical Research* 61 (2023): 96-104; Macarena Gómez-Barris and May Joseph, "Coloniality and Islands," *Shima* 13(2) (2019): 1-10; Adam Grydehøj, "A future of Island Studies," *Island Studies Journal* 12(1) (2017): 3-16; Yaso Nadarajah, Elena Burgos Martinez, Ping Su, and Adam Grydehøj, "Critical Reflexivity and Decolonial Methodology in Island Studies: Interrogating the Scholar Within," *Island Studies Journal* 17(1) (2022): 3-25; Sarah Nimführ and Greca N. Meloni, "Decolonial

"ideal image of the island – a neatly bounded piece of land, surrounded by water – is engaging in its straightforward conceivability"[13] and influences how scholars think of real islands in real seas along with the tropes discussed above. Thinkers should strive towards making knowledge "*by*, *for* or *with*"[14] islands and islanders, rather than "*of* and *about*"[15] them. To avoid unconsciously reproducing colonial logics within the realm of epistemology, critical attention must be turned to how knowledge about islands is made. If political decolonisation brought virtually all former colonies to independence by the end of the 20th century, decolonial theorists argue that coloniality lives on as a logic which continues to structure the relations between Euro-American culture and the world.[16] Decoloniality "does not imply the absence of coloniality but the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living […]."[17] Decoloniality must be enacted: it is thus fundamental to consider how this is done. In academic research, the *how* of knowledge production is addressed by methodology – the framework which structures an epistemic project. Decolonial feminist theorists Zuleika Bibi Sheik argues that methodologies in the traditional sense subtly contribute to the reproduction of coloniality in the epistemic realm by carrying colonial logics inscribed within them. As an alternative, Sheik theorised the epistemic practice of *liminagraphy* – detailed in chapter 4 – foregrounding the notion of subjectivity as relational, the involvement of the body in the process of theorising, and the urgency of decolonising the senses.[18] This thesis proposes *liminagraphy* as an epistemic practice to be adopted within island studies to respond to the urgency of decolonising knowledge production within the field. I consider the epistemic and ethical implications of adopting this approach by activating *liminagraphy* in the Italian island of Pantelleria.

Pantelleria is a volcanic island located in the centre of the Strait of Sicily, 95 km away from the Sicilian coast and 67 km away from the coast of Tunisia.[19] It began

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Thinking: A Critical Perspective on Positionality and Representations in Island Studies," *Island Studies Journal* 16(2) (2021): 3-17.

[13] Grydehøj, "A Future of Island Studies," 5.

[14] Godfrey Baldacchino, "Studying Islands: On Whose Terms? Some Epistemological and Methodological Challenges to the Pursuit of Island Studies," *Island Studies Journal* 3(1) (2008): 49.

[15] Baldacchino, "Studying Islands," 49.

[16] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

[17] Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 81.

[18] Zuleika Bibi Sheik, *Liminagraphy: Lessons in Life-affirming Research Practices for Collective Liberation*, PhD diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2021.

[19] Silvio G. Rotolo, Maria Luisa Carapezza, Alessando Correale, Franco Foresta Martin, Gregor Hahn, Alastair G.E. Hodgetts, Mariangela La Monica, Manuela Nazzari, Pierangelo Romano, Leonardo Sagnotti, Gaia Siravo, and Fabio Speranza, "Obsidians of Pantelleria

emerging from the depths of the Mediterranean Sea around 0.3 million years ago, when magma started erupting out of the cracks in the thinned continental crust which characterises the area. In contact with water and air, the lava became rock, and thus the island took shape.[20] Pantelleria's volcanoes are no longer active, but phenomena of secondary volcanism – such as fumaroles and thermal springs – are still present on the island.[21] Multiple population inhabited the emerged land over its history, progressively developing ingenious techniques apt at sustaining life in the windy, dry, and hot climate of the island. Over the centuries, the humans who lived on the island created terraces suitable for agriculture through a process of de-stoning of the rocky soil. The volcanic rocks were then employed for the construction of the dry-stone walls which still run through the landscape, and for building structures such as *dammusi* – the island's typical dwellings. Traditional cultivations include capers and *zibibbo* grapes, which are dried in the sun after picking and used to make the sweet wine *passito*.[22]

I first visited Pantelleria in April 2023 as part of a WOOFF exchange.[23] Then, I helped my host Lucia working the land around her *dammuso*. In March 2024, I returned to the island in the intent of cultivating knowledge through the activation of *liminagraphy*. In an attempt to move away from the goal of making knowledge *about* the island and towards the possibility of making knowledge *with* it, I adopted Édouard Glissant's theory of relationality – explored in chapter 2 – as a theoretical lens. Glissant poses that "being is a relation to the other, a relation to the world, a relation to the cosmos."[24] In his *Poetics of Relation*, the Martinican philosopher uses the notion of Relation to name the entanglement of the world – in which all that is diverse is connected. Diversity is the "threatened beauty"[25] of the planet: global market

(Strait of Sicily): A Petrographic, Geochemical and Magnetic Study of Known and New Geological Sources," *Open Archaeology* 6 (2020): 434-453.

[20] Pietro Minissale, Salvatore Cambria, Erina Montoleone, Gianmarco Tavilla, Gianpietro Giusso del Galdo, Saverio Sciandrello, Emilio Badalamenti, and Tommaso La Mantia, "The Alien Vascular Flora of the Pantelleria National Park (Sicily Channel, Italy): New Insights into the Distribution of Some Potentially Invasive Species," *BioInvasion Records* 12(4) (2023): 861-885.

[21] Vittorio Duchi and Maria Emanuela Campana, "Geochemistry of Thermal Fluids on the Volcanic Isle of Pantelleria, Southern Italy," *Applied Geochemistry* 9 (1994): 147-160.

[22] Cassandra L. Quave and Alessandro Saitta, "Forty-five Years Later: The Shifting Dynamic of Traditional Ecological Knowledge on Pantelleria Island, Italy," *Economic Botany* 70(4) (2016): 380-393.

[23] World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) is an organisation which facilitates exchanges between volunteers and organic farmers. See "About WWOOF," 2024, World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, Accessed July 26, 2024, https://wwoof.net/about/.

[24] Édouard Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, trans. Celia Britton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, [1995] 2020), 16.

[25] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, [1990] 2023), 20.

capitalism and Western universalizing tendencies risk crushing difference into a homogenous compound. Thus, Glissant argues that the task we are faced today as humans is to preserve particularity. He poses that since Relation expresses itself poetically, poetic thinking and writing are the modes of encounter with the real which are most suited to take up this task. He also argues that aesthetic – in the sense of sensual – relations with the place in which one is are fundamental to perceive the material diversity of Relation. In chapter 5, I present the knowledge which emerged from my encounter with Pantelleria in the days between 1 and 9 March 2024, reflecting on the process of becoming sensually attuned to the material particularity of the island, and on the ethical implications of this epistemology. Seeking to move away from approaching the island as an object of knowledge, I conceive it as a relational field in which my embodied subjectivity comes to be imbricated. Through the sensing flesh, I come to see the island's eruptive past inscribed in its rocks; I taste the scarcity of rain and the volcanic soil in the sweetness and saltiness of dried grapes and capers, and I feel the presence of the volcano through the heated water of the island's thermal pools. Through poetic writing, I consider these processes as instances of knowledge emerging through material, sensual relations; and I reflect on the ethical moments which arose as I practiced *liminagraphy* in Pantelleria.

1. ISLANDS

SEA AND LAND

Islands are characterised by their spatial isolation: it is their detachment from the continent, their existence as entities apart, that defines them as specific geophysical bodies. Bodies of land fully surrounded by water, they emerge from a sea, ocean, river, or lake. "[D]ry and wet form a meaningful pair of notions to define an island as against a mainland […]."[26] In what philosopher Peter Sloterdijk calls the "dialectics of space"[27] the mainland and the island are understood as thesis and antithesis, as "a rule and its exception."[28] The Vulgar Latin and Italian verb *isolare* means "to make into an island"[29] – to set apart. Islands' isolation is brought about by the body of water which fully surrounds them. Here, I focus on the sea as isolator, but this function can be carried out by other bodies of water, too – as mentioned above, rivers and lakes can also contain their own islands.

The sea is an "island maker":[30] it isolates islands, but it also connects them – to one another, in their archipelagic formations, and to the mainland. In pre-industrial times, the sea was the main mean of communication and exchange:[31] before planes began connecting different parts of the planet flying through air, ships were sailing oceans and seas. Sea and land exist in different states: liquid against solid. To reach an island, one must engage in a crossing of difference: whether arriving to it via water (on a boat) or air (on a plane), water must be traversed to set foot on insular land. This crossing "implies a different technology, and different skills, experiences and risks"[32] than a land crossing. The experience of reaching an island thus creates "another perception of distance and time"[33] – of space and time – brought about by the encounter with a materiality other than land, the solid ground on which humans are used to stand.

The sea frames the island: as the technical idea of isolation suggests, it excludes an object space and interrupts the reality continuum.[34] The solidity of the mainland is interrupted by the sea, beginning again on the shores of the island. Yet, below the body of water, islands and continents are connected to one another: deep

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[26] Kopaka, "What is an Island?," 183.
[27] Peter Sloterdijk, *Foams. Sphere III: Plural Spherology* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2016), 288.
[28] Sloterdijk, *Foams*, 287.
[29] Sloterdijk, *Foams*, 291.
[30] Sloterdijk, *Foams*, 291.
[31] Kopaka, "What is an Island?."
[32] Kopaka, "What is an Island?," 184.
[33] Kopaka, "What is an Island?," 184.
[34] Sloterdijk, *Foams*.

down, they belong to the same geological continuum.[35] The finiteness of islands is only apparent, and the boundary which the sea draws around land is not as stable as it may appear by glancing at a map.

THE SHORE

In most maps of the world, islands are outlined by defined, immobile, crisp outer boundaries – but the reality of the liminal zones between sea and land is one of continuous movement and change. Theorist Angus Cameron writes: "[a]ll 'maps' […] of all territories are incomplete because whatever their particular claim to 'accuracy', all are necessarily partial and directed."[36] The "banal conventionality"[37] of the representation of shores as stable and stark is rooted in the moment when European empires were being turned into modern, sovereign nation states. Before the 16th century, the power of European sovereigns was not tied to contiguous territories: sovereignty was conceived based on the people who were ruled over, rather than the land on which they lived. The 16th century saw the beginning of an equation between territory and domain of power, and by the late 18th century, the notion of a nation – a distinct community of humans – being rooted in a territory and thus rightfully governed by a state became naturalised.[38]

The nation state came into existence through a process of political territorialisation which required the drawing of clearly defined boundaries that enclosed, separated, and contained different national sovereignties. Geographer Phillip Steinberg writes that the modern idea of the state "as territorially bounded, unambiguously governed by a sole authority and culturally homogeneous is a profoundly insular vision."[39] The "carto-realist"[40] language of 'political' maps represents the world as comprising of one-dimensional areas of different colours, bordered by precise boundary lines. Nations are conceived as islands, when islands are conceived as entities fully apart, totally separate. The ubiquity of cartographic realism, argues Cameron, renders it difficult to remember that the representation of the world as neatly divided into separate national and geographical entities is a social convention. Separation is never neat: the reality of boundaries is one of never-ending, if subtle, mutation.

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[35] Gillis, *Islands of the Mind*.
[36] Cameron, "Splendid Isolation," 742.
[37] Cameron, "Splendid Isolation," 744.
[38] Philip E. Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood: The Representation of Islands on Portolan Charts and the Construction of the Territorial State," *Geografiska Annaler* 87 B(4) (2005): 253-265.
[39] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 255.
[40] Cameron, "Splendid Isolation," 741.

The boundaries of islands are not static as the lines which surround them on maps. Shores are in motion: sea levels are never the exact same. Every day, seas alternate moments of low and high tides – meaning that their boundaries are continuously shifting, redrawn daily through the contact of solid and wet matter. Moreover, islands do not float on the surface of seas: they are grounded in the seafloor through parts of their solid bodies which extend underwater. The fact that we cannot see them – if not through immersion – does not mean that they do not exist. Extending our thinking below the water's surface allows us to conceive of islands as in fact existing in physical continuity with other pieces of emerged land. The emerged portion of an island then revels itself as just that: a portion of it. Shores are in motion and are relative – our conception of them depends on various factors such as when and from where we are thinking of them. Conceiving of this is to accept that reality trembles and shifts – which may not be as reassuring and easy to grasp as thinking of it as stable, under control.

THE SHIP

"The geography of excision is simply too gripping […]."[41]

Understandings of islands as bounded entities are pervasive. In his 1903 text "The Philosophy of Islands," English philosopher Gilbert Keith Chesterton writes that "man has always had the instinct that to isolate a thing was to identify it."[42] This instinct is symbolised by what he calls "the perennial poetry of islands, and the perennial poetry of ships."[43] He argues that a ship and an island exercise the same allure on the human mind: a ship is valued by the mind "because it is an island,"[44] and the island "because it is a ship."[45] In this view, ship sails through the ocean like an island sits in it: both closed, bounded, self-contained entities in the middle of vast, lifeless expanses of water. An island is like a ship, writes Chesterton,

> because its orchards and forests can be numbered like bales of merchandise, because its corn can be counted like gold, because the starriest and dreariest snows upon is most forsaken peaks are silver flags flown from familiar masts, because its dimmest and most inhuman mines of coal or lead below the roots

[41] Godfrey Baldacchino, "The Lure of the Island: A Spatial Analysis of Power Relations," *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 1 (2012), 57.
[42] Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands," 177.
[43] Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands," 178.
[44] Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands," 178.
[45] Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands," 178.

> of all things are definite chatels stored awkwardly in the lowest locker of the hold.[46]

Inside the bounds of the islands are orchards and forests which are to be numbered, corn to be counted, snows to be seen as flags. In Chesterton's elaboration, the island's coal and lead, sitting underground, are to be thought of as chattel – as personal possession – as resource to be extracted. And the water that surrounds the island is conceived as devoid of life, empty, barren. "[I]slands, unlike continents, look like property":[47] conceived as property – or, as Chesterton puts it, as containers of property – they are prone to being subjected to impulses of domination, to the compulsion to possess.

It is important to remember that one kind of ship – the slave ship – was the vessel through which the transatlantic slave trade was enacted.[48] In the slave ship, "stored awkwardly in the lowest locker of the hold"[49] were human beings, which were violently depredated of their humanity, and treated like property. I will return to discussions of the slave ship later in the text, in chapter 4 in relation to Édouard Glissant's understanding of it as one of the matrixes of modernity;[50] and in chapter 5 in relation to Black Studies scholar Christina Sharpe's elaboration of the connection between the transatlantic slave trade and contemporary Mediterranean migrations.[51]

Islands are like ships if we think of each as objects that are self-contained, each a solid body existing within a liquid one – fundamentally different and separate from it. The shore is thought of as framing the island as the outer walls of the ship frame the vessel. It is necessary for the ship's boundaries to be impermeable: otherwise, it would sink. Keeping the water out, floating on it, the ship is a temporary solid reality between different shores. Water is life-giving matter, but humans cannot survive in it. Outside of the boundaries of the ship, water represents the looming possibility of death. Survival depends on the solidity of the vessel's boundaries. If boundaries break down, the humans on board of the ship are likely to die, drowned at sea. Unless there is another solid body at reach: then, the shores of an island represent salvation, and the possibility to begin again.

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[46] Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands," 178.
[47] Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, eds., *Islands in History and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.
[48] In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant writes that "[t]he Slave Trade came through the cramped doorway of the slave ship, leaving a wake like that of crawling desert caravans" (Glissant [1990] 2023, 5).
[49] Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands," 178.
[50] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.
[51] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016).

A ship sails in stormy weather, through a rough sea: chaos ensues, the waves have risen, the water swallows the vessel that was once dry. Shipwreck: the boat no longer floats. The humans which were travelling in it are spat out into the water, and sometimes, they land on an unknown shore. This is the beginning of many tales set on islands written by Western authors since the 17th century. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* (1875), and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), the encounter with the island that is the main setting of each of these works is brought about by a shipwreck: disaster, loss of control. The ship – solid, bounded, dry – is destroyed, it floats no more. Being cast out of the solid dimension of the ship and into the wet body of the sea, risking drowning, is a passage through a realm of difference – one upon which the encounter with the island is predicated. Destruction of the ship is integral to the encounter with the island: the human protagonists of these novels would not be on its shore if the ship remained intact.

As the slave trade was enacted through the slave ship, colonialism too necessitated ships to carry European conquerors and explorers to the shores of the world. Leaving the continent of Europe, ships set sail towards otherness – seeking shores where they could safely dock. In their quests, colonists moved from a solid knowledge of their continent towards the unknown: a passage which in literature is represented by the trope of the shipwreck. Writer and artist Paul Carter writes:

> all imperial knowledge was predicated on shipwreck of one kind or another. […] To get ashore was always to be in danger of drowning, to be momentarily out of your depth both physically and intellectually. This moment of crossing over involved the shipwreck of reason; only by giving oneself up to the elements could one make a translation that was often felt to be as much emotional or spiritual as physical.[52]

Destruction of the ship as a solid, bounded container of "resources, and rules, and trades, and treasuries of a nation,"[53] then the violent encounter with water, and then land, again: a chance to begin anew. On the land met again after long time at sea, Europeans met what they did not know – otherness – with violence: casting themselves as ontologically superior to the Indigenous populations they encountered,

[52] Paul Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 71.
[53] Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands," 178.

they claimed ownership of lands that were not theirs. Europeans' beginning in what they claimed as colonies was drenched in the blood of the Indigenous peoples who they met, and in the erasure of their histories and ways of knowing the world.[54] The erasure of the history of a place before the arrival of Europeans – a fundamental colonial act – is reproduced by a particular philosophical island trope: that of the desert island.

DESERT ISLAND

The first island to appear in the history of Western philosophy is Atlantis. In *Timaeus* and *Critia*, Plato tells the tale of a lost island city which once was rival to Athens. At the apex of the war the two civilizations were fighting against one another, a great flood submerged both. Atlantis was forever lost to the depths of water, while Athens rose from them: it was born again. To become the perfect Republic, the city had to start from scratch once more: stripped of its glorious past, it progressively had to move from a state of immaturity to its age of reason.[55] The myth of Atlantis reveals philosophy's desire to found knowledge on a slate wiped clean: on an imaginary innocence which is truly an amnesia of the past. It also reveals Plato's attempt to found politics on solid ground. For Jacques Rancière, "to shield politics from the perils that are immanent to it, it has to be hauled on to dry land, set down on terra firma."[56] Rancière writes that the sea was antagonised by Plato because "it smells of democracy:"[57] even when the space of the polis is configured as dry, the chaotic force of the sea is inherent to politics – it is the power of the people, which cannot be done away with.

Since Atlantis, multiple islands have been used by philosophers and writers as settings for experiments of thought.[58] Philosopher Robin Mackay has named these metaphorical islands "philosophers' islands."[59] One of the first philosophical islands appeared in the 12th century text *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan,* written by Spanish Muslim philosopher Ibn Tufayl. In this philosophical tale – translated into English in 1708 as *The Improvement of Human Reason* – Tufayl narrates the story of a boy who grows up on an inhabited island, and progressively passes from the realm of instinct to that

[54] Zukas, "Terra Incognita/Terra Nullius."
[55] Mackay, "Philosophers' Islands."
[56] Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 1.
[57] Rancière, On the Shores of Politics, 2.
[58] See Thomas More, *Utopia* (Richmond, Surrey: Alma Books [1516] 2017); Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis*, Auckland: Floating Press ([1627] 2009); Aldous Leonard Huxley, *Island: A Novel* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books [1962] 1968).
[59] Mackay, "Philosophers' Islands," 431.

of knowledge: on this imagined desert island, philosophy's desire to found itself on a tabula rasa reveals itself again.[60]

In the 20th century, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze wrote the text "Desert Islands." For Deleuze, thinking of islands is thinking of the possibility of a new starting point – of beginning anew. And the island, for Deleuze, is always deserted. The desert island is imagined – it exists only in thought. For Deleuze, this is the ideal setting for thinking: the place where humans can best approximate an ideal of humanity. The desert island is not a desert – what Deleuze conceives as deserted is the ocean in which it stands. Again, as in Chesterton's "Philosophy of Islands" water is characterised as lifeless – but the ocean does harbour life, only of different kinds from those which exist on earth. For Deleuze, the desertedness of the island does not mean that it is devoid of life. He writes that

> in itself the island may contain the liveliest of rivers, the most agile fauna, the brightest flora, the most amazing nourishment, the hardiest of savages, and the castaway as its most precious fruit, it may even contain, however momentarily, the ship that comes to take him away. For all that, it is not any less a deserted island.[61]

The deserted island is not a desert: it has life. Yet, to begin again on it, we must ignore this life. Then, the island can be conceived in the geography of the mind as a place where one can start anew. The condition of the castaway – who has landed on the island after shipwreck – is for Deleuze that which most closely approximates the ideal conditions which allow us to ground our thinking in a supposedly deserted island.

Deleuze's new beginning is predicated on a fundamental colonial gesture: the erasure of the life and history of a land before the arrival of white people. His idea of a desert island is comparable to the notion of *terra nullius*, which was employed by Western European and Euro-Americans as ideological rationale for colonisation of lands in the Americas, Africa, and Australia from 1450 until 1900. The concept of *terra nullius* originally signalled a region empty of human population. The notion derived from the Roman legal argument of *res nullius*, which maintained that 'empty things', including land, remained common property until put to use by someone, who then became the rightful owner of that thing.[62] Colonists based their conquest on the

[60] Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Tufayl, *The Improvement of Human Reason, Exhibited in the Life of Hayy Ibn Yakzan: Written in Arabic Above 600 Years Ago* (Cairo, Egypt: E.A. van Dyke, 1905).
[61] Deleuze, "Desert Islands," 11.
[62] Zukas, "Terra Incognita/Terra Nullius."

proclamation of territories as "no man's lands,"[63] declaring themselves as their new rightful owners. The concept was stretched to mean that a region was devoid of a settled population – nomadic peoples would then have no right to the land. It was further stretched to mean that the population living on it had no concept of private property – and in this way, Europeans were able to surpass the sovereignty of Indigenous people living on the lands they sought to occupy. Deleuze's statement that his island is deserted despite being populated reproduces the colonial erasure of Indigenous populations living on lands before they were occupied by Europeans. And his naming of Indigenous islanders as "the hardiest of savages"[64] reproduces the colonial violence of casting Indigenous peoples to an ontological realm different from that of the human.

The conceptualisation of space as empty goes hand in hand with the idea of time as beginning – or re-beginning – with the arrival of Europeans. The spatial concept of *terra nullius* allowed for the erasure of the existence of Indigenous populations, which in turn justified the colonists' claim that they were the first to discover the land which they were occupying. This narrative of discovery allowed Europeans to situated themselves in time "at the beginning of a long and glorious history,"[65] thus erasing the history of the occupied lands before the moment of European arrival. Deleuze's beginning again on the desert island is the new beginning of the castaway, of the shipwrecked, of the European colonist on land claimed as *terra nullius*. The desert island as a place where to begin again contains the philosophical presuppositions for the reproduction of epistemic colonial violence. Islands blur the boundaries between geographies of the mind and geographies of the earth: to avoid reproducing colonial logics, it is necessary to consider both philosophical islands, and real islands in real seas.

ISLAND STUDIES

The metaphorical islands of literature and philosophy have real counterparts in Western theory: the field of island studies focuses on the multifaceted nature of existing islands – their life, culture, politics, economics, ecologies and more.[66] The field emerged recently: in 1988, a group of researchers came together and in 1992

[63] Zukas, "Terra Incognita/Terra Nullius," 53.
[64] Deleuze, "Desert Islands," 11.
[65] Simon Ryan, "Inscribing the Emptiness: Cartography, Exploration and the Construction of Australia," in *De-scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*, eds. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), 127.
[66] Nadarajah et al., "Critical Reflexivity and Decolonial Methodology in Island Studies."

formed the International Small Island Studies Association. The first journal dedicated to island research – *Island Studies Journal* – was founded in 2006.[67]

The islands at the centre of island studies as a knowledge project are not wholly separate from the islands discussed before: the imaginaries of literary and philosophical islands seep into the thought of real islands, just as real islands mingle with imagined ones. *Island Studies Journal* executive editor Adam Grydehøj writes that

> [t]he ideal image of the island – a neatly bounded piece of land, surrounded by water – is engaging in its straightforward conceivability. Yet the contrast between this alluring conceptual simplicity and the complexity of island life itself has resulted in a scholarly field that cannot escape certain submerged contradictions and hazy paradoxes.[68]

Thinking of the rocks or sand of shores as delimiting the island is tempting because this conception makes it easy to conceive – to grasp, to map, to chart, and thus to fully know. Islands within island studies have been thought of as worlds contained within their shores, representing microcosms which tempt the imagination of humans: "islands, it seems, can stand for all things desired."[69] The conception of an island as geographically finite makes it "easier to hold, to own, to manage or to manipulate, to embrace and to caress"[70] – making islands prone to being the object of impulses of domination.

Island studies scholar Grant McCall has proposed 'nissology' – from the Greek *nisos*, meaning 'island', and *logos*, meaning 'study of' – as "the study of islands on their own terms."[71] To avoid reproducing discourses of conquest within the field, thorough attention needs to be paid to how one interprets the island's 'own terms'. Baldacchino writes that researchers

> may be reinterpreting 'terms' for islands, but maintaining the same deep structure and its colonizing disposition: while side-lining the narrative away from the perspective of the 'explorer-discoverer-colonist', it may be taken over by the perspective of the 'custodian-steward-environmentalist'. In this shift, the

[67] Grydehøj, "A Future of Island Studies."
[68] Grydehøj, "A Future of Island Studies," 5.
[69] Godfrey Baldacchino, "Islands – Objects of Representation," *Geografiska Annaler* 87 B (2005): 247-251.
[70] Baldacchino, "Islands – Objects of Representation," 247.
[71] Grant McCall, "Nissology: A Proposal for Consideration," *Journal of the Pacific Society* 63-64(17), 105.

> island narrative is still not enough a narrative *by*, *for* or *with*, islanders but remains one *of* and *about* them.[72]

A narrative that is not by, for or with islands and islanders risks reproducing "a hegemonic discourse of conquest."[73] The entanglement of knowledge production and coloniality has been the topic of much reflection within the field in recent years.[74] Grydehøj has argued that in the intent of studying islands on their own terms, scholars risk failing to take responsibility for the entrenchment of coloniality in practices of knowledge production – even when these claim to be activated in the intent of granting agency to islands and their populations.[75]

Calling for a 'decolonial island studies', Yaso Nadarajah and Grydehøj have argued for the importance of understanding the difference between colonisation and coloniality – to understand how the process of political decolonisation has not ended coloniality, which is ever-present as a tendency within trajectories of power and knowledge.[76] What is needed, for Nadarajah, is "a profound reflexive encounter with the ontological and epistemological coordinates of the social-ontological discourses that have underpinned the disciplinary terrain and practice."[77] Knowledge projects that relate to islands should start from the question: "Who is seeing islands, and from where?"[78] Careful consideration of one's position as a researcher – of one's relation to structures of power and traditions of knowledge – is fundamental to avoid the reproduction of colonial logics within the realm of epistemology.

In their imagined and real articulations, islands are multifaceted entities. They are multiple in their ontologies, and so are insular epistemologies: there is no one way of knowing islands, but many. This "epistemological plurality"[79] must be respected in an effort to decenter Western perspectives and open the field to other ways of

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[72] Baldacchino, "Studying Islands," 49.

[73] Baldacchino, "Studying Islands," 49.

[74] See Farbotko et al., "Decolonising Methodologies;" Gómez-Barris and Joseph, "Coloniality and Islands;" Grydehøj, "A Future of Island Studies;" Nadarajah et al., "Critical Reflexivity and Decolonial Methodology in Island Studies;" Nimführ and Meloni, "Decolonial Thinking."

[75] Grydehøj, "A Future of Island Studies."

[76] Yaso Nadarajah and Adam Grydehøj, "Island Studies as a Decolonial Project," *Island Studies Journal* 11(2) (2016): 437-446.

[77] Yaso Nadarajah, "The Outsider Within: Commencing Fieldwork in the Kuala Lumpur/Petaling Jaya Corridor, Malaysia," *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 3(2) (2007), 129.

[78] Nadarajah et al., "Critical Reflexivity and Decolonial Methodology in Island Studies," 5.

[79] Santiago Castro-Gómez, *Zero-Point Hubris: Science, Race, and Enlightenment in Eighteen-Century Latin America* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 428.

knowing. To respect ways of knowing that are not rooted in Western epistemic foundations, it is necessary to engage in critical reflexivity – to become aware of the location from which one theorises, and deconstruct the notion of the Western scholar as the only holder of legitimate knowledge. "'Decolonising cannot be separated from epistemic humility and the need to decentre, to stand apart from one's own intellectual authority."[80] Nadarajah et al. write that "the starting point should not be the result of the knowledge production but instead the process of producing knowledge."[81] In order to enact the ontological and epistemic shift which is required to live and theorise decoloniality, the foundations and techniques of the knowledge we produce must be questioned and reworked. This may start from a thorough consideration of the methodologies which structure and guide our work[82] – so to make possible a shift from thinking *of* and *about* islands and islanders to making knowledge *by*, *for*, and *with* them.

A SEA OF ISLANDS

Fundamental to the decolonial effort within island studies is the work of Tongan-Fijian scholar Epeli Hau'ofa (1939-2009). Although Hau'ofa did not categorise himself as an island studies theorist, his work came to be regarded as central to the field – particularly his 1994 essay "Our Sea of Islands."[83] In this text, the theorist draws a clear picture of how Pacific Islands have come to be conceptualised as small, isolated, and dependent through colonial processes – and how a reconceptualization of islands from the viewpoints of islanders is crucial to fighting neocolonial trajectories of power and knowledge.[84]

A colonial view of Oceania continues to imply that island territories and states are "much too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centres of economic growth"[85] to ever be able to stand on their own, without being dependent on aid provided by wealthy nations. This conception of inevitable dependency, argues Hau'ofa, is neocolonial – it is a discourse crafted to drive island population into believing that they have no choice but to depend. This casts Western nations as generous providers of aid, and ties Pacific islands to them in a relation of dominance and submission. It was "[c]ontinental men, namely Europeans"[86] who first conceived of these islands as small, isolated points in a vast ocean. Later, "it was

[80] Nadarajah et al., "Critical Reflexivity and Decolonial Methodology in Island Studies," 5.
[81] Nadarajah et al., "Critical Reflexivity and Decolonial Methodology in Island Studies," 4.
[82] See Farbotko et al., "Decolonising Methodologies;" Nadarajah et al., "Critical Reflexivity and Decolonial Methodology in Island Studies."
[83] Nadarajah et al., "Critical Reflexivity and Decolonial Methodology in Island Studies."
[84] Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific* 6(1) (Spring 1994): 148-161.
[85] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 150.
[86] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 153.

continental men – Europeans and Americans – [who] drew imaginary lines across the sea, making the colonial boundaries that confined ocean peoples to tiny spaces for the first time."[87]

The conception of smallness is relative, argues Hau'ofa: "it depends on what is included and excluded in any calculation of size."[88] The calculation of size upon which Europeans drew their conception of Pacific islands as 'small' – and upon which they drew the conception of these islands as incapable of independence, poor and isolated – is based "entirely on the extent of the land surfaces they see."[89] Only the dry surface, and only that which they could perceive through the eyes. This view is one of "islands in a far sea"[90] – one which Hau'ofa contrasts with the notion of "a sea of islands":[91] this is how populations indigenous to the Pacific have been conceiving their world.

Showing the colonial roots of the conception of Pacific islands as small surfaces of dry land isolated from one another by water, Hau'ofa proposes a notion of place which he draws from the cosmologies and histories of Indigenous populations in the Pacific. He writes:

> […] if we look at the myths, legends and oral traditions, and the cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania, it will become evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic propositions. Their universe comprised not only of dry surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations that people could count on to guide their ways across the seas. Their world was anything but tiny.[92]

Not only the dry surface – also the ocean, and the land below. Water, in this conception, is a body which connects. People raised in the Pacific islands grew up with the sea, they developed advanced seafaring skills, and traversed the water to explore, trade, marry, visit relatives, and expand social networks. And below the surface of the ocean, continuing beyond the shore, is more land, more island – more depth. It was on the Big Island of Hawai'i, in 1993, that Hau'ofa saw "the future for Oceania"[93] – a future founded on a conception of Pacific islands not as isolated, small,

[87] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 153.
[88] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 152.
[89] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 152.
[90] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 152.
[91] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 152.
[92] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 152.
[93] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 159.

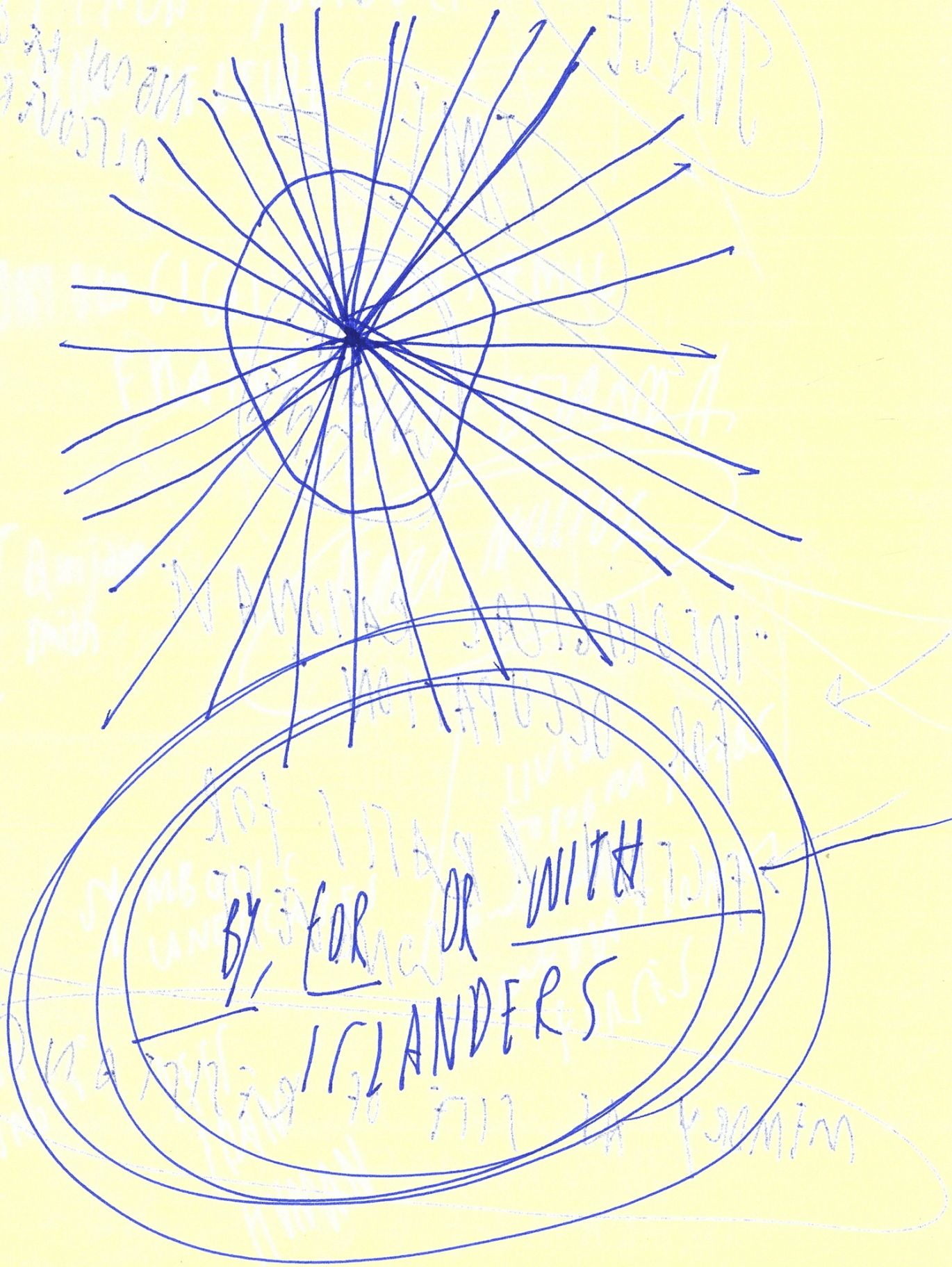
and dependent, but as connected to one another, rooted, and growing. A future in the hands of Pacific islanders, and not determined by a colonial conception of place. Driving between Kona and Hilo, Hau‘ofa saw

> […] the eerie blackness of regions covered by recent volcanic eruptions; the remote majesty of Maunaloa, long and smooth, the world’s largest volcano; the awesome craters of Kilauea threatening to erupt at any moment; and the lava flow on the coast not far away. Under the aegis of Pele, and before my very eyes, the Big Island was growing, rising from the depths of a mighty sea.[94]

The volcanic depths of Hawai'i push lava out of the core of the earth, through the sea, and islands keep growing, changing, becoming something else. There is much more below the surface, under the edge of perception, where the European, colonial gaze stopped. Underneath, there is creative potential – there is the force of movement and growth. And in the water, there is connection, there is a body which can be traversed, which touches different shores with its waves.

It is in the encounter with another archipelago – that of Hawai'i – that Tongan-Fijian Hau‘ofa deepened his understanding of the nature of Pacific islands. This shift in perspective – from understanding Pacific islands as ‘islands in a vast sea’ to ‘a sea of islands’ – implies a shift away from Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge, and a turning towards indigenous ones – a turning towards other archipelagos. Postcolonial thinker Édouard Glissant – born in Martinique, in the Caribbean archipelago of the Antilles – has argued that “archipelagos must encounter each other because, across their many islands, interdependence and difference coexist […].”[95] The archipelago is the place where “we can begin to understand and resolve the contradictions of the world […].”[96]

[94] Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” 151.
[95] Édouard Glissant and Hans Ulrich Obrist, “The Archipelago Conversations,” trans. Emma Ramadan, *isolarii*, 6 (December 2021), 20.
[96] Glissant and Obrist, “The Archipelago Conversations,” 19.


BY FOR OR WITH
ISLANDERS

2. THINKING ISLANDS WITH ÉDOUARD GLISSANT

ARCHIPELAGIC THINKING

Archipelagos are structures of islands: they are expanses of water and land in which emerged portions of solid matter are connected subaqueously, in which the sea is a body which at once separates and connects. It is to these island formations that Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant turns in search of a kind of thought that may allow us to conceive of the inextricability of the world while honouring its diversity. He writes that

> […] we need archipelagic thinking, which is one that opens, one that confirms diversity – one that is not made to obtain unity, but rather a new kind of Relation. One that trembles – physically, geologically, mentally, spiritually – because it seeks the point, the utopian point, at which all the cultures of the world can meet and understand each other without being dispersed or lost.[97]

In archipelagic thinking, elements – thoughts, people, cultures – stand in relation to one another as islands in the sea: not absolutely unified – never one homogeneous mass – but connected, nonetheless. In difference – as on each island life articulates itself in a different way.

Archipelagic thinking is thought "that trembles:"[98] it is thinking that does not ascribe to any single system of thought, but rather continuously moves in search of connections and articulations of difference. Trembling thinking is "an instinct, an intuition of the world that we can't achieve with imperial thoughts, with thoughts of domination, thoughts of a systematic path toward a truth that we've posited in advance."[99] The thought Glissant calls for is thought in movement, ready to be disrupted, always open to changing through contact. It is a way of thinking that does not determine a result to be achieved in advance – it is thought that moves, but not in the spirit of conquest.

Archipelagos, structures of islands existing in connection and difference, are places which materialise the kind of thought Glissant advocates for: archipelagos "are able to diffract, they create diversity and expansiveness, they are spaces of relation that recognize all the infinite details of the real."[100] In archipelagos, we may find ways to conceive the world as inextricably entangled yet always carrying forward

[97] Glissant and Obrist, "The Archipelago Conversations," 164-165.
[98] Glissant and Obrist, "The Archipelago Conversations," 165.
[99] Glissant and Obrist, "The Archipelago Conversations," 141.
[100] Glissant and Obrist, "The Archipelago Conversations," 20.

diverse multiplicities. And, Glissant hopes, archipelagic thinking which trembles, trembling thinking which is archipelagic, may allow us to strive towards the preservation of the world's diversity in the face of the totalitarian push towards homogenisation which is currently at work.

POETICS OF RELATION

In his *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant poses relation as primary. As pre-Socratic philosophers, he poses that "being is not an absolute, that being is a relation to the other, a relation to the world, a relation to the cosmos."[101] Relation does not presuppose originary elements that come into contact with one another, but rather, relation itself precedes the coming into contact of its elements. Glissant's Relation is "not the One but All:"[102] it is a concept through which to understand the totality of the world without falling into the trap of universalism, which for Glissant is a "generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny."[103] To think of Relation is not to think of something which reduces diversity into a homogeneous compound, nor to drive our thinking towards an absolute which would summarise the multitudes of the world. It is, rather, something which comprehends all that is diverse, and honours it as the driving force of the world in motion. Relation is a lens through which to understand the world in its peculiarities, in its pockets of diversity, which make up its "threatened beauty."[104] Posing that Relation is primary to the world's existence, Glissant offers a way to understand the contemporary world – one in which diversity is threatened to disappear, swallowed by the imperative drive toward standardized consumption which is dictated by global market capitalism. The important task that we are faced with today as humans is, for Glissant, that of preserving particularity. To preserve diversity, it is necessary to understand diversity as the driving force of the world.

Relation is "what the world makes and expresses of itself:"[105] it is the world as it articulates itself. "[T]hough the world is not a book, it is nonetheless true that the silence of the world would, in turn, make us deaf. Relation, driving humanities chaotically onwards, needs words to publish itself, to continue."[106] Relation expresses itself aesthetically: it has its own poetics. The poetics of Relation is "a theory that tries to conclude, a presence that concludes (presumes) nothing."[107] It is how the world

[101] Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 16.
[102] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 47.
[103] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 20.
[104] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 20.
[105] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 160.
[106] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 27-28.
[107] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 183.

expresses itself, and how we try to make sense of it. Poetics is the way we can make sense of the "undecipherable magma"[108] of Relation. Glissant's notion of poetics extends beyond written poetry: as literary scholar Celia Britton argues, it is not only a linguistic but also a cognitive phenomenon – it refers to both language and to a mode of thinking.[109] Poetic thought and language do not seek to fixate meaning – a poetics "suggests new connections, or relations, between things in the world, and in so doing also disrupts the conventional patterns and usages of language itself."[110] Ambiguity and polysemy – the coexistence of multiple meanings – are characteristics which render poetic language and thought particularly apt to destabilise preconceived convictions and shaking the boundaries of concepts, and in turn lead to the emergence of new formations of meaning.[111] Moreover, poetic thought does not seek to abstract universal truths from situated experiences: in Glissant's words, it "safeguards the particular."[112] Poetic thinking and writing are means through which one can relate to Relation: to sense and make sense of the entanglement of the world, we need poetics. In poetic writing, one can turn their attention to "the actual substance of each of the places, their minute or infinite detail and the thrilling sum of their particularities."[113] To write "is to summon up the savour of the world."[114] Glissant's poetics of Relation, and the poetics we need to relate to it, is "latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible."[115] Through poetic writing and thought, we can sense Relation – the weave of the world – and work to preserve its "threatened beauty"[116] – its ever-evolving diversity.

THE SLAVE SHIP AND THE PLANTATION

Fundamental to Glissant's poetics of Relation is the notion of the slave ship and the plantation as "bellies of the world."[117] These are matrixes of modernity – models of organisation of the world from which the modern world was born. Without them, the world would not be what it is, and without understanding this history we cannot understand the world – we cannot understand Relation. Here is "where we must return

[108] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 164.
[109] Celia Britton, "Philosophy, Poetics, Politics," *Callaloo* 36(4) (Fall 2013): 841-847.
[110] Britton, "Philosophy, Poetics, Politics," 845.
[111] Britton, "Philosophy, Poetics, Politics."
[112] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 32.
[113] Édouard Glissant, *Treatise on the Whole-World*, trans. Celia Britton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, [1997] 2020), 73.
[114] Glissant, *Treatise on the Whole-World*, 73.
[115] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 32.
[116] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 20.
[117] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 75.

to track our difficult and opaque sources."[118] We cannot think Relation without thinking of the slave ship and of the plantation.

The slave trade "came through the cramped doorway of the slave ship, leaving a wake like that of crawling desert caravans."[119] The ship is the vessel which brought modernity into being, and the Middle Passage gave birth to a new way of conceiving humanity – and its negation. For Afro-Pessimist theorist Frank B. Wilderson III, the transatlantic slave trade generated a "new ontology:"[120] racial blackness was forged as – in the words of theorist Zahi Zalloua – "an ontological paradox, a kind of (non)being devoid of any relationality […]."[121] In the Middle Passage, Blackness emerged as barred being – "~~black~~ being"[122] – as a state of being devoid of subjectivity. Through the slave trade, African people were subjected to an "ontological evisceration:"[123] they boarded the ship as people, and they disembarked it as "Black flesh."[124] The Western notion of humanity, for Zalloua, constitutively excludes the notion of Blackness: it needs to define itself against an other which is fundamentally different from itself, without which it could not exists – because it exists only insofar as it has this other to oppose itself to. Racial slavery and colonial genocide are "key and violent events in the modern ontology of the human."[125]

The Middle Passage was a space of ontological violence; the slave ship, the vessel through which it was carried out. Across the water, within the bounded space of the ship, Blackness was generated and so was modernity: "[t]his boat is a womb, a womb abyss."[126] The sea, another abyss: "[w]henever a fleet of ships gave chase to slave ships, it was easiest just to lighten the boat by throwing cargo overboard, weighing it down with the balls and chains."[127] The bottom of the sea is punctuated by "these balls and chains gone green"[128] as the consciousness of humanity is punctuated by them.

After reaching the shores of America, enslaved Africans were often made to work on agricultural crops in plantations. The plantation is the second matrix of modernity –

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[118] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 73.
[119] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 5.
[120] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structures of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press 2010), 18.
[121] Zahi Zalloua, "Black ~~Being~~," in *Being Posthuman: Ontologies of the Future* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 148.
[122] Zalloua, "Black ~~Being~~," 148.
[123] Zalloua, "Black ~~Being~~," 161.
[124] Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 18.
[125] Zalloua, "Black ~~Being~~," 147.
[126] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 6.
[127] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 6.
[128] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 6.

the world's second belly. As the ship, it is "a space apart."[129] An organised racial hierarchy – white owners at the top and black slaves at the bottom, it was defined by its closure: crossing its boundaries was forbidden, made impossible for those who were made to live within it as slaves. Enslaved people had no part in the plantation's yield: they were made to work the land but could not enjoy its fruits. Violence, but also hope: Glissant writes that "[w]ithin this universe of domination and oppression, of silent or professed dehumanisation, forms of humanity stubbornly persisted."[130] Literature and music were the expressions of those who were enslaved, born out of the plantation.

> Night in the cabins gave birth to this other enormous silence from which music, inescapable, a murmur at first, finally burst out into this long shout – a music of reserved spirituality through which the body suddenly expresses itself. […] This was the cry of the plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world.[131]

The seclusion of the plantation – the enforced impermeability of its boundaries – is among the factors that eventually led the plantation system to collapse. In their pretence to autarky, plantations were in reality always dependent on someplace elsewhere: they could not exist as self-sufficient. Goods produced in the plantation were exchanged mostly at a loss, and planters were never able to constitute the plantation as a place of actual independence, or as a place solid enough to participate in a market as a rightful actor.[132] The impenetrable boundary of the plantation was its structural weakness. Eventually, its seclusion was broken – the system fell. The world born out of it "remains open"[133] – Relation goes on articulating itself. But it is nothing without the memory of the plantation and of the slave ship.

OPACITY

Relation goes on articulating itself, and we go on seeking to relate to its poetics. Relating to the poetics of Relation is to be done by recognising a "right to opacity"[134] to the world. Opaque is that which we cannot understand, that which escapes our comprehension. Glissant offers the notion of opacity as opposed to that of transparency, not as a stable structure of thought but as a construct to approximate the complexity of Relation. He argues that Western claims to knowledge have been

[129] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 71.
[130] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 65.
[131] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 73.
[132] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.
[133] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 75.
[134] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

historically driven by a desire to fully know, to see thoroughly – which he understands as a desire for transparency: the transparency of the other, the transparency of the world. But the world, argues Glissant, cannot be understood as transparent because it is not: at the bottom of the mirror through which humanity has been looking at itself is a sediment, a silt which clouds vision. This is the totality of all cultures and peoples, a multiplicity which cannot be understood at once. That which cannot be known, cannot be understood – that which cannot be reduced – is what Glissant gestures towards through his concept of opacity. He tells us that others cannot be reduced to something which is fully knowable – and they should not be. He writes:

> Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures.[135]

To grant the right to opacity to the world is to allow others not to be reduced to something I think I can fully know. This is needed to preserve the peculiarities of Relation. Western epistemologies that are founded upon a desire for transparency – for universal knowledge – are bound to crush the diversity which drives the world forward, to subsume difference through a predatory attempt to know linked to a desire to own. For the age of conquest has now turned into the age of knowledge – there are no areas in the world yet to be put on a map, but knowledge about the world continues being produced. The Western drive for discovery and conquest has transmuted: "[…] masters of Voyage and […] masters of Knowledge are one and the same."[136] The epistemology of the Western master of Voyage is the epistemology of the One – knowledge "composed of abstract generality and linked to the spirit of conquest and discovery […]."[137]

To grasp knowledge, to grasp the other, to conquer that which is conceived as separate and external from oneself – to bring it inside of us, to make it our own, to integrate it into our being. To be reassured in front of the overwhelming awareness – which is felt if not understood – that we cannot fully understand Relation even though we are part of it; and that the boundaries of the self are always unstable. To contrast this fear, we desire to grasp the other, to bring that which we do not know under control to make it less threatening to our sense of identity – that which, if lost, may make us melt back into the chaos of Relation.

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[135] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.
[136] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 56.
[137] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 111.

The connection between epistemic and practical conquest is fleshed out through the two words for 'understand' used in *Poetics of Relation*: *comprendre* and *donner-avec*. Betsy Wings, translator of the English version of the book, writes that the word *comprendre* derives from Latin *comprehendere*, 'to seize'. She writes that Glissant "contrasts this form of understanding – appropriative, almost rapacious – with the understanding upon which Relation must be based: *donner-avec*. *Donner (*to give) is meant as a generosity of perception."[138] If the repressive, reducing meaning of *comprendre* is related to a grasping of knowledge and of the other – to "a movement of hands that grab their surroundings and bring them back to themselves"[139] – *donner-avec*, translated as 'giving-on-and-with', is related to a gesture "that opens finally on totality."[140] To relate to the other, argues Glissant, it is not necessary to grasp them. "To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does"[141] it is sufficient to open up to the other's alterity – to the alterity of Relation – and respect the dimensions which one cannot see clearly. *Donner-avec* also contains "the possible sense of yielding, as a tree might 'give' in a storm in order to remain standing."[142] The one who gives-on-and-with "strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this."[143]

Relinquishing the desire for transparency, allowing the world to exist in opacity, we make poetic knowledge, and thus we know Relation. The best way to relate to Relation and to its opacity, according to Glissant, is through poetic language and thought: "[t]he highest point of knowledge is always a poetics."[144] Poetic thinking and writing, ambiguous and polysemic, are likely to generate opacity. A text is, for Glissant, always a "producer of opacity."[145] Words come to stand as a medium between writer and reader – and the latter can only infer what the former may mean. The reader may "describe the text as 'difficult'"[146] – as I did many times while reading *Poetics of Relation* – and thus knowingly or unknowingly speak of opacity. Through poetic language, often opaque, Glissant calls us to respect the world's right to opacity – as opacity is fundamental to the poetics of Relation. Through poetics, Glissant produces opacity to argue for the right to opacity: in the words of Wings, *Poetics of Relation* is "an enactment of its own poetics."[147]

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[138] Wings, *Poetics of Relation*, xiv.
[139] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 192.
[140] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 192.
[141] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 194.
[142] Wings, *Poetics of Relation*, xiv.
[143] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 20.
[144] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 140.
[145] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 115.
[146] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 115.
[147] Wings, *Poetics of Relation*, xii.

TO KNOW/THE
OTHER IT IS
NECESSARY TO
GRASP THEM

Peculiarity must be preserved – opacity must be respected. Against the totalitarian drive towards standardization: against generalisation, the thought of the One, digestion of the other. Glissant writes that

> […] to oppose the disturbing affective standardization of peoples, whose affect has been diverted by the processes and products of international exchange, either consented to or imposed, it is necessary to renew the visions and aesthetics of relating to the earth.[148]

Global market capitalism is driving the world towards standardised consumption – and in so doing, it is threatening the diversity which drives Relation forward. "[S]ensibilities have already been diverted widely by these processes of exchange:"[149] standardization is an affective and aesthetic[150] process. The senses have been conditioned to comply to international standards: each person's sensuous attunement to the particular – that which is different in each different place – is being threatened together with the particular itself. To preserve the particular, we must preserve the peculiarity of our relations to the earth: we must imagine and enact an aesthetics of relation which does not submit to the totalitarian push to homogenisation. It is through the body that we can most directly take up this task. Considering our sensuous relations to the place in which we are – how we relate to the earth through taste, touch, hearing, sight, and smell – we can work to deepen our attunement to the particularities of Relation.

Among the senses, Glissant considers taste at length, focusing on food. The food one eats is a bridge, a material connection between one's body and the body of the earth. The philosopher speaks of local Martinican foods – yams, breadfruit, Chinese cabbage – as threatened by international products – Coca-Cola, wheat bread, dairy butter. What is threatened by the global food industry is not only the

[148] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 148.
[149] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 148.
[150] I am here considering the notion of 'aesthetics' not as referring to artistic canons, but as relating to the human capacity to perceive the world through the senses. My understanding of aesthetics within the work of Glissant is influenced by Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez's concept of 'decolonial aesthesis' – see Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez's "Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings," *Social Text Online* (July 15, 2013). The decolonial theorists argue that the Western concept of aesthetics relates to a regulation of sensibility and is instrumental to maintain the modern/colonial order. A 'decolonial aesthesis' as a process of liberation of the senses is proposed as an alternative to this notion of aesthetics – "to decolonize the regulation of sensing all the sensations to which our bodies respond" (Mignolo and Vázquez 2013). I will return to this concept in chapter 5. For the remainder of this section, I will use the term 'aesthetics' rather than 'aesthesis' to stay close to Glissant's language.

existence of local product themselves – "whose excellence depend on their fragility"[151] – but also people's desire and taste for them. One's taste for local foods is replaced by a taste for international products – and this in turn leads to the threatened disappearance of the edible expressions of the peculiarity of a place.

The practices of producing food are central to the task of developing an aesthetic relation to the earth which preserves diversity: Glissant writes that "[a] man involved in agriculture is a man involved in culture. He can no longer produce innocently."[152] He also writes that "[i]t would be obnoxious to indulge in idiotic praise of the peasantry when it is going downhill […] everywhere."[153] The philosopher fears a future in which humanity will be saved from extinction only if technology will be employed "for the massive production of synthetic food that would take care of the richest."[154] Although he sees no point in praising those who still work the land, he writes that "this nightmare"[155] may be avoided through a "revived aesthetic connection with the earth."[156] What is at stake is "the pleasure of consuming one's own product"[157] – the aesthetic connection with the peculiarity of the place in which one lives – the material, sensorial dimension of the pocket of diversity in which one is embedded. The aesthetics of the earth for which Glissant calls is "a poetics [that needs to] be "resuscitated:"[158] it already exists. It lives in the agricultural practices respectful of the peculiarity of the land, in a taste for the food that a peculiar place can yield. He writes:

> An aesthetics of the earth? In the half-starved dust of Africas? In the mud of flooded Asias? In epidemics, masked forms of exploitation, flies buzz-bombing the skeleton skins of children? In the frozen silence of the Andes? In the rains uprooting *favelas* and shantytowns? In the scrub and scree of Bantu lands? In flowers encircling necks and ukuleles? In mud huts crowing goldmines? In red-light districts? In drunken indiscriminate consumption? In the noose? The cabin? Night with no candle?
> Yes.[159]

[151] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 148.
[152] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 149.
[153] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 150.
[154] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 150.
[155] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 150.
[156] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 150.
[157] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 151.
[158] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 150.
[159] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 151.

The plantation – where enslaved people were forced to work without being able to enjoy the fruits of their labour – cannot be forgotten when thinking of agricultural practices and of an aesthetics of the earth. Contemporary and past forms of exploitation and oppression must always figure in our thinking of Relation. With this awareness, we must strive towards an aesthetics of relating to the earth which is based on love: "[i]magining the idea of love of the earth […] with all the strength of charcoal fires or sweet syrup."[160] Love of the earth begins in the peculiarity of place: "passion for the land where one lives is a start, an action we must endlessly risk."[161] Here, in sensual connection with the peculiarity of Relation, one can begin practicing a mode of relating to the earth which may preserve its diversity.

[160] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 151.
[161] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 151.

AN AESTHETICS
OF RELATING TO
THE EARTH

3. PANTELLERIA

GEOLOGICAL HISTORY AND ENVIRONMENT

My research project will explore the epistemic and ethical implications of enacting an "aesthetics of relating to the earth"[162] through the practice of *liminagraphy* in the island of Pantelleria. Pantelleria is a volcanic island located in the centre of the Strait of Sicily Rift System, in an area marked by plentiful subaqueous and subaerial magmatism due to the thinned domain of continental crust which characterises its seafloor. The island rises from a depth of 2000 meters below sea level, sitting 95 km (51 nautical miles) away from the coast of Sicily and 67 km (36 nautical miles) from Tunisia's Cape Bon.[163] As of 2023, its 83 km^2 were inhabited by 7362 people, whose economic activities mostly focused on agriculture and tourism.[164]

The island's emergence began around 0.3 million years ago, when underwater volcanic activity initiated a long period of explosive eruptions which progressively gave it shape.[165] Multiple subsequent eruptions covered the island with different types of rocks, with the Green Tuff eruption – which occurred 44 thousand years ago – being the last high-energy volcanic episode.[166] The ignimbrite – volcanic rock born out of the emplacement, cooling and welding of lava flows – which was formed during this eruption came to cover much of the island as a greenish mantle which is still draped around it.[167] The last eruptive episode, a submarine one, was recorded in 1891 roughly 5 km away from the coast of the island.[168] A peculiar episode of submarine magmatism was observed during the month of July in 1831 not far from Pantelleria, when a period of underwater eruptions gave birth to a small island – roughly 300 m large and 60 m high – in the Strait of Sicily.[169] The island – called *Isola*

[162] Glissant, Poetics of Relation, 148.
[163] Silvio G. Rotolo, Valerio Agnesi, Christian Conoscenti, and Giovanni Lanzo. "Pantelleria Island (Strait of Sicily): Volcanic History and Geomorphological Landscape," in *Landscapes and Landforms of Italy*, eds. Mauro Soldati and Mauro Marchetti (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017): 479-487.
[164] Minissale et al., "The alien vascular flora of the Pantelleria National Park (Sicily Channel, Italy)."
[165] Minissale et al., "The alien vascular flora of the Pantelleria National Park (Sicily Channel, Italy)."
[166] Rotolo et al., "Pantelleria Island (Strait of Sicily)."
[167] Rotolo et al., "Obsidians of Pantelleria."
[168] Rotolo et al., "Pantelleria Island (Strait of Sicily)."
[169] Mauro Coltelli, Danilo Cavallaro, Giuseppe D'Anna, Antonino D'Alessandro, Fausto Grassa, Giorgio Mangano, Domenico Patanè, and Stefano Gresta, "Exploring the Submarine Graham Bank in the Sicily Channel," *Annals of Geophysics* 59(2) (2016):1-13.

Ferdinandea in Italian – was claimed by various powers, but over the following three months it was eroded by the waves and sank back into the sea.[170]

Today, Pantelleria is characterised by phenomena of secondary volcanism: fumaroles – cracks in the ground from which steam rises – and thermal springs. The temperature of the fumaroles' steam varies, being cooler – around 40 °C – in the so-called *favare*, and hotter – around 80 °C – in the *bagni asciutti*. Literally 'dry baths', these are caves where the steam rises from the rocky depths of the island's body.[171] The thermal springs are disseminated throughout the southwestern shoreline of the island,[172] and they are also present in the lake *Specchio di Venere* – 'Mirror of Venus' – which is replenished by the springs and by rainfall.[173]

The island is characterised by scarcity of freshwater: no perennial streams nor cold springs are known – only two wells contain water with relatively low salinity levels. Rainfall is scarce: this is a salient factor of the island's general dry Mediterranean climate.[174] Within this general predisposition, the island's morphology determines microclimatic variations.[175] The soil is volcanic – mineral-rich and fertile.[176] Strong winds blow on Pantelleria for more than 300 days every year:[177] the name of the island is derived from the Arabic *Bint al-riyāḥ* – 'daughter of the winds'.[178] The island hosts over 600 species of flora, including nine species of endemic plants – making it a strikingly biodiverse environment. Plants carried from the nearby coasts of Sicily and Tunisia colonised the lava substrates early on in the history of the island's formation, during the tumultuous period of eruptive volcanism. Today, due to climate change, anthropogenic factors, and to the presence of alien plant species, the biodiversity of

[170] Marcello Carapezza, Paolo Ferla, P. Mario Nuccio, and Mariano Valenza. "Caratteri Petrologici e Geochimici delle Vulcaniti dell'Isola 'Ferdinandea'," *Società Italiana di Mineralogia e Petrologia* 35(1) (1979): 377-388.
[171] Duchi and Campana, "Geochemistry of Thermal Fluids on the Volcanic Isle of Pantelleria, Southern Italy."
[172] Rotolo et al., "Pantelleria Island (Strait of Sicily)."
[173] Duchi and Campana, "Geochemistry of Thermal Fluids on the Volcanic Isle of Pantelleria, Southern Italy."
[174] Duchi and Campana, "Geochemistry of Thermal Fluids on the Volcanic Isle of Pantelleria, Southern Italy.""
[175] Vito Campo, Rolando Romolini, and Romieg Soca, "Due Taxa Esclusivi dell'Isola di Pantelleria (Trapani, Sicilia): *Ophrys Scolopax* 'di Pantelleria' e *Serapias Cossyrensis*," *GIROS Orch. Spont. Eur.* 60(1) (2017): 180-192.
[176] John Guest, Paul Cole, Angus Duncan, and David Chester, "Other Islands: Ischia, Ustica, Linosa, Pantelleria and Graham Island," in *Volcanoes of Southern Italy*, (London: The Geological Society, 2003): 215-238.
[177] Campo et al., "Due Taxa Esclusivi dell'Isola di Pantelleria (Trapani, Sicilia)."
[178] Giuseppe Staccioli, "L'Ultima Isola Musulmana in Italia, Pantelleria (Bint al-riyāḥ)," *Symposia Melitensia* 11 (2015): 193-225.

the island is under threat: seeking to preserve it, Pantelleria has been named a National Park in 2016.[179]

HUMAN DWELLING

Throughout its history, Pantelleria was home to – and site of conquest for – multiple populations. As a crossroad in the Mediterranean in times when the sea was the main route of communication and trade, it was territory of colonisation and cultural exchange. The first human population to leave traces on the island was that of the so-called Sesioti. Their origins and moment of arrival in Pantelleria is uncertain, but they are thought to have first come to the island during the Neolithic period (6000 BCE).[180] They built their settlement in today's Mursia locality – on the West coast of the island – where a prehistoric village is still preserved today. The population is thought to have lived of sheep and goat breeding and fishing, and they used to work obsidians to make tools.[181] Obsidian, the hard, dark volcanic glass that was once present in large quantities on the island, was used until the Bronze Age to manufacture sharp tools and weapons and was used as trading commodity across the Mediterranean.[182] A necropolis is located close to the village, characterised by funeral monuments made of volcanic stones, shaped as circular truncated cones. Inside, one or more galleries lead to circular funeral cells. The biggest funeral monument – *Sese Grande* or *Sese del Re* – contains 13 galleries, and is 10 by 20 meters wide. The name of the population – Sesioti – is derived from the local word *sese* – meaning 'pile of stones'. The Sesioti disappeared in uncertain circumstances by the end of 2000 BCE, leaving the island empty of humans for roughly five centuries.[183]

From 900 BCE onwards, the island was used as a post of call by the Phoenicians – and then, with the growing importance of the nearby Carthage, Pantelleria became a Punic city-state. The Phoenicians first introduced the cultivation of *zibibbo* vines on the island,[184] which are still cultivated to make the sweet wine

[179] Minissale et al., "The alien vascular flora of the Pantelleria National Park (Sicily Channel, Italy)."
[180] Simone Mantellini, "The Implications of Water Storage for Human Settlement in Mediterranean Waterless Islands: The Example of Pantelleria," *Environmental Archaeology* 20(4) (2015): 406-424.
[181] Amanda Culoma, Szilvia Szeréna Baráth, and Giulia Morini, "Rediscovering Pantelleria Beyond the Sea," *Journal of Art Historiography* 27 (2022): 1-31.
[182] Rotolo et al., "Obsidians of Pantelleria."
[183] Culoma et al., "Rediscovering Pantelleria Beyond the Sea."
[184] Gianluca Macchi, "The Character of Island Vineyard Landscape in Pantelleria and Giglio, Italy," in *Island Landscapes: An Expression of European Culture*, ed. Gloria Pungetti, (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017), 128-134.

passito.[185] Soon, the Phoenicians' expansionist policy clashed with Rome, and the island was conquered by the Romans during the second Punic war (217 BCE). Between the end of the Roman period and the moment when Pantelleria became part of the newly unified Reign of Italy in 1861, many powers controlled the island. Among them, the Arabs figure as having left significant traces on the island's physical and cultural landscape. After the Arab conquest of Sicily in 827, the island came to be populated by Arabic populations, who continued to exist in Pantelleria even after it eventually passed under Norman control.[186] Traces of this cultural influence can be noticed in the shape of the island's typical dwelling – the *dammuso* – which with its angular body and domed roof can be recognised as having Arabic architectural roots;[187] and in the toponymic and dialect of the island. Arabic traces can be found not only in the name of the island but also in those of many of its localities, such as Muèggen, from the Tunisian-Arabic *mawāğin*, 'cisterns'; Gadir, from ġadīr, 'swamp'; and Punta Fram, from *frān*, 'ovens'. The name of Monte Gibele – the second highest volcanic peak after the Montagna Grande – is derived from *ğabal*, 'mountain'. Small volcanic domes are named *cùddie*, from the Arabic *kudyah*, 'hill'. The dialect of Pantelleria – *Pantesco* – also contains many Arabic influences, as the language continued to be spoken on the island alongside Italian for centuries, giving shape to a hybrid idiom which is still spoken by the local population.[188]

CULTURAL ECOLOGY

Throughout the history of human habitation of the island, the populations who lived in Pantelleria developed techniques apt to sustain their life on the rocky, windy, dry, and sun-drenched land in the Mediterranean. Many of the cultivations present on the island have been adapted to suit the limited rainfall and harsh winds and sunshine which characterise the island.[189] The landscape is punctuated by cultivations of caper bushes – naturally growing close to the ground – and *zibibbo* grapes, which are grown in individual conic holes[190] dug in the terraces which were constructed by humans over the centuries to make the island's grounds suitable for cultivation.[191] The grapevines are kept low to the ground through a low bush training system – *vite ad alberello* – which since 2014 has been inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List

[185] Rotolo et al., "Pantelleria Island (Strait of Sicily)."
[186] Staccioli, "L'Ultima Isola Musulmana in Italia."
[187] Culoma et al., "Rediscovering Pantelleria Beyond the Sea."
[188] Staccioli, "L'Ultima Isola Musulmana in Italia."
[189] Quave and Saitta, "Forty-five years later."
[190] Quave and Saitta, "Forty-five years later."
[191] Campo et al., "Due Taxa Esclusivi dell'Isola di Pantelleria (Trapani, Sicilia)."

of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.[192] The olive trees, too, are pruned to stay close to the ground, never made to grow taller than a person. Prickly pear cactus paddles are used to provide shade and protection against the wind to young plants, mostly tomatoes and eggplants. The cultivations are bordered by dry walls – *muretti a secco* – made of volcanic stones, which run through the landscape to provide added protection from the wind.[193] These, built since Roman times,[194] were built with stones reclaimed from the soil through a process of de-stoning which at once made the ground suitable for agriculture and provided building materials.[195] The technique used to make dry walls is also listed as part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.[196]

Other two typical structures spread throughout the landscape of Pantelleria are *dammusi* and *giardini panteschi*. The *dammuso* is the island's typical dwelling, mostly made of lava stones and characterised by white vaulted roofs traditionally used to collect rainwater through their connection to a cistern. Today, freshwater is mostly delivered to the island in tankers, by ships.[197] Last, *giardini panteschi* are circular constructions built with volcanic stones, opened at the top, sheltering a single citrus tree which grows inside of them.[198] The walls protect the tree from the wind, while also conveying dewfall condensation to the plant and thus allowing it to grow in absence of irrigation.[199] Sunshine and rain reach the tree from above, nourishing it; and humans pass through a small entryway to pick its fruits.[200]

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[192] "Traditional agricultural practice of cultivating the 'vite ad alberello' (head-trained bush vines) of the community of Pantelleria," UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2014, accessed March 27, 2024, https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-agricultural-practice-of-cultivating-the-vite-ad-alberello-head-trained-bush-vines-of-the-community-of-pantelleria-00720.
[193] Quave and Saitta, "Forty-five years later."
[194] Rotolo et al., "Pantelleria Island (Strait of Sicily)."
[195]Giuseppe Barbera, C. Chieco, Teodoro Georgiadis, Antonio Motisi, and Federica Rossi, "The 'Jardinu' of Pantelleria as a Paradigm of Resource-Efficient Horticulture in the Built-Up Environment," *ISHS Acta Horticulturae 1215* (2018): 351-356.
[196] "Art of dry stone walling, knowledge and techniques," UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2018, accessed March 27, 2024, https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/art-of-dry-stone-walling-knowledge-and-techniques-01393.
[197] Quave and Saitta, "Forty-five years later."
[198] Barbera et al., "The 'Jardinu' of Pantelleria."
[199] Barbera et al., "The 'Jardinu' of Pantelleria."
[200] Quave and Saitta, "Forty-five years later."

4. ~~METHODOLOGY~~: *LIMINAGRAPHY*

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis seeks to contribute to the decolonial effort within island studies by testing the epistemic practice of *liminagraphy* as a technique of knowledge cultivation to be applied within the field. Theorised by decolonial feminist thinker and poet Zuleika Bibi Sheik, *liminagraphy* foregrounds a notion of subjectivity as relational, the involvement of the body in the process of theorising, and the urgency of decolonising the senses. This research project aims at exploring the epistemic and ethical implications of approaching an island – Pantelleria – through Sheik's ~~methodology~~. This thesis asks:

- *To what extent is* liminagraphy *an epistemic practice suited to the cultivation of decolonial island knowledge?*
- *How does knowledge emerge through a practice of* liminagraphy *in Pantelleria?*
- *What writing practices are suited to cultivating knowledge through* liminagraphy*?*
- *How to face the ethical implications of this epistemic practice?*

COLONIALITY AND DECOLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE

To make knowledge decolonially, it is necessary to understand how knowledge practices can lead to the reproduction of colonial logics – and how to defy this through epistemic strategies. Decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo writes: "[w]e, and by we I mean here the human species, are all today in the colonial matrix of power. There is no outside of it […]."[201] The notion of 'decolonial matrix of power' translates the concept of "patrón de poder,"[202] formulated by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. The word 'matrix' derives from the Old French *matrice*, meaning 'uterus':[203] this "bell[y] of the world"[204] engenders a colonial system of power, in which "all of us, human beings, are being ruled, and the ruling includes of course the creators and gatekeepers of the rule: the ruler is ruled by its own desire and compulsion to rule."[205] Coloniality differs from colonisation: if political decolonisation brought virtually all former colonies to independence by the end of the 20th century, coloniality lives on

[201] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 108.
[202] Aníbal Quijano, *Cuestiones y Horizontes: De la Dependencia Histórico-Estructural a la Colonialidad/Descolonialidad del Poder* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2014), 779.
[203] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 114.
[204] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 75.
[205] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 118.

as the logic which once sustained colonialism, and now continues to structure relations between Europe and the world.[206] The colonial matrix of power is a "universe of meaning:"[207] it is a structure which governs epistemic and aesthetic registers. It rules over subjectivities – "emotioning, sensing, reasoning."[208] Coloniality is at work below the political: it operates in its substratum – it structures and sustains it. Coloniality is a Eurocentric logic, and Eurocentrism is "not a geographical issue, but an epistemic and aesthesic one (e.g. control of knowledge and subjectivities)."[209] The problem of Eurocentrism is not so much the consideration of Europe as the centre of the world but the desire to homogenise the world in its image, and the consequent de-legitimation of ways of knowing and sensing born outside of Europe. "Eurocentered knowledge asserts itself at the same time that it disqualifies the vocabulary (and logic) of other knowing praxis and knowledge belief systems:"[210] it is an "epistemic totalitarianism."[211]

Eurocentrism was – and still is, "in its extensions to Americanism and globalism"[212] – a temporal issue as much as it was spatial. If its spatial dimension consisted in the conceptualisation of Europe as the geographical region home to the only legitimate modes of knowing, its temporal dimension had to do with the notion of progress which sustained the idea of modernity. Modernity was conceived as a horizon towards which European society marched on from the Enlightenment onwards: history was a movement towards a future of progress, away from the obscurity of the past. The whole world was conceived as naturally moving towards the same horizon: "Western Europe and more recently the U.S. were the point of arrival for the rest of the planet."[213] The space that was not Europe came to be considered as belonging to the historical moment before modernity: "underdeveloped, uncivilized people"[214] had to catch up to approximate the point at which Europe had arrived. For Vázquez, modernity is "the time that rejects the past, affirms the present as the site of the real, and construes the future in the semblance of a teleology."[215]

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[206] Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21(2-3) (2007): 168-178.
[207] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 196.
[208] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 196.
[209] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 125.
[210] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 113.
[211] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 195.
[212] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 194.
[213] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 119.
[214] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 117.
[215] Rolando Vázquez, "Modernity Coloniality and Visibility: The Politics of Time," *Sociological Research Online* 14(4)7 (2009).

Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge are, for Quijano, founded on the separation between "body and nonbody."[216] This divide is rooted in the history of Christianity, which conceived the human being as made up by body and soul – with the soul being considered as privileged site of salvation. During the Enlightenment, the philosophy of René Descartes contributed to the secularization of this Christian notion, providing the conceptual pillars for an Eurocentered system of thought founded on a radical dualism. Through Descartes' philosophy, the Christian notion of the soul mutated into the secular concept of the rational subject – and the body became mere object of knowledge. The human began being thought of as unique due to his capacity to reason, located in the mind. The body was, by definition, incapable of reasoning – devoid of thought. The mind was conceived as the only possible location of subjectivity, and all else became object. That which was not rational subject – not mind – starting from the subject's body, could only be thought of – it could not think.[217] For Quijano, the Cartesian split continues to structure Eurocentric epistemes by conceiving knowledge as a relation between subject and object. This dualism is rooted in a conception of an immaterial, rational, European, white, and masculine subject as the only legitimate holder of knowledge. For this reason, it is bound to reproduce colonial logics. Historically, the subject-object paradigm "blocked […] every relation of communication, of interchange of knowledge and of modes of producing knowledge between the cultures since the paradigm implies that between 'subject' and 'object' there can be but a relation of externality."[218] Decoloniality thus implies a reconfiguration of knowledge as a relationship of a different kind: as "an intersubjective relation for the purpose of something."[219]

Decoloniality also implies a decentring of Europe in time and space – showing how the paradigms of knowledge born within it are not universal but regional, that its timeline is one among many. Vázquez writes that by listening, and experiencing time, we can "realize that the linear history of modernity, its universal chronology is continually being called into question by a history based on difference, where the present is constantly interspersed by the past."[220] To "relocate Western universals in their *local* emergence and restore them to their *local* scope,"[221] it is fundamental to "always [approach] knowing and knowledge body- and geopolitically (who, where, why, when)."[222] The epistemic foundations of coloniality are rooted in 16th century

[216] Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1(3) (2000): 554.
[217] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America."
[218] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 174.
[219] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 173.
[220] Vázquez, "Modernity Coloniality and Visibility," 5.
[221] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 205.
[222] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 205.

theology, which conceived "the eyes of God as the ultimate warranty of knowing. Secularization displaced the eyes of God for the eyes of Reason and autho-rity of the modern subject."[223] Modern knowledge is made from an immaterial and supposedly neutral location – it is, in Santiago Castro-Gómez's terms, a "zero-point"[224] epistemology. Although not explicitly relating to the coloniality of this construct, in 1988 Donna Haraway theorised Western knowledge projects as being traditionally developed through a gaze "from above, from nowhere"[225] – from the perspective of "the master, the Man, the One God."[226] Decolonial epistemology, on the other hand, is grounded in a sharp awareness of one's material location – a point which has long been argued for by feminist theorists.[227] To defy the Eurocentric conception of the White man's mind as the only location of legitimate knowledge, the body must be reconfigured as active within the process of thought through its capacity for sensing, and theory must become enfleshed.

A FEMINIST DECOLONIAL PRACTICE OF KNOWLEDGE CULTIVATION

Decoloniality, writes theorist Catherine Walsh, "does not imply the absence of coloniality but the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living […]."[228] Decoloniality is not a state which can be reached, nor an end goal: it is a practice, an effort, a path to walk on. It is thus fundamental to consider how one moves towards it. Figuring decoloniality as cracks in the colonial matrix of power, Walsh encourages to ask:

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[223] Walter D. Mignolo, "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-colonial Thinking," *Cultural Studies* 21(2-3) (2007): 162.
[224] Castro-Gómez, *Zero-Point Hubris*, 11.
[225] Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, 14(3) (1988): 589.
[226] Haraway, "Situated Knowledges": 587.
[227] In 1988, Haraway proposed the concept of 'situated knowledges' as an alternative to the disembodied gaze from above (Haraway 1988). Inspired by Black feminists such as Audre Lorde and the Combahee River Collective, in 1984 Adrienne Rich proposed the notion of a feminist politics of location to express the idea that through our bodies, we are differently situated in relation to axes of power. Acknowledging our positionalities is fundamental to reckon with simultaneous oppressions and potential privileges – and to allow us to build coalitions of struggle across difference. See Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," in H*ome Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London: Silver Press, 2017), 94-106; Adrienne Rich, "Notes toward a Politics of Location," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 210-231.
[228] Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 81.

> How do we, and can we, move within the cracks, open cracks, and extend the fissures? How can we shift our gaze to see from and through the cracks?[229]

Decolonial feminist theorist Zuleika Bibi Sheik's *liminagraphy* addresses the *how* of decoloniality, while refusing its categorization as methodology – as methodologies are conceived as complicit in the reproduction of colonial logics. Methodology "in its explorative search for certainty and stability, regulates, measures and controls our ways of being together, making […] methods anti-relational."[230] *Liminagraphy* is incompatible with the label of methodology – instead, it can be understood as an epistemic practice. If following a methodology implies relying on a code which seeks legitimacy through control, "practicing encourages 'learning from' through relation, reciprocity and accountability."[231] *Liminagraphy* refuses the grammar of legitimacy: it "has no data, no fieldwork, no triangulation nor validity."[232] There are "no research subjects nor participants, no subjects and object, no 'other', only relations which hold us accountable." Rhythm is valued over results, reminding us that "we can never know all there is to know and that is alright."[233]

Liminagraphy was developed as a simultaneous critique of the modern/colonial knowledge system and an attempt to reclaim research as a decolonial feminist practice of epistemic non-violence. As an attitude towards research and research practice, it seeks to minimise erasure, extraction, and harm in the process of making knowledge. Sheik's neologism is a compound of *limin-*, which signifies in-betweenness; *-graphy*, which means to write, carve, scratch and scrape; and *-a-* in between the two to signify plurality. The in-betweenness Sheik invokes gestures to the work of decolonial feminist Gloria Anzaldúa, and refers to the "space of transition and transformation that arises from rubbing borders."[234] Following Anzaldúa, Sheik conceives of borders not as blocking a path or dividing subjects and objects, but offering opportunities to understand difference.[235] *Liminagraphy* thus denotes "a process of growth which seeks to draw out the knowledges of the flesh by coming into deep relation"[236] while attending to the violence and silencing of coloniality.

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[229] Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 83.
[230] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 19.
[231] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 81.
[232] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 108.
[233] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 82.
[234] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 97.
[235] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).
[236] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 3.

Liminagraphy is grounded in a conceptual shift away from the idea of 'knowledge production' inscribed in the system of "academic capitalism."[237] Sheik conceives the Western university as "racialized, gendered, colonial, neoliberal."[238] Here, knowledge is produced as a commodity to be bought and sold to fuel the "academic machinery."[239] For Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, the academy reproduces the colonial status quo by accumulating instances of injustices yet not actively committing to social justice; following the interests of the nation-state in knowledge production yet claiming neutrality; accumulating capital – intellectual and financial; and absorbing or excluding different knowledge systems.[240] Academia reinscribes the codes of coloniality, reproducing them through methodologies.[241]

Moving away from conceiving our knowledge projects as processes of production allows us to work against academic capitalism. Outside the grammar of academic production, we are encouraged to think of knowledge cultivation. Political scientist Robbie Shilliam writes:

> [T]o cultivate knowledge is to till, to turn matter around and fold back on itself so as to rebind and encourage growth. Knowledge production is less a creative endeavour and more a process of accumulation and imperial extension […]. Most importantly, cultivation also infers habitation, which means that knowledge is creatively released as the practitioner enfolds her/himself in the communal matter of her/his inquiry.[242]

Conceiving the practice of research as a matter of cultivation rather than production, we begin to ground ourselves in a horizon of life-giving epistemic relations rather than in an industrial structure of the imagination. To cultivate knowledge is to think of knowledge as grown in relation, requiring reciprocity and care, rather than as a process of extraction and accumulation. Coloniality, argues Shilliam, is a "cutting logic that seeks to – but on the whole never quite manages to – segregate peoples from their lands, their pasts, their ancestors and spirits."[243] Decolonial praxis is then

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[237] Xochitl Leyva Solano, "Undoing Colonial Patriarchies: Life and Struggle Pathways," in *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning*, eds. Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza, and Olivia U. Rutazibwa (London: Routledge, 2019), 49.
[238] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 68.
[239] Solano, "Undoing Colonial Patriarchies," 49.
[240] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "R-Words: Refusing Research," *Humanizing research: decolonizing qualitative enquiry with youth and communities* (2014): 223-233.
[241] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*.
[242] Robert Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 25.
[243] Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*, 13.

the attempt to bind these back together – to recover the relations which resist under the cuts of coloniality.

The land that is evoked in Shilliam's theory is fundamental to decolonial praxis. For Sheik, "[o]ne of the most heinous crimes of colonialism was turning us against the land with whips and hoes:"[244] colonialism and slavery violently severed the relation between people and land, reconfiguring it as a system of extraction which functioned through the labour of enslaved people. Sheik follows Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's understanding that the idea of private property and the concept of the individual self were born out of cuts made according to colonial logics:[245] "in order to own pieces of the earth we need to first separate ourselves from it."[246] Thus, epistemic commitment to decoloniality must work towards the liberation of all peoples' relation with land. In Sheik's words, "[w]e need to lovingly be able to sink our fingers into the soil once more."[247]

DECOLONIAL POSITIONALITY

The notion of 'decolonial positionality' is explained by Vázquez as meaning that "all of us have a geo-historical position along the colonial difference."[248] This position "is a position that is not of our choosing, that we cannot choose as one could choose to perform an identity."[249]

> *I am white European, born in Italy and educated in universities located in the United Kingdom and The Netherlands.*

Sheik writes: "There are various inner pathways to reach the liminal space of humility and reciprocity needed to love across difference. The most accessible is through ancestry and lineage."[250]

> *I am white European, born in Italy and educated in universities in the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, and my family is working class. My grandparents on my mother's side have worked the piece of land on which their house is built for all their lives. I honour this relationship: labour, love, and land.*

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[244] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 54.
[245] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2021).
[246] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 34.
[247] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 54.
[248] Rolando Vázquez, V*istas of Modernity: Decolonial Aesthesis and the End of the Contemporary* (Amsterdam: Mondriaan Fund, 2020), 149.
[249] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 149.
[250] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 54.

It is a privilege that I could be nourished by the fruits of my grandparents' labour. It is a privilege that this relation was not severed by slavery and colonialism.

Positionality is "the basis of our knowledge claims; not merely our identities […]."[251] Sheik writes that "[r]ecognizing the ways in which we are complicit in the silencing of others and in enacting violence while under colonial logics is a necessary first step in *liminagraphy* […]."[252] To engage in a practice of *liminagraphy*, it is necessary to become aware of the colonial logics we may have internalised, and of the ways these may have rendered us complicit in the erasure of other ways of knowing and being. This process can be debilitating – it can trigger guilt and shame. Sheik challenges us to use this shock "as fertilizer"[253] to nourish our growth – intended as the coming into awareness of the pervasiveness of coloniality. This awareness is necessary to become able to think, sense, and live decolonially. *Liminagraphy* "embraces the discomfort of dismantling,"[254] as it poses unlearning as a fundamental part of research.

DECOLONISING THE SELF

If the coloniality of knowledge is founded upon a cut between knowing subject and known object,[255] *liminagraphy* calls researchers to undo this construct and recognise the primacy of relationality. Sheik's concept of 'decolonising the self', inspired by Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's project of 'decolonising the mind'[256] is a call to shed ourselves of the dominant, authoritative, singular 'I'. Conducting research within the colonial matrix of power is to inherit its epistemic foundations: to naturally conceive ourselves as subjects who produce knowledge, separate from a passive object which we analyse.

Māori theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith, author of the seminal work *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, writes that colonial knowledge is predicated upon the idea of distance: "[t]he individual can be distanced, or separated, from the physical environment, the community. Through the controls over time and space, the individual can also operate at a distance from the universe."[257] *Liminagraphy* calls us to decolonise the self by asking us to "reimagine ourselves in

[251] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 83.
[252] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 15.
[253] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 15.
[254] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 88.
[255] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality."
[256] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, (London: James Currey, 1986).
[257] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London, New York and Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, [1999] 2022), 63.

relation."[258] The research practice thus differs from Western epistemic approaches such as autoethnography, self-study, and self-reflexivity as it does not centre the experience of a subject conceived as a separate self. *Liminagraphy* asks us to recognise the logics of extraction, consumption, expropriation, and theft which are tied to the conception of researchers as separate from and superior to the objects of their study.

Writing is a way through which to channel the process of unlearning and learning otherwise: it is a way for "coming into relation across non-dominant differences."[259] The suffix *-graphy* in *liminagraphy* denotes a kind of writing which is committed to decolonizing the self by "carving-cutting out those parts that no longer serve us."[260] This process can be related to the yielding involved in Glissant's conception of understanding and giving-on-and-with.[261] The self progressively undoes itself in relation: the weave of one's identity becomes tangled with the weave of the world. Writing is a practice through which this process can be enacted – and ultimately, it "is meant to honour the relations that have helped us grow […]."[262]

ENFLESHED THEORISING

As a practice rather than a methodology, *liminagraphy* "does not carry the codes of colonialism and imperialism, but rather the traces of its violence embedded in the flesh."[263] Sheik's call for enfleshed theorising is inspired by women of colour feminists, black feminists and Indigenous authors who have a long tradition of involving the body in theory.[264] In Anzaldúa's words, a theory of the flesh "sees practice as a form of theorizing and theorizing as a form of practice."[265] Enfleshed theory "opposes the universal, rigid and cold theory of conventional or dominant social sciences, which we might call in an antagonistic tone 'without flesh' – that is, the ones that claim to be 'neutral' and 'objective'"[266] A theory of the flesh, from the flesh, defies the zero-point-hubris of colonial, Eurocentric knowledge – as a practice of thinking and writing, it presupposes the entanglement of body and mind, rather than the superiority of the

[258] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 28.
[259] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 5.
[260] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*.
[261] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.
[262] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 19.
[263] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 107.
[264] See Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back*: *Writings by Radical Women of Colour* (New York: Suny Press, 2015); Audre Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London: Silver Press, 2017); Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
[265] Anzaldúa and Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back*: Writings by Radical Women of Colour (New York: Suny Press, 2015), 181.
[266] Solano, "Undoing Colonial Patriarchies," 53.

mind over the body conceived as separate entities. The flesh is thinking matter: its ability to sense is fundamental to make knowledge.

It matters where the flesh is located: the thinking flesh is aware of its position along the colonial continuum. Through this awareness, one can confront one's privileges – "touching the enemy that we all carry inside […]."[267] To engage in an enfleshed epistemic practice is to go against the academic grammar, which demands writing aimed at objectivity – writing without flesh. The writing that Sheik calls for "does not translate well into the rigidity of academic writing, it is free, its wings unclipped, it is not aiming for abstraction or universal understanding."[268] Enfleshed theory can thus take shape in forms of expression such as poetry, storytelling, podcast, artwork, visuals, performance or installation. Knowledge made this way aims at being accessible not only to those working within the walls of academia, but also to the people who exist outside its bounds: it is anti-elitist.[269]

Poetry is particularly suited to bringing the flesh into the written word. Following Audre Lorde, Sheik thinks poetry as "the revelation or distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted […]."[270] If for Glissant poetic thought "safeguards the particular,"[271] for Sheik, poetry is the voice of the mnemonic body. Through poetry, the flesh remembers – violence and joy, the cuttings of coloniality and the necessity to reclaim relationality. Poetic thought and language safeguard the peculiarity of relation as lived and remembered through our flesh. It is the sound of the memory of relation.

In her seminal text "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," Lorde writes: "[t]he white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free."[272] Eurocentred epistemes value thinking above feeling – thinking that is devoid of flesh. *Liminagraphy*, as a decolonial feminist practice of knowledge cultivation, asks us to think through the flesh. The voice which speaks through poetry is that of the thinking flesh: through the organs – eyes, mouth, nose, skin, hearth, womb, lungs – both internal and external worlds are experienced. The body's capacity to feel must be honoured and brought to the fore of our theorising – as it is a rich source of knowledge about our relation with the world. For this reason, Sheik argues that decolonising the self cannot just be a matter of the mind: "attempting to decolonize at the level of the mind alone continuously leads to the nonsensical logics of coloniality where the Cartesian split

[267] Solano, "Undoing Colonial Patriarchies," 54.
[268] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 4-5.
[269] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*.
[270] Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London: Silver Press, 2017), 8.
[271] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 32.
[272] Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," 9-10.

between body and mind is reinforced."[273] To decolonise the self, one must decolonise the body – and this must pass through the domain of the senses.

DECOLONIAL AESTHESIS

Sheik writes:

> In order to heal from the Cartesian split, inflicted upon us through formal education and learning through erasure; to bring mind, body/flesh and spirit into harmony, […] we need to address the ways in which we have been taught how to sense.[274]

Decoloniality is as much an epistemic endeavour as it is an 'aesthesic' one. The concept of "decolonial aesthesis"[275] was introduced by Mignolo and Vázquez to name the effort to work towards decoloniality through the domain of the senses. The theorists argue that "the modern/colonial project has implied not only control of the economy, the political, and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception."[276]

Aesthetics denotes "the things perceptible by the senses in distinction from the thinkable or the immaterial."[277] In 18th century Europe, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten developed this concept – already constituted as a subject-object relation – into a sense of criticism and taste of the beautiful and the sublime, ultimately becoming a form of control over the senses.[278] This sense of aesthetics is, for Mignolo and Vázquez, colonial: it contributed to the creation of a canon of beauty which had the power to exclude and include. The regulation of beauty in art passed through the realm of aesthetics, as did the regulation of the senses themselves.

Under the hegemony of aesthetics, projected by Europe onto the parts of the world which it colonised, what came to be suppressed was 'aesthesis'. Aesthesis signifies "an unelaborated elementary awareness of stimulation"[279] – or "the vibrations of the sensorial organs."[280] Aesthesis "is not focused on the object, but on the perception of the senses."[281] As a decolonial critique and practice, it asks us to move

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[273] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 40.
[274] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 41.
[275] Mignolo and Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis."
[276] Mignolo and Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis."
[277] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 30.
[278] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*.
[279] Mignolo and Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis."
[280] Walter D. Mignolo, "Ricostruzione Epistemico-Estetica: L'Aesthesis Decoloniale un Decennio Dopo," *Echo* 1 (2019): 237. My translation.
[281] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 14.

away from an understanding of perception as perception of an object by a subject, to focus on "the relationality of reception."[282] Decolonial aesthesis "liberates the senses through re-membering and enfleshing"[283] – it is a practice which asks us to pay close attention to the ways we perceive the world through our sensorium, and to become aware of the regulations which we have internalised at the level of the body. It is a practice that is not confined to the material reality of the present: the temporality of decolonial aesthesis has "mnemonic affiliations"[284] with the past. To decolonise the senses is to liberate aesthesis – to feel the vibrations of the flesh, and through the body, remember and imagine that which has been erased by coloniality: modes of sensing and knowing the world other than Eurocentric ones. This process allows us to become aware of and thus responsible how we may have internalised the logics of coloniality within the flesh.

Sheik points us towards the notion that the work of decolonising the self and the senses is a deeply spiritual one. Spirituality, "an important means of resistance which has survived the imposition of colonialism and imperialism, is the essence of *liminagraphy*, guiding the hands, eyes, ears, lips, and nose."[285] Drawing from Aminata Cairo's *Holding Space*,[286] Sheik tells us that *liminagraphy* "requires and encourages listening, not mere hearing"[287] as an attitude towards the world. Listening "in order not to retain information or extract,"[288] but to witness, receive, and honour what we are given "is one of the seeds which cross pollinates *liminagraphy*."[289] In Black feminist writer and poet Alexis Pauline Gumbs' words, "[l]istening is not only about the normative ability to hear, it is a transformative and revolutionary resource that requires quieting down and tuning in."[290] This sort of listening can be practiced through the thinking flesh, and through the soul. Through it, we can become able to honour our encounter with what Glissant conceives as Relation – the entanglement of difference which makes up the world. Experience then can begin to escape the restriction of the colonial aesthetic order, and become a practice of presence – in Vázquez words, "an exposure towards the unexpected."[291] Decolonial aesthesis

[282] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 15.
[283] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 41.
[284] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 18.
[285] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 24.
[286] Aminata Cairo, *Holding Space: A Storytelling Approach to Tramping Diversity and Inclusion* (Amsterdam: Aminata Cairo Consultancy, 2021).
[287] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 108.
[288] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 108.
[289] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 108.
[290] Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (Chico and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2020), 15.
[291] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 26.

occurs in "the age of listening,"[292] in orientation "towards the Earth, others and time,"[293] moving towards "weaving relations in the mode of offering, in a consciousness beyond the enclosure of the subject, a consciousness of gratitude."[294]

RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

In *liminagraphy*, the ethics of research are relational, and "[w]e are allowed to falter, to make mistakes and missteps – these are the moments of unlearning which cause the most discomfort yet offer the greatest lessons."[295] As we stumble and unlearn, we allow the world to change us, learning to "be in/with ideas rather than just learning about those ideas."[296] What matters the most is to hold oneself accountable to the relationships weaved through the process of research, through humility, reciprocity, sharing, and gratitude.[297] Sheik's conception of ethics is in line with Indigenous Studies scholar Shawn Wilson's ethics of relational accountability. Wilson introduces the concept of relational accountability as part of his articulation of an Indigenous research paradigm – which has the notion of relationality at its foundation. For Wilson, knowledge is formed in relation, and thus it cannot be owned. An idea does not belong to an individual but to the system of relationships in which it is imbricated. The role of the researcher is not that of discoverer or conqueror of knowledge: instead, research as Wilson intends it requires one to "build a relationship with an idea."[298] As ideas, the researcher is also imbricated in a field of relationality, and is "inseparable from the subject of […] research."[299]

In essence, relational accountability means that "the methodology needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)."[300] As researchers, we are accountable "to ourselves, the community, our environment or cosmos as a whole, and also to the idea or topics that we are researching."[301] Accountability to ourselves entails contextualising ourselves in the field of relations in which we are situated and maintaining a sense of integrity. To do so, "[y]ou have to be true to yourself and put your own true voice in there […]."[302] For Wilson,

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[292] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 176.
[293] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 176.
[294] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 177.
[295] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 113.
[296] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 115.
[297] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*.
[298] Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 114.
[299] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 77.
[300] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 99.
[301] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 106.
[302] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 123.

> [w]riting ideas down fixes them as objects that can be taken out of context of time and relationship. As fixed objects, ideas lose the ability to grow and change, as those who hold relations with the ideas grow and change themselves.[303]

Thus, to stay close to the movement of ideas through writing, we are called to record how research may have changed us – how we have been transformed by the process. Accountability to the community means that the community in which a knowledge project is conducted must "lead its own research."[304] Topics to be researched should emerge from the community, rather than from the individual will of the researcher. And the knowledge cultivated in the process of research should return to the community: ultimately, research should benefit the people living in the place in which it is conducted. Accountability to the environment and cosmos entails recognising the ecological and spiritual dimension of the relational field in which we are immersed. Relationality is not only human: it is the system of relations which connect all life on earth. Cultivating knowledge is about "feeling a new relationship with the land, the thrill of a new understanding of the complex relationships that make up the land."[305] Recognising and honouring one's relations with the environment – with the land in which one is situated while conducting research – may allow one to connect with the spiritual dimension of relationality. Finally, accountability to the idea being researched entails thinking of research as a process of building a relationship with an idea. In this process, knowledge is cultivated:

> You build relationships with the idea in various and multiple ways, until you reach a new understanding or higher state of awareness regarding whatever it is that you are studying.[306]

Being accountable to our relations with ideas means honouring the relations which have nurtured our knowledge, and through research, work to further build relations – with ideas, communities, the environment, the cosmos, and ourselves.

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[303] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 123.
[304] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 108.
[305] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 118.
[306] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 117.

5. PANTELLERIA: A *LIMINAGRAPHY*

THE *LIMINAGRAPHY* STARTS HERE

2 February 2024
In the University library
Utrecht

The *liminagraphy* starts here, now. It started when I was reading about it, but this is the first time I make an attempt at turning thoughts into words. I make this tentative effort knowing that the text that I am typing will be a "producer of opacity."[307] For Glissant, texts work as producers of opacity as they exist between a realm of thoughts which may be understood as a transparent totality and the world of things. The words I am writing come to sit between this abstract dimension and a reader, but also between me and my thoughts.

It begins here but it has already begun. It begins with the contemplation of the possibility of visiting the island at the beginning of next month. It is now 2 February, and I could be going to Pantelleria at the beginning of March. This possibility has become more real now that Zuleika[308] has provided her advice – she wrote that I already know that I should go now. Reading her email, a chill ran through my body, my belly felt tight. This possibility, which now feels like it could actualise, scares me.

What I am doing now feels different from the writing I did before. I feel like there is no legitimacy in writing about how my body feels. But I know that the body is important to the work I aim at doing. I know that without body there is no thought. I shall begin with this body of mine, with the subjectivity which I need to start understanding as relational. What does it mean, for the 'I' from which I speak to be relational? It means that in my approach to Pantelleria I am not alone. I have had input from Zuleika, and from Lucia, who I just texted:

Ciao Lucia, come stai? Sto pensando al ritorno a Pantelleria…
Hello Lucia, how are you? I am thinking about returning to Pantelleria…

[307] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 115.
[308] Dr. Zuleika Bibi Sheik, who theorised *liminagraphy*, was to be my thesis supervisor before Dr. Theron Schmidt took over this task. At the time of writing this text, Zuleika and I were in touch to discuss how I would set up and carry out my research.

I know that I know this island very little, I know its people very little, I know its soil, its water, its wind and sun and hidden fire only a bit. The first time I went there, in April 2023, I was hosted by Lucia, who has a house on the island, but does not live there all the time. She is from a place very close to where I am from in Italy, much more north than the island, something that made me feel close to her from the start. She is a WWOOF host, meaning, she offers food and lodging in exchange for help working her land. That is how I was able to stay on the island for the first time, because I did not have enough money for a holiday, but also because that was not what I was looking for. I was led to Pantelleria in a moment of crisis, when in the heart of the Dutch winter, I felt like I had become engulfed in the academic machinery: fed theory to produce texts to be graded to gain credits to obtain a degree (to find a job to continue producing until death). I decided to take a halt, and go back to my roots: first, to my grandparents' land; then, to Pantelleria. Two weeks in the north and two weeks in the south, I worked two different lands. This thesis focuses on my embodied experience on the island – however, the love of land with which I write is grounded in the field of my grandparents, whose labour has fed me for my whole life. I am because of this land, labour, and love. It is my intent to write in a way that honours this relation. May writing bring me closer to the land rather than driving me away from it.

Robert Shilliam writes that coloniality is a logic of enclosure – a cutting logic which inflicts wounds. It is a logic which "seeks to – but on the whole never quite manages to – segregate peoples from their lands, their pasts, their ancestors and spirits."[309] Colonial governance – when it was in place – and coloniality – as an enduring logic – racially segregate: "enslaved, indentured, native, free poor and masters. None can relate sideways to each other."[310] Decolonial science seeks to repair colonial wounds by retrieving the relationality which exists below these cuttings: it binds back together.

To relate: following the Latin roots of the word, the verb means to "bring back – re-bind – that which has been rent asunder."[311] For Shilliam, this is the ethos of humanity, and the beating heart of a decolonial science. To relate "is not an imperial process of convergence that seeks to homogenize all the diverse experiences of humanity and dimensions of existence. Rather, the act of binding implicates diverse but relatable matters […]."[312] Diversity of experience is necessary to wilful relating: it must be acknowledged and respected.

[309] Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*, 13.
[310] Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*, 23.
[311] Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*, 16.
[312] Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*, 17.

As I worked outside with my grandparents and Lucia, we cultivated relations: relations between us as people, our relations with the places in which we were, the relation of the seeds and the small plants with the soil.

I am writing, and I feel different from how I felt when I wrote before, because I have already been changed by the contact with the place which I am trying to write about. When I write I feel that under my nails there once was dirt, accumulated throughout hours of pulling weeds out of the ground; my body, which now feels sickish in a way that I recognise as a response to the Dutch cold, has once been fully exposed to the elements, my clothes left on the side. My back, which now hurts as I look at the screen, was touched – as my hips, legs, neck, and all of me – by a gentle breeze as I took a shower outside. As I look at this page, I also see the hills that filled my eyes then. This writing feels different because it is grounded in a material reality which I cannot forget. I cannot write about the island without the island's memory – through the knowledge of how it touched me. I feel bursts of pleasure as I feel my body here but also elsewhere, touched by wind and water in Pantelleria.

Before I felt my stomach tighten, I stumbled and spilled the tea I was carrying.

I am sick of reading the I.

Should I be writing in third person, about other things, pretending that I am not here?

I

Attempting to change my sense of self, I write to come to understand it as open, porous, relational, always involved.

I am afraid of and I desire (I know this tightening of the stomach) the island of Pantelleria. I desire the island because it is unknown, it makes me sink into my body to think of it intensely, I want it and I am scared of it at the same time. My mouth got wet the first time I saw it from above, from the plane, I wanted to take a bite of it and make it become part of me, no longer outside, I wanted to bring it in.

The day after I came back from Pantelleria, I attended the lecture by Rolando Vázquez and artist Uzoma Orij titled "Inspirations for Decolonial Understandings and Aesthetics" in Amsterdam. Citing Taras Grescoe's book *The Lost Supper*, Vázquez

said that Coast Salish Indigenous people called the incoming colonisers "*hwunitum* – 'the hungry ones'."[313] Colonisers were 'hungry from their mouths, their eyes, and all the senses'.

I want Pantelleria as I have wanted lovers in the past, with a desire tinged by a compulsion to possess. To bite and open wide that other which is not me, to have access to that which I cannot reach with my touch. I want to know it. I want to rip the earth open and see below, that which I can sense but I can't see, that which I can feel only indirectly:

IL VULCANO
THE VOLCANO

The volcano is under everything I am writing about, it is there when I write about wind and earth and water, there is fire running in the belly of this earth. There are multiple points of contact between that hot, runny core and the surface which I can feel. Sometimes, I feel it very close, like in the cement tub filled with seawater in which I bathed last year. I think its temperature reached 50 degrees. I can never see it, but I see it all the time: the memory of the fire is everywhere. Almost everything here is lava.

The different rocks – tuff, obsidian, basalts, and more – all formed after coming up from the cracks in the earth below the sea. They came out as runny hot destructive tongues and explosions which made the island of Pantelleria.

I want to feel the core. I want to rip the land apart and melt into it. I want to relinquish my sense of identity. I want to dissolve subjectivity. I want to lose the I.

I WANT TO MELT BACK INTO THE CHAOS OF RELATION

[313] Taras Grescoe, *The Lost Supper: Searching for the Future of Food in the Flavors of the Past* (La Vergne: Greystone Books, 2023).

RICE WITH TUNA

2 March 2024

Pantelleria

I am writing outside, wearing two jumpers, it is quite cold. If I lift my eyes from the keyboard, above the screen, I see layers of land, sky, and sea. The horizon is blurry, one fuses into the other under low clouds. In the plot of land below the house there is a man who has been working since I got up at 9 AM. He was already there when I came outside. His back is bent. I have been looking at him now and again. Maybe he is looking back at me.

His figure clad in blue comes and goes behind the olive trees. Bent, he faces the land. That is the position I also took when I was here in April last year. Then I was here to work, now I am here to write.

I realise that there is the possibility that all which I will be writing will eventually be lost. I have no access to the internet to save these texts in a cloud and I did not bring a USB stick. I will write anyway, not to compose a final assignment, but for the act of writing itself. Always comprehending the possibility that these words could disappear.

The labour I did here last year changed me, it brought back together pieces of me. Not to give up body and soul in service of the mind must be a lifelong act. This is why I am back, although I am now trying to keep things together through writing rather than working. My hands are clean, I have no soil under my fingernails, no blisters on my palms. But I remember them.

If I try to write with what is around and inside me, maybe I can come back to earth.

I am writing outside, although my hands are cold, trying to accept that my words could be lost, because even if they do, I will still have been changed by the process of writing – writing outside, with the man clad in blue, with the smell of smoke and sweat, which reminds me of when I used to go the mountains with my father as a child. They are burning something, maybe dry grass. I remember Lucia doing it last year, I remember when they did it in the mountain pastures, so that the grass would grow strong again.

Smell – listen. Today, Alexis Pauline Gumbs has told me to quiet down, and tune in.[314] Let the body become a drum, into which sounds can refract and reveal themselves. I have been hearing the sound of the plastic cover on top of the *cannizzo*[315] slamming all night long. It scared me. It is the wind, slipping underneath the plastic cover, lifting it up, and then letting it fall. The glass windows outside are creaking, that is also the wind.

When the wind has quietened, I stop typing and listen. I hear a rooster and birds. It is quiet, no human sounds. I am alone. This silence has been very loud. Last night when it was dark and I could see almost nothing, there was nothing but the sound of the plastic cover slamming on top of the roof outside.

Then, there was water boiling, as I started cooking rice. After the trip, my stomach ached with hunger, so I made rice with tuna. That was the meal I had every Friday between the age of six and eleven, when school finished early and I went to my grandparents' house. We would eat rice with tuna because on Fridays my grandma would clean the house, and my grandad would cook what he could. I remember windows open, a breeze like the one which now blows on my face, my grandma hitting the rugs with a carpet beater and the marble floors layered with wax. Then we had rice with tuna. Yesterday, too, was a Friday, and I made myself that meal. On Catholic Fridays you shall not eat meat, it is the day when Jesus died.

[314] Gumbs, *Undrowned*. Zuleika Bibi Sheik suggested that I would bring Gumbs' book to Pantelleria and consult it as a guide to my daily practice of presence on the island.
[315] The *cannizzo* is a covering made of canes, laid on top of the outdoor pergola in the *dammusi* of Pantelleria.

EROTICO PANTESCO[316]
DESIRE LIVES HERE
9 March 2024

It starts with you
Ophrys scolopax Cav. subsp. *Apiformis*[317]

the orchid which looks like a bee
like “the erotic organs of the avid female bee hungry for copulation”[318]

I met you through Haraway,[319]

[316] Betsy Wings, translator of Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*, writes that “[t]he stumbling blocks of a translation frequently exist at its most productive points” (Glissant 1997, xi). Composing this *liminagraphy*, I have struggled to find a satisfying translation for the word *pantesco/a*. *Pantesco/a* is that which is of Pantelleria: islanders are called *panteschi*, the typical salad is called *insalata pantesca*, the typical dessert *bacio pantesco*. I have decided to leave this term untranslated. Here, I use it to refer to an eroticism which I come to understand as endemic to the island.

[317] This orchid is among the narrow endemic species of Pantelleria, meaning that they are rare, found in small numbers in few areas of the island (Minissale et al., 2023).

[318] The orchid mimics the looks of the genitals of the female bee, and its pheromones. The male bee looking to copulate is attracted to the insect-like features of the flowers, and moving from flower to flower, it spreads the pollen of the plants – and so, the orchid continues to reproduce (Haraway 2016, 69).

[319] In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway mentions the bee orchid in relation to Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers’ paper “Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters.” Here, they argue against the neo-Darwinian economy of the burgeoning field of chemical ecology, which explains interspecies ecologies such as those of the bee and the orchid as “the blind effects of random genetic variation” (Hustak and Myers 2012, 76). Instead, Hustak and Myers propose an alternative reading of this relationship – as an instance in “an ecology of interspecies intimacies” (Hustak and Myers 2012,106).

Deleuze and Guattari[320]

as concept

now I see you
in Pantelleria

the bee orchid is nonhuman sex
“everywhere there is libido as machine energy”[321]

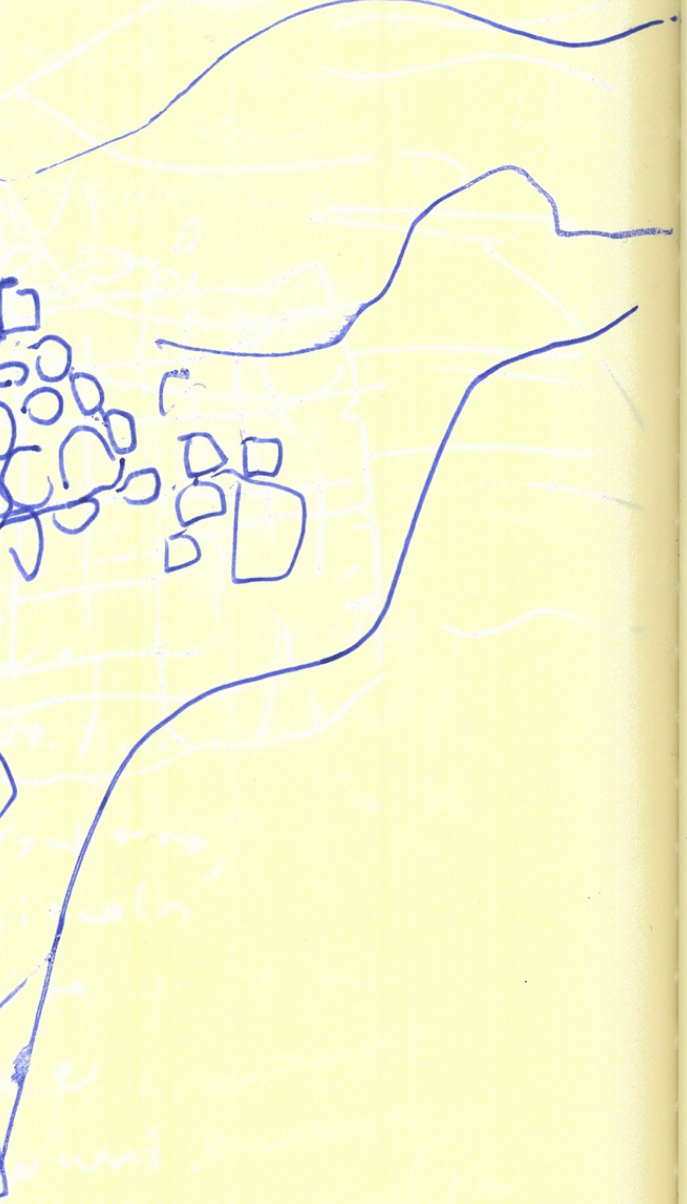
does the flower have an image of itself?
where does it see itself reflected?

in the desire of the bee which tries to make love with it

the flower remembers the bee’s desire

[320] In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari mention the bee orchid as an instance of material conjunction through which desire – which they figure as the driving force of the incessant becoming of the world – flows. The bee orchid is “nonhuman sex” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994 [1972], 295).

[321] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 232.



the earth
represents
itself for itself

the flower
performs for the bee
to keep blooming

this erotic performance
is not for my eyes
not for my sex

maybe desire is dying
these plants are rare

here they are
growing in moss
kissed by sunbeams

here, desire lives
nonhuman sex
is no longer a concept
it takes shape
matter, again

I desire you
I want to own you
to dig my fingers in the soil and scrape your bulb out of the ground
uproot you
plant you in my garden
look at you every day[322]

[322] Attuned to my sensing flesh, I feel myself desiring the bee orchid. Eve Tuck proposes a "desire-based research framework" (Tuck 2010, 638) as an alternative to damage-centred research, which focuses on pain and damage to advocate for improvement in the lives of people and communities – especially Indigenous ones. Tuck's theorisation of "a framework of desire" (Tuck 2010, 638) is informed by Deleuze and Guattari's notion of it desire as the fundamental force which leads to the creation of the world. The philosophers' understanding of the workings of this process as proceeding through interruptions and leading to unpredictable results is, for Tuck, a profound epistemological shift which she takes on in her conceptualisation of desire-based research. The epistemology of desire is one that "makes room for the unanticipated, the uninvited, the uncharted, the unintended" (Tuck 2010, 641).

However, Tuck's notion of desire does not fully adhere to that of the French theorists. Deleuze and Guattari situate desire in the unconscious – more precisely, they understand the unconscious as "a mechanism of desire" (Deleuze 2004, 232). The unconscious is "desire that flows, interrupts, begins flowing again" (Deleuze 2004, 232). Opposing psychoanalysis' attempt at interpreting the unconscious and its consequent pathologising of desire through an Oedipal framework, they argue that the system of the unconscious –

desire in motion – is “perfectly meaningless” (Deleuze 2004, 232). Deleuze and Guttari’s desire is meaningless and is unaware of itself. For Tuck, this is not the case: desire is not unaware – it is smart.

For Tuck, desire constitutes expertise. Drawing (also) from her Indigenous knowledge system, she argues that desire “accrues wisdom in assemblage, and does so over generations” (Tuck 2010, 644): desire learns and remembers. It can “teach itself, craft itself, inform itself” (Tuck 2010, 645). Desire changes by “picking up flashes of self-understanding and world-understanding along the way of life” (Tuck 2010, 645). The temporality of desire is connected to the past – as it is informed by what was – and to the future – as it leads us towards that which not yet is. Desire “is time-warping” (Tuck and Yang 2014, 231): its logics is “asynchronous just as it is distemporal” (Tuck and Yang 2014, 231).

you seem happy here
in your bed of moss
looking at Venus’ lake
drinking morning dew

you shall stay here
every bulb

if we all took one of you
thirty people coming would make you disappear

desire lost
no more sex

I touch you like I would touch a baby's head
I do not tell that I have seen you
I let you be

may the bees keep making love with you
may you bloom again next year[323]

[323] A desire-based framework fosters an epistemology of erotic attunement: knowledge emerges, often unexpectedly, from the feeling of how the world rubs into bodies. Attuned to my desire, I feel my desire to possess the bee orchid. My body remembers the feeling of wanting to control the other: the colonial desire to digest. Desire "is haunted" (Tuck and Yang 2014, 235): I am haunted by coloniality. My desire remembers – and it learns. I know that this desire has led to the annihilation of life: therefore, I do not give in to it. I let the bee orchid be, and I walk away.

SALVATORE

3rd March 2024

Oggi il vento soffia selvaggio, mi entra negli occhi e nel naso e mi lascia lacrimante sotto il sole, sulla strada in discesa che mi conduce alla cantina di Salvatore.

Today the wind blows wild, it gets into my eyes and nose and it leaves me tearful in the sun, on the downhill road which leads to Salvatore's winery.

Scrivo in italiano nonostante sappia che questo poi mi procurerà un'ulteriore fatica, quella della traduzione, e allora il mio tentativo sarà quello di rendere questo testo meno opaco, più trasparente, ma già so che l'opacità rimarrà intrinseca al testo.

I write in Italian even thought I know that this will cost me another effort, that of translation, and then my attempt will be that of rendering this text less opaque, but I already know that opacity will remain.[324]

[324] Relation "is spoken multilingually" (Glissant 1997, 19): thus, a poetics of Relation is "multilingual in intention" (Glissant 1997, 32). I wrote this *liminagraphy* both in Italian and in English. To show the bilingual nature of my thought, I chose to include the Italian texts in this document. Through the act of translating my own words, I have engaged in an attempt to "give 'some transparency' back to a text" (Glissant 1997, 116) which is, nonetheless, always a producer of opacity. I cannot know what Salvatore meant exactly, and you may not know what my Italian words mean. You may understand the English translation, but the words on these pages do not represent perfectly neither Salvatore's nor my thoughts.

La notte scorsa ho dormito come nella pancia di un animale. Quando mi sveglio mi chiama Lucia, dice telefona a Salvatore, vignaiuolo pantesco che fa il passito. Mi dice vediamoci tra un'ora alla cantina.

Last night I slept as if inside an animal's belly. When I wake up, Lucia calls me and tells me to call her friend Salvatore. The *pantesco* winemaker makes *passito*.[325] He says he can see me in an hour.

[325] *Passito* belongs to the local tradition of Pantelleria. It is made from *zibibbo* grapes – Muscat of Alessandria – grown low to the ground as *viti ad alberello* and left to dry in the sun for about four weeks. The dry grapes are then pressed to make the sweet, aromatic wine (Mencarelli and Tonutti 2013).

Quando arrivo all'entrata della cantina, vengo accolta da due cani. Li avevo già visti l'anno scorso, mi avevano spaventata. Ora pure, mi spaventano, abbaiano ed uno esce fino alla soglia, vuole mandarmi via. Chiamo Salvatore e lui mi dice che Ursula vuole solo una carezza.

When I get to the entrance of the winery, two dogs come out to greet me. I had seen them last year and they had scared me. They scare me now, they bark, and one comes outside, it wants to send me away. I call Salvatore and he tells me that Ursula only wants to be caressed.

Devo fidarmi: per arrivare all'umano devo affrontare il cane. Cammino, con la paura nella pancia, ma il cane non mi morde, si acquieta, e mi segue fino alla cantina. Trovo Salvatore intento a curare una cassetta di carciofi. Per tutto il

I must trust: to get to the human, I have to face the dog. I walk on, with fear in my stomach, but the dog does not bite me, she quietens down and follows me into the cellar. I find Salvatore busy cleaning artichokes. For the whole time of our

tempo della nostra conversazione non smetterà mai di fare questo, carciofo dopo carciofo, tre cassette saranno pulite.

conversation, he never stops doing this, artichoke after artichoke, three boxes will be cleaned.

Non registro nulla, non prendo note: cerco di solo di ascoltare, di essere pienamente presente e ricettiva. Poi, sola, scrivo. Questo farò con ognuna delle persone che incontrerò a Pantelleria.

I do not use a recorder, I do not take notes: I only try to listen, to be fully present and receptive. Then, alone, I write. This is what I will do with every person who I will talk to in Pantelleria.[326]

[326] In *Research is Ceremony*, Wilson writes that in an Indigenous research paradigm, "interviewing or questioning […] cannot really take place without this level of deep listening that leads to meaningful exchanges. It's a matter of forming a relationship that goes beyond the informant-researcher duality to becoming co-learners" (Wilson 2008, 113). Thinking knowledge as emergent through relations which need to be nourished rather than as produced through rigid exchanges between researcher and researched affords flexibility regarding research tools. In certain settings, using recorders or even taking notes can be "obtrusive and invasive" (Wilson 2008, 113). Deep listening is a valid alternative to tools which allow the recording of information in real time: it allows for the inscription of knowledge in memory and flesh. Conversation in which the listening researcher is open and receptive "helps build relationships" (Wilson 2008, 113) – which should be the ultimate aim of research.

Salvatore mi chiede se i miei hanno terra, gli parlo dei nonni. Dice che vivere di terra a Pantelleria è non tanto una questione di amore ma di sapienza e di perizia, di dedizione, e di necessità. Che pochi ancora, quasi nessuno, al giorno d'oggi sono in grado di fare questo lavoro, che significa prendere alla terra quello che ci serve per continuare a campare. La natura, la terra, non regala niente, tutto glielo si deve strappare. Allora le sua mani si levano dai carciofi per un attimo, e mima questo, il gesto di strappare con le mani, con le dita come artigli.

Salvatore asks me if my family has land, I tell him about my grandparents. He tells me that living off the land in Pantelleria is not so much a matter of love but of wisdom, expertise, dedication, and necessity. Today, not many can do this job, taking from the earth what they need to live. Nature, the earth, does not gift anything but everything must be taken from it. His hands leave the artichokes for a moment to mime this gesture of grabbing, his fingers like claws.[327]

[327] The gesture which Salvatore uses to illustrate how humans must relate to the earth in Pantelleria to live off of it is the same gesture which Glissant describes when explaining the meaning of *comprendre*: "a movement of hands that grab their surroundings and bring them back to themselves" (Glissant 1997, 192). Glissant is critical of this manner of relating to the world and encourages instead a more generous attitude through the concept of giving-on-and-with. However, the philosopher is concerned with humans' intellectual attitude to the world, while Salvatore is referring to the material practices of cultivating the land of Pantelleria. I think of my grandfather telling me about planting seeds in the field one by one, his back bent when he was a child: he told me Sara, it was hard. Relating to the land through agricultural practices must be conceived as an aesthesic pursuit, but it must not be romanticised. To live off the land, cultivating the food one needs to live, is a pursuit which requires hard work. I come to understand Salvatore's gesture as related to the difficulty of cultivating this land, rather than to an extractivist attitude towards the earth. His words are infused with respect for the land which provides him with the nourishment he needs to live.

Dice che per lungo tempo coloro che coltivano la terra sono stati ghettizzati, ma tu stai parlando con un principe, Sara. Salvatore dice di essere fiero come u sceccu*, l'asino di Pantelleria, con le orecchie a punta e le gambe lunghe.*

For a long time, people who worked the land have been marginalised, but he tells me that he is a prince. He is as proud as *u sceccu*, the donkey of Pantelleria, with long legs and pointy ears.

Pantelleria non è mai stata in grado di soddisfare una grande domanda per il mercato, ma bisogna produrre non per il profitto ma per il gusto, che a Pantelleria è unico e speciale. I pesciolini nel mare, i carciofi, i capperi, il pomodoro, la patata, l'uva passa, profumano e hanno sapore che questi non hanno in nessun altro luogo.

Pantelleria was never able to satisfy a great market demand. The island must be cultivated not for profit, but for taste, which here is special and unique. Here, fish, artichokes, capers, tomatoes, potatoes, raisins smell and taste like nowhere in the world.

Le generazioni che verranno avranno tre compiti, dice, quello di desalinizzare l'acqua per le coltivazioni, e di rimetterla nel lago di Venere in modo da continuare ad avere il lago, e quello di non barare: invece di prendere i pomodori siciliani, i pomodori dovranno essere coltivati a Pantelleria.

The generations that will come will have three tasks: to desalinise water for cultivation, to put it back into Venus' lake so it keeps existing, and to not cheat. Instead of buying Sicilian tomatoes, tomatoes will have to be cultivated in Pantelleria.

Se Pantelleria avesse una sorgente d'acqua, sarebbe un continente a sé.

Perché il gusto delle cose è così speciale, chiedo. Le poche piogge, il terreno vulcanico, e lo zibibbo, il cui profumo impregna tutto. Anche l'umano, se gli si tagliano le vene, sgocciola sangue che sa l'odore dell'uva.

Salvatore si alza e mi porta una scatola piena di uva passa – con questa si fa il passito. Uve grosse, scure, acini rugosi ancora attaccati ai raspi. Mi dice assaggia, questa è Pantelleria. Taglio con i denti la buccia spessa ma non dura, e dentro una consistenza morbida, liscia, che mi accarezza la lingua. La dolcezza di quest'uva mi esplode in bocca piano, ogni chicco ha dentro tre semi, che mastico, che nella loro durezza e amarezza esaltano tutto quello che sta intorno a loro, la polpa.

If Pantelleria had a spring, it would be a continent of its own.

I ask why the taste of things is so special. Scarce rain, volcanic soil, and *zibibbo*, the smell of which impregnates everything. Even the human, if his veins were cut, would bleed blood that smells of grapes.

He gets up and brings me a box full of dry grapes, with which *passito* is made. Big grapes, dark, still attached to the stalks. He tells me taste, this is Pantelleria. I cut the thick skin with my teeth, the flesh inside is soft on my tongue. Sweetness bursts into my mouth gently, every grape contains tree seeds, I chew them, their hardness and bitterness exalt the flesh around them.

Ora le parole sembrano superflue, guardo le mani di Salvatore muoversi veloci sui carciofi. La cagna che mi faceva tanta paura, si è seduta accanto a me e mi ha posato il muso sulla coscia, la accarezzo. Mi lecca la mano piano, e la vicinanza ai suoi denti non mi disturba più.

Words seem superfluous now; I look at Salvatore's hands moving fast on the artichokes. The dog which scared me has sat next to me and has put her head on my thigh, I pet her. She licks my hand, and the closeness of her teeth does not scare me anymore.

Vuoi assaggiare un carciofo? Sì.

Do you want to taste an artichoke? Yes.

Bollito e senza sale, è tenero come il burro. Il sale non serve, perché l'aria del mare, condisce tutto.

Boiled without salt, it is tender as butter. There is no need for salt because the sea air seasons everything.

Il mare è da sempre vissuto con diffidenza, solo pochi hanno saputo coltivare un buon rapporto con il mare. Ma con il mare non ci si da mai del tu – il rapporto col mare va sempre vissuto con deferenza. Il mare è visto così perché ha sempre portato disgrazie, le scorrerie dei pirati in primis, e perché è sempre in tempesta, ci si abbatte sempre contro di rovescio.

The relation with the sea has always been lived with diffidence, few have been able to cultivate a good relationship with it. But the sea must never be treated with too much confidence, always with deference. It is like this because the sea has always brought disgraces, first of them the incursions of pirates, and because it is

always rough, it always crashes against the island on the wrong side.

Ma il mare è anche una gran ricchezza, al di là del mare ci sta l'Africa, così vicina eppure così sconosciuta, di essa non conosciamo nulla, ne percepiamo solo i confini. Ma da lì è arrivato l'uomo a Pantelleria, e da lì arriverà forse l'umano nel futuro, flussi migratori nuovi. Poco si sa dei Sesioti perché non lasciarono nulla di scritto e allora 'bisogna leggere la pietra'.

The sea is also a great richness, on the other side of it there is Africa, so close yet so unknown, we only feel its borders. From there, humans came to Pantelleria, and from there people will come. Not much is known about the Sesioti, because they left nothing in writing. Then we must read the stone.

Chiedo del vulcano. Salvatore mi dice che tutto è vulcano, tutto quello di cui abbiamo parlato fino ad ora.

I ask about the volcano. He tells me that everything is volcano – all that which we have talked about until now.

La terra vulcanica, per lui, non è terra ma 'lapilli diventati commestibili'. L'uva passa che mi sta davanti, in questa cassetta piena, potrebbe essere fatta di lapilli, di quelle piccole pietre vulcaniche

Volcanic soil, for him, is not soil but 'lapilli which have become edible'. The dry grapes in front of me could be lapilli, the small volcanic rocks which once burst out of the mouth of the volcano.

che un giorno schizzarono fuori dalla bocca del vulcano.

Dalla credenza in casa prende una bottiglia, il suo passito, annata 1983. È il vino dedicato a sua madre. Sull'etichetta dietro c'è una poesia, scritta da lui: mi dice, metti in bocca un chicco d'uva passa e leggi.

Salvatore takes a bottle of his *passito* from the cupboard, year 1983. It's dedicated to his mother. On the label there is a poem he wrote: he tells me to eat a grape and read it.

“Inno alla vita”
Sono molteplici le trasformazioni
delle uve zibibbo.
Riteniamo comunque,
essere il contributo all’esaltazione
massima,
la produzione dello “nghïleppo”.
Questo vino racchiude in se,
facendo sprigionare all’olfatto e al gusto,
il sapore dei vulcani,
le acque degli Dei,
per poter raggiungere l’infinito.
Non può esser che, il nettare di un Dio
che, conosce le esatte mescolanze e fa
sentire agli uomini,
quello che la mente non può riuscire a
pensare.
Distribuisce piacere,
fa misurare la propria profondità.
Dedicato a mia madre

“Hymn to life”
Multiple are the transformations
of the zibibbo grapes.
We consider anyway,
to be contribution to the maximum
exaltation,
the production of the “nghïleppo”.
This wine contains within it,
releasing to smell and taste,
the taste of volcanoes,
the waters of the Gods,
to reach the infinite.
Can’t it be that the nectar of a God
who, knows the exact mixtures and
makes it felt to man,
that which the mind cannot think.
Distributes pleasure,
makes one measure its depth.
Dedicated to my mother[328]

[328] “Creato,” Vini Murana, 2024, accessed July 31, 2024, https://vinimurana.it/prodotto/creato/. My translation.

UNTITLED I

4 March 2024

Ieri mi sono alzata prima dell'alba, il sole si è alzato ed ha inondato la costa di luce dorata.

Yesterday I woke up before dawn, the sun rose and bathed the coast in golden light.

Le schiene che vedo piegate nei campi che circondano il dammuso in cui sono alloggiata sono schiene di anziani.

The backs that I see bent in the fields that surround the *dammuso* where I stay[329] are the backs of old people.

Mentre scendo verso Tracino, incontro una signora. Mi chiede se sono una turista. Non sono qui in vacanza, ma non sono Pantesca. Dico di sì. Non dico di essere una ricercatrice.

While I walk down towards Tracino, I meet a woman. She greets me and asks me if I am a tourist. I am not here on holiday, but I am not from the island either. I say yes. I do not say I am a researcher.[330]

[329] During my time in Pantelleria, I stay in the *dammuso* of one of Lucia's friends.

[330] This encounter was not part of a research plan. When we met, I did not feel like it was appropriate or relevant to disclose that I was on the island to conduct research. I cannot know how what this person told me would have changed if she had known that I was conducting a research project. This moment opens a space for further questioning the ethics of research within *liminagraphy*. In hindsight, I realise that I would have been

more honest – and thus more accountable to both myself and to the person I met – if I told her about the purpose of my visit to the island. Following Sheik's idea that in *liminagraphy* "[w]e are allowed to falter, to make mistakes and missteps – these are the moments of unlearning which cause the most discomfort yet offer the greatest lessons" (Sheik 2021,113), I seek to affirmatively engage with this stumbling block. The ethics of *liminagraphy* are in line with Wilson's articulation of relational accountability, which does not provide rigid guidelines but instead conceives of ethical moments which emerge in relation through the process of doing research (Wilson 2008). To be accountable to relationships formed through research is the most important thing in the paradigms proposed by both Sheik and Wilson. I cannot change what has been – but I can act now so to be accountable to the relation which I formed with this person. This attempt takes the shape of an instance of refusal: I refuse to include in this document parts of what I was told. Tuck and Yang theorise refusal as a productive practice of research, one which illuminates the nature of the setter colonial knowledge system of the academy (Tuck and Yang 2014). This is a knowledge system which wants to know – to conquer – all there is: it aims at what Glissant names transparency (Glissant 1997). To grant the world a right to opacity, researchers and researched alike can practice refusal: refuse to feed all

knowledge to the academy – attempting to "place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred, and what can't be known" (Tuck and Yang 2014, 115). In this instance, I seek to retroactively practice an ethics of research which is in line with Wilson's relational accountability by refusing to write some of the things which were revealed to me.

Le chiedo – lei è Pantesca? Lei dice, sì, no, sono rumena, ma sono qui da tanti anni. Mi racconta di essere venuta sull'isola più di quindici anni fa con il marito, ora hanno una figlia nata qui. Lui lavora nei campi, e lei fa le pulizie.

I ask her if she is *Pantesca*, she says yes, no, I am Romanian, but here for many years. She came to the island fifteen years ago with her husband, they have a daughter who was born here. He works in the fields, and she cleans.

La comunità rumena sull'isola è consistente, circa cinquecento persone che sono venute qui per lavorare.

The Romanian community on the island is consistent – around five hundred people who came here to work.

Scendiamo insieme verso la fermata, se non ci fosse lei che mi guida sarei rimasta ad aspettare invano nel posto sbagliato. Ci sediamo vicine.

She guides me to the bus stop, if she was not with me I would have gone to the wrong place. We sit next to each other.

Mi parla di maternità, di sua figlia, della scuola, di quanto la vita qui costi molto perché tutto deve essere importato, il cibo costa tanto, le verdure più di tutto.

She talks to me about motherhood, her daughter, the cost of life which here is high because here everything has to be imported, food is expensive, vegetables above all else.

Mio marito è nei campi tutto il giorno, deve portare a casa i soldi per mangiare, per l'affitto, e mia figlia l'ho cresciuta io. Tutto cambia quando si diventa madre, cambia il corpo e cambiano le priorità.

Her husband is in the fields all day to bring home money to eat and pay rent: she raised her daughter herself. Everything changes when you become a mother, priorities and body.

Penso alla bellezza ed alla gioventù, al potere che mi conferiscono. Come cambierà il mio corpo se farò un figlio?

I think of youth and beauty, of the power these give me. How will my body change if I will have a child?

Scendo al capolinea, davanti alla chiesa.

I get down at the last stop, in front of the church.

Ho un'ora prima dell'appuntamento che ho con l'artista Filippo Panseca al bar in piazza, allora entro in chiesa.

I have an hour before meeting artist Filippo Panseca[331] in the café on the other side of the square. I go into the church.

[331] Filippo Panseca was born on 5 March 1940 in Palermo. Since 1970, he has been concerned with 'aesthetic pollution'. His artistic research has led him to biodegradable art, and he used photo-sensible plastics (among other materials) to create ephemeral artworks. In 1979, he began working with computers, making him one of the fathers of computer art. Between

1978 and 1991, he curated the image and congress scenography of the Italian Socialist Party. Since 2010, he has been creating biodynamic photocatalytic artworks. Covered in titanium dioxide, his artworks now decompose harmful chemical compounds through photocatalysis (Panseca 2022).

Le signore iniziano ad entrare: ecco le donne.

Ladies start coming in: here are the women.

Entra un sacerdote, e mi rendo conto che la messa sta per iniziare. Non sono religiosa, ma sono cresciuta in una famiglia cattolica. Adesso trovo conforto nello stare in chiesa, a volte cerco la sua pace.

A priest comes in and I realise the mass is about to start. I am not religious, but I was raised Catholic. Now I find comfort being in a church, sometimes I search its peace.

Rimango. L'odore dell'incenso e la luce delle candele mi riportano alla chiesa del paese in cui sono cresciuta. Canto insieme a queste donne pantesche che sembrano conoscersi tutte. Le voci loro mi entrano dentro e vibriamo insieme.

I stay. The smell of incense and the light of the candles brings me back to the church of the village where I was raised. I sing with these *pantesche* women who all seem to know one another. Their voices get inside me and we vibrate together.

Filippo da bambino decise di fare
l'artista, per sempre colpito dalla scritta
sul Teatro Massimo a Palermo:
L'arte rinnova i popoli e ne rivela la vita.

Filippo chose to be an artist when he
was a child, forever struck by the writing
on the Teatro Massimo in Palermo:
Art renews peoples and reveals their life.

Mi dice
Che Pantelleria è sempre stata
conquistata
che non ci sono più finestre sul mare nei
dammusi antichi
che l'invasore veniva dall'acqua e
vedeva le luci alle finestre, lì andava a
violentare

He tells me
That Pantelleria was always conquered
that there are no windows facing the sea
in the old *dammusi*
because the invaders came from the
water and saw lights from the windows,
they went there and raped

Pantelleria e Malta
le gemelle del mediterraneo

Pantelleria and Malta
the twins of the Mediterranean

Unite dalle stesse invasioni

United by the same invasions

Ora i panteschi portano dentro questo
timore
che chi viene sull'isola da fuori
venga per prendere e per sfruttare

Now the *panteschi* carry this fear inside
that who comes from outside
comes to take and exploit

Davanti alla sua casa c'è un sese
luogo di riposo eterno degli umani che
qui giunsero per primi

In front of his house there is a *sese*
place of eternal rest of the humans who
first came to the island

Prima c'era vento e vulcano

Before there was volcano and wind

il vento è il respiro dell'isola
il vulcano rende tutto vivo

the wind is the breath of the island
the volcano makes everything alive

prendiamo i ritmi dell'isola

we follow the island's rhythms

Mangiamo patate bollite intere, pomodori
(fuori stagione), capperi, olive, cipolla e
formaggio pecorino
insalata pantesca

We eat potatoes boiled whole, tomatoes
(out of season), capers, olives, onions,
pecorino cheese
insalata pantesca

In campagna ormai non ci sta quasi più
nessuno

Almost no one works the land anymore

Sono dei vecchi quelle schiene che vedo
nei campi chine

The backs I see bent in the fields are
those of old people

Tanti giovani vivono di turismo
vendono le case dei nonni agl'invasori

Many young people live of tourism
they sell their grandparents' houses to
invaders

Mangiamo, poi facciamo l'amore

We eat, then we make love[332]

[332] Potatoes, tomatoes, olives, capers, onions and cheese. He cooks for me, and I feel at home. I taste something familiar in his gestures, in the care with which he encourages me to eat. He touches my cheek, I shed a tear.

Desire lives in the unconscious (Deleuze and Guattari [1972] 1994).

Desire is smart (Tuck 2010).

The erotic moment is an ethical moment. Desire feels itself – I feel my desire through my body. Desire lives in the body.

Yes.

We make love.

"There seems to be a kind of unwritten, unspoken, and, for the most part, unquestioned rule about the ethics of sex in the field […]. That rule can be summarized in one word: *Don't*" (Kulick and Willson 1995, 10).

The researcher's erotic subjectivity remains a taboo in contemporary academia (De Graeve and De Craene 2019). Institutional research ethics "tend to start from the illusion that doing research without affecting or being affected […] is necessary and possible, and/or that harm can be avoided by adhering to a simple set of universal

guidelines" (De Graeve and De Craene 2019, 9).

Practicing an ethics of relational accountability requires us to take responsibility for our positionality.

I am 29, Filippo is 84. He is a man, I am a woman. We are both white. I am on the island to cultivate knowledge about it, he lives here.

"Acknowledgement of sexual subjectivity should not be misread as a license for an unbridled, honorless exploitation of the Other […]" (Wekkers 2006, 4). Each of our yeses is loud.

To plunge into the ecology of relations in which we are imbricated entails recognising the erotic dimension of this field.

Desire drives the becoming of the world.

My body is open, plugged into the field of relation. I feel its erotic charge.
The body responds: desire is agentive.
Desire is self-reflective: it is wise.
My yes is informed by the past – by other loud yeses,
and by yeses that should have been nos.

Liminagraphy, as a deeply embodied research practice, requires deeply embodied research ethics.

"[F]ully embracing the embodied presence of the researcher also includes the acknowledgement of the *sexual* body of the researcher" (De Graeve and De Craene 2019, 8).

The erotic charge of the relational field cannot be escaped: we must critically relate to it.

A research vision which understands knowledge as emergent in embodied relation – as implied by *liminagraphy* – requires "relational, affective ethics" (De Graeve and De Craene 2019, 12) which entail "a critical disposition both theoretically and in terms of everyday (research) practice, centralising embodied accountability and/or fully acknowledging the consequences of actions within relationships of shifting and varying power asymmetry" (De Graeve and De Craene 2019, 12).

In the erotic encounter, the boundaries between self and other blur: bodies and subjectivities momentarily melt into one another. The other touches the self: 'self' and 'other' lose meaning for a moment.

The most intimate encounter with the relational field is erotic. To wilfully participate in the eroticism of the relational ecology in which we are immersed is to consciously let

the world come inside of us. This process is enacted and perceived through the senses.

The most intimate encounters are the most delicate: touching and being touched can hurt. An epistemology of erotic attunement must involve a practice of relational accountability. Erotic moments are ethical moments.

Erotic encounters generate knowledge. Momentarily touching the other inside, while maintaining critical attention to where we are located in relation to power, allows for the emergence of deep insights about the world. Erotic moments are potentially fertile grounds for the cultivation of knowledge.

Arte e potere	Art and power
Sesso e gioventù	Sex and youth
Bellezza effimera	Ephemeral beauty
Non siamo padroni del tempo ma il tempo è padrone di noi	We are not the masters of time, time is our master
Il mattino dopo mi sveglio a casa mie ed è mancata la corrente	The morning after I wake up in my house and electricity is gone
Il vento ha sconvolto il flusso di energia	The wind disrupted the energy flux

Metto una pietra sopra la cerata del tavolo fuori, così non vola

I put a stone on top of the tablecloth outside, so it does not fly away

Vento e pietra
Sono complementari
Uno solleva e l'altro ancora
Come quegli ulivi i cui rami sono tenuti a terra da dei contrappesi

Wind and stone
They are complementary
One lifts and the other anchors
Like those olive trees' branches held to the ground by rocks and ropes

Questa terra è aspra
Aspre sono le scogliere
La roccia nuda
Il vento che raramente si quieta

Tanto aspra quanto dolce

Di zibibbo, di passito,
Di pasta di mandorle,
Di fichi

Il profilo di una donna attraversa i coni
degli antichi vulcani
Distesa
Guarda il cielo

This land is sour
Sour are its cliffs
The naked rock
The wind that rarely quietens down

As sour as it is sweet
Of *zibibbo*, *passito*,
Marzipan,
Figs

The profile of a woman traverses the
cones of the ancient volcanoes
Lying down
She looks at the sky

Torno all'isola dopo un mese e mezzo
questa volta sto con Filippo

I return to the island after a month and a half
this time with Filippo

I primi pomodori nell'orto sono maturi
mi aspetta
li raccogliamo insieme

The first tomatoes in the garden are ripe
he waits for me
we pick them together[333]

[333] Desire warps the linearity of time: informed by the past, it sows the future into the present.
I come back to Pantelleria to see Filippo: desire brings me back to the island.
We cultivate our relation; he waits for me and cultivates his land. He offers me the fruits of his labour. I pick the tomatoes, I water the plants.
We cultivate relations, knowledge, and land. We relate to each other's worlds, and to the earth.

UNTITLED II
6 March 2024

At last
Peace
Sunshine
Sweet oranges full of seeds
In my eyes I have blue
The roar of last night's stars

Black stone
Red, green, purple
Ochre with lichens

Silence
Few cars on the Perimetrale[334]

[334] The Perimetrale is the road which runs around Pantelleria.

Two flies run after each other in flight

The island breaths
Vibrates in me

ANTONELLO

7 March 2024

I meet Antonello in the morning, on the sunniest day we have had during my stay.

He has a diving centre on the island – today we talk about the sea.

He tells me that since he was a boy, he has loved the vast blue body that surrounds this land. He waited, trembling, for his cousins to come visit during the summer, as their parents had left the island for work.

Then they would go swimming, descend from the hills towards the sea. They had discovered an old route that would take them down to the shore, they followed it early in the morning and went back at night. His parents were afraid of the abyss, but he always loved it. He dreamt of swimming, belly on the ground. Dreaming of being in water rather than in air: imagining buoyancy.

There was once an underwater museum in Gadir, the small port on the eastern side of the island. The underwater museum worked as such: a series of webcams were placed underwater close to the coast, were a number of artifacts – mostly Punic amphoras – were found, probably remains of an ancient shipwreck. At night they were illuminated by lights, and anyone in the world could connect to the website and see in real time to see the artifacts underwater.

Sebastiano Tusa was Superintendent of the Sea for the region of Sicily until his death in 2016. He was responsible for the region's submerged cultural heritage. After Tusa died, the underwater museum project was abandoned.

The sea is no longer what it used to be when Antonello started diving. There used to be a much greater diversity of crustaceans and fish. Now the sea is suffering, because of extensive fishing among other things.

He used to fish around the island and in the shoals that surround it, also where the Isola Ferdinandea sank.

He has been trying to propose the creation of protected areas around the island, where you can't fish or sail, to see if the biodiversity of the underwater reign can be improved. Some people say that the sea is healthy, it is not suffering at all. These people, however, do not see things from below: they do not swim.

How is it below? The diversity of the landscape of Pantelleria is reflected underneath the water's surface. The volcanic rock plunges in, deep in some places and lower in others, in some areas on the seabed there is white sand.[335]

[335] In *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, Macarena Gómez-Barris offers the notion of "submerged perspectives" (Gómez-Barris 2017, 1) to argue for the decolonial potentiality of "shift[ing] how we see, specifically reckoning with the thick opacity of what lies below the water surface […]" (Gómez-Barris 2017, xiv). The renewed perception called for by Gómez-Barris does not merely refer to a structure of visibility, but rather aims at becoming a tool to think and sense the world outside of colonial, Eurocentric paradigms.

As argued by Epeli Hau'ofa, a change in perspective is needed to avoid reproducing colonial understandings of islands. Hau'ofa argued that the (neo)colonial understanding of Pacific islands as small and isolated is based on a Euro-American mode of perception centred around sight and solidity (Hau'ofa 1994). Islands appear small, isolated, and discrete when seen through a gaze situated on solid ground: a gaze from the continent, or from the ship – when the dry ship is conceived in opposition to the liquid, potentially life-threatening sea.

A submerged perspective plunges into the water – it dives into difference. In *Wild Blue Media: Thinking Through Seawater*, Melody Jue argues that much of human thought is oriented by our conditions of life on earth – by living on the planet's dry surface. To change *how* we think, we must change *where* we think: for Jue, immersion is a strategy to learn to think otherwise, and the ocean is an epistemic environment for conceptual reorientation (Jue 2020).

Jue propose diving as a “method of cognitive estrangement” (Jue 2020, 163) – as a way to materialise the physical and epistemic conditions for sensing/thinking outside of normative structures. Through Antonello’s experience of immersion, I learn to conceive the island of Pantelleria not as bounded by its shores. Diving, one can perceive a hidden dimension of the island: underwater, another part of its body becomes visible. One can then imagine the rocky body of Pantelleria extending all the way to the seafloor, through which the island is connected to the fiery depths of the earth.

Antonello always comes back to his land and sea. For him, the Mediterranean contains the most underwater beauty. He says that *we* – Italians, *panteschi* – are sometimes not fully aware of this. To appreciate the richness and diversity of this place, we must think it in relation to the rest of the world.

GADIR

7th March 2024

We go down to Gadir
one of the few places with direct access to the sea

the water is warm
in contact with the volcano underneath

I step into the cement bath by the shore
three of them
one hot, one hotter, and the last one super hot

the sign says

CAUTION – VERY HOT WATER

I step into the hotter one
I need time to get used to the heat

the water that surrounds the tubs is cold
the sea has not yet been warmed up by the sun
but this heat comes from the depths, not from the sky

first my feet
then, slowly, my legs
at last, I sit

My body tingles, it burns
My skin comes into contact with the water
And the heat of the liquid comes into my flesh

I sit back and close my eyes
The tingle passes
The wind touches my face

I stay in there many minutes
Let the water's heat sink into my body

Silence

I am still

Heat inside my body and breeze on my face
Here I cannot not know that there is fire underneath
That same fire which once brought this land to life
When the cracks in the earth's surface erupted in a cascade of glowing red goo
the volcanoes erupted many times

through these openings, the volcano's mouths
ejected the matter which is at the core of the earth

We live on the surface of this planet
Most of the time oblivious to what is underneath
Here, I cannot not know
In these waters
My knowledge of the fiery depths is alive in my body, it sinks into it by osmosis

The heat I feel is the knowledge that the earth burns
In its core, this sphere of matter contains magma

Undifferentiated matter
Matter *in potenza* – in potentiality
Before actualisation
Matter in a state which comprehends all difference
Before differentiation
Matter which contains the whole

The shock of knowing this other state of things passes through my body through a tingle
painful at first
then the pain subsides
and there is only pleasure
in my naked body
on its surface and in its depths

Naked
I am open to the feeling of knowing what is inside the earth
my crevices,

cracks in my flesh through which the heat that passes through the cracks of the earth is taken in

My skin is permeable
I can feel the heat
my gooey insides, red of blood and organs and soft tissue
feel the gooey insides of the earth
I cannot see the fiery matter
but I can feel it through touch

In between, rock, water and skin
mediums through which the gooey
dimensions of my body and of the body
of the earth touch one another[336]

[336] My internal organs and the core of the earth are not immediately present to one another: instead, they are in contact with each other through "chains of mediation" (Jue 2020, 3). Medium means "'middle', 'interval', 'interspace'" (Elleström 2010, 13): an object, body, or phenomenon situated between something and something else (Elleström 2010). Although traditionally understood as technical objects, media can be thought of in a more expansive manner. As John Durham Peters understands the environment as a medium (Peters 2015), I come to understand rock, water, and skin as media.

Rock, water, skin mediate the contact between my insides and the insides of the island. In the thermal waters of Gadir, they make possible my perception of something which I cannot see: the connection of the island's body with the core of the earth. I perceive this through the sense of touch, as it is communicated through the multiple media through heat. My feeling of heat as experienced in Gadir becomes embodied knowledge of the volcanic nature of Pantelleria.

And time
how much longer these insides have been in existence, much longer than mine
and long after my body this body will continue to be
after death
the matter that makes up my flesh will decompose
and be absorbed again into the matter that makes the body of the earth
again, it will make other bodies
dust, and then again something else

soil
I will become
matter that can make

when the volcanos erupted, it was in touch with wind and water that rock took shape
it is in contact with the elements on the surface of the earth that magma – matter *in potenza* – solidifies

Different eruptions gave life to different rocks
when the eruption was explosive, the magma did not have much time to cool down
the shock of contact with air and water made the lava harden fast
what was created were obsidians – volcanic glass – basalts, dense heavy rocks
when the eruption was slow, there was tuff, a much lighter rock that had more time to cool down, the small bubbles of air forming inside of it had time to slowly burst

The red, hot core of this earth which has made this island
contains in its movement the power of creation
which only happens
in contact with water and wind

As it creates
it can destroy
burn everything to death
annihilation of being
ending
only to begin again
as that which is destroyed is not gone forever
the matter of the bodies which once were something will become other again

If the core of the earth touched my surface directly
I would die
I would burn to death and turn to dust
but now
with water in between
medium between my body and the magma of the earth
it heats me up
opens me to knowledge
caressing me like a lover would

I am filled with pleasure
opened by this heat

this too is *erotico pantesco*
it is my perception of this island's sex

when I emerge
I am transformed
the touch of the volcano changed me
I stand on the ground steadier than before
I let the sun kiss my face and my feet are grounded in what I now know is below

A fisherman offers us wine
we eat olives
I know that later we'll make love

Look at the stones that make up that wall
the lower part of it is dark, the three upper rows are grey
the ones at the bottom are local
the top ones come from somewhere else
Panteschi recognise the provenance of the stones
They read the rock[337]

[337] 'Reading rocks' allows to interpret the environment in which they are situated (Macauley 2010). In their silence, stones inform us about the history of a place, as they carry the past inscribed in their materiality (Bjornnerud 2005). The memory of Pantelleria's volcanic history is present in the island's geological landscape. The poetics of Pantelleria can be sensed through the colours, shapes, textures, and arrangements of its stones.

As desire, stones warp the linearity of time: the past is present in their bodies. Becoming attuned to the silent language of rocks allows us to perceive the polyphony of temporalities which co-exist in a place. The universal chronology of modernity, which poses the present as "the only site of the real" (Vázquez 2009, 2) is thus disturbed by one's aesthesic orientation towards stones. Sensing the stones, the "mnemonic affiliations" (Vázquez 2020, 18) of decolonial aesthesis emerge: my

mnemonic body attunes itself to the
mnemonic body of the earth.

Perceiving the stones through my senses, I attune myself to the material presence of Pantelleria's past. This is the memory of the volcano erupting – and of all those who before me have perceived these rocks.

I was in Gadir with Filippo. As I bathed, he took pictures of me. He then made them into an artwork. Covered in titanium dioxide (TiO_2), the *Venere al bagno di Gadir* absorbs and degrades polluting agents in the air through photocatalysis as five tall trees would through photosynthesis.

In the next page: Fig 1, Filippo Panseca, "Venere al bagno di Gadir," digital bionic nanotechnological photocatalytic work on canvas, 284 x 163 cm, 2024, Caserma delle Arti Pantelleria, in *L'Energia Rivela l'Arte Bionica Post-Antropocene*, Filippo Panseca, pp. 90-91, Bagheria: Edizioni Ezio Pagano, 2024.

The week after I leave Pantelleria, I read the island's local news.[338]

[338] Pantelleria Internet, "Sbarcati 250 Migranti," March 16, 2024, https://www.pantelleria.com/news/lista_news.asp?NEWS_ID=33651.

News 34202, Pantelleria 16/03/2024

Tra giovedì e ieri

SBARCATI 250 MIGRANTI

Sono 250 i migranti arrivati a Pantelleria nelle giornate di giovedì e venerdì. Hanno approfittato delle ottime condizioni del mare che ha consentito a piccole imbarcazioni di raggiungere facilmente l'isola. Gli sbarchi sono stati in tutto 15, cinque giovedì e dieci ieri. Giovedì errano arrivati nell'isola 80 migranti, venerdì 170. Di questi 70 sono stati già portati a Trapani nel centro di prima accoglienza, 180 si trovano ancora nell'isola nel centro di crisi presso l'ex caserma dell'esercito V. Barone in Via Arenella. L'Africa dall'isola è vicina, dista soltanto 70 chilometri. I migranti partono dai porti di Kelibia, Monastir, Soussa e raggiungono, quando il tempo è buono facilmente l'isola.

News 34202, Pantelleria 16/03/2024

Between Thursday and yesterday

250 MIGRANTS LANDED

250 migrants have arrived in Pantelleria between the days of Thursday and Friday. They took advantage of the optimal conditions of the sea which allowed the small boats to easily reach the island. The landing were 15 in total, five on Thursday and ten yesterday. On Thursday 80 migrants arrived in the island, on Friday 170. Of these, 70 have already been taken to the reception centre in Trapani, 180 still are on the island in the crisis centre housed in the former army barracks V. Barone in Via Arenella. Africa is close to the island, only 70 km away. Migrants leave from the ports of Kelinia, Monastir, Soussa and when the weather is good, they easily reach the island.

Although less spectacularised than the island of Lampedusa,[339] Pantelleria is a significant point of passage in one of the routes traversed by migrants travelling from Africa towards Europe. Between 11 August 2023 and 18 March 2024, 3234 people arrived in Pantelleria from Tunisia, including 663 unaccompanied minors. After landing, migrants are taken to the former Caserma Barone – an old military barrack which since 2022 is used as a migrant hotspot. Here, migrants are held for limited periods of time, around two or three days. People are detained, their phones are sequestered, and data

[339] ASGI, *Il Modello Lampedusa Amplificato a Pantelleria: Il "Nuovo" Hotspot e la Privazione della Libertà Personale*, November 6, 2023, https://www.asgi.it/allontamento-espulsione/report-sul-punto-crisi-di-pantelleria-implicazioni-sulla-privazione-della-liberta-personale/.

regarding their identities is collected. They are made to wear a bracelet with the date and number of their landing, and a number marking the person. They can use a phone to make calls in the afternoon, but these are supervised. They cannot leave the building.[340]
This denial of personal freedom without legal and juridical bases is illegitimate considering both the Italian Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights.[341]

[340] ASGI, *Hotspot di Pantelleria: L'Accesso ai Diritti e al Trattamento dei Cittadini Stranieri*, July 24, 2024, https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/hotspot-di-pantelleria/.

[341] ASGI, *La Frontiera di Pantelleria: Una Sospensione del Diritto*, August 11, 2022, https://www.asgi.it/allontamento-espulsione/sospensione-del-diritto-il-report-su-pantelleria/.

Then, they wait for the weather conditions to be good enough to be transferred to Sicily by ferry boat. Sometimes, this takes a long time. From Trapani, they are taken to the *Centro di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio* (CPR) – pre-removal detention centre – in Milo. Here, their juridical position is determined, and they either request international protection and apply for asylum,[342]
or are detained until an official deportation order is issued – sometimes for very long periods of time.[343]

[342] ASGI, *Hotspot di Pantelleria*.

[343] ASGI, *I (Dis)servizi del CPR di Trapani: Report su Trasparenza e Appalti*, July 19, 2024, https://www.asgi.it/allontamento-espulsione/i-disservizi-del-cpr-di-trapani-report-su-trasparenza-e-appalti/.

For migrants to reach Pantelleria, and for them to be brought to Sicily afterwards, the weather needs to be good. I remember what Salvatore told me about the sea always being rough and catching the island from the wrong side.

For Black Studies scholar Christina Sharpe, the weather is "always ripe for Black death."[344] The weather is

> not the specifics of any one event or set of events that are endlessly repeatable and repeated, but the totality of the environments in which we struggle; the machines in which we live.[345]

The weather cannot be good for migrants crossing the Mediterranean from Africa to Europe, when the weather is antiblack.

I see Caserma Barone on the side of the road while we cross the industrial area by the port of Pantelleria. It is a tall building the colour of cream, full of holes that reveal the cement underneath. Its walls are shedding layers.

The slave trade "came through the cramped doorway of the slave ship, leaving a wake like that of crawling desert caravans."[346]
For Sharpe, we live in the wake of slavery – in the traces that slave ships left in oceans and consciousness. Slavery – "the overweening, defining event of the modern world"[347] – lives on in the present.

[344] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 124.

[345] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 111.

[346] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 5.

[347] Toni Morrison, "Home," in *The House that Race Built: Original Essays by Toni Morrison, Angela Y. Davis, Cornel West, and Others on Black Americans and Politics in America Today*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano, (New York: Vintage, 1998), 3.

In the wake, Black lives are marked by "skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment."[348]

[348] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 6.

In the wake, the past is not past: it "reappears, always, to rupture the present."[349]

[349] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 9.

A tall wall surrounds Caserma Barone. I can see past it, there is a tower of small wooden boats: the migrants' vessels. They are piled up here, awaiting destruction.

In the wake,

> the semiotics of the slave ship continue: from the forced movements of the enslaved to the forced movements of the migrant and the refugee, to the regulation of Black people in American streets and neighborhoods, to those ongoing crossings of and drownings in the Mediterranean Sea […].[350]

[350] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 21.

The logics of enclosure, captivity and control enacted in the hold of the slave ship are reproduced in the detention centre in Pantelleria. Black Studies scholars P. Khalil and Tryon P. Woods write that in the world slavery makes, "criminalisation is not a contingent violence, but rather a gratuitous feature of blackness; the criminality of blackness is presupposed […]."[351]

[351] P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, "Ex Aqua: The Mediterranean Basin, Africans on the Move and the Politics of Policing," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 61(141) (December 2014), 70.

In Caserma Barone, migrants are detained without a sentence: this "womb abyss"[352] reproduces Black being as criminality.

[352] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 6.

Sharpe argues that

> the repetition of the visual, discursive, state, and other quotidian and extraordinary cruel and unusual violences enacted on Black people does not lead to a cessation of violence […]. Such repetitions often work to solidify and make continuous the colonial project of violence.[353]

[353] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 117.

To avoid the reproduction of this violence, she calls for "an ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention, an ethics of seeing, and of being in the wake as consciousness […]."[354] Sharpe advocates for Black redaction and annotation as practices of seeing and reading otherwise and in excess of the violence perpetrated against Black people – as a way of seeing and reading how Black life is insisted into the wake.

[354] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 131.

I search my memory for something in excess. The detention centre is crumbling, cream-coloured against the sky. The gate is open.

CONCLUSION

Coloniality is an epistemic and aesthesic logic: it rules over subjectivities and modes of perception. Existing within the colonial matrix of power yet struggling towards decolonial modes of living and knowing implies a continuous effort to be enacted through the realms of epistemology and aesthetics. In the words of Catherine Walsh, "decoloniality does not imply the absence of coloniality but the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living […]."[355] This thesis sought to contribute to the decolonial effort at work within the field of island studies by testing *liminagraphy* as an epistemic practice suited to the cultivation of decolonial island knowledge. To explore the epistemic and ethical implications of practicing *liminagraphy* in an island context, I activated the ~~methodology~~ in the Italian island of Pantelleria between 1 and 9 March 2024.

[355] Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 81.

The first chapter has shown how islands collapse the divide between geographies of the mind and geographies of the earth, revealing a Western compulsion to define, grasp, and possess. Conceived through dualities such as dry and wet, liquid and solid, land and sea, islands appear as bounded objects – portions of land fully surrounded by water. In most maps of the world, they are represented as neatly bounded by sharp lines: this social construct leads us to conceive of them as stable and self-contained. This conception makes islands prone to being objected to desires of domination. In Gilbert Keith Chesterton's 1903 text "The Philosophy of Islands,"[356] islands are compared to ships – definite, bounded, dry objects existing in the middle of an expanse of water thought of as devoid of life. As ships contain possessions in their hold, islands are figured as containers of potential resources – as

[356] Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Islands."

territories to be extracted from. In many tales set on islands written by European authors in the modern period, the island at the centre of each story is met through a violent event: shipwreck. Travellers are cast out of the safety of their ship and into the chaos of the water by weather events: they temporarily lose control and face the possibility of death. This passage is integral to the encounter with the shores of the island, which then comes to represent a chance to begin again on a slate wiped clean. The island as territory where to start anew with an imagined innocence is exemplified especially well by one particular island trope: that of the desert island. In Deleuze's text "Desert Islands,"[357] the French philosopher figures the desert island as the ideal place for a new beginning for the consciousness of humanity – a place where humans can do away with their past and start approximating an ideal of themselves. I have argued that Deleuze's notion of the desert island reproduces the fundamental colonial gesture through which European and Euro-American colonisers violently bypassed Indigenous sovereignty in the Americas, Africa, and Australia. This was enacted through the declaration of a territory as *terra nullius* – a concept which originally established that a thing belonged to no one until it was used, which was stretched during the colonial period to mean that a land could be rightfully appropriated if its inhabitants had no conception of private property.[358] This colonial grabbing was accompanied by genocidal violence which sought to erase Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Coloniality is a cutting logic: it severs relations both in space and time.[359] If the concept of *terra nullius* allowed colonisers to claim space as their own despite the presence of Indigenous people, it also enabled them to erase their history from the Western conception of time. Deleuze's notion of an island as deserted despite being home to "the liveliest of rivers, the most agile fauna, the brightest flora, the most

[357] Deleuze, "Desert Islands."

[358] Zukas, "Terra Incognita/Terra Nullius."

[359] Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*.

amazing nourishment, the hardiest of savages, and the castaway as its most precious fruit"[400] is enacting a temporal colonial cut.

[400] Deleuze, "Desert Islands," 11.

Literary and philosophical islands provide coordinates for thinking about real islands in real seas: to avoid reproducing colonial logics and discourses of conquests in the process of studying islands, critical attention must be devoted to the constructs which may implicitly condition how we think about islands. In his seminal text "Our Sea of Islands,"[401] Tongan-Fijian scholar Epeli Hau'ofa argued that contemporary conceptions of islands are still conditioned by colonial views. Focusing on Pacific islands, Hau'ofa illuminates how a notion of islands as small and isolated is a construction informed by a Euro-American perspective – which valued sight and solidity above all. Colonisers conceived of Pacific islands as small and isolated because their understanding of what an island was counted only the emerged portion of land which they could see. On the other hand, Indigenous Pacific islanders thought of islands as extending across and underneath the water – conceiving them as connected to one another in archipelagic formations, and to the fiery core of the earth through the submerged portions of their bodies. Working towards decolonial island studies entails shifting away from adopting Eurocentric paradigms to frame and direct our knowledge projects, moving towards cultivating knowledge through techniques respectful of the modes of being and knowing indigenous to each island. This thesis has sought to enact this sort of epistemic shift through the activation of the decolonial feminist practice of *liminagraphy* in the islands of Pantelleria.

[401] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands."

In chapter 2, I have considerd Glissant's notions of archipelagic thinking, poetics of Realtion, the slave ship and the plantation as matrixes of modernity, opacity, and aesthetics of (relating to) the earth as theoretical lenses to frame my approach to

Pantelleria through a practice of *liminagraphy*. In my encounter with the island between 1 and 9 March 2024, I sought to practice the sort of archipelagic, trembling thinking which Glissant calls for: a sort of thinking which "opens, one that confirms diversity"[402] – "an instinct, an intuition of the world that we can't achieve with imperial thoughts, with thoughts of domination, thoughts of a systematic path toward a truth that we've posited in advance."[403] This inspired me not to approach Pantelleria with the intent of extracting specific pieces of knowledge from it – rather, I sought to encounter the island with an attitude of openness, receptivity, and respect. My ultimate intent was to let the island offer me what it wanted to give. Glissant's notion of poetics of Relation framed my attempt – called for by Sheik – to undo the sovereign subjectivity which normally drives knowledge projects framed by Eurocentric paradigms, and informed my understanding of poetic thinking and writing as modes through which to best approach the island's relational field. The ideas of the slave ship and the plantation as matrixes of modernity allowed me to think the present as always interspersed by the past – of slavery as still shaping the lives people live depending on racial categorization. The concept of opacity pushed me to "give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures"[404] – framing my understanding of a desire for total knowledge as colonial. Finally, Glissant's call for a renewed "aesthetics of relating to the earth"[405] inspired my commitment to develop an epistemology of sensuous attunement through the practice of *liminagraphy* in the island of Pantelleria.

[402] Glissant and Obrist, "The Archipelago Conversations," 164.

[403] Glissant and Obrist, "The Archipelago Conversations," 141.

[404] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

[405] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 148.

Between 1 and 9 March 2024, I stayed on the island of Pantelleria with the intent of cultivating knowledge *with*, rather than *about*, the island. My attempt to engage in an epistemic project committed to making knowledge decolonially was informed by an

understanding of coloniality as a "universe of meaning"[406] which operates through epistemic and aesthetic registers. *Liminagraphy* offered me the conceptual tools to approach the island not as a discrete object of study, but as a field of relations. As outlined in the first chapter, the conception of shores as stable boundaries leads to a notion of islands as contained, definite objects. This, in turn, makes them prone to being subjected to colonial impulses. In other words, the conception of an island as geographically finite makes it "easier to hold, to own, to manage or to manipulate, to embrace and to caress."[407] Pushing for the conceptual undoing of the subject/object construct, *liminagraphy* has enabled me to a reframe my understanding of Pantelleria through a relational theory. The island thus emerged not as an object which can be fully known and potentially possessed, but as a relational ecology in which my subjectivity came to be imbricated. It is through this entanglement which knowledge emerged: through a practice of *liminagraphy*, island knowledge was formed in relation. As the island and the researcher cease being conceived as wholly separate from one another – one subject, and the other object – one can begin making knowledge *with*, rather than *about*, islands. Quijano argued for the decolonial potential of undoing the notion of knowledge as a subject/object relation and advocated for its reconceptualization as "an intersubjective relation for the purpose of something."[408] Sheik pushes her conception of knowledge further, as *liminagraphy* seeks to bypass the notion of the subject as well as that of the object by stressing the primacy of relations. Subjectivity is not dissolved – one must remain aware of their position on the colonial difference; however, its boundaries become open as one plunges in a relational field. Through *liminagraphy*, knowledge is cultivated rather than discovered or extracted – and the process of cultivation is what leads to the emergence of knowledge itself.

[406] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 196.

[407] Baldacchino, "Islands – Objects of Representation," 247.

[408] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 173.

Liminagraphy also encourages the incarnation of theory: it pushes for the undoing of the Cartesian split between body and mind. As a decolonial *feminist* practice, it stresses the centrality of the flesh in the process of knowledge cultivation. Relations are material – they are perceived through the body. Without body, no relations can be felt – and without relations, no decolonial knowledge can emerge. The body is situated in relation to the world: thinking through the body defies the zero-point hubris of colonial science – forcing us to remain aware of our position on the colonial continuum. In *liminagraphy*, knowledge emerges through the flesh: the body is a medium in the chain of mediation which leads to the emergence of knowledge. In Gadir, I came to know the connection between the island of Pantelleria and the fiery depths of the earth through my body. Knowledge of the presence of the molten core of the planet underneath the island's surface passed through rocks, water, and flesh. Through this experience, I came to understand flesh, water, and rocks as media – when a medium is understood as an object, body, or phenomenon situated between something and something else.[409] Food is a medium, too: through the dried grapes and artichokes that Salvatore offered me, the capers in Filippo's *insalata pantesca*, and the *passito* we drank – all cultivated on the island – I could indirectly taste Pantelleria's volcanic soil, the scarcity of rain, and its briny wind. Through *liminagraphy*'s call to involve the body in the process of theorising, I practiced Glissant's "aesthetics of relating to the earth"[410] by sensually relating to the material particularity of the island of Pantelleria. The heat of the volcano in the depths; the sweetness of *zibibbo* grapes, the saltiness of capers, the artichokes boiled without salt yet full of flavour are all part of Pantelleria's poetics – that which the island expresses of itself, which I perceived through my senses. *Liminagraphy* allows for a practice of what Glissant names 'aesthetics of relating to the earth' as well as what Mignolo and Vázquez call "decolonial aesthesis."[411]

[409] Lars Elleström, "The Modalities of Media: Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations," in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 11-48.

[410] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 148.

[411] Mignolo and Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis."

If Glissant advocates for a sensual practice of relation with the material particularity of the place in which we find ourselves, Mignolo and Vázquez call for a practice of critical attention paid to the modes in which we sense. Seeking to address the control which coloniality established over the realm of perception, the theorists stress the decolonial potential of recovering that which was suppressed by the colonial conceptualisation of aesthetics as the regulation of beauty – "an unelaborated elementary awareness of perception."[412] Practicing decolonial aesthesis calls us to pay close attention to how we perceive the world through our sensorium, seeking to feel how we may have internalised colonial constructs of perception. This, in turn, may open us to the possibility of sensing otherwise: to enact decoloniality through the ways in which we perceive the world. Antonello's experience of immersion disturbed my conception of the island as ending at its shore. His submerged perspective made conceivable a portion of the body of the island which I could not see, thus making me aware that Pantelleria is not contained by the boundary lines which I see when I search for it on a map. Seeing the island from below, rather than from above, defies the colonial construction of a zero-point hubris which is in fact a disembodied gaze looking down at the world. Rather than reproducing a notion of the island as thought through a Eurocentric gaze which stops at the surface of the water, Antonello's immersion enacted the sort of epistemic shift in island thinking argued for by Epeli Hau'ofa[413] – a perspective on islands developed by indigenous islanders. Looking at the volcanic rocks' different colours and textures around the island, and learning to 'read them' allowed me to perceive the eruptive past of Pantelleria as inscribed in its landscape. The "mnemonic affiliations"[414] of decolonial aesthesis made themselves felt: as I began to pay critical attention to the way I looked, learning to listen to that which I could see, I began to sense the presence of the past. My mnemonic body remembered childhood,

[412] Mignolo and Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis."

[413] Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands."

[414] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*, 18.

my grandparents, my connection with the land written in the taste of rice with tuna, in the smell of smoke and sweat. Seeing the bee orchid – a flower which carries depicted in its body the memory of an insect – also allowed me to begin moving away from the modern construction of the present as only site of the real, seeking to build a relation with the island's past. This is, for Vázquez, fundamental to make space for the emergence of the memory of that which has been erased through coloniality.[415] As the erasure of the history of a place before the arrival of Europeans was a founding colonial act, building a relationship with the past of the island through *liminagraphy* allows me to avoid reproducing the colonial logic of a re-beginning which led Deleuze to declare his island as deserted. Thinking through Glissant's notion of the slave ship as matrix of modernity, I was able to see how the logics of captivity and control which once were enacted on slave ships are reproduced in the hotspot of the former Caserma Barone in Pantelleria. The past continues to rupture the present: we must reckon with the legacy of slavery and colonialism. The present must become a space of ethical engagement with the violence of the past.

[415] Vázquez, *Vistas of Modernity*.

In light of these considerations, I argue that *liminagraphy* has allowed me to cultivate knowledge *with* the island of Pantelleria, to configure an understanding of the island as extending beyond the bounds of its shore, and to perceive the presence of its past – and thus, that it may be an epistemic practice suited to the enactment of other decolonial knowledge projects in island contexts. However, a single instance of activation of *liminagraphy* in one island is not enough to fully flesh out the potentialities and challenges of this ~~methodology~~ for the field of island studies. Further *liminagraphies* should be carried out in different islands to better understand how this epistemic practice may contribute to the decolonial effort within the field.

Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge are founded upon a Cartesian split – a dualistic conception of body and mind, which figures the mind as the only site of reason, and the body as devoid of thought.[416] "[F]eelings were supposed to kneel to thought"[417] – but they survived. *Liminagraphy* calls for a mode of writing which escapes the academy's demand for objectivity, that collapses the divide between body and mind to create theory which emerges from an embodied involvement with the field of relations in which we find ourselves. This knowledge is not seeking to abstract universal truths from experience but stays grounded in the peculiarity of experience, seeking depth. Knowledge is grounded in the body and in place. Knowledge is inscribed in the body – to write, one must first listen. *Liminagraphy* calls for deep listening as a practice of presence. Knowledge germinates in the body which is open to receiving input from the field of relations. Writing is a practice which allows the body to speak. The body speaks poetically: poetry emerges through the body, following a practice of deep listening, as distillation of experience. This is the knowledge of *liminagraphy*: writing which "summon[s] up the savour of the world."[418] The knowledge of *liminagraphy* is a poetics: it is "an instinct, an intuition of the world"[419] rather than knowledge achieved through "a systematic path toward a truth that we've posited in advance."[420]

[416] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America."

[417] Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," 10.

[418] Glissant, *Treatise on the Whole-World*, 73.

[419] Glissant and Obrist, "The Archipelago Conversations," 141.

[420] Glissant and Obrist, "The Archipelago Conversations," 141.

Poet Joan Retallack writes that

> [i]f you're to embrace complex life on earth, if you can no longer pretend that all things are fundamentally simple and elegant, a poetics thickened by an *h* launches an exploration of art's significance *as*, not just *about*, a form of living in the real world.[421]

[421] Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003), 26.

A poetics thickened by an *h* is a poethics – proposed by Retallack as a mode of writing which collapses the divide between art and ethics. In *liminagraphy*, writing is a way of channelling the process of unlearning and growth which one may go through while conducting research. It is a place where to deal with "the ways in which we are complicit in the silencing of others and in enacting violence while under colonial logics."[422] *Liminagraphy* is a fleshing out of our embodied relations with the material peculiarity of place which allows us to reckon with colonial complicity: the knowledge of *liminagraphy* is a poethics. In writing, we can actively work to enact an ethics of relational accountability. Sheik's epistemic practice "embraces the discomfort of dismantling"[423] – posing that the moments in which we falter can provide occasions for profound unlearning. I regretted my decision of not telling the person I met while going to the bus the real reason of my visit to Pantelleria. In writing, I could relate ethically to this situation by practicing refusal – by deciding to put a limit to the knowledge I offer to the academy.[424] Through writing, I could grant this person a right to opacity.[425]
In writing, I could also reckon with the ethical demands of desire. I recognised my desire to own the bee orchid as a colonial impulse: a drive to possess and uproot. Desiring Filippo, I felt the presence of my erotic body, active in the process of knowledge cultivation. Writing about this experience, I argued for *liminagraphy* to

[422] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 15.

[423] Sheik, *Liminagraphy*, 88.

[424] Tuck and Yang, "R-Words."

[425] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

follow an ethics of relational accountability which takes the erotic charge of the relational field into account: a poethics of desire, through which the body can speak itself honestly, without fear.

FURTHER RESEARCH

On 10 April 2024, the European Parliament voted in favour of a new "Pact on Migration and Asylum," a new set of rules concerning migration and asylum in the European Union.[426] This agreement legalises many of the previously illegitimate procedures enacted in the hotspot of Pantelleria, such as systematic detention at the border, the suspension of constitutional rights related to personal freedom, communication, jurisdictional control, the capacity to immediately claim one's rights, and access to asylum[427] – potentially worsening the already dire conditions in which migrants are made to live.

[426] European Commission, *Pact on Migration and Asylum*, May 21, 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

[427] ASGI, *Hotspot di Pantelleria*.

In light of this, it appears urgent to further consider Pantelleria in its archipelagic formation with Africa and Europe – as a zone where European policies of border policing are enacted, and where Blackness is reproduced as criminality. Further research could be conducted to respond to the following questions:

- *How to respond to the criminalisation of migrants through logics of enclosure, captivity and control – once enacted in the hold of the slave ship – in the hotspot of Pantelleria?*

- *How to practice Sharpe's "ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention, an ethics of seeing, and of being in the wake as consciousness)"[428] in the island of Pantelleria?*

[428] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 131.

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