Cainà: Islandscape and 'islanderscope' on screen

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Abstract: The establishment of Island Studies within the academe and the introduction of concepts such as 'islandness' and 'islandscape' have accompanied a general rethinking of the concept of insularity which encompasses the reflection over a cinematic representation of islands and islanders. The use of islands as cinematic landscapes and settings has reinforced cultural, mythical, and identity stereotypes associated with the island imagery built-up in literature, as well as the construction of the islander as a character exhibiting specific behavioural features. The film *Cainà. L'isola e il continente* (Gennaro Righelli, 1922) is emblematic insofar as it is the first feature film shot in Sardinia and its character is not just a symbol of feminine rebellion against a patriarchal society, but it also serves as an allegory of an unspoiled island, such as it was considered and depicted at that time. As islanders ourselves, we have wondered to what extent *Cainà* adheres to the stereotypes of islandness and insularity conventionally ascribed to islands and, in this specific case, to Sardinia. Our paper aims to examine the genesis of the Sardinian insular imagination through the lens of the cinematic construction of 'islanderness' and 'islanderscope', an assortment of agency representing islanders — and islands — on screen.

Introduction: The islander within

> Dreaming of islands — whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter — is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone — or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew. (Gilles Deleuze, 2004)

In 1992, Livio Jacob and Vittorio Marinelli from the Friuli Film Institute, while searching for silent films in the Národní Filmový Archiv (National Film Archive) in Prague, came across the only surviving positive copy of an Italian film starring actress Maria Jacobini with the title and captions in Czech. That was the first encounter with *Cainà. L'Isola e il Continente*, directed by theatre director Gennaro Righelli and set in Sardinia in 1922. After being shown at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, the film finally made it back to its homeland in 1993 when it was screened in Cagliari at the first edition of the conference "La Sardegna sullo schermo" (Sardinia on Screen), organized by the Società Umanitaria Cineteca Sarda. Among the projects and initiatives that were planned during the conference was the restoration of *Cainà*, which was then entrusted to L'immagine Ritrovata, a film restoration laboratory based in Bologna. In 1995, the restored copy of the film was finally screened at the Alfieri movie theatre in Cagliari; a further modern element was the original score composed by Mauro Palmas which, according to Salvatore Pinna (2001, p. 11), enhanced and updated the film. In 2000, when *Cainà* was screened in Aggius, the little town in northern Sardinia where the film had been shot, the organisers saluted the event as a homecoming of the film and its protagonist, as if Cainà had been missing from her 'hometown' for seventy-eight years.

If we trace back *Cainà*'s journey since its discovery in the Czech film archive and draw a temporal line up to the screening in Aggius, the protagonist's 'hometown', we will get a precise, circular departure–return trajectory. This little anecdote about the finding and restoration of the film and its return 'home' makes us reflect upon the concepts of belonging and mobility associated with the film and its protagonist. On the one hand, *belonging* is tied to the notion of *home* as a "space of comfort" (Macgregor Wise, 2000, p. 300), and it is also strongly connected with the concept of identity, for "homes and identities are always permeable and social" entities (Macgregor Wise, 2000, p. 301). As an identity-related space, home evokes, first and foremost, "a sense of place, belonging or alienation that is intimately tied to a sense of self" (Blunt, 2003, p. 73). On the other hand, the concept of *mobility* poses us a series of questions about the implications of this "integral aspect of social life" (Easthope, 2009, p. 61) that involves people, commodities, and services all around the world; a continuous, back-and-forth movement that forces us to re-define the boundaries of our personal and social scope.

In this paper, we have focused on the silent film *Cainà* because, despite its age, it still triggers a double-vision experience: as spectators, we enjoy a film whose protagonist is a metaphor of the island, which allows us to introduce the notions of islandness (Baldacchino, 2004, 2007a; Frieman, 2008; Stratford, 2008) and islandscape (Baldacchino, 2013; Broodbank, 2000; Nimführ & Otto, 2020) in relation to the cinematic landscape. As islanders, we empathize with Cainà, the rebellious woman longing for emancipation and independence, as we recognize our temperament in her passionate yet torn nature. Like Cainà, we were born in Sardinia, we consider it our home, though we have often felt (and still feel) the urge to travel overseas and live abroad, a fact that has never compromised our islanderness; we have moved inside and outside the borders of Sardinia trying to bridge the gap — or at least reduce the distance — between the island and the continent (to quote the film's subtitle). This physical and intellectual tension towards the outside world has established our *islanderscope*, a concept that defines the agency to act and make choices outlined by islanderness. The film, thus, represents a remarkable case study to address the representation of the islandscape through the character of Cainà, and to introduce the notion of islanderscope

within a cyclic, mobility pattern; a concept which is also deeply connected with the narrative representation of a dynamic space in which an islander, whether real or fictional, builds or discovers a relation with their islanderness. The dramatic life of Cainà stages a cinematic representation of both Sardinia and Sardinians in which the cultural conflict and ambiguity concerning the definition of her role and identity within — and without — the local community inexorably predicts her unfortunate destiny. Cainà's tragedy originates from an act of rebellion which outlines the perimeter of her islanderscope, forcing her to struggle between the familiar dimension defined by the tradition and social hierarchy and the hopeless attempt at freedom overseas.

Moreover, the film serves as an opportunity to reflect upon our positioning as film and media scholars within the methodological framework of our research (Baldacchino, 2008). To do so, we introduce the concept of autoethnography discussed by cultural anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997, p. 9), that is to say, "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context," and apply it to our disciplinary field so as to broaden the scope of our investigation and include our point of view as scholars born and raised in the island of Sardinia. The autoethnographic practice implies a synthesis of the viewer's gaze with the participant's autobiography, which is also transfused in the process of rumination and self-reflection involved in the work of analysis (Baldacchino, 2007b). Our internal gaze, too, as islanders, consists of a construction often stemming from an external gaze as a result of "forms of hetero-definition" which imply "the islanders assume a continental point of view over themselves" (Sedda, 2019, p. 27; authors' translation). Put otherwise, as also stated by the editors in the introduction to this thematic section, we are aware of our position "within the colonial matrix of power" (Grydehøj, 2018, p. 3), and we would like our contribution to enhance further research and reflection upon island-related topics in this direction.

Following Epeli Hau'ofa's (1994) reflections about the self-representation of islanders against the heterogeneous representations imposed by hegemonic cultures, we argue that the contemporary interpretation of Cainà must take into account the de-construction of cultural, anthropological, and literary tropes traditionally associated with the image of Sardinia and Sardinians in cinematic production. We have thus wondered to what extent Cainà adheres to the stereotypes of islandness and islanderness conventionally ascribed to Sardinia and its inhabitants, and to what extent her islanderscope coincides with ours.

Both the auto-ethnographic and the geographical reflections coexist in the concept of 'iconographic interpretation' developed by Erwin Panofsky (1939), which is based on close and deep symbolic relationships between the subject and the world. During the interpretative process, depending on the observer's ability to dig up and retrieve cultural references, the understanding will be more strictly analytical (iconography) or more broadly interpretative (iconology). The landscape, as a cultural product, can be read as a 'text' in a semiotic sense (Eco, 1968), thus offering itself to contractions and expansions of the interpretative process and, therefore, to infinite "ways of seeing" (Berger, 1972/1985). Faced with the risk of getting lost in the excess of interpretative flexibility — which can also lead to forms of "aberrant decoding" (Eco, 1968) — in the case of *Cainà*, our gaze sticks to the cinematic filter; the cinematic space is translated into a landscape by means of narration, and we expect it to interact with the protagonist and to have an impact on her. "Ceci n'est pas la Sardaigne," we could say, paraphrasing a famous painting by René Magritte, *La trahison des images* (1929): what we see onscreen is not Sardinia but one of its many (possible) representations, and we

should focus our attention on the construction of the viewpoint rather than the authenticity of the landscape portrayed.

What image of islandness does Cainà convey? And what are the traits of her personality that can serve as trustworthy symbols of the islandscape? Obviously, the issue can be tackled from several perspectives and, according to the sociologist John Urry (Urry & Larsen, 2011, pp. 1–2), "there is not a pre-existing reality simply waiting out there […]. Just like language, one's eyes are socio-culturally framed."

While collecting the bibliographic references to conduct our analysis, and even more so when rewatching the film, we realized that Cainà was far from being an ancient, traditional stereotype of a Sardinian woman, but rather she was a pioneering character, a symbol of female emancipation in a patriarchal society, who could be regarded as a stunning example of a "proto-feminist Sardinian heroine" (Pinna, 2001, p. 11; authors' translation). Cainà stood out as an island herself, an insular character opposed to her family and the whole village; she lived her own way and followed her own rules regardless of the values and principles of the community which she came from. *Cainà* was — and still is — the ideal cinematic example to address the topics of islandness and islanderness from a native perspective, for the following reasons:

- The film is the first ever motion picture shot in Sardinia by a non-Sardinian director and starring non-Sardinian actors: we thus have the first island-set film that deals with islandness issues;

- It is not an adaption of a novel by Sardinian novelist Grazia Deledda, though it shares some typical features and themes derived from the Deledda genre: passionate characters who try to struggle against their fate and uncontrollable forces of nature; turbulent romances and irresistible stories of banditry;

- Cainà's character is the human representation of the island's wild and untameable nature. The full correspondence of female-related characteristics and islandness is a key element of the film;

- Her resolution clashes with the prejudicial assumption that women are not allowed to live their own way, let alone islander women who wish to leave their island.

The aim of this paper is ultimately to analyze the image of the islander Cainà by means of cinematic landscape and link the notion of islanderscope to a departure–return tension; we will also refer to the term 'islandscape' to keep the focus on the character and her relationship both with the natural environment and the socio-cultural context. The paper will be structured as follows: in the first part, we discuss the role played by literature and cinema in shaping the island imagery throughout the centuries; in the second part, we address the literary and cinematic representations of Sardinia; finally, in the third part, we analyze the character of Cainà by means of theoretical tools and concepts derived by the cinematic (Bernardi, 2002; Harper & Rayner, 2010; Lefebvre, 2006b; Mottet, 1999) and cultural (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; Rose, 1993; Rowntree & Conkey, 1980; Sauer, 1925/1983) approaches to the study of landscape.

Cinematic and literary islands

Over the centuries, islands have exerted a major fascination on human imagination and have embodied mythical and mythological representations of alterity and remoteness, in a geographical and cultural sense (Brazzelli, 2012, p. 8). From literature to cinema, the myth of islands is founded on the symbolic relation between fiction and reality. Islands have become the narrative and semiotic places par excellence: they embody the very essence of imaginary worlds inhabited by marvelous creatures — as recounted so tellingly in literary works and films — and represent the reverse side of real human societies. As islands also symbolize authentic upside-down worlds (e.g., those described by François Rabelais in *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, and the insular space explored in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*), the literary paradigm offers the coordinates to interpret them as places of adventure, leisure, and pursuit of the *locus amoenus*. Islands may be regarded as both Edenic places and prisons, situated in the limbo between the celestial heavens and the flames of hell due to their inherent nature of unknowability and the halo of mystery that has always surrounded them. Omar Calabrese (2019) depicts islands in terms of utopian (e.g., Thomas More's *Utopia*) and dystopian systems endowed with specific physical features — they are closed and well-defined spaces, separated from the other lands — and moral characters — they can be either ideal worlds ruled by progressive and democratic principles or totalitarian regimes where injustice and repression have the upper hand on the inhabitants (see *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, 1954, and *Island* by Aldous Huxley, 1960). Since the archetypical idea and the dimension of islands as places of otherness are recurring elements in literature and the arts, Calabrese (2019) has outlined a valuable 'island paradigm' on which all the features related to the storytelling and localization of islands converge. In this paradigm perspective, islands may also serve as symbols of human nature, thus acquiring human connotations: they are portrayed as solitary, charming, quiet, thirsty, naked, unknown, mysterious; sometimes they can be even happy and lucky creatures (Matvejević, 1987). In the perspective elaborated by Louis Marin (1994, p. 107) with reference to *Getica* by Cassiodorus and his disciple Jordanes, the quality of origin of the island is highlighted: "the island is the sign of an origin: the place where the world begins […] at once reading and vision." Likewise, for Deleuze the island is "the radical and absolute origin" (Sedda, 2019, p. 61; authors' translation).

The cinematic island, like the literary one, is configured as a construction of desire (Anton, 2015); a "heterotopia" in the sense of "other space" (Addis, 2016), of "counter-place" (Foucault, 2001, pp. 20–21) with respect to a place, of mythicized space which is not found in reality, and which must be represented in order to exist and be maintained. Cinema plays its part by confusing the real thing with fiction, geography with the imaginary (Gámir & Manuel, 2007). As for the Mediterranean basin, one of the very first films set on an island is probably *The Corsican Brothers* (1898), directed by George Albert Smith, also known as "the English Méliès" (Génot, 2007). This is an adaptation of a theatrical work set specifically in Corsica (for the first film shot on the island we must wait until the 1909 documentary *La Corse Pittoresque*) and in turn inspired by the Alexandre Dumas novel *Les Frères corses* (1844) which tells the story of the separation of twins, one of whom remains on the island and the other leaves to live in Paris. The reference to Corsica, an island that is historically related to Sardinia, allows us to introduce the question of the representation of the island in relation to the continent. The recurring theme in *Les Frères corses* is the telepathy of the two characters,

cinematically transposed by means of pioneering special effects such as the superimposition of images on film. The narrative dualism translates into the representation of the contrast between the wild behaviour of the brother who lives in Corsica, a hospitable land but subject to the law of vendetta, and the civilized brother, who discovers the cruelty and cynicism hidden beneath the refined veil of cultured and sophisticated Paris.

> On the one hand, it is interesting to learn that Corsica arrives in cinema as an image overlaid on the background of another image, on the other hand it is even more important to note that Corsica at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a sufficiently trafficked setting that it may be considered generalized: as soon as a 'Corsican story' is presented, the public already knows what to expect. (Génot, 2007, p. 4; authors' translation)

In the film, Corsica, as it appears cinematographically, becomes a tool for reflection on the definition of the national identity of a Paris-centric France. The French capital establishes a threshold by which to measure and judge itself through the representation of deviance from itself. In the dialectic of this cultural relativism, the island is defined by the negation of something else and the 'islanderscope' of protagonists tends to embody the archetypical desire of 'away' which strengthens the representation of the islanders' choice within the opportunities offered by the continent.

The island is situated as a counter-model in an evident lack of horizontality between "observing culture and observed culture" (Cirese, 1976, p. 38) where, however, it is curiously the first to claim a need for affirmation with regard to the latter. Within the structure of this discourse, the essence of the island is constrained within the constitutive function of a culture, that is the making of itself as "another space, a place which displaces elsewhere the unthinkable elements of history" (Addis, 2016, p. 16; authors' translation). In this way, the representation of islands has all too often found itself subordinate to the representation of the mainland, and it is perhaps no surprise that in 2015 the Museum of Corsica in the town of Corte organized a temporary exhibition entitled *Île(s)* pledging to reflect on the singularities of Corsica through a comparative approach between islands (http://www.musee-corse.com). The innovative aspect of the exhibition was the inversion of the tendency to place the duality of the insular condition in the island-continent contrast, allowing the islands to engage in dialogue with one another — and with the archipelagos — in terms of similarity and difference, within a broader vision, expanded to encompass the vast totality of the sea (Musée de la Corse, 2015): "The island is characterized by its deep ambivalence, its duality, and its paradoxical status [...] an island can signify openness to the vastness of the ocean, to all the ports of the world and to all cultures."

On the islands, the boundaries between land and water are not fixed ones: they form a metamorphic zone (Mack, 2011, p. 183) that changes according to the tides. Mack (2011) has observed the conformation and functions of the shores, described as the liminal and intermediary space that allows sailors, merchants, and castaways to penetrate the marine membrane and temporarily invade the insular soil, though it also represents a resource for the island's economic and social development; from the historical viewpoint, the sea is a limitless and challenging territory that invites travel and 360-degree exploration. On the one hand, it has encouraged commercial trade and cultural exchanges over the centuries, boosted

economic growth, and favoured language contacts; on the other hand, it has facilitated the entry of conquerors and rulers which have taken advantage of their dominant position to subjugate the islanders and enslave them — Western history is studded with such episodes of aggression and violence, and not only in ancient times.

Framing Sardinia

The discourse regarding the island–sea dichotomy also applies to our island, Sardinia. With a surface area of 24,090 km² including its smaller islands and archipelagos, Sardinia is the second-largest island of the Mediterranean. The literary and cinematic representation of Sardinia has long been associated with the interior mountainous landscape, "thus implying an almost total removal of the seascape from the collective imagery of the island" (Urban, 2011, p. 54; authors' translation). The idea of Sardinia as a mysterious land stuck in the past was perpetuated throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and up to the early 20th century in travel books and journals written by historians, geographers (Gen. Alberto Della Marmora), linguists (Max Leopold Wagner), and travellers (Charles Edwardes), not to mention renowned authors from Britain (D. H. Lawrence), Germany (Ernst Jünger and Thomas Münster), and Italy (Elio Vittorini, Carlo Levi). In the eyes (and minds) of these writers, Sardinia appeared as a fascinating treasure to unearth and possess; the features related to wilderness and innocence associated with Sardinia's unspoiled nature have been transferred to its inhabitants, often depicted as proud and indomitable people. The iconography of Sardinia related to marvellous and ancestral themes — such as myths and folk tales about its traditional customs and its collection of superstitions and beliefs regarding atmospheric and natural elements — is also fertile in literary works and films. In this regard, anthropologist Giulio Angioni (2010) coined the neologism *autoesotismo* ('self-exoticism') to refer to the authorial gaze towards Sardinia that Sardinian writer Grazia Deledda nurtured in her works, thus contributing to the invention of a globally successful literary image of Sardinia which was subsequently transferred to several films set on the island, starting with *Cenere* (Febo Mari, 1916), adapted from Deledda's homonymous novel.

Isolation and insularity were the only two possible features which could be attributed to Sardinia, a land which was perceived "like nowhere, […] outside the circuit of civilization," as Lawrence (1921, p. 15) described it in *Sea and Sardinia*. In the title of Lawrence's travel journal, the conjunction 'and' does not imply an intimate connection between the two conjoined elements, inscribed in a dichotomous relation, but it serves in fact to reinforce the geographical and historical distance between Sardinia and the European continent and the impossibility of shortening it by crossing the sea. This disconnection locates the island in "a distinct space-time dimension" (Previti, 2010, p. 13), so the image of Sardinia appears shaped by the gaze of the foreign male visitor, who perceives it as having "no history, no date, no race, no offering" (Lawrence, 1921, p. 15). Lawrence was then attracted by the "uncaptured Sardinia" (Lawrence, 1921, p. 15), which represented the unspoiled, unknown heart of the exotic Mediterranean island, whereas the sea was the aquatic fortress that protected it from foreign invaders and prevented it from stepping into contemporary history.

Though an integral part of its geography and landscape, the sea has always been perceived as a peril by Sardinian islanders, for it allowed pirates and conquerors to pillage undisturbed in seaside villages, plundering their natural and economic resources. This

complex and problematic relationship with the marine element of the island has been long displayed in the narrative production of Sardinian authors until late 1980s, when a new generation of writers emerged, laying the foundations for an innovative literary depiction of the island and an even more revolutionary self-conception of themselves as initiators of a major cultural change. Whilst in the preceding film productions, up to the '80s, Sardinia was depicted as a wild and mysterious land, often nameless and even voiceless, inhabited by uncivilised and almost primitive people, contemporary cinema has focused on cultural and historical issues, dealing with political matters, and exploring the whole of its geography — the inner mountains and the coastline, the rural areas as well as the urban centres. The island placetelling (Diaz-Moore, 2006) has become one of the main stylistic features of present-day film productions, and today Sardinia offers a wide variety of locations for feature-length films and documentaries, music videos, commercials, and television series. The discovery of the Sardinian landscape as a meaningful element which conveys its complex geographical identity has finally brought about the concept of territory as intended by geographers and geo-philosophers. Film critic Goffredo Fofi (2003) has saluted the brand-new literary and cinematic movement as the Sardinian "nouvelle vague," a phrase that vividly evokes the image of a wave breaking on the Sardinian shore — the term 'wave' has been also employed by Laura Nieddu (2012) in her study dedicated to Sardinian 'seagazers', i.e., those authors who have finally discovered the literary potential of the sea and have incorporated it in their narrative universe. The wave metaphor applied to both literature and cinema and, while not meeting the approval of all Sardinian critics and scholars (see Floris, 2001), symbolizes the reconciliation with the sea as a pervasive and iconic constituent of the geography, history, economy, and culture of Sardinia throughout the centuries; the *conditio sine qua non* of its existence and morphology.

As has been extensively pointed out by scholars of film studies (Floris, 2014; Olla, 2008; Urban, 2013), the representation of Sardinia onscreen originates in novels, tales, and travelogues which have tended to highlight the features of wilderness, mystery, and untameability ascribed to the innermost parts of the island. In this view, the recent studies conducted by Sardinian film and media scholars emphasize the importance of constructively calling into question the external gaze of directors, filmmakers, and authors which has moulded and disseminated the image of an ancestral, primitive, and timeless island throughout the 20th century.

Cainà, a woman against the tide

Since the early '20s, Italian film troupes began to travel to Sardinia in search of suggestive and unspoiled settings; between 1920 and 1929, seven feature films were shot on the island: *Alba serena in un tramonto di sangue* (1920) by Mario Celada; *Marcella* (1921) by Carmine Gallone; *Il trionfo della vita* (1921) by Antonio Gravina; *Cainà* (1922) by Gennaro Righelli; *In terra sarda* (1922) by Romano Luigi Borgnetto; *Il richiamo della terra* (1928) by Giovannino Bissi; and *La Grazia* (1929), adapted from a short tale by Grazia Deledda and directed by Aldo De Benedetti. All of these films shared some elements and themes derived from Grazia Deledda's novels and short tales; another noteworthy event is that Deledda was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1926, which led to an ever-growing visibility of her literary works in the Italian cinematic context.

Righelli's film revolves around a young Sardinian goat keeper, Cainà, who lives immersed in the loneliness and wilderness of nature. She is a rebellious woman who refuses to comply with the strict familial rules and to conform to the social role assigned to women in the rural community, so when an Italian sailing ship gets to her village, she manages to escape from the island and reach the continent. During the journey, the captain falls in love with her and offers to accommodate her in his house in a southern Italian town; she agrees to live with him and his sisters who treat her with open hostility and unkindness. When she returns to her homeland, she finds out that misfortune has befallen her whole family: her father has died while searching for her in the mountains; her mother has been left paralysed due to a heart attack caused by shame and grief; her promised fiancé Agostineddu has lost his mind. Feeling guilty and full of remorse, Cainà finally commits suicide.

By reading the plot, the audience acquires all the features to situate Righelli's tragedy within the category of early adventure and exploration films: the means of transport is a sailing ship that connects the two distant worlds, the island and the continent; moreover, the landscape plays a key role in conveying the very meaning of the film, as well as asserting the authorial role of the director. Gianni Olla (2001, p. 32) argues that *Cainà* may be a vivid example of the tendency, widespread at the time, to show landscapes and territories which had been little or rarely explored in films, with the purpose of broadening the narrow boundaries of cinematic fiction. The sailing ship approaching the coastline is an element detached from the island, a floating body which belongs to the sea, not the land. Cainà observes it from far away, while standing on the rocks, the dark majesty of the stony background contrasting with the dazzling luminosity of the sea's surface which stretches from the coast to disappear at the horizon. While inherent to that environment, she feels an irresistible desire to be somewhere else; the synaesthesia of her being mirrors the movements of the natural elements, and she seems to embody the combination of telluric passion, ever-shifting water, and flickering sunlight. From the first scene, the island is connotated as a place separate from others, closed and liminal: an 'Otherworld'. The island takes on the semblance of "a little world […] original repetition of the difference between the world and it is inconceivable exterior whose conception is thereby enabled" (Marin, 1994, p. 107).

The narration incorporates some documentary-like sequences (the scene of Sardinian folk dancing; the feast in the village; the *atìtidu*, the ancient mournful lament), which, alongside the people's use of authentic traditional costumes and work tools, confirm the taste for realism combined with exoticism that was so popular at the time. On a narrative level, these expedients serve to contextualize the story in an existing setting; on an ethnographic level, they inform the audience about the actual habits and indigenous lifestyle by focusing on those geographical, anthropological, and mythical elements that the external observer — and, implicitly, their recipient — wishes to learn about. By sticking to the classical literary canon, *Cainà* contributed to the formation and enhancement of the image of an ancestral and timeless Sardinia, a *topos* that has been profitably exploited by the subsequent feature films shot on the island, first and foremost those adapted from Grazia Deledda's novels and short tales. The act of filming (in) a specific context, whether a mountainous, marine, or urban environment, corresponds to exploring and mapping its boundaries so as to inform the audience about the morphology, the resources, and the potentials of the territory. According to the literary scholar Juri M. Lotman's (1976) topological model of culture, creating a cinematic figure by means of the camera is tantamount to constructing a semantic space. This

means that a border has been crossed (Escher, 2006, p. 308): crossing the border in semantic and cinematic terms is the equivalent of crossing a geographical and cultural border and coming into contact with new, unexpected realities which take shape before the camera and our eyes. Crossing cultural, geographical, linguistic, and gender-related borders turns the unimaginable into cinematic reality (Zimmermann & Escher, 2005). Narration and representation enable the filmmaker to construct the cinematic world, and thus give the audience the key to reorganise it into their mental schemes: this dual meaning construction process derives from an interaction with landscape as a semantic space (Lotman, 1976). They are also closely linked to the concepts of recognition and reception of landscape in geographical, historical, and social terms: "the audience perceives a landscape it has seen before and thus a product purposefully created and processes this substitute into its own subjective sense of perception" (Escher, 2006, p. 309). Films allow the audience to travel to faraway places, get to know distant cultures, and visit real landscapes, as well as imagined ones — the latter bring about several stereotypes and tropes which serve to reinforce our vision of the world. If we can address the historical references of cinema, we can also consider its imaginary, infinite geographical coordinates and explore the world through a mediatized experience. Geographer Chris Lukinbeal (2005) has examined the possible functions landscape can serve in narrative cinema, attributing to each function several dramatic features: landscape as space, i.e., the "area in which the drama of the film can unfold" (Lukinbeal, 2005, p. 6); and landscape as place, which "refers to the location where the narrative is supposedly set (whether real or imagined)" (Lukinbeal, 2005, p. 6). Following this dichotomy, cinematic landscape can be interpreted in geographical and spatial terms, as well as regarded from a narrative and symbolic perspective. Yet, Harper and Rayner (2010) assign two distinctive roles to films regarding the use they make of landscapes: they can be either metaphoric or metonymic. In the first case, cinematic landscapes offer "displaced representations of desires and values, so that these can be expressed by the filmmakers and shared by audiences" (Harper & Rayner, 2010, p. 21), whereas, in the second, the landscape is comprised of one identifiable element — e.g., a city represented by one single skyscraper — that transfers the idea of the landscape as a complex whole (Harper & Rayner, 2010, p. 20). One of the purposes of fiction films is to spread images of invented and real landscapes throughout time and space, thus contributing to further discovery and knowledge. Unlike photography and pictorial art, cinema has endowed landscapes with movement and duration, thus gaining the temporal dimension as well (Costa, 2006).

The cinematic depiction of islands falls within the broader category of cinematic landscape, which has proven to be a productive field in film studies since the period of silent films (Balázs, 1924) and even more in recent times (Bernardi, 2002; Harper & Rayner, 2010; Lefebvre, 2006b; Mottet, 1999). Cinematic landscape has also been addressed from a geographical perspective, especially with respect to documentary films (Lacoste, 1976; Wirth, 1952). In this regard, the ground-breaking articles by Aitken and Zonn (1993, 1994) have paved the way for geographical film research about cinematic landscapes (Escher, 2006; Escher & Zimmermann, 2001; Lukinbeal, 2005) and about cinematic representation and its impact on geography (Aitken, 2003; Mains, 2004; Zonn & Winchell, 2002). In films, "landscapes are not always discovered, they can also be created" (Harper & Rayner, 2010, p. 16): they can likewise be re-created, invented, and adjusted to the specific purposes of the story recounted in the film. They can fulfil several functions, too, as argued by André Gardies

(1999): landscape as backdrop, landscape as framework, landscape as counterpoint, landscape as expression, landscape as catalysis, and landscape as drama. The depiction of the islandscape in *Cainà* belongs to the categories of landscape as expression and drama, as it embodies the woman's feelings and her innermost desire to cross the insular boundaries to discover other places and sublimate her "nostalgia for an unknown land […]". This oxymoron is an allusion to the earliest human settlements on the island, and at the same time encourages Cainà to move towards emancipation. Cainà's nostalgia can also be channelled to her curiosity for another unknown place, like the one so vividly evoked by Charles Baudelaire (1869) in his poem *L'invitation au voyage*: "cette nostalgie du pays qu'on ignore, cette angoisse de la curiosité." From the very beginning, we have some interesting textual and narrative elements: the setting where the story unfolds, Cainà's homesickness, and the shadow of an unknown land projecting onto her destiny. Cainà is the bearer of specific attitudinal and behavioural features, such as wildness, rebelliousness, independence, freedom, and an inability to bow to her father's will and social rules. Her pride, like the ruins of the *nuraghi* (imposing megalithic edifices built in Sardinia during the Bronze Age) and defensive castles shown in the opening frames of the film, is the relic of a glorious past. All the contradictions of a contested culture converge in the tragedy of the young woman; Cainà's destiny can also be read as the metaphor of the island's fate in a delicate historical period of political and institutional changes that are causing Sardinia to become more and more involved in the process of national unification, from the modernisation of standards of living, the pressures of tradition, and the comparison with an increasingly culturally and geographically accessible elsewhere (the continent). She is forced to pay the price for her pursuit of freedom: the expiation of the guilt of an island which once was free and indomitable in a now-distant past for which the protagonist feels nostalgia.

In her study of cinematic insularity, Simona Previti (2010, p. 56; authors' translation) considers setting a film on an island a "strong authorial choice":

> It is an operation that vigorously puts the act of cinematic creation into play, probably in its most crucial point […]. It is as if the author needed to take their characters to these spaces, throw them like a handful of earth on a lost island in the middle of the sea so as to better observe, from above and from a distance, what they are or what they may become in an extreme place where they do not belong.

The intrinsic characteristics of the island have a profound impact on the filmmaking process and influence the relationship between the cast and the insular landscape, whose features are mirrored in the representation of the characters and in the storytelling. The portrayal of human characters and feelings is strongly connected with the depiction of a 'humanised' space, as in our case study.

Drawing on the notion of cinematic landscape as cultural artefact, Gámir and Manuel (2013, pp. 92–93; authors' translation) argue that:

> the 'cinematic island' is a basically cultural concept, derived from the approximations and intentions of its creators (screen players, producers, directors), which most of the times exhibit the intention to show their apartness in relation to continental space, as well as, in some extreme cases, their inaccessibility.

Nevertheless, as the two authors point out, films have exploited some geographical features to the detriment of others, thus turning them into universal themes of insularity and islandness, and insisting on some peculiar aspects more than others, such as smaller islands being preferred to larger ones. The island would essentially be defined as an entity apart from the continent, not only in terms of geographical distance but also due to its physical size: the ideal island is smaller than the continent which it is detached from.

From the earliest days, the cinematic evocation of the Sardinian landscape was never a simple question of the photography and the vehicle for a specific idea of Sardinia.

> The territory tends to be identified with the people who inhabit it, it becomes the projection of the feelings and characteristics of a community, it bears the marks of the past and of a collective memory. The territory thus becomes the mirror image of the traits attributed to the characters in it. (Urban, 2013, p. 308)

The indomitable Cainà embodies a certain idea of wild nature from the first part of the film; with the rejection of her betrothed, Agostineddu, she begins the route to a double betrayal — that of her family and that of the entire community. Already, the name Cainà takes us into the realm of Bible stories, and she is not only a rebel and a traitor but, more precisely, she is the prodigal daughter and the unyoked woman whose very behaviour denies the Christian values of honouring one's parents and submitting to one's husband. Her sins end up being atoned for by her family, fiancé included. The warning is clear and the reference to religious precepts is articulated as a conflict of values which emerges from the incongruence of the young woman's extrovert and contemptuous behaviour compared to the community's gloomy Catholic moralism. Likewise, her strong personality may be interpreted as a form of unconscious pagan spirituality and devotion to the natural elements; her ecstatic relationship with the sea arouses her parents' concern, such that she is believed to be bewitched. The image of Cainà diving into the sea, irresistibly attracted by the water's surface sparkling in the sunlight, draws her parents' disapproval and severe religious judgement: the façade of the church framed behind the parents' point-of-view shot expresses all their contempt and lack of understanding, and resonates with the inescapable hostility of the community. Cainà's wildness, though being a reason for her intolerance and restlessness, is anything but primitive; rather, it converges on a burst of emancipation through which the protagonist tries to liberate herself from a conservative and oppressive system.

Frames are significant pieces of a moving narrative which responds to precise rules of the cinematic language — Christian Metz (1964) attributed linguistic qualities to cinema (*langue ou langage*), and Pasolini (1972) described it as the "written language of reality." Cinematic landscape comprises other elements too, such as sounds and music, which contribute to framing the narrative within fixed spatial and temporal limits. As for silent films, landscapes were more similar to the still backdrops of theatrical pieces where characters acted in a delimited, motionless space. The idea of landscape as representation, as a theatre where actual life occurs, has been theorized by Italian geographer Eugenio Turri (1998, p. 13), who attributes to individuals and society the double role of actors with an ecological impact on the environment, and viewers who can critically interpret and grasp their own agency in the territory. According to the distinction between setting and landscape as conceptualised by French art historian Anne Cauquelin, setting is the space where the story takes place, whilst

landscape is the "*space freed from eventhood*" (Lefebvre, 2006b, p. 22; italics in original). *Setting* defines the portion of space framed by the camera and incorporates all the spatial and narrative features of the story, thus providing the spectator with the necessary information to contextualise the events in the diegetic space ("the telling of a story always requires a setting of some sort": Lefebvre, 2006a, p. xi). According to Lefebvre (2006b, p. 24), "in mainstream cinema, natural or exterior spaces tend to function as setting rather than landscape in the vast majority of cases. It is the place where something happens, where something takes place and unfolds." The definition of cinematic landscape as setting encompasses the participatory role of the viewer in constructing its cultural and symbolic patterns. Among the scholars who have studied the relationship between cinema and landscape, Harper and Rayner (2010) argue that cinematic landscape is the result of a combined vision of space — on the one hand, it reflects the filmmaker's individual sense and personal sensitivity; on the other hand, it represents the product of a cultural or societal history: "Film language, therefore, and the language of cinematic landscapes, are portrayals that connect filmmakers and audiences with an innate and primal sense of self and of the world" (Harper & Rayner, 2010, p. 18). This is particularly true if we consider the role played by cinematic landscapes in triggering our memories and feelings linked to a place, a situation, or a personal experience: in this sense, the idea of land-shape — that is to say, the landscape being shaped by the author's gaze (Tognolotti, 2017) and re-defined by the audience — underlies the notions of collective memory and cultural representation linked to landscape so effectively formulated by Simon Schama (1995, p. 61):

> Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock. […] it should also be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery.

This image draws on Carl O. Sauer's (1925/1983, p. 321) definition of landscape as "an area made up of distinct associations of forms, both physical and cultural," which shape the landscape's identity and individuality. Associating the cultural landscape to a "symbolic legacy," as Rowntree and Conkey (1980, p. 461) put it, means conveying a series of elements or phenomena which are linked to the history of a territory and the human presence in it. People, like monuments and buildings, leave a concrete, culture-related print on the environment they inhabit and bend to their own needs, therefore the landscape absorbs and reflects the signs and artefacts produced by a given community during a specific time span. By including the notion of landscape within a culture vs. nature pattern, we attribute to it a specific function of world appropriation, that is to say, "the agency of the human gaze to transform and construct the world and storytelling correspondingly" (Bernardi, 2017, p. 23; authors' translation). Similarly, Daniels and Cosgrove (1988, p. 1) link the concept of landscape to a "cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings"; landscape is then embedded in a hegemonic culture that conceives society in terms of hierarchical relations. We would also include the gender category into this hierarchy, as the symbolization of landscape and nature by means of the woman's body conveys "the dominant visual regime of white heterosexual masculinism" (Rose, 1993, p. 88) and the

"active male subject vs. passive female object" dichotomy conceptualized by John Berger and afterwards recalled by Laura Mulvey:

> Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus this turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (Berger, 1972/1985, p. 47)

Moving from a Freudian and Lacanian perspective, Mulvey (1989, p. 19) builds on Berger's theory concerning the active male gaze and postulates the concept of "woman's to-be-looked-at-ness" in narrative cinema; that is to say, the woman stands as the image (spectacle), whilst the man is the one who directs the gaze: the spectator. The objectification and *looked-at-ness* of women in the cinematic context implies submissive roles attributed to female characters, which, despite their endeavour to overcome gender-related disparity and discrimination, finally succumb to male control and power. Locating Cainà in the nature-related pole results in her opposition to the culture-related one assigned to her family and community: she is determined to escape patriarchal control and women's predestination to fixed roles in the familial and social hierarchy. We can identify Cainà's islanderscope as a form of world appropriation and a quest for agency and empowerment in opposition to the rigid rules of her family and community. As Cainà embodies the wild, untameable nature, she is not bound to succeed against the power of a male-dominated culture and will eventually be punished for trying to oppose her destiny. If we assume, with Laura Mulvey (1989, p. 15), that woman "stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other," then the character of Cainà confirms the feminine stereotype in traditional Sardinian society: although she strives for self-determination and emancipation, she is incomplete and imperfect without her male counterpart; men control her life and impose on her "the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (Mulvey, 1989, p. 15). In the context of that community in which the female archetype, as represented by the figure of the mother, reflects the universe of the maternal land, Cainà, neither wife nor mother, finds that her role no longer makes sense. The protagonist's longing for freedom, considered a betrayal by the community, must be sanctioned. Cainà takes on the role of scapegoat, confirming the Christian patriarchal structure of the community and at the same time demonstrating the performative strength of the female archetype within the story. Nevertheless, she is a powerful character, she is the one who has an active role; she makes things happen, albeit in a negative way.

Her narrative strength expands the misfortune of the island, taking on its features: the viewer is from the off projected onto her point of view, accompanying her on synaesthetic immersions in a particular universe and sympathizing with her passionate transformations, especially through the essence of her islanderness which mutually reflects a representation of Sardinia. On top of that, since she resists adjusting to the model that society and the family have designed for her, her active role cannot help but be a negative and harmful one; consequently, her actions will result in great adversity for her family and village, hence dooming everyone to a fate of grief and despair. In this regard, her character corresponds more to a reactionary rather than transgressive and empowering representation of women,

and this trait is shared by other films set on islands and starring young female protagonists, such as John Sayles' *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994), where "the portrayal of Fiona, as well as other women […], cannot be analyzed according to its 'success' in representing to the viewer an 'empowered' feminine subject" (Selby & Dixon, 1998, p. 5). In the film, the islandscape, with its mythical and supernatural connotations, is represented as a female space (Selby & Dixon, 1998, p. 20), and Fiona plays a key role in mediating between the human world and the Otherworld inhabited by fairy creatures. Stuart Aitken (2010, p. 14) provides us with another fascinating interpretation of Sayles film, as it "presents a story of close relations between humans and nature, and how these relations are mediated by children." Nature, alongside its connection with female characters — whether human beings or deities — and children, is a central element of both analyses. As Gillian Rose (1993) has brilliantly pointed out, historically there has always been a strong connection between landscapes and nature and the female body, and this is just as true for Cainà: being a woman, she must adhere to the aesthetic stereotypes of mother nature, which in turn appears to be profoundly 'feminised' in the cinematic representation of the landscape. Cainà's character converges on the clichés of apartness, mystery, and wildness which have shaped the island imagery throughout the centuries. Positioning themselves within the ecofeminist perspective, Aitken and Zonn (1993, p. 196) have studied the female and male sexuality and the gender-environment relations in Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) and *Gallipoli* (1981) and outlined a scheme that links masculinity with notions such as culture, control, alienation, and sacrifice, and femininity with concepts like nature, nurture, spirituality, and belonging: the reasoning, masculine side is thus opposed to the spiritual, feminine one. Although subsequent ecofeminist theories have questioned the sharp distinction between the nature-related female role and the culture-related male model and recommended constructively overcoming this Manichean view of the world, the scheme proposed by Aitken and Zonn (1993) is functional to understand the logics underlying the gendered representation of the environment in Righelli's film: the island is a female figure, and this connotation proves to be even more effective in the Italian language, where the noun *isola* is feminine whilst the *continent* belongs to the masculine semiotic and semantic sphere. The island, by definition, must stay apart from the mainland, remain a detached entity; otherwise, its intrinsic nature changes and affects the environment around it. Cainà is not only an insular female character: she is also a border character that inhabits the liminal space between the wilderness of the island and the civilization of the continent, and represents a gendered extension of the marine frontier (Dando, 2005).

From a feminist perspective, following Mulvey's (1989) work, the conventional subject–object relationship which is generally established between man and woman in cinema is overturned in Righelli's film: the exhibition of desire addressed to the female character is immediately inhibited in the vain attempt to objectify Cainà's body. Nevertheless, the viewer identifies with the protagonist's passions, choices, and desires; Cainà is the one who asserts her own agency by choosing how and where to live, the man to love (the sailor), and even the one to reject (Agostineddu). Even her libertarian momentum, though negatively connoted, embraces the viewer's point of view, and her body shuns any possible attempt of objectification and eroticization as the spectator's scopophilic tension moves away from the human form to the natural environment. The metaphor of landscape as theater provided by Eugenio Turri involves both the actor/character and the spectator: the former acts in a play, whilst the latter observes its moves and evolution on stage; "Landscape takes on a new or at

least not fully recognized meaning, which connects it to the ecological relationship between human being and nature, between human being and world" (Turri, 1998, p. 28; authors' translation). As we (spectators) watch Cainà's figure dissolve in the islandscape, we expect it to become the islandscape itself. Her tragedy is the metaphorical condemnation of the island trapped within its own boundaries, and we witness the final dissolution of her body into the landscape-theater. In the very last scene, we see Cainà's body lying on the rocks before being swallowed by the waves and blending with the sea: the process of 'self-scaping' — that is to say, the fusion of her islanderscope with the islandscape — is finally complete.

Conclusions

The analysis of the character of Cainà through the representation of the cinematic space has led us to reconsider the boundaries of islandness and the image of the island from an internal perspective. As islanders ourselves, we have not just focused on the 'island vs. continent' dichotomy, as highlighted in previous studies of the film (Urban, 2011, 2013), or analysed the figure of Cainà as opposed to her family and community, an issue still worthy of further investigation, but have tried to identify ourselves with the film's character and to connect her actions to her islanderscope, a concept we have introduced to explain the islanders' active role. Since ancient times, the arts have resorted to established tropes of backwardness, isolation, and remoteness to convey an idealised — and often distorted — image of islands which has eventually resulted in a colonial gaze and hetero-representation of the insular space, also in cultural and political terms. The cinematic island thus stands for a place of apartness and extraordinariness, regardless of its size and the distance from the mainland. Claiming the specialness of islands may be a double-edged weapon, especially for islanders: the dichotomies (unique–ordinary, normal–deviant, internal–external, island–continent) certainly represent useful tools of the creative processes which give birth to the narration of islands, but also produce an archetypical representation of both islands and islanders. Our case study uncovers the presence of an inner ambiguity between external and internal gazes: whilst the former has developed through the appropriation of island representation, the latter has progressed avoiding the limits of interpretation vertically imposed.

While we were analysing the relationship between Cainà and the representation of Sardinia(ns), we realised the impact this heroine was having on us as spectators and scholars. The very evolution of Cainà's character and her span of exploration solicited more introspection and empathy from us. We were increasingly encouraged to see our personal odysseys — as students and later scholars who have experienced living and studying abroad — mirrored in her discontent and curiosity; certainly, similar triggers pushed us to regard the continent as a getaway from the constraints and idiosyncrasies of the island. The desire to leave the island and visit distant places inhabits Cainà just as any islander who longs to travel overseas, enrich their store of knowledge, and, finally, come back home — or, alternatively, decide to spend the rest of their lives elsewhere.

Since "the task of decolonization remains unfinished, and is perhaps unfinishable" (Nadarajah & Grydehøj, 2016, p. 440), and we have but started to venture into this never-ending process, we are aware that decolonizing the image of a one-hundred-year-old female film character requires tools and efforts that go beyond the specific purpose of our analysis. Nonetheless, our reinterpretation of Cainà has been an occasion of shifting from a vertical approach that

shows islandness as a model of uniqueness, deviance, and eventually marginality, to a decolonial perspective which focuses on Cainà's (r)evolution as the core of a personal and general reflection of contemporary issues, such as female empowerment, patriarchally-structured societal heritage, and our self-perception as islanders. By stating our positionality within the perimeter of our research, we have sought to overturn the 'orientalized' representation of the island, regarded as an exotic, fabulous, and mysterious territory, and look at it as a place of belongingness, identity, and mobility. The narrative strength of Cainà's character blends with the tragedy of the island of which she assumes the features: the viewer shares her point of view, travels with her to Italy and back to Sardinia, and witnesses a perilous odyssey that will ultimately lead to her tragic death. In the final scene, her body is devoured by the sea waves in the very liminal space where islandscape and islanderscope are no longer distinguishable.

At the end of our journey, we would like to conclude our contribution by quoting some verses by Italian poet Andrea Zanzotto about the relationship between *paesaggio* ('landscape') and *personaggio* ('character'), two rhyming words in Italian. The poem goes like this:

> Paesaggio e personaggio / non sempre vanno insieme, / che l'un nell'altro affondino / è quel che più si teme. // Però se questo capita / pur sempre è gran ventura, / solo ove il cuore palpita / la sintesi è sicura. // Fusi eppure distinti: / tali li vuol natura.
>
> *Landscape and character / do not always walk side by side, / the latter sinking in the former / is the most dreadful sight. // If this ever happened, / yet it'll be a great chance, / only where the heart pounds / the union will be intense. // Bonded yet apart: / that's their natural romance.* (Zanzotto, 2005, p. 103; authors' translation)

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