

This essay examines the interrelation between (peripheral) gender identity and (peripheral) urban space. The analysis focuses on the *femminiello*, a quintessentially Neapolitan non-binary subjectivity embodying a fluid sexual identity, performatively crossing across masculine and feminine, deeply connected to the territory where it originates—Naples’ inner city and its low-income historic neighborhoods. Accordingly, the essay looks at the material and immaterial interrelations between urban space and the *femminiello* identity.

Methodologically, the study is built on a qualitative approach based mainly on fieldwork interviews with three of the most prominent *femminielli* of the Neapolitan context: Ciro Ciretta, a recognized exponent of the *femminielli* community and among the founders of a cultural association devoted to spreading and preserving the ancient *femminiello* culture; Tarantina Taran, an iconic local figure dubbed as “Naples’ last *femminiello*” in the city’s Spanish Quarters; and Loredana, activist and secretary of Naples’ Transsexual Association. The voices and stories of these three *femminielli* led us to read this non-binary gender identity in its relation to urban space, from different and complementary perspectives, which ultimately helped us trace a map of changing meaning and emerging forms of adaptation over time.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)

FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Fabrizia Cannella, *Femminielli and the city: urban space and non-binary gender identities in Naples*, © Author(s), CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-661-2.09, in Giuseppina Forte, Kuan Hwa (edited by), *Embodying Peripheries*, pp. 200-215, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-661-2, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-661-2

FEMMINIELLI AND THE CITY: URBAN SPACE AND NON-BINARY GENDER IDENTITIES IN NAPLES

Fabrizia Cannella

The concept I carry with me is [...] that a center does not exist. What does exist is a territory that I traverse. This territory—before I was born, before I identified myself, before I belonged to a social role which each of us is bound to play in the social game—this existing territory is half female and half fish,¹ by which I mean it's a twofold land. This myth was not born in California or in Paris, it was born here, in Naples. This is a very ancient issue: Naples is a land which holds duplicity in itself. You arrive to this land, and you believe you are being visited by duplicity. It is this land indeed that brings the *femminella* to life.

—CiroCiretta, Interview, 2019

This essay examines the interrelation between (peripheral) gender identity and (peripheral) urban space. The focus of analysis is the *femminiello*, a quintessentially Neapolitan non-binary subjectivity embodying a fluid sexual identity, performatively crossing across masculine and feminine, deeply connected to the territory where it originates.² We are particularly interested in the linkages between the *femminiello* identity, their lived experience, and local urban space.³ The essay thus looks at the historical and social linkages between the *femminielli* and the urban character of Naples' inner-city low-income neighborhoods, investigating possible interrelations in the concurrent transformations affecting both these urban spaces and this peculiar gender identity.

The *femminiello* is characterized by a close link with Naples' inner city *quartieri popolari*, low-income historic neighborhoods where they historically embodied a radical questioning of the social construction of gender, existing as men only from the biological point of view but *femmine* (females) in all possible expressions. Inspired by the roles that women assume in Naples' *quartieri popolari* (Di Nuzzo, 2009),⁴ coupled with a continuous interpretation of

¹ In Naples, the word *pesce* (fish) is used to refer to the penis. *CiroCiretta* is therefore presenting Naples as both an amphibious city between land and sea and an entity between feminine and masculine.

² The term *femminiello* in itself conveys the peculiar positioning of this subjectivity across genders. It contains a semantic root referring to the feminine (*femmin-*), combined with an alteration, most often declined in its masculine form (*-iello*) (Zito, 2013). In this essay, the masculine (*femminiello/i*) and feminine (*femmenella/e* and *femminella/e*) forms of the term are used alternately, as it happens in Naples' spoken language.

³ I often use the plural in this essay because the research work has been carried out together with my dear friend and coworker Francesco Pasta.

⁴ In Naples and its surrounding areas, women have often played a central social role, despite living within a patriarchal

female gender that becomes behavior and lifestyle, the femminielli enact an “excessive” performance, expressing a militant will to confirm and to be confirmed as a liminal, peripheral identity (Mauriello, 2018).

The city and its *quartieri popolari* become the stage, the scenography, and the public of this performance, exposing the performative nature of gender (Butler, 2014)—a deconstructive performance that is traditionally expressed both in daily activities and in particular ceremonies carried out by the femminielli. In general, neighborhoods such as the Spanish Quarters, the Rione Sanità, and Forcella—where this character with ancient roots tended to settle in—lie at the heart of Naples, but can be described as peripheral in virtue of their inhabitants’ transversal interactions with institutionalized structures (Caldeira, 2017), as well as the fact that they are beset by persisting predicaments such as substandard housing, joblessness, and crime (Dines, 2012).

We approach this urban underbelly—the socio-cultural setting where the femminiello figure has thrived—as “a place produced through inhabiting” (McFarlane, 2011), that is, through embodied practices by its inhabitants, with social relationships deeply inscribed in its urban patterns. We thus read Naples’ *quartieri popolari*, their local culture, and the embedded identities within as mutually constitutive entities, both in socio-spatial terms and as patterns of meaning.

Naples’ marginal integration into circuits of capitalist accumulation allowed the character of such neighborhoods to remain intact, with a persistent rooting of the lower-income classes and activities in the center.⁵ However, from the ’90s onward, the situation has been rapidly changing, with emerging issues of gentrification, marketization, and displacement. As an old-time inhabitant of the Spanish Quarters, Gigi, puts it: “You lose the essence of Naples, which was your home, it was your city” (Interview, 2019). The apparent demise of the femminiello may thus be seen as a telltale symptom indicating how the peripheral culture characterizing Naples’ “popular quarters” as “a space of radical opening” (hooks, 1969) is increasingly being lost. If it is in this scenography that the femminiello identity takes shape, what are the material and immaterial interrelations between urban space and the femminielli? Furthermore, is the ongoing local socio-spatial and cultural transformation feeding significantly into the progressive disappearance of this character from Naples’ humanscape, as some studies suggest (Di Nuzzo, 2009; Zito, 2013)—and if so, in what ways?

culture. Women and femminielli, for instance, famously took part in Naples’ *Quattro Giornate* (Four Days), the famous upheaval against occupying Nazi forces toward the end of World War II.

⁵ Naples’ historic center remains one of the most densely populated in Europe (Dines, 2012).

This essay contributes to answering these questions, focusing on the role of urban space and culture in defining this identity. It does so by presenting three different yet complementary narratives, which emerged through fieldwork interviews with three femminielli: *CiroCiretta* (a recognized exponent of the femminielli community, among the founders of a cultural association devoted to spreading and preserving the ancient femminiello culture), *Tarantina Taran* (an iconic local figure dubbed as “Naples’ last femminiello” in the city’s Spanish Quarters), and *Loredana* (secretary of Naples’ Transsexual Association). By leaving space for them to speak for themselves—to explain their own subjective experience—our aim is to avoid positing the femminielli as an abstract object of study. On the contrary, we intend only to render their unexpected and peculiar micro-narratives and pictures, which are closer to their real living contexts and display a significant personal awareness of the evolution of their identities through space and time. We integrate their testimonies with our own observations and scholarly references only to contextualize them and help the reader understand and make sense of the discourse. With help from the voices of these three prominent femminielli, we will now traverse Naples’ urban space, tracing a map of femminiello history—replete with shifting meaning and emerging forms of adaption—over place and across time.

Scene 1. *CiroCiretta*: “Don’t look for us out of our neighborhoods”

CiroCiretta, born in the early 1950s, is a recognized exponent of the femminielli community, running a cultural association devoted to spreading and preserving the ancient femminiello culture.⁶ You will definitely find him/her⁷ at every major event in and around Naples, such as the celebration of *Madonna di Montevergine*, the protector of femminielli, a ritual of devotion, purification from sin, and initiation into a new life⁸. A handsome man with an intense womanly gaze, *CiroCiretta* appears just as he personally defines himself: “A male who, however, carries in himself a pink brush stroke.”⁹

As she implies in the opening quote (this essay’s epigraph), Naples and its territory constitute the cultural and physical background enabling the femminiello to exist as such. Duplicity is in the city’s character, as embodied in the myth of the city’s founding through the figure of *Partenope*, an ornitomorphic mermaid representing both duplicity and self-sufficiency

⁶ AFAN (Associazione Femmenelle Antiche Napoletane), founded in 2009.

⁷ We are going to refer to *CiroCiretta* both as “he” and “she” as he/she (lui/lei in Italian) does in conversation.

⁸ The *Madonna di Montevergine*, also known as “*Mamma Schiavona*” and revered as protector of the femminielli, is a sort of Christian transfiguration of the earthly pagan goddess *Cibeles* (Zito, 2013). The festivity celebrating her falls in the beginning of February and is held at the namesake sanctuary in *Montevergine*, in the Campania region.

⁹ *CiroCiretta* welcomed us for an interview in *Torre Annunziata*, in Naples’ hinterland, where she currently lives. The interview lasted approximately two hours and was conducted in July 2019. All quotes in this section, where not otherwise stated, are *CiroCiretta*’s own words.



Fig. 1
A portrait of
Ciro Ciretta
(photo:
Alessandro
Genovese).



(Zito, 2013). Half bird and half woman, Partenope personifies Naples as the cradle of the idea of doubleness (Bertuzzi, 2018). According to Marcasciano (2015), Naples is a city that, “for its history and tradition, legend and reality, represented the largest factory of gender variance” in Italy (Fig. 1).

Naples/Partenope thus defines the cultural frame where the *femminiello*—“a person with a masculine body and a feminine feeling,” as described again by a *CiroCiretta* himself¹⁰—traditionally belongs. This is spatially articulated in the urban tissue of inner-city low-income neighborhoods. As Porpora Marcasciano (2015) recalls in her account of transgender experience in Naples in the 1970s, the city “had possible and probable spaces, places and times, which were absolutely public spaces—such as alleys, quarters, *bassi*, nooks, and, in general, the whole historic centre—open to a visibility impossible elsewhere.” Here, the *basso* (in Neapolitan, *vascio*; meaning, literally, “low”) constitutes the archetypal domestic space, one that mediates social relations and undergirds, in its spatiality, the definition of the *femminielli*’s non-binary identity. The *basso* is a small dwelling constituted by one (sometimes two) room(s), located at ground level and immediately adjacent to the street, over which it often extends through unauthorized built extensions

¹⁰ From the interview in “Come mestiere si vestiva di sogno” (in Italian), curated by Pasquale Quaranta, Roberto Spellucci, Francesca Petrucci: www.arcoiris.tv/scheda/it/9988.

as well as flexible uses of space. It is a multifunctional space with neither rigid partitions nor strictly designated functional areas, seamlessly connected to the public space: a spatial continuum which, as *CiroCiretta* explains, is projected into the *femminielli*'s own fluid identity, and constitutes the setting for its social performance. *CiroCiretta* thus explicitly recognizes the importance of the built environment in the cultural definition of the *femminiello* identity and social role, emphasizing its underlying spatial component. The bourgeois house “separates your body and its activities,” while the *basso* doesn't.

Marcasciano (2015) renders the private-public continuity of the *bassi* and *vicoli* (alleys) of Naples' Spanish Quarters as the *femminielli*'s milieu, situating her observation in one of the most significant periods of their presence in the neighborhood (the 1970s). She vividly describes an utterly surprising, uncategorizable eatery, run by a middle-aged woman known as *Palumbella*, who at some point in the night would spread open her ground-floor one-room home doors, which “became one with the alley,” fixing the shutters with chairs usually occupied by transsexuals. The clientele, carefully selected “quite in contrast to the codes in effect elsewhere,” was composed of “commoners, rascals, smugglers, prostitutes, and above all, many *femminielli*.” Neighboring women took a hand in her successful enterprise: those on the sides selling beer, wine, napkins, and condoms, and the ones from upper balconies pulling down their *panaro* (basket) to trade smuggled cigarettes.

According to *CiroCiretta*, the essence of the *femminella* identity is nowadays facing a “portion of contemporaneity” in a space in continuous evolution dominated by the reverberations of globalization, which combine to eradicate the *femminiello*—as well as other local cultures and identities—from its original condition.^{11,12} In this regard, *Bertuzzi* (2018) points out that the new generations tend not to identify themselves with the archaic figure of the *femminiello*, nor do they recognize the historical cultural context to which the *femminielli* belong. Instead, new generations rely on more contemporary and translocal self-ascriptions (such as “transsexual,” “transgender,” or “cross-dresser”). No historical, mythological, transcendental component is contemplated by them (Fig. 2).

Nevertheless, for *femminelle* like *Ciretta*, such an estrangement from themselves and their culture would only be possible in the event of a true apocalypse, in which the mermaid loses her double, the sea dries up, and the volcano *Vesuvius* gets sucked down underground. In other words, it could never happen! According to her point of view, the *femminiello* follows space-time trajectories that go beyond a superficial union because of the mythical descent

¹¹ *Ciretta* describes the workings of globalization with a Neapolitan expression, “*trasn e sic 'e si mettn' e chiat*,” which literally means “they get in thin and they go fat.” In other words, they slowly insinuate themselves and then become pervasive.

¹² For a more detailed discussion on these issues see *Zito and Paolo*, 2010, 2019 and *Vesce*, 2017 (all in Italian).



Fig. 2
Ciro Ciretta
(photo:
Alessandro
Genovese).

Fig. 3
The vandalized
mural depicting
la Tarantina
in the Spanish
Quarters, 2019
(photo: Fabrizia
Cannella, Naples,
September 2019).



and deep territorial rooting. Indeed, in her association's name—Associazione Femmenelle Antiche Napoletane (Ancient Neapolitan Femmenelle Association)—“ancient” stands for anti-historical, Ciretta argues: an identity which is immortal, and beyond time. For CiroCiretta, although the number of femmenelle consistent with their original “approach”—the expression of their non-binary identity—seems (apparently) very small, this does not imply an actual risk of disappearance or homogenization into an alternative gender identity. She effectively summarizes this thought with a metaphor: “So I say to myself, should I believe those twelve who in 1931 didn't sign the fascist statute, or should I believe the 30 million who signed? I believe in those twelve, this is my answer!”¹³

Scene 2. Tarantina Taran: “Naples' last femminiello”

“Non è Napoli!” (it's not Naples). This derogatory statement appeared one morning on the recently inaugurated mural depicting La Tarantina, an iconic local figure dubbed as “Naples' last femminiello” in the city's Spanish Quarters. Her portrait was obscured overnight, her gaze and gesturalism sprayed in black¹⁴ (Fig. 3). La Tarantina is a revered

¹³ With this statement, CiroCiretta refers to the oath of allegiance to the Fascist regime of 1931, requested of Italian university professors. Throughout Italy, there were only about ten who refused to sign the formal act to join the regime, thus accepting the loss of their university chair along with other restrictions.

¹⁴ In June 2020, the mural was restored to its original condition, with support from Naples' municipality, and re-inaugurated in grand style, with the participation of the city mayor. In this respect, this episode further highlights that the femminiello identity enjoys an across-the-board consideration as an element at the core of Neapolitan culture, despite this unexpected act of vandalism.



character in the “quartieri,” where she lives. In 1947, as a teenager, she escaped from her family in a small town and reached Naples. She settled in the Spanish Quarters, where she became a recognized femminiello. “I was small, I was like 10 ... I was, you know, effeminate ... and everyone was telling me *femmene*,” she recounts, indicating the femminiello not just as a self-ascribed identity.¹⁵ The mural expresses the public will to perpetuate and commemorate the identity of the femminiello and testifies to the relevance of her socio-cultural role. Its vandalization may also reveal ongoing societal shifts within the local community, as Pino, a long-time resident, explains:

[This] ... would never have occurred in other times. The absolute respect of this figure with mythical connotations, of this icon that could also pacify families and complex situations in the neighborhood, has recently undergone this act [...] and therefore the denial of its roots, the history it has developed in the Spanish Quarters. (Interview, 2019)

When we meet La Tarantina herself, however, she proudly declares to be absolutely unaffected by this silly affront.

The vandalized mural depicts La Tarantina holding the *panariello*, a wicker basket used for *tombulella scostumata*, a traditional raffle game that historically brought together the inhabitants of “popular districts” (Fig. 4). Traditionally, the femminella does not participate in the game as contender, but rather—in light of her social role, exceeding dualistic gender divisions—performs the role of guarantor of impartiality, extracting the numbers to read them out loud and weave stories out of them in an overtly vulgar, comic performance (Bertuzzi, 2018). This is a deeply rooted, powerful ritual, its significance lying as much in the creation of a community as in its peculiar performative expression. It is La Tarantina that embraces the *panariello*, and it is the femmenella that holds tight her territory’s community, signifying the local codes of coexistence.

The figure of the femminiello, indeed, is historically embedded in this neighborhood, which remains animated by the chapels of saints and deceased family members, screams of sellers, markets, craft shops, traffic of overcrowded two-wheeled vehicles, and a dense texture of bassi. Although the population is predominantly constituted by a socially marginalized underclass, even middle-class groups coexist structurally with public employees, an intellectual class of bourgeois owners together with immigrants and families of organized crime members (Laino, 2017). A first triangulation of interviews (2019) with local inhabitants reveals disparate perceptions of the femminielli. For some, the



Fig. 4
A scene from
a *tombulella*
scostumata
(photo:
Alessandro
Genovese).

¹⁵ We met La Tarantina twice in the basso in the Spanish Quarters where she lives. We conducted two interviews of approximately one hour each, carried out in October 2019. All quotes in this section, where not otherwise stated, are La Tarantina’s words, collected in these two meetings.



femminielli continue to characterize the neighborhood—but only in specific places and time slots. For others, it is a figure that has become extinct altogether; some claim that the few remaining femminielli became invisible, moving out from the center, forced to live on prostitution as “transsexuals.” For most people and local media, however, only “the last femminiello” allegedly remains: La Tarantina.

As a matter of fact, when La Tarantina receives us in the basso where she lives alone, she cares to remark upon her role as the last existing authentic femminiello: “Now everything is imitation, and vulgarity.” In the past years, she has indeed ascended to stardom: she appeared on TV reports, a documentary, and is now touring as main actress in a theater piece dedicated to her life. As we sit talking in her bedroom/living room/entrance, a young couple calls, asking for a photograph. The walls display old pictures, and her drawers guard many more images of her youth, when she was allegedly a friend and muse for Fellini, Pasolini, Moravia, Parise, and other writers, artists, and directors of the time.¹⁶

When she first arrived to the quarters, she recounts, there was hunger in Naples. At that time, the alley she lives in was known to host brothels and prostitution. King Ferdinando too, she tells, had been a regular in his day¹⁷—the Royal Palace is at a stone’s throw—and a man living

¹⁶ For a more detailed account of La Tarantina’s life experience, see Romano, 2013 (in Italian).

¹⁷ She refers to King Ferdinando I, who ruled between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

just down the alley is widely said to be the illegitimate son of King Umberto (indeed, “he is called Umberto himself”), who is believed to have had a relationship with a beautiful woman from the quarters.¹⁸ The truthfulness of these legends is of course less relevant than their role in highlighting Naples’ historical and still lingering mixture of high and low.

From her perspective—undoubtedly centered on her own character—La Tarantina is categorical when speaking of the fate of the femminiello in the popular districts and in Naples: “The world goes on, it has not fallen behind, and today I am the last one, full stop!” Her somewhat intransigent statement aims to highlight how the core of this shift lies in a process of evolution, the opening up of possibilities for the femminiello in the “multidimensional expression of gender” (Miano Borruso, 2011). In the times of her youth, in terms of substantiality, “as God created you, so you remained,” whereas today, “we can turn the virtue into vanities, cross-dressing and coloring ourselves,” and even, “transform an essence into a form, undergoing surgery.” In La Tarantina’s view, thus, the femminiello is an obsolete character, whose essence has been nowadays irremediably outdated due to the evolving technologies and social costumes.

Scene 3. Loredana: “We will soon be called TTT”

“The femminielli were the welfare of the quarters!” Thus Loredana, secretary of Naples’ Transsexual Association, around 60, sums up her down-to-earth analysis of the femminielli’s social role and historical path, chain-smoking smuggled cigarettes.¹⁹ She does not hesitate to debunk the widespread view of the popular quarters as a space of recognition and acceptance for the femminielli, and instead explains the relation between such non-heteronormated subjects and the peripheral inner neighborhoods as one of mutual support, a pragmatic compromise. In her view, the femminielli, because of social stigmatization, quite simply had no other place to go, but in the city’s poverty-stricken neighborhoods they would find some accommodation, usually of bad quality and at high cost. They typically engaged in the prostitution business, she explains, putting forward her own experience when she got kicked out from home—“and imagine, my father voted for the Communist Party!” At that time business was good, and the femminielli had some disposable income; they started lending credit or helping neighborhood families buy home appliances—a pan, some bedsheets—getting the money back in small



Fig. 5
Loredana at
her window,
in Central
Naples (photo:
Alessandro
Genovese).

¹⁸ King Umberto I died in 1900, making the story highly unlikely to be true.

¹⁹ Loredana agreed to dedicate her time to meet us and invited us to her house in the Rione Sanità. The interview, conducted over coffee, lasted about two hours and was carried out in October 2019. All quotes in this section, where not otherwise stated, were collected in this conversation with Loredana.



instalments. “The femminielli fought for, and bought the acceptance of the quarters,” Loredana states. They built up support networks within the quarters, helping each other out. Concerning the femminielli’s supposedly mythical status, she is just as desecrating: “The femminielli are said to have broken asses, and therefore to bring good luck! That’s why they pick the raffle numbers!”²⁰ She also cares to mention the other side of the coin, namely that the femminielli have been identified with misfortune: during the 1980s earthquake that hit

²⁰ In Neapolitan, “tener o cul rotti” (to have a broken ass) is a colloquial expression meaning “to have good luck.”



Fig. 6
A framed picture portraying Loredana during her *matrimonio* (wedding) (photo: Fabrizia Cannella, Naples, September 2019).

the city, people frantically escaping from their homes allegedly scapegoated them for the disaster.

Loredana has been living here, near the Sanità neighborhood, for over thirty years (Fig. 5). Her two-room street-level home, leading onto steps climbing up the hill, is garnished with pictures, one of them portraying her in a wedding gown: that was her *matrimonio*, a staged wedding, traditionally a ceremony of the *femminielli*²¹ (Fig. 6). Back then it was a real thing, with the procession, vehicles, and all; now, it's more like a re-enactment, she says. Yet, she stresses, *femminielli* have not disappeared: "Of course the *femminielli* still exist: they are just being called with new names, such as transgender, transsexual, now the Americans are going to find a new name for us, we will be called TTT!"²² She explains this while drinking one coffee after another, her talk frequently interrupted by phone calls for the Trans Helpline. Loredana

considers herself as falling within each one of these gender categories.

The *femminiello* therefore emerges as not just a geographically located, but also a historically contingent category. Things started to change in the late 1970s—not because of drugs, as La Tarantina seemed to argue at one point, or because of the 1980 earthquake, as in a neighbor's view, but because technological advancement made gender transition possible. Initially it was a do-it-yourself, uncertain process; nowadays, a tighter procedure is in place. Hormones and surgery enable many people, who would have identified as a *femminiello* half a century ago, to become woman. Being a *femminiello* was thus a condition framed by, and performed through, the available means; and as such possibilities have changed, so has the *femminiello*. Now that they can rent a flat anywhere in the city, they do not need to reside only in Naples' low-end neighborhoods: the *femminielli*'s purported disappearance, in Loredana's view, is actually a consequence of their increasingly emancipated role within society.

²¹ For an interesting account (in Italian) on the *femminielli*'s wedding, see Zito (2017).

²² Loredana says TTT to actually refer to DDT (an insecticide). With this term she ironically makes reference to the infinite variety of appellations and acronyms used in the LGBTQI+ community to indicate gender identity.

Conclusion

The voices and stories of *CiroCiretta*, *Tarantina Taran*, and *Loredana* have led us through the question of the *femminiello* identity in its relation to urban space, from different and complementary perspectives. On a material level, dwelling space in the quarters may have influenced the *femminielli* gender identity and its social performance. According to *CiroCiretta*, the flexible spatiality of living in the *basso*, and its seamless flow into the public space of the neighborhood's alleys, translate into a fluid gender identity which is consciously social and publicly performed.

With their socio-spatial arrangements and lifestyles, Naples' *quartieri popolari* constituted the milieu where the figure of the *femminiello* found shelter and sustenance, engaging in under-the-counter economies and informal livelihoods. Substandard but affordable housing solutions, off-the-books transactions, and "unauthorized" activities in the quarters allowed the *femminielli* to survive and thrive at times of widespread poverty and social exclusion. In the quarters, the *femminielli* gained social acceptance through neighborhood-based pragmatic interactions, rather than any predetermined cultural acceptance, as *Loredana* pointed out.

In this respect, the central location of such neighborhoods within Naples' urban core is likely to have played a role in positioning the *femminella* firmly in the city's cultural imagination and social reality, as *La Tarantina* indirectly explained (and as her case in and of itself demonstrates). A stone-throw from the city's monumental squares, seats of power, and formal spaces, these "peripheral" settlements in the heart of Naples provided the *femminielli* proximity, visibility, and recognition.

Furthermore, beyond the spatial qualities and topographic location of the quarters, it is necessary to recognize a more metaphysical component in the construction of the *femminiello* identity. As *CiroCiretta* unwaveringly states, it is the locality—with its history, myths, and energy—that ensures that despite exterior changes, the *femminiello*, in its locally grounded essence, will not disappear.

The three testimonies presented thus shed some light on how the figure of the *femminiello* intertwines, in practice, with the urban space where it originated, overlapping in material, social, topographic, and symbolic dimensions. Yet the question of the interconnection between the supposed demise of the *femminiello* and the socio-spatial transformations permeating the quarters is far more complex, defying categorization under a single perspective and requiring further investigation across several areas of study.

As a self-proclaimed last exponent of a bygone era and disappearing identity, *La Tarantina* depicts the *femminiello* as an evolving figure embedded in a flow of change—a flow that affects

neighborhoods and their once mutually constitutive identities alike. With her historical analysis, Loredana further articulates this concept: broader processes of social transformation, technological innovation, and ultimately emancipation led the femminiello to sever its ties to the popular neighborhoods. Yet, as Ciro Ciretta explains, the femminiello will continue to exist as a Neapolitan identity, independent from the social role and denominations projected onto it—at least “until the sea dries up and the Volcano crumbles underground.”

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