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**The Sea and The Body as Liminal Spaces:
An epistemological investigation
on colonial wounds**

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Appendices</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>vii</i>
Chapter 1 Introduction: Paddling out to the sea	1
1.1 Theoretical background	2
1.2 Presentation of the research	4
1.3 The sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Ocean Sea	5
1.4 Positionality: The seashore as borderlands	6
Chapter 2 Methodology: Waiting in the line-up	9
2.1 Liminagraphy: A research method, anti-method, qualitative approach <i>A relational approach</i>	10 10
2.2 The Liminagraphy Sea	12
2.3 Healing writing	13
2.4 Methodological diary	14
Chapter 3 Stories: Catching waves	16
3.1 Stories from the sea	17
<i>Adriana</i>	17
<i>P</i>	18
<i>Paola</i>	20
<i>Micaela</i>	20
<i>Michela and Luigi</i>	21
<i>Marta</i>	23
<i>Ibrahim</i>	23
Chapter 4 Lessons: Taking a stroll on the seashore	26
4.1 Nature/Human	27
4.2 Body/Mind	28
<i>Water Body</i>	29
<i>Blue Mind</i>	29
<i>Fluid Spirit</i>	30
4.3 Feeling/thinking	30
<i>Body as epistemology</i>	31
<i>Sea as epistemology</i>	31
4.4 Conclusion	32
<i>Appendices</i>	<i>34</i>
References	37

List of Figures

Figure 1 - Paddling out to the sea	1
Figure 2 - Waiting in the line-up	9
Figure 3 - Catching waves	16
Figure 4 - Taking a stroll on the seashore	26

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Is <i>my</i> relation with the sea colonized?	34
Appendix 2 - Details of the stories	36

List of Acronyms

PAR Participatory Action Research

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Abstract

This research paper is an encounter of stories, each of which narrates a different epistemological position with the sea highlighting different ways of learning and (un)learning. Through the metaphor of the sea and the adoption of liminagraphy, a feminist decolonial approach, the research aims to refuse a colonial/imperialistic binary logic and to embrace “embodied” and “relational” ways of knowing (and being). Exploring the connection with body, trauma, and the sea, it investigates the systemic invisible violence that caused the colonial wounds and their (im)possibility to heal. The research, therefore, aims to highlight and acknowledge the tensions that the current global system still carries and to question the possibilities and impossibilities of completely resisting it, as the first step toward a social transition.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research starts from the critique against the pain narrative and the modern/colonial, neoliberal, rational, and binary logic imposed by the mainstream development theories and practices that have resulted to be violent, distant, detached, and dehumanizing. Hence, it moves towards the need to re-connecting the concept of development with relationality, vulnerability, and human emotions and re-orienting its practices towards the dimension of healing and caring. In other words, this research acknowledges the impossibility of living in this “general moral, social and even emotional crisis” (Pupavac 2001, p. 359) and the consequent urgency of a social transition. Recognizing that “emotional, embodied, oral, popular and spiritual knowledges are delegitimised, invisibilised and denied” (Motta 2016, p. 35), the research contributes to the re-evaluation of other ways of being and knowing based on emotional, relational, corporeal, and material dimensions. This research inserts into the wider literature of post-colonial studies, decolonial, feminist decolonial, and indigenous approaches, black feminist and critical thought, and critical surf studies and ocean studies.

Keywords

Body, sea, colonial wounds, decolonial embodiment, liminagraphy, relationality, vulnerability, borderlands, liminal space, healing.

Chapter 1 | Introduction: Paddling out to the sea

This research is structured into four chapters, each representing a pivotal phase of the research process and my decolonial journey and, metaphorically, of surf. When you go surfing, the first step once you enter the water is to paddle against the breaking waves to go out to the sea. Thus, when I jumped in the water of this research, I started to paddle out but the more I was paddling, the more my body was pushed back by the waves and my mind was spinning under water. I often felt disorientated and overwhelmed. Nonetheless, I kept paddling against (resisting) the dominant current. Waves were coming in the form of questions; one after another, they shackled my body and my soul to its very root, washing away what I knew and leading me to a process of (un)learning.

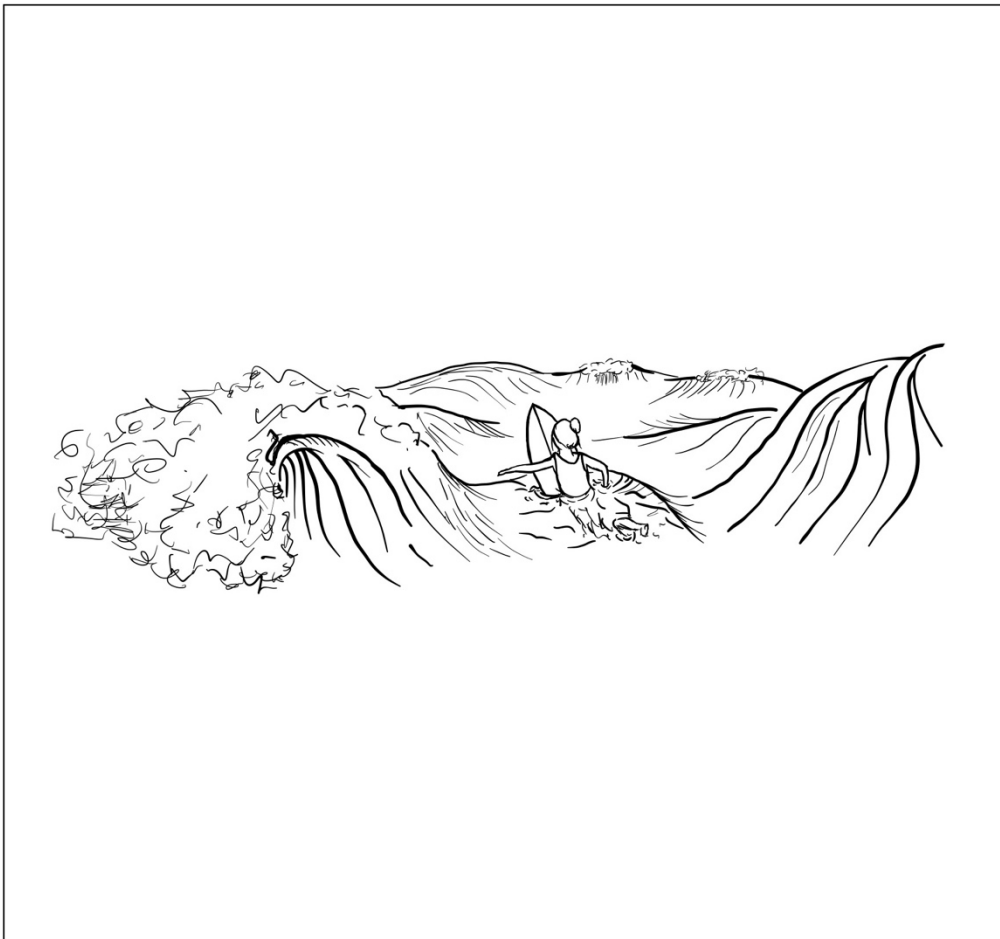


Figure 1 - Paddling out to the sea¹

¹ All the drawings are made by brother, Giovanni Richero. He is a surfer and an artist, and this is his way of narrating the sea.

1.1 Theoretical background

“How inappropriate to call this planet Earth when is quite clearly Ocean”

(Arthur C. Clarke in Nichols 2018, p. 9)

The research starts from the understanding of coloniality² as the globalized system of oppression reproduced by the complex structures of power that “survives colonization” until today (Maldonado-Torres 2007 in Motta 2018, p. 6; Mignolo 2018). The term coloniality highlights a Western ontological, epistemological, cultural, and political domination that has produced and reproduced social structural injustices such as “racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and the depredation of nature” (Suárez-Krabbe 2016, p. 1) and that development contributed to justifying (ibidem, p. 3). Indeed, the dominant mainstream discourses and practices of development have increased those challenges that should have helped to diminish such as climate change, conflicts, poverty, social marginalization, and discrimination (Escobar 2007, p. 20). By imposing top-down practices and being embedded in a neoliberal/modern/colonial logic, development has often been dehumanizing and detached, contributing in this way to perpetuating violence.

In this research, I focus on the invisible and internalized violence of the colonial wounds, a pivotal concept in decolonial thought that indicates the embodied onto-epistemological injuries caused by historic, systematic, and collective traumas, logics, and processes of subjectification (Ureña 2019, p. 1649; Motta 2018, p. 9). With the term coloniality indeed we refer also to the process by which “the White patriarchal subject of reason and rationality is constituted against the non-being and dehumanization of the colonized Other” (Motta 2018, p. 5). This process “creates and (re)produces a particular knowing-subject – the Westernized and individualized subject encapsulated in Rene Descartes’ articulation of ego-cogito” (Motta 2016, p. 35). Through the statement “I think therefore I am”, it has been created the ontological foundation by which being, existing as a subject, is a consequence of thinking; rationality has been raised as the only way of expressing, knowing, and being. In this way, all the knowledges not based on rational thinking have been de-valued, silenced, erased, and the subjects “lacking” rational thought (stereotypically, the feminized and racialized bodies) have been reduced to objects and de-humanized to non-being or less-than-human (Motta 2018). Thus, acknowledging “rationality” as “integral to wider power relations, based on racism and coloniality, at all levels of social life” (Gordon 2011 in Suárez-Krabbe 2016, p. 114-5) and refusing to reproduce “coloniality of knowledge and being” (Mignolo 2018), this research adopts a theoretical and methodological decolonial approach.

Understanding decoloniality as the process towards the liberation and re-existence of knowledge and subjectivities that have been devalued, silenced, and erased by coloniality (Mignolo 2018, p. 146), this research applies it in two main ways. First, it refuses the binary thinking and the dualistic categories (such as thinking/feeling, mind/body, subject/object, man/woman, human/nature, health/illness, able/disabled) through which coloniality organizes and controls the world (Suárez-Krabbe 2016, p. 51) investigating the in-between, the nuances, “what lays beyond binary thinking” (Lugones 2003 in Trejo Méndez 2021, p. 1). Second, it re-values a bodily, sensorial, emotional, and material dimension of knowing, re-linking body-mind-spirit and recognizing the connection between violence against knowledge with violence against the body (Sheik 2021).

² Abbreviation of “Coloniality of Power” (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2018). With this expression, Anibal Quijano named the structures of power, control, and hegemony that emerged during the modern era of colonialism and still persist today (ibidem).

Acknowledging that the biopolitical logic of dehumanization perpetuated by coloniality starts from the body (Motta 2018, p. 5), the research collocates the body in the center, questioning and re-valuing how the body knows. Recalling the theory of “decolonial embodiment” (Fanon 2008 in Ureña 2019, p. 1642), the research also investigates the connection between body and traumas showing the importance of felt and embodied experiences in dealing with social injustices. In the following pages, the word “embodiment” will recur frequently, therefore, I find it necessary to specify its meaning and understanding within this research. By “embodied” I mean what one feels and senses within/through the body, in other words, the embodiment of the feelings. Indeed, I’ll use the expression “embodied experience” to indicate an experience lived through the body and the senses, and in particular the expression “embodied traumas and wounds” to recall the fact that traumatic experiences have “flesh and blood attached to them” (Lederach 2015, p. 142; Van Der Kolk 2014). My willingness to underline it rose from the acknowledgment that how the bodies know, how they have experienced violence, racialization, discrimination, or marginalization, and how they “corporally remember” (Väyrynen 2018) these violences are dimensions that are rarely taken into consideration in both academic and practical Western liberal approaches to development. Hence, through this research I wonder what if development studies would start to embrace and value the embodied wounds and experiences; in other words, what if the study of the structural oppressive systems (i.e., coloniality, modernity, capitalism, patriarchy), and the co-related social injustices (i.e., poverty, discrimination, marginalization, racism, sexism, and ableism) has at its core the embodied wounds that they have caused and left unresolved? Although many embodied traumas have been provoked by structural violence and injustices or collective phenomenon (i.e., wars, colonialism, racism, sexism, bullying, domestic violence, etc.), traumas are mostly understood and faced within an individualistic logic. The consequence of this theoretical understanding and practical approach has brought the perpetuation of inter-generational traumas and violence (Pupavac 2001, p. 366).

Therefore, challenging the modern biomedical definition of “health”, hence of “wounds”, the research highlights a transition to the concept of “healing” understood as “the generational healing of colonial wound needed for collective liberation” (Sheik 2021, p. 99). With this active verb, I want to underline healing as an ongoing process that takes place in the everyday small actions of resistance to the Western modern/colonial logic (Icaza and Jong 2019, p. 20), and as the acknowledging of the self as *relational* (Trejo Méndez 2021). The decolonial concept of “relationality” is indeed pivotal for the development of the research. It challenges the Western individualism and affirms that we are not individual, but plural, connected, in relation. In other words, relationality acknowledges an ontological and epistemological plurality, a way of being and knowing that is relational, that exists by being in relation. Moreover, while “individualism fails to capture the condition of vulnerability” (Butler 2021, p. 198), relationality embraces it. Perceiving oneself as vulnerable implies understanding the self “as being shaped through its relationships to others” (Väyrynen 2018, p. 27). Therefore, vulnerability is here understood not as “victimization and passivity” (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016, p. 1) and “weakness or inferiority” (Väyrynen 2018, p. 27) rather as “a basic kind of openness to being affected and affecting in both positive and negative ways” (ibidem) and “one of the conditions of the very possibility of resistance” (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016, p. 1; Butler 2016; 2021) In other words, vulnerability is here the condition of resisting, of unveiling and refusing coloniality, of recognizing oneself as being and knowing in relation, of “coming to voice” (Sheik 2021), and of healing.

1.2 Presentation of the research

This research paper is an encounter of stories.

Acknowledging “the danger of the single story” of becoming the *only* story (Adichie 2009) and refusing to reproduce the dominant imposed narrative, this research makes space for *many* marginalized stories of everyday life related to the sea. Stories are powerful; they can dehumanize, create stereotypes, racialize, and sexualize bodies and they can restore and affirm love, life, humanity (ibidem; Motta 2016; Simmons 2020). Nonetheless, within social science studies, stories have mostly been told and instrumentalized through and by a colonial dominant logic that reproduces a politic of recognition of humanity rooted in pain narrative. People or communities in the margin have been invited “to not speak in a voice of resistance” or joy but only in a voice of pain (hooks 1990, p. 343 in Tuck and Yang 2014, p. 6). In this logic, indeed, wounds, scars, violence, traumas, loss, sufferance, and pain are what make voices count and stories authentic (Tuck and Yang 2014, p. 7-8). In other words, pain became the onto-epistemological key access to be considered a subject worthy of humanity. However, recognizing that “we are more than the pain and scars that mark us” (Trejo Méndez 2021, p. 2), this research narrates instead stories of joy, hope, dreams, vulnerabilities, and resistance. It aims at highlighting the margins not only as “a site of deprivation” but simultaneously ‘a site of radical possibility, a space for resistance’” (hooks 1990, p. 341 in Clisby 2020, p. 2). Acknowledging stories as a relational way of learning and connecting, the research investigates ways of (un)learning through the sea. In other words, it aims to bring to the surface marginalized epistemes that Western rationality has been buried in the deep sea. Therefore, the main question that this research surfs throughout these pages is: *what can we learn and unlearn from the embodied stories that surface from the sea?*

Each story highlights a different epistemic position with the sea, going across marks of differences (age, gender, race, class, ableism) and beyond the dominant dichotomies (thinking/feeling, body/mind, subject/object, man/woman, young/old, health/illness, able/disable). Nevertheless, I need to underline that this way of proceeding doesn’t aim to stress the differences and the opposites between the stories, but rather to also make visible the commonalities, the crossings, and the nuances that there are between them. The sea and the body, therefore, represent the liminal spaces through which I analyze the (im)possibilities to refuse the colonial binary logic to escape the fixed roles and social categories and constructs that the dominant dichotomies and the neo-liberal subject creation contributed to perpetuating. By liminal spaces, I mean the in-between space, the state of *neptala*³, “the site-state of transition” (Trejo Méndez 2021, p. 7), “a bridge and a place outside the limitations of categorical thinking” (ibidem). In other words, understanding the sea and the body as liminal spaces, I’m underlying their “possibility of telling/creating other stories that hold the potential for healing onto-epistemic wounds” (Motta 2018, p. 9 in Trejo Méndez 2021, p. 7). Therefore, in the research, I also wonder, how different epistemic positions with the sea can highlight the invisible structural onto-epistemological violence that coloniality perpetuates? In which ways the sea can contribute to healing the colonial wounds that affect our body, our mind, and our spirit at a personal, interpersonal, and community level? And, in what ways the body and the sea can be considered relational and embodied ways of knowing?

Moreover, to conduct this research, I adopted liminagraphy, a new feminist decolonial theoretical and methodological approach (Sheik 2021). Since the research is a first application of this approach, it also aims at exploring liminagraphy in the practice, analyzing its

³ A Nahuatl word that indicates the “in-betweenness” and that it is used to refer to “the psychic/spiritual/material points of potential transformation” (Anzaldúa 2015 in Sheik 2021, p. 114; Anzaldúa 1987; 2002).

possibilities and limitations. In other words, the research also wonders, does the application of liminagraphy to research in Development Studies contribute to bringing an onto-epistemological transition in social justice?

1.3 The sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Ocean Sea

“The sea resists my stubborn attempts to understand it. I hadn't thought it could be that hard to stay in front of him. And I wander, with my tools and my notebooks, without finding the beginning of what I'm searching for, the entrance to any answer. Where does the end of the sea begin? Or even: what do we say when we say: sea?”

(Baricco 1994, p. 37; my translation)

The sea is the heart of this research. It is the main element flowing throughout these pages, the meeting point of the stories, and the metaphorical language used to narrate. Therefore, I need here to present what I mean by the *sea*. To me, indeed, it is a layered word; it hides a meaning under another, and how many of them are you going to gather depends only on how deep you allow yourself to dive in.

First, the sea is understood as body of water, the immense amount of water that exist on the Earth, a natural element, and a concrete, corporeal and material reality.

Secondly, as an Italian, I refer to the Mediterranean Sea. This sea is characterized by relatively less strong and violent waters than the ocean, and consequently, it has a more relaxing and welcoming nature. The Mediterranean Sea is the center of many social, cultural, political, economic, environmental, and humanitarian issues. Its waters have been marked by a long history and complex international (imperialistic and colonial) relations between continents. While now, they are characterized by mass tourism and intense economic activity, have been affected by an increase in pollution, and have caused many floods and “natural” disasters in Italy. Moreover, due to the intense migratory movements that have been crossing it, the Mediterranean Sea also represents, nowadays, a political symbol, a geographical border and a humanitarian channel, a grave and a “fluid archive”⁴.

Thirdly, by sea, I'm not alluding to the sea rather than the ocean but to their idea, what the seas and the oceans recall. This third understanding of the sea brings a more emotional, spiritual, and existential dimension of it and grasps its contradictions, ambiguities, and tensions. Recalling the concept of “*Oceano mare*” (in English “Ocean Sea”) from one of my favorite Italian books (Baricco 1994), by the sea I mean “an explosion of vital energy, which releases everything and the opposite of everything, a source of healing and at the same time of perdition, which resides within human beings themselves” (Zanotta 2015). In other words, the sea is a call to live fully.

Moreover, I wanted to underline how during the writing process of the research I've struggled with the choice of pronouns to use to refer to the sea. Indeed, the colonial languages tend to gender or objectify the sea. For instance, in Italian, the sea is a male noun, *il mare*, and consequently, I'm used to referring to the sea using the male pronoun, even though I don't identify it with any gender. Therefore, during the reading of the paper, I ask the reader

⁴ As the researcher Zuzanna Dziuban highlighted at the conference “Ocean as Archives” (Flannery, Mawani, and Stelder 2022), it's necessary a transition from “grave” to “fluid archive”. While the concept of grave highlights only the deathly aspect of the sea encouraging closure, denial, and silence, the idea of archive instead recalls the memory of what happened demanding accountability for those bodies that disappear in the sea.

to keep in mind this language limitation and my willingness to personify the sea but not gender it.

1.4 Positionality: The seashore as borderlands

I'm from a little town on the North-West coast of Italy. To be precise, I'm from a particular region called Liguria, a narrow strip of land where the sea and the mountains meet. Therefore, as a Ligurian, I grew up in two different natural environments: the sea and the wood; in other words, between a blue, salty, and wet world and a green, fresh, and muddy one. This is also where I stand, between the sea and the mountains, on the seashore.

I stand on the seashore.

*Land under my feet to keep me grounded
Blue sky over my head to keep me dreaming
Sharp mountains behind me to watch my back and support me
Sea on my horizon to make me feel,*

deeply.

I have always been knowing the world through my feelings, my senses, and my instinct. However, this has brought me to feel not understood or accepted many times and in different contexts. During the years, naming the systems, the logic, and the structures of Western modernity, capitalism, and patriarchy allowed me to give a name to my anger and to understand where it was coming from. Then, with the beginning of this master's degree, I started a painful and liberating process of decolonizing the self that has allowed me to embrace new “[alternative] praxis of living, thinking, and doing” (Mignolo 2018, p. 147) and to recognize the ones that I was already cultivating without knowing it: the sea.

I've spent my childhood practicing sailing as a competitive sport doing regattas at regional, national, and European levels. I still remember the joy that I felt the first time I was in the middle of the sea with my boat, the thrill under my skin, and the beating of my heart as it was going to explode outside my chest. I felt free. Since I was 9 years old, the sea has always been the only place where I can feel free to be and express myself. When I was eighteen, I started also surfing, a different practice from sailing that has allowed me to rediscover a whole different way of knowing and living the sea. I then became a sailing instructor and during the summer I started to teach children and adults how to sail and know the sea. Besides the sports, I remember when I was little spending the summer at the beach doing immersions with my brother and our friends, we used to swim all together with our scuba masks till the red buoy and dive in hoping to find some mysterious treasures. I also remember my grandfather, captain of merchant ships, telling me stories about his days of navigation, going with him to the local nautical museum, and watching him build wooden models of sailing ships. Growing up, I used to go to the beach with my grandma to swim and with my brother to surf, to have a stroll by the sea with my mom to talk and search for little cute stones or shells, to sit in front of the sea to have a heart-to-heart conversation with my best friend, to stare at the sea to clarify my doubts, to pray and to thank, to feel not alone and to feel deeply. I grew up being connected to the sea and as it does with the cliff, it has shaped me.

I stand on the seashore.

*The sea is the place of my enunciation,
the metaphor that I use to know the world,
the safe space where I can be myself,
the ceremony that makes me feel connected and belonging,
the archive of my spirit,*

the borderland where I feel at home.

Therefore, the sea has always been an essential part of my life and my family. However, only now, through decolonizing the self, I realize that I've not just been knowing the sea since I was little, but also, I have been knowing through the sea my whole life. The sea represents for me the metaphor and the embodiment of how I know and who I am. Hence, this process of decolonization has allowed me to refuse the universalized "Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought" (Walsh 2018, p. 17) and to recognize and re-connect with different perspectives and knowledges that I have never felt valued. It allowed me to feel what only the sea made me feel before: myself and free. However, on the other hand, it has also represented a tough process. Recognizing for the first time myself as a white person and acknowledging the privileges that it carries has been an overwhelming and turbulent experience. Decoloniality, as well as the process of decolonizing the self, is not "a static condition, an individual attribute, or a lineal point of arrival or enlightenment" (ibidem), it is rather "a form of struggle and survival, an epistemic and existence-based response and practice" to coloniality (ibidem). It starts with the recognition of the colonial matrix of power in all its dimensions (race, class, gender, sexuality, age, etc.), its dominance as the only possible "normal" and "right" way of knowing and being and its intertwining with "global capitalism and Western modernity" (ibidem). However, it also means asking yourself on which side of the coloniality of power are you positioned. In front of that question, I felt trapped: my being white, well-off, and having a Eurocentric higher education positioned me on one side of the coloniality of power (the colonizer) but at the same time my being a woman and Italian (South Europe) and my feeling angry, disappointed, misled, and betrayed by that same positionality made me realize that my being and my mindset has been colonized for the whole time (the colonized). I found myself in the borderlands.

Decolonizing the self requires indeed "such a transformation of the pain and anger of denial and devaluation into relationships of becoming, opening and integrity [that inevitably] involves crossings into the borderlands" (Motta 2016, p. 43). In writing this research, I'm standing on the seashore, not as a physical space but metaphorically as borderlands, "a vague and undermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa 2007, p. 25 in Sheik 2021, p. 92). This concept, recalled by liminagraphy, has been developed by the Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) in the context of the US-Mexico border. It emerged from her "enfleshed experiences of being mestiza" (Chang et al. 2018 in Sheik 2021, p. 92) and it reaches across time and space to those people who inhabit "multiple and often conflicting worlds and cultures" (Clisby 2020, p. 2). Those in the borderlands have a consciousness characterized by "a tolerance for ambiguity, drawing strength from the ability to see things from multiple perspectives" (ibidem). In other words, the borderlands is an onto-epistemological position, an embodied experience and a way of living that disrupts and goes beyond the dominant binary logic (Icaza 2017, p. 29). And, to me, the seashore perfectly embodies (metaphorically and not) this tension, this liminal space.

*I stand on the seashore
not land, not water
in-between*

*wet and dry
static and fluid
vulnerable and tough*

where transitions occur

*not just a space
but a relation*

a living contradiction.

Therefore, this research is going to be part of my decoloniality process of dismantling the internalized coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being from within. In other words, through this research, at a personal level, I aim to re-connect with my body, the people of my community/town, and the sea, to learn from the stories and the conversations that I'll have, and to heal my colonial (and not) wounds through writing. Nevertheless, I hope that the sharing of this personal (but not individual) journey and this academic research process can dialogue with other people's journeys and experiences. Indeed, in the research, the "we" to whom I will refer and in which I include myself too, is "the modern individual" shaped by a Eurocentric perspective and who is by now trapped in an internalized and oppressive colonial and modern logic that himself/herself keeps contributing to creating and who is willing to start a process of decolonization, liberation, and healing.

Chapter 2 | Methodology: Waiting in the line-up

After having paddled for a while, I finally arrived in the line-up, the area offshore where waves begin breaking and surfers sit on their boards waiting for them. I took a deep breath and smiled. The line-up is a safe space because it's where I can recover my breath just letting the waves pass me by. There the body is relaxed on the surfboard, the arms and feet are heavy hanging in the water, the heart is beating fast, the breath is slowing down. Silence, peace, calm. Waiting in the line-up, for me, means feeling present in the moment, connecting with the senses and the sea, feeling at the same time a single drop of the sea and the sea itself. Relationality, accountability, spirituality. Therefore, the methodological part of this research has allowed me to recover my breath after the first months of paddling, representing a process of reflection, connection, and healing.

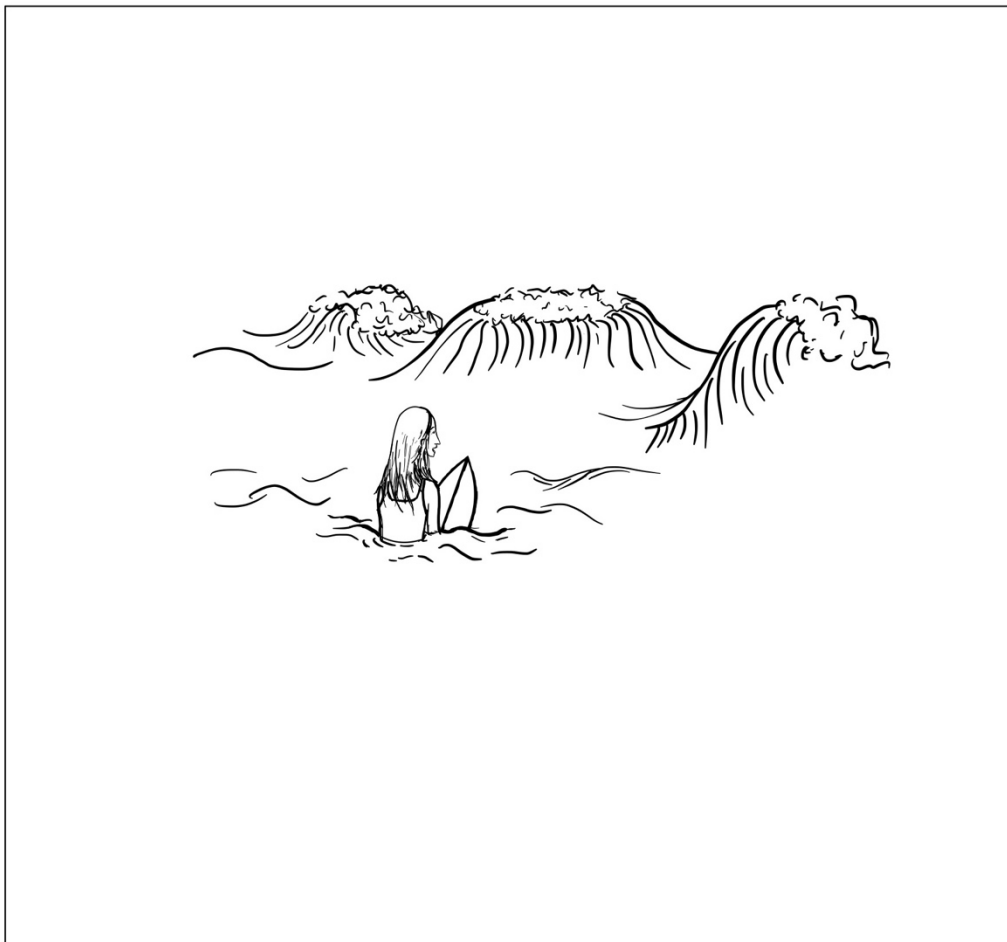


Figure 2 - Waiting in the line-up

2.1 ~~Liminagraphy: A research method, anti-method, qualitative approach~~

Liminagraphy is “a life-affirming [and non-violent] approach to research [and life] that offers a pathway to decolonial re-existence and collective liberation through relationality, reciprocity, accountability and coalition” (Sheik 2021, abstract). It is not defined as a method to research, neither as a critique or anti-method. It is rather a “pathway”, a “journey”, a “process”, a “relational approach” that is grounded in “a trans- post- and anti-disciplinary approach to research, held together by the anti-colonial roots that connect Decolonial Feminism, Black Studies, African philosophy and Chicana Studies” (Sheik 2021, p. 3). Etymologically, liminagraphy is composed of the word *limin-* that indicates the state of *neptala*, the borderlands, and the suffix *-graphy* that is here not commonly translated with “write”, but with its deeper mean “scratch, carve” to indicate “the motion of decolonizing the self” (Sheik 2021, p. 97, 99). Between these two words, the *-a-* connective highlights the plurality of knowing-being, to “commemorate a shift to the feminization of knowledge” (Anzaldúa 2015, p. 119 in Sheik 2021, p. 100), and to honour our relations with nature and our lineages (Sheik 2021, p. 100).

Therefore, starting from the definition of decoloniality as a “movement of re-existence where through mourning and healing we co-create relational worlds where life is affirmed” (ibidem, p. 19), liminagraphy can be understood as a pathway that embraces this decolonial movement to “onto-epistemological re-existence” (ibidem, p. 3). It indeed refuses the colonial/imperialistic rational logic imposed by the dominant Eurocentric discourse and delinks itself from the other Western epistemological approaches and methods to research. Thus, I here briefly present liminagraphy analyzing how and where it differs from the traditional qualitative methods (i.e., ethnography, autoethnography, PAR, qualitative interview) and why it well suits the purpose and the objectives of this research and my ethics.

A relational approach

Liminagraphy can be defined as a relational approach because it highlights relationality both in its ontological and epistemological dimensions and puts at the center of the research process the relation, dismantling the hierarchical division between researcher and researched. Acknowledging that the violence against the body is not disconnected from the violence against knowledge, liminagraphy refuses to reproduce violence in the form of epistemicide (violence against knowledge) and the objectification and dehumanization of “the other” (violence against body) that the other methods have contributed to perpetuate *and* re-affirms those knowledges and subjects that have been erased or silenced (Sheik 2021, p. 3).

From an ontological point of view, liminagraphy contributes to decolonize and dismantle the dominant individual “I” and “consent not to be a single being” (Moten 2018 in Sheik 2021, p. 17) but a relational plural being. Recognizing the fragmentation of the colonized self, its subjectification and categorization, liminagraphy offers a pathway towards “the emergence of the plural self, and the eventual reconstruction of self as a coming to voice.” (Lorde 2007, pp. 79–86 in Sheik 2021, p. 27). In other words, it contributes to healing our plural self who has been divided and silenced by the dichotomies that have defined (or should I say confined) us, going beyond any gender and racial label or social position (Anzaldúa 2015 in Sheik 2021, p. 24). In this aspect, it differentiates from autoethnography which instead is based on a singular, separated, individual self resulting still embedded in a Western epistemological and individualistic approach.

From an epistemological point of view, instead, liminagraphy re-orientes the research from “knowledge production” (understood as a violent extractive appropriation of knowledge) to “knowledge cultivation” (a collective emerging of knowledge by being in

relation, in dialogue, and in bodies) claiming that “all knowledge is relational” (Sheik 2021, p. 4). In this view, knowledge doesn’t exist out there to be achieved, owned, or extracted, rather it is embedded in relations, in bodies, and it requires us to connect with it (ibidem; Potts and Brown 2005, p. 261). Liminagraphy moves away from the academic purposes of “representation”, “interpretation” and “categorization” that ethnography and PAR still perpetuate and instead embrace “reception” (Sheik 2021, p. 24). Indeed, while the ethnographical fieldwork requires collecting “data” (people’s lives, actions, and beliefs) in a “natural setting” (their everyday life and contexts) to study, interpret, and represent their culture (the culture of “others”) (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 1), liminagraphy invites the researcher to be open, to connect, and to come into relations. Moreover, to not cause epistemic violence, and therefore also to not be violent towards the people involved in the research process, liminagraphy re-thinks “data” in terms of *stories*, *relations*, and *feelings* and shifts from the idea of “findings” to *lessons* (Sheik 2021). In other words, liminagraphy disrupts the idea of “the other” as an object to observe, analyze, interpret, represent, and extract knowledge and stories.

Challenging the never-questioned dichotomy researcher-researched, liminagraphy refuses to reproduce those power imbalances between the researcher (the subject who has the power and the knowledge) and the researched (the “objects of the research”) (Bejarano *et al.* 2019, p. 6) that still characterized ethnography and collaborative and participatory research methods. Indeed, even though lately some of these qualitative methods have been characterized by a “decolonial turn” to recognize “the colonial nature of Western thought and scholarly inquiry” (ibidem, p. 7), they still maintain a colonial legacy and reproduce onto-epistemological violence. Defining Participatory Action Research as “a *collaborative* process of research, education and action explicitly oriented towards social transformation” (Hall 1981 and Mc Taggart 1997 in Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007, p. 9; my emphasis) doesn’t guarantee indeed that there is an equal, respectful, and meaningful relationship between the parts. To collaborate means to work together, in this case, to do research together, but it doesn’t change the colonial relations of power underneath it. The terms and conditions of how to work and research (the topic, the modalities, the timing of the research, who is going to be involved, etc.) are still decided and imposed by the researcher. In other words, even though PAR contributes to re-thinking research as “a non-hierarchal teaching/learning/advocacy process” (Gill, Purru, and Lin 2012, p. 11), it still doesn’t completely dismantle the objectification and de-humanization of communities in the research process. The idea of empowering a group of vulnerable people or a marginalized community and “giving them a voice” still reproduces a pain narrative and consequently a hierarchical power relation between the “participants from the academy” and the “participants from the community” (Gill, Purru, and Lin 2012, p. 5). In the application of liminagraphy, instead, there is no researcher and researched, but the relations between the bodies involved in the research process. In other words, liminagraphy requires the researcher to create a deep relation “not founded on differences” but “based on mutuality, reciprocity, reception, respect and love” (Sheik 2021, p. 19).

Therefore, liminagraphy represents a concrete theoretical and practical step towards decolonizing the social science research field. Nonetheless, alongside its life-affirming and non-violent possibilities, it also emerges its impossibility of completely refusing the colonial academic system in which also it, it is still embedded. The pivotal difference I learned between liminagraphy and the qualitative research methods above relies on the acknowledgement of its complicity in the academic money-profit-driven system and its impossibility of completely delinking from it.

2.2 The Liminagraphy Sea

Besides the theoretical and ethical reasons, explained before, there is also a more personal embodied reason (or should I say feeling) that explains why I choose liminagraphy in the research, what it represents to me and how I understand it.

The first time that I read about liminagraphy, I remember being overwhelmed by a sense of peace; I had in front of me a possibility to finally express myself being myself within academia. I've indeed always struggled to follow the rigid and rational rules of academic writing. As I explained before, being empathic, sensitive, caring, sensing, and expressing always "too much" have led me to not feel fitting in many social and academic contexts (school, university, family, friends). The only place where the rule of rationality has never applied, and I could be free to be and express myself has always been the sea. When I was little, I remember thinking that also him like me never just stand still, never shut up, and deeply feel. The sea has always understood my moving, saying, being "too much" and my way of expressing outside the rational rule. Hence, the more I was exploring liminagraphy and the more connections with the sea I found.

As emerged before, liminagraphy doesn't have a fixed definition rather, like the sea, it is fluid, open, ongoing, grounded, plural, personal, and even contradictory sometimes. This being free from a definition means being free from the modern/colonial logic by which everything we know must be categorized, compartmentalized, and controlled; a logic that the other research methods still perpetuate. Thus, liminagraphy has helped me during the whole process of the research to remind me to let go of the need (or the illusion) of control that sometimes takes over me and to resist those systems that try to define me into boxes. The sea has taught me to stop trying to keep everything under control and it has taught me instead to flow. When I am on my boat in the middle of the sea with the wind in my hair, the sound of waves, a fresh smell of salt, and the sun warming my skin, I surrender myself to the senses, instinct, and feelings, I let everything go and I feel free. The relationship between a sailor and the sea is one of the deepest and most respectful that I've ever experienced. Indeed, a sailor knows that you can't control, dominate, or possess the sea, you can just respect his flowing.

Moreover, liminagraphy like the sea reminds me to *feel* before to think; something that after spending a long time on the land it's very easy to forget for me. Indeed, in the middle of the sea, the senses are fully engaged with the natural world making us feel connected with it (Nichols 2018, p. 85). Similarly, through "going back to the senses" and "decolonizing the self" (Sheik 2021), liminagraphy allows me to listen to, connect and embrace my emotions and to bring out the flesh with my creativity. Through this approach, I have been free to express myself by being myself since the very beginning of the research process. Indeed, choosing liminagraphy, has never been a choice between it or a mainstream qualitative research method, but between following my instinct or not. I chose it because I felt it right in my body because, just like the sea, liminagraphy to me represents freedom.

The sea also recalls the concept of relationality embraced by liminagraphy. Going back to the senses, acknowledging feeling as a way of knowing, connecting with the natural world, like the water and the wind, have always led me to perceive myself as a relational and plural being. In the middle of the sea in my boat and surfboard or just into the seawater, I felt connected, in relation, alive together and thanks to what is around me.

An additional pivotal point that characterized liminagraphy and distinguished it from the other qualitative research methods and made me connect it with the sea is the acknowledgment and re-claiming of the spiritual, emotional, and existentialist dimensions. In fact, spirituality understood as "an important means of resistance which has survived the impositions of colonialism and imperialism" is the essence of liminagraphy (Sheik 2021, p. 24). Hence, since the sea represents to me the natural element that makes me connect with

a more spiritual reality and it's the only place where I could express this way of knowing, I felt natural its connection with liminagraphy. Indeed, water has always been an important spiritual, religious, and cultural symbol in different parts of the world (Flannery, Mawani, and Stelder 2022). In many cultures and religions outside the Eurocentric dominant perspective, rivers, lakes, seas, oceans are the embodiment of gods or spirits (ibidem; Nichols 2018, p. 235)⁵.

Water is also the element of life; it is the main element on the earth and in our bodies. "Water is life's matter and matrix, mother and medium. There is no life without water." (Szent-György in Nichols 2018, p. 3). Thus, what if not water can metaphorically embody the life-affirming and generative approach of liminagraphy? Liminagraphy indeed understands research as *refusal*. The refusal like the act of resistance shouts a "NO" but in addition, it makes spaces and opens to new possibilities and radical alternatives beyond the one that is resisting (Sheik 2021, p. 66; Tuck and Yang 2014, p. 17). Refusal is indeed a life-affirming and generative practice (ibidem). In this way, Liminagraphy goes beyond the wall of resistance also showing an open sea of opportunities and alternatives.

Nevertheless, liminagraphy, like the sea, is challenging in its very nature. Indeed, not having a precise definition, a fixed way to be used or some precise steps to follow represent on one hand adaptability, openness, and freedom, however on the other hand difficulties, challenges, and responsibilities. As Zuleika Sheik affirmed: "the beauty of this method is that it shows while you are using it" (2021). In fact, instead of showing the exact pre-established path or way to do research, liminagraphy provides the researcher with some ethical guidelines as a compass to be able to orientate in this complex and challenging research process. Liminagraphy has pushed me to challenge myself, question my ethics, go beyond academic limits, and face the tensions that emerged during the process.

You need to learn to sail the Liminagraphy sea.

2.3 Healing writing

The theorization of liminagraphy started from the refusal of the ontological position which claims that thinking and sensing are separated and the opening to the idea that "the ontological and epistemological are not mutually exclusive, but rather held intimately in the flesh" (Copeland, 2010; Spillers, 1987; Harney and Moten, 2021; Hurtado, 2019 in Sheik 2021, p. 2). Bringing the words of Zuleika Sheik: "This theorizing from the flesh does not translate well into the rigidity of academic writing, it is free, its wings unclipped, it is not aiming for abstraction or universal understanding. It asks of you to make the knowledge understandable and accessible to those outside academia [...] it asks of you to demonstrate the co-creation of being together." (2021, p. 4-5). Therefore, contrary to what can seem at first look, liminagraphy is not abstract or merely theoretical; instead, it is grounded in the flesh. Decentering the written words and refusing the rigid and conventional academic writing, liminagraphy allows me to bring into the academic field of research both a bodily/material and an en-fleshed/spiritual dimension. Indeed, liminagraphy introduces us the concept of *enfleshment* which departs and differs from the one explained before of decolonial embodiment. While embodiment recalls a materiality and corporality of the body, enfleshment reconnects with a more spiritual and ancestral dimension (Copeland 2010 in Sheik 2021, p. 48; Vázquez and Chávez 2017, p. 41-43). In other words, while the former is limited to the material body that exists now, in the present, the latter, remembering the bodies and spirits of our descendants,

⁵ See also *Mame Coumba Bang* 2022; a mini-documentary which explores the deep cultural relationship of the inhabitants of the city of Saint-Louis (Senegal, Africa) with the river, where lives the spirit of Mame Coumba Bang.

brings us to cross the body temporality and materiality and to recognize our relational and ancestral body. Therefore, acknowledging this difference, I use in the research both an embodied and an en fleshed writing style.

Positioning at the center of the narration the body as a source of “epistemological transformation” and “a boundless source of questions” (Ureña 2019, p. 1655 and 1642), I investigate how the body knows to re-value sensing and feeling as a way of knowing through the body. Thus, through the practice of decolonial embodiment (Ureña 2019, p. 1642; Vázquez and Chávez 2017, p. 42), I write the research combining thinking and feeling (*sentipensar*); in other words, I narrate through my body. This methodological and stylistic choice of writing the research is indeed pivotal for challenging the modern dehumanization of the body based on race, gender, and ability, and the dualist Western hegemonic logic, above all the dichotomies of mind/body and thinking/feeling.

Being inspired by Audre Lorde (2007a), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and Zuleika Sheik (2021), in this research I also use poetry “as an expression of en fleshed knowing which heals the colonial wounds caused by modernity’s violence” (Sheik 2021, p. 8). Thus, understanding poetry as *en fleshed* poetry, I refer with this expression to “the verses imprinted in our flesh, the ‘struggle poetry’ written in exile [in the borderlands]” (ibidem, p. 38). This way of writing allows us to sense and name the embodied traumas that we experienced and the en fleshed wounds of our ancestors that we are carrying and to heal them (ibidem; Trejo Méndez 2021, p. 12). Using the words of Audre Lorde:

“The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us -the poet- whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand, the implementation of that freedom.” (Lorde 2007a, p. 38).

Next to it, I use the metaphor as another pivotal methodological writing instrument. “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980 in Docherty 2004, p. 847). Therefore, metaphors, like poetries, go beyond words making us feel. They contribute to “re-store our empathy” (Hosseini in Simmons 2020, ch. 2) highlighting our being in relation. In particular, in this research I use metaphors related to the sea, since it is *the lens through which I know*. Indeed, as already emerged before, to me, the sea metaphorically embodies liminagraphy and the borderlands. Moreover, in the research, metaphors are also a way of resisting to the pain narrative that traps the “vulnerable people” in the image of the powerless victim relegating “the condition of vulnerability to those who suffer discrimination, exploitation, or violence” (Butler 2016, p. 23). Therefore, through the metaphor tool and a narrative that links “the history of abusive power and the structure of our moral intuitions” (Simmons 2020, ch. 3), the research tries to “re-story” that narrative creating alternative images (Lederach 2015, p. 147).

Therefore, through an embodied narration, *sentipensar*, en fleshed poetry, and the use of metaphor I bring out the invisible colonial wounds in alternative and creative ways to start a process of healing.

2.4 Methodological diary

The concrete use of liminagraphy during the research investigation has been a challenging process full of ups and downs and at the same time a beautiful, learning, and creative journey. Since this has been a first application, I had the opportunity to experiment and follow my instinct, however, I also felt alone, misunderstood, and confused most of the time. Moreover, I have struggled in being truthful to my ethics and liminagraphy principles while at the same

time following the strict requests of academia. However, keeping a methodological diary during this process has helped me to face these challenges and flow with the work.

I conducted the research mostly in Loano, my hometown, in Italy. There I had many different informal and free conversations with different people that allowed me to listen to their different stories, experiences, and relations with the sea. I refused to conduct interviews following pre-decided questions and I instead preferred to create a dialogue together with the other person and to flow with the conversation, seeing where it was bringing us. In this way, I spend most of my research field listening, deeply, caring, and being in relation. I went to search for stories from everyday life, understanding it as the “corporeal and relational world” (Schutz 1967 and Väyrynen 2001 in Väyrynen 2018, p. 18) where life happens, where healing can happen. I asked about the sea to my family, friends, friends of friends, acquaintances, and people who I have never talked before, and the most interesting things come up in the most unexpected moments while eating gelato on a summer afternoon, having dinner with a pizza on the seashore, swimming, in front of a coffee, in a quiet afternoon in the countryside, surfing...

During these past months, I kept a methodological diary where I wrote some notes about the conversations that I had and my reflections on them. This has reminded my being in relations and guided me to care for these relations, making me question “How can I honor these stories?” and “To whom I am accountable?”. I also used the diary to write my reflections about the research process and the application of liminagraphy, to note the new ideas about the sea and its metaphor, or to clarify my thoughts and feelings.

Stealing time from my chaotic days to reflect has helped me to put the flesh into words, keeping the track of my thinking/feeling throughout the whole process of the research. Moreover, writing with a certain regularity has contributed to challenging and questioning myself, to reflect on the work but without overthinking or overgeneralizing, to keep the focus. It has also allowed me to ground the research but also keep it fluid thus being able to adapt it to changes and unexpected experiences. This has been especially helpful to overcome one of the main challenges that I found myself facing in the writing process of the research: finding the balance between grounding key concepts, relations, and stories and maintaining them fluidly, not fixing them.

Chapter 3 | Stories: Catching waves

Once I recharged physically, mentally, and spiritually, I was ready to catch some waves. Thus, I started to look around; there were moments when the waves arrived all together, unexpectedly or seen from afar, and others of flat calm. Each wave had a different shape, length, power, color, and sound. The third part of the research, deeply listening to different stories, has been indeed like surfing different waves. Fear, excitement, full joy. I connected and flew with them feeling their enthusiasm, their vulnerability, their strength, their pain, and their humanity. These waves have been part of my healing process.

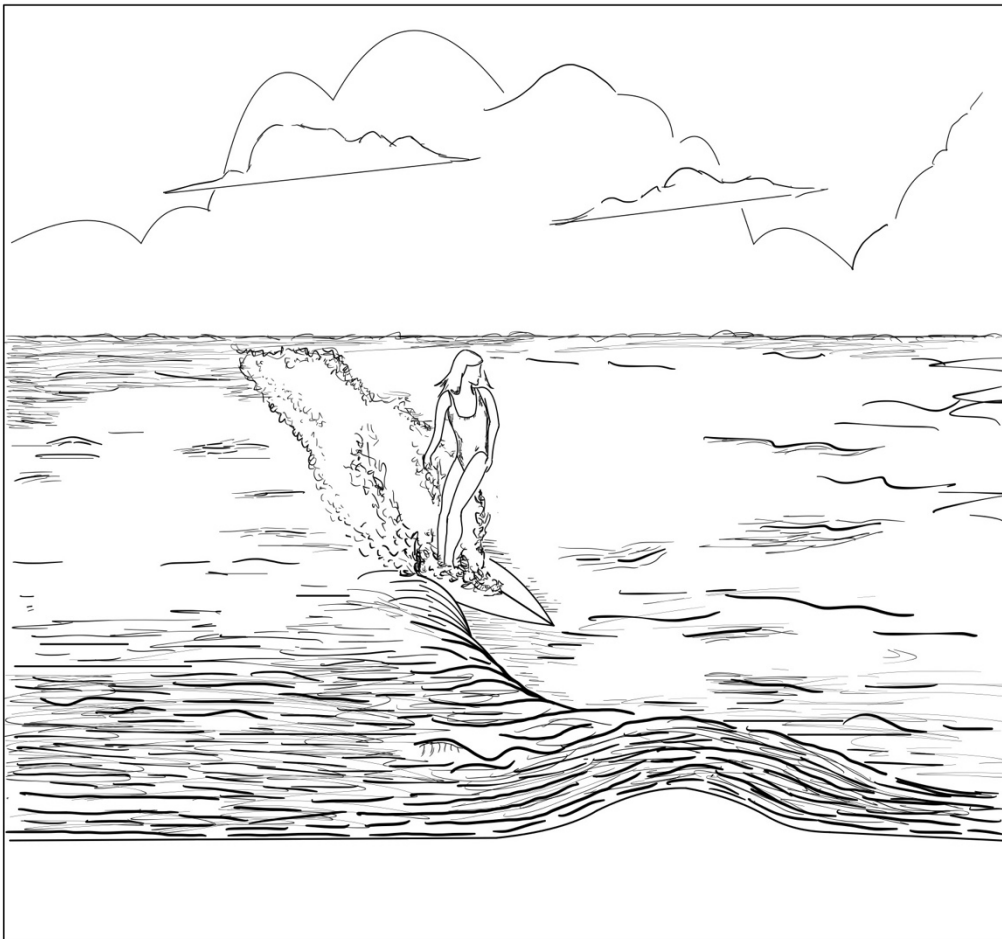


Figure 3 - Catching waves

3.1 Stories from the sea

“Cosa è il mare per te?” “Storia”

(Dad)

All the stories that I met during these months contributed to shaping this research. However, due to academic requirements and the need to limit the focus of the research, there are here only seven stories, the ones that move this research forward and from which I (un)learned more. I’ve presented them in the same order that they arrived at me, both a chronological order and an order made by the heart. I started with the story of my grandma, even though it is about months after, because she is the first person that I thought of when the idea of this research started to take shape, and I finished with the story of Ibrahim which is the last story that I met, even though I had it in my heart throughout all the research process. Thus, I invite you to surf these stories flowing through them following that same current that brought them to me.

Adriana

My grandma is a fish. She loves to swim; she could stay into the water just floating for hours without getting cold. In the summer she goes every morning to swim into the sea. And every time that I can, I go with her. This is our summer tradition.

When we arrive at the beach usually there are already all my grandma’s friends waiting for her. Over the years she literally drags her friends to enter the sea because she sustains that it is good for their health. Thus, you need to imagine my grandma as the leader of a small group of old, determined, and active women who every morning at 7 o’clock meet to swim and do gymnastics in the sea; the only rule is to move in the water. Once I went out of the water to observe them, they were beautiful: behind my grandma a line of four women who was following her moves (clearly completely made up at the moment). However, this morning it’s just my grandma and me, and the sea. We park the bike and go to the seashore. The sea is calm, and everything around is silent as if the rest of the world is still sleeping. Time to dip a toe in the water that my grandma is already underwater; how she can do that, I’ll never know. Once I found the courage to enter the cold water, we start to swim together. She has short white hair and yellow swim goggles; she glows with the reflections of the sun on the surface of the sea. To rest a bit, she floats on her back playing the dead afloat. I follow her. “I’m weightless, and yet fully connected with my body”, my grandma says. I feel the same, “It’s like floating in infinity” (Nichols 2018, p. 101). We come back swimming and then I ask her: “Grandma, what is the sea for you?”, “A hug”.

We keep swimming when I ask her specifically, why she goes every morning to the sea. What does move her? “It’s a necessity to me, a physical necessity to feel good and healthy”. She doesn’t feel right to complain and stand still feeling sorry for yourself; if you have physical or emotional pain, you need to face it. “When I go to the sea, I’m facing it”, she says. “Facing the sea means that you are alive, that you are living and not lived”. She then explains to me how in the water the pain in the back goes away and that she can move how she could never do in the land, and while she is saying that she is taking her knees close to her chest and screaming all happy “See?!”. I smile.

My grandma is a woman who resists no matter what. She is always one piece; her emotions never transpire. She grew up alone in a boarding school where she did the elementary school. At 13 years old, she started to work in a shop as a knitter and at 17 years old, she married my grandpa. My grandpa and my grandma spent their lives together; it has been the most beautiful relation that I know. My grandma is always one piece; she never let herself go, the only place where she does, it’s in the water.

P

I'm agitated, a bit thrilled, and scared. I checked the weather for today at least three times before going to sleep yesterday; I always do that. I woke up at 5.30, changed two trains and took a bus. As soon as I get off the bus, I'm starting to feel nervous. The town seems dead, there is a church and a cemetery in the middle of the square, and some cafés but they are all close. It's 8.30 on a Sunday morning in June. The landscape is so different from the one that I'm used to, nothing looks familiar; I can feel that is a coastal town but still, I don't recognize it. I'm glad that Anna is here with me, she always is. We start to see the dunes of sand, and every time that I see them, I suddenly remember that the Netherlands is under the level of the sea and a shiver runs all under my skin. I shake it off, brrr. It feels so unnatural, and not my place. We are walking and talking when I feel the salty air on my face waking me up and comforting me. Hi North Sea.

While I was in the Netherlands, I learned about several projects/organizations around the world on surf therapy, a practice that aims to improve physical and mental health, personal well-being (confidence, self-esteem, resilience), and social and relational skills through surfing (ISTO Declaration 2018). Therefore, I entered in contact with the ones present in The Netherlands and I volunteered for the Surftherapie Foundation, the one that replied to my emails being available and welcoming. Since 2014, it has been providing “challenging rehabilitation therapy for people who are recovering after a neurological disorder such as a stroke, a spinal cord injury or chronic pain” (The Surftherapie Foundation 2022).

Smiling, waving hands, “Hi, I'm Marta and this is my friend Anna”, shaking hands, “I talked with you through emails, we are here for volunteering”. I can feel his eyes scanning my body.

He asks if we are familiar with surf therapy and if we have already volunteered other times. “No, it's our first experience”. He reassures us that this is not a problem and asks if we have experience with being into the sea. “Yes, I'm a sailor instructor, and we both started surfing five years ago”. I can feel his eyes scanning my body.

We then start to talk about the weather conditions: sunny, not too much wind, and not so big waves. Translation: perfect conditions. Nevertheless, he warns us that in this sea there are strong currents and that therefore since we are physically little, if we feel that we are in difficulty to tell him. “Before helping others, we have to feel safe and comfortable”. After a brief first panic moment when my mind remained focused on the words “STRONG CURRENT?!” listening to this familiar and reassuring concept calms me. This is also the first lesson that teach you when you became a volunteer at the Red Cross. Nevertheless, I'm having a contrasting feeling about it. On one hand, I feel safe because my limits are understood and respected. On the other hand, I feel irritated because from my being small and thin (and being a woman), he is already assuming that the current would have been too strong for me.

We sit around a table on the patio outside: the coach, P⁶, the other volunteer, and me. They are all men, taller, more robust, and older than me. We start a round of presentations. I say my name, where I'm from, and then I explain why I'm there and the research that I'm working at. Silence. I don't know what they are thinking. I just feel their looks telling me “Wow, how all that can stay inside that body?” as if they didn't expect that the little girl that I look like could have done all the stuff that I said. That expression of surprise when people associate my body with surfing, or sailing is here again. I know it too well. Too small, too weak, too fragile. And, physically, I am sometimes. My muscles, my back, and my lungs have their limits, like everyone. And I learned to know them. However, as this experience of surf therapy shows this is not a limit to going into the water. But still, somehow the association of my knowledge and experience with my body shocks.

⁶ For privacy, I'll refer to the participant only by his name initial.

It's the turn of P. He had a stroke years ago, and this caused him the lost sensibility in the left part of his body. Now he can walk, even with some difficulties, but he still can't feel or move his left arm. I'm frozen not knowing how to react; a stranger is sharing with me one of his deep wounds and trauma and is going to entrust me with his body in the sea. I limit myself to deeply listening to him and I see in his eyes tenderness, willingness, calm, trust, pain, strength. Still frozen. And then, I feel something, a transition. Seeing the coach going on asking P about his expectations from the day, and what he wants to work on and achieve like he didn't just share his wound, it's a slap on the face. I would like to specify better; his way of acting isn't shallowness or carelessness, it is something else. To me, it doesn't seem that the coach and I are looking at the same person. I'm seeing P as a victim of what happened to him, and I'm stuck in this perspective, while the others aren't allowing his wound to define him (only) as a victim. Indeed, he is here to heal his wounds, and we are here to help him to achieve little steps toward it, healing together. To their eyes, and now mine, he is a victim and a surfer. Surf therapy challenges ourselves seeing the body beyond the wounds, it focuses on the desires instead of the pain (Tuck and Yang 2014). And the wishes of P are to obtain again the sensibility and mobility of the left arm. Therefore, the goal of today is to catch some waves finding the balance lying on the board to stimulate the body (and therefore, his left arm). We help P wear the lifejacket and the safety helmet. We all wear already the wetsuit. Walking, stretching, jumping, breathing. Ready.

A first foot into the water, to say "Hi" to the sea. A second foot into the water, "brrr". A few minutes later, "Okay, not so cold, this is what I'm used to in winter.". In the sea there are about five little other groups like ours, each one focused on one participant. Anna's group is next to mine. "The current is strong, he was right". "Damn it if it's strong". I'm scared but willing to go on. "Okay, you can do it, just keep walking and stick to the board". I follow the suggestion of my head. P is in position on the board now. It's difficult to manage it with him on top, and I'm struggling to walk while carrying it. Three, two, one, go! We push the board, and he is catching a wave. He has to keep his balance to go toward the coach who is closer to the shore ready to catch him. Keeping the balance on the board is something extremely difficult to do because requires moving every single inch of your body. It means finding harmony with all the parts of your body, connecting them, and feeling them together at the same time. He falls and the board goes over him. We all throw ourselves toward him to help him to get up. He can't swim well. I'm keeping the board with one hand, helping him to get up with the other, while my body is resisting the current. Oh, right, the current. I can't feel it. My body, the one that was scanned and looked at with surprise, is now too focused on carrying his body that it doesn't feel the current.

My body is carrying his body.

"Radical tenderness is to carry the weight of another body as if it were your own" (D'Emilia and Chávez 2015).

I'm helping him to stay on the board and he is helping me not to flow with the current.

His body is anchoring my body.

"Radical tenderness is to share sweat with a stranger" (ibidem).

Whose body is healthy? Whose body is strong?

Without my body, he couldn't swim and surf. And without his body, I couldn't resist the current.

My body is carrying his body.

The bodies in the water are lighter; what I can't lift into the land, I can lift into the water.

My body is lighter; I can feel it floating.

My mind and my spirit are lighter.

Paola

It's a hot summer afternoon and I'm having ice cream with my aunt Paola when I ask her: "Which kind of relation do you have with the sea?". I spent a lot of time with my aunt this summer and she knows what my research is about, but I've never asked her what the sea represents to her, how she lives it since she sees it every day. I've always thought that to her the sea represented a connection with the memory of her father who was captain of merchant ships. Instead, I receive the most unexpected answer: "In a certain way I ignore the sea because I know it exists, that it is there; it is a constant." The surprise makes me reflect: how arrogant of me to assume already what the sea represented to her. Thus, I share my thoughts with her, and I apologize for not having asked her before and taking for granted my idea of her idea of the sea. Yes, sometimes the sea makes her think about her dad, but this is not the main connection that she has with it. Nonetheless, I kept thinking about the tension in her words. And, then keep talking, I understand that she knows the sea like a sailor does. She respects the sea. She acknowledges its presence, but she doesn't go to disturb it; she just goes to see the sea when he is angry, to comfort him. She takes care of the sea.

My aunt is a rare and precious treasure of the sea, a mother-of-pearl. Hidden but shiny, fragile and resistant, hurt and healing.

Micaela

Caring, creative and messy, always with the head and the heart on another place and time; this is how I know my mom. She is like the sea when with its choppy waves became full of blue, light blue, and grey shades. My mom is a dreamer and like every soul that dreams, she has a deep relation with the sea and when I asked her about it, she wrote a poetry.

The sea ... I *look* at it ... its relentless movement, its vastness, the line of the horizon that does not define but invites to look beyond ... it is the mirror where I can contemplate the infinite, what the soul can only sense and crave.

The sea ... I *listen* to it ... the stormy sea, its roar, the furious waves crashing on the shore ... it reminds me that I am small, a finite being, precarious ... it is memory of who I am.

The sea ... I *feel* it ... the seashore is the only place where I walk with bare feet ... barefoot I feel a sense of freedom, of essentiality, of lightness. I immerse myself in the waters of the sea, his hug embraces me, toughened me up. A silent hug, it calms me.

The sea orients me. It is my reference point. Everything else is just land overlooking the sea.

The sea is home.

And it is in the sea that I wish to return. In the End.⁷

Reading the poetry my mom wrote me, I can feel her in every word. I'm trying to translate it from Italian to English when I read that "reference point" can also be translated with "landmark". I smile. Every time I go sailing, I look at the land to find some landmarks, some recognizable natural or man-made features in the land to use as reference point, to orientate and stay the course. While for my mom, the sea is her landmark.

⁷ My translation.

You
who live on the land
and bring me from water to land

You
who live on the land
and the sea orients you

You
who love your everyday life on the land
and dream looking at the line of the horizon of the infinite sea

You
who grounded your feet on the land
and immerge your barefoot in the water to *feel*

You
who live on the land
and teach me how to love the sea

You
who live on the land
You, are my landmark

I couldn't navigate in the sea without you.

Like a compass, our relation orients each other. The land orients the one in the sea and the sea orients the one on the land.

Michela and Luigi

Talking with my mom, I realized that I was surrounded by more people that have a relation with the sea than I expected. I was thinking about only the people that I know already or with whom I have a relationship. Nonetheless, this is not the purpose of the research and its methodology. Therefore, I asked a friend of our family, if her parents would be available and enjoy having a conversation with me about the sea. They are about 80 years old and almost every day, in summer and winter, they go swimming in the sea.

She gave me the number of her dad to contact him and organize when and how to meet. I waited two days before to call him, I don't know why. Or maybe I do. I'm here with the phone in my hand walking into the living room preparing the speech for the call. I need to present myself because he doesn't know who I am, and I'll need to explain a bit about my research... Will this be overwhelming? Will he understand me? I'm afraid of being judged, that tone of voice distant and haughty.

I call him, in my head the speech ready (“Hi, I’m Marta, how are you? I don’t know if you remember me, I think your daughter talked about me to you about the research that I’m doing and the possibility to meet to talk.”), ringing, (“Hi, I’m Marta, ...), still ringing, then from the phone emerged an energetic, comfortable, and familiar voice saying “Hi Marta, good to hear you, how are you? I’m leaving with the scooter to come back home; can I call you when I arrive? So, we can organize with calm when to meet!”. Useless to say that I didn’t have to use my ready speech. I close the call lasted thirty seconds and I smile. He called me Marta; he knew who I was. He was waiting for my call.

I ring the door, and they let me come in. In the morning they have been to a little lake in the countryside to dive, swim and make videos. Luigi tells me that he has a YouTube channel called “Questa sì che è vita” (in English, “This is what I call life”) where he uploaded videos of all the baths that he and his wife with their friends do in the years. I can see on the side of the living room his workspace with the computer and the camera. Suddenly, I think that I haven’t presented but it seems it doesn’t matter. I want to but now I feel it inappropriate, I should stop the conversation that I didn’t even know how it started and I would add a formality that would break this familiar context. So, I let it go. They invited me into their house as if I was one of their nephews, who are friends of mine, a connection that I’ll explain later in the conversation when Michela will ask me “and who are you?”. It didn’t seem to matter to them if they know me or not.

They are telling me about their morning in the lake; it was a cold bath away from the tourists. On the table, there still are their swimming goggles and towels. Then, I try to present myself and why I was interested in listening to their story. And Luigi tells me, “We are the right ones to talk with, we did more than 500 cold baths; I write everything down, you know?”. I’m still processing the number five hundred that Michela starts to narrate it. They learned how to swim at the age of 55, “but once we learned, no one ever stopped us!”. To break their monotony and get back into the game after their retirement, Michela suggested to her husband, “Let’s take some dance classes” and Luigi replied, “Rather some swimming lessons”. And this is how it started. Michela describes to me the interior conflict that she had every time she went to the classes: while preparing the bag at home she was excited but while she was walking towards the swimming pool, she always had this “knot in the throat”, and once arrived, she invented all the possible excuses to not enter in the water. “It is difficult,” she said with a slight tone of sufferance and pride “at that age”. Meanwhile, Luigi was grumbling in the background.

The Italian word “*cimentarsi*” which means “to challenge, to test yourselves” is also used in the Italian culture to refer to immersion in the cold water of the sea during the winter season. In the region of Liguria, as well as in the other Italian seacoasts, the water temperature of the sea ranged from 8 °C to 14 °C. This practice involves the bathers to “enter the sea together, without wearing a wetsuit, and remain in the water for a variable time, typically around 20 min, either swimming or simply floating” (Demori *et. al* 2021, p. 123).

A thousand needles, excitement, anesthesia, wellness in the body and the spirit; this is how Luigi explains to me what he feels when immerses himself in the cold water. I notice that Michela instead is more hesitant to share his experience, thus I share with them my relation with the sea, my experience with sailing and surfing. After that, she feels safe to open up. For her, the cold baths are a challenge against herself, a way to challenge the monotony and her comfort zone and to try new emotions every time. And she adds: “but, you know, it is difficult to explain what you feel and the benefits of having a cold bath to who never tries it on his/her own body”. She then explains that they have been criticized, judged, and insulted many times by family and friends or by the people who walk in their fluffy winter jackets and watch them enter the sea with just their swimsuits. “They think we are exhibitionist or crazy, but this is not exhibitionism” Michela says. She has a sad but also determined look in her eyes. The judgments and the insults hurt her but don't stop her. She only knows how much wellness the cold bath brings her and means to her, and that's enough.

Marta

Marta is a windsurfer. We went for years to the same nautical club, me to sail and her to windsurf, but we never know each other very much; there has always been a strict division between sailing and windsurfing in the club. I know that we have always shared a passion and a deep understanding of the sea, and when I asked her if she would have liked to share her relation with the sea in this research, she wrote a poetry.

The sea

With the sea inside you are born, just like shells that, wherever they are, keep inside them a lapping of waves and a breath of wind.

What at first was just an instinctive thrill of happiness at the sight of the immense blue expanse, which suddenly appeared after a curve on the highway, has become my daily horizon, my companion of many adventures often lived with a smile on my lips. and a light soul.

I was born in Turin, about 180 km from the sea, and in the summer of 2009 at the age of six, almost by chance, I stepped on a windsurf for the first time, unaware that I would never abandon it again. From that moment on I always carry within me the sound of the table sliding on the water, the force of the wind that ruffles my hair, the feeling of the sand under my feet that tickles, the salt that remains on my skin.

After a few years, I started windsurfing at a competitive level and since then I have traveled a lot and I am in the water practically every day: sun or rain, hot or cold, the sea is always ready to welcome me with its hug. He was present in the most beautiful and carefree moments, but also in the saddest and most painful ones, silent and faithful, ready to rejoice with me or to avoid me drowning.

Although my passion has become a real job for me, I never get used to the beauty of the sea, and the habit of its presence never generates boredom: it is always different from place to place, day after day. You never stop learning from him: one moment, he can be calm and friendly and the moment later he can get choppy with his comber that powerful break on the shore.

Many years have passed since my first encounter with the sea; the sails and boards have changed, but he is always there, accompanying all my activities. And I keep that same thrill of happiness in me as when I was a child and I dreamed of living by the sea: he chose me and I chose him.⁸

Ibrahim

It was April 2021. I was talking about the sea with one of the guys that lived in the refugee center, when I met his eyes and I understood (or better, I felt down deep in my soul) that we were seeing two different seas. My eyes were full of an infinite blue sea that with its salt heals my wounds, with its wind blows my sails and with its waves pushes my surfboards. While in his eyes, I saw fear, terror, violence, death. I remember feeling confused, overwhelmed, and guilty. The tension that emerged from this five-second crushed me. Something changed.

⁸ My translation.

Once I arrived in Italy, I contacted the social cooperative where I worked as an intern in a refugee center a year ago; I presented my research and asked if it would be possible to talk with a migrant who crossed the Mediterranean Sea. I decided to contact it because I thought that it would be ethically better to have a conversation about what is a traumatic embodied experience related to the sea with the help of a mediator and/or a psychologist. Indeed, I don't have the experience to approach this kind of trauma and my questions about the sea would have triggered it. Another motivation was that the people who work in the refugee centers know the stories of the migrants. Therefore, they could have present me someone who had already partially healed the trauma and/or felt comfortable to talk about it. Nevertheless, I never received an answer from them.

It's afternoon, and my mom comes back home from school and gives me a book. "Read it". I look at the cover "Galdima: il Re della Savana" [in English, "Galdima: The King of the Savannah"] by Alessandra Munerol and Ibrahim Galdima (2022). I sit on the sofa, I open the first page, and then I disappear for an hour. I went to Cameroon, in Africa, where I met Ibrahim and his family, his dad, his three moms, and his brothers. He shows me his life there, so colorful and full of love; until he had to leave everything and everyone behind to run, to survive. He thus brings me to Libya where he suffered the most terrible violence, physical, mental, and emotional. I close the book, but I can't come back. I'm still there, I feel afraid and sick. I can't stop crying. I need to breathe. My mom enters the room and hugs me. I'm back to my present. "Keep reading", she said. There are just a few pages to finish but I can't go on. I can't just read about it while he lived through it. I open the book and find myself in the Mediterranean Sea.

"One day I found myself in the sea, in an offshore inflatable boat full of people. I was alone, I had nothing. I was running away to breathe and to survive. There was only one person I knew: my friend. On a boat that holds 70 people, we got to 150.

Which idea of life can someone who is on that boat have?

I remember that at a certain point I didn't know where we were anymore.

We got lost.

Babies cry.

Men cry.

We no longer see anything, nothing. We have been at sea for days. Endless days.

I was sure I was going to die. I no longer had any hope of living. Going forward or going back, it was all the same. The only way out was to breathe and think that as long as I breathed, I would stay alive.

I didn't have my memory focused on life. I felt dead. I think I can't swim. I never learned due to an accident. Even now I can't swim. Maybe next year I will learn. The sea still scares me. I'm afraid of the sea.

[...]

At some point, men from all over the world arrive to save our lives. Without knowing us. This struck me so much. Seeing these people help us without knowing anything about us, with the smile of who knows without asking, of whom is kind. [...] What I felt inside me was so intense that I couldn't cry. I only realized that I was alive, for real. Today I cry a little when I'm alone to free me from this part of my life."

(Munerol and Galdima 2022, p. 97-98; my translation)

It's a Sunday afternoon and I'm going to the presentation of the book to meet Ibrahim and Alessandra. My aunt is coming with me, I'm happy. I sit in a little room, words, questions, laughs, silences; eyes and seas are meeting. I like hearing their voices while reading parts of the book. It is real, they are there. Quoting the book, "They had a polite rebellion in the eyes" (ibidem, p. 110). There is a particular part of the book that catches my attention: when referring to one of his moms, Ibrahim says, "The important is that she knows that I'm alive, that I live, that the hate sank under the sea and that I went against the current, that I'm a wave and she is my wind." (ibidem, p. 89). My mom was right, I kept reading and that feeling of death went away making way for life. From the book, it emerges life, willingness to live, despite all. Doesn't matter how much violence Ibrahim, like many other migrants who cross the Mediterranean Sea, passed through, he was full of life; "I'm grateful to life and I would like to look like it" (ibidem, p. 101).

Chapter 4 | Lessons: Taking a stroll on the seashore

I went out of the water exhausted but with a big smile on my face, my heart full of joy, and my body thrilled. I turned and I looked at the sea: the wave breaking and coming back, the nuances of colours, the line of the horizon, the salty fresh air, the water still on my body, the sand under my feet. Time to go, to conclude. I took my surfboard under my arm, and I went away to take a stroll on the seashore. Surfing is an intense life experience; however, it is only after when I walk on the seashore that I fully live it. At the same way, the final part of this research has been like a slow walk throughout the whole research process that allowed me to reflect, feel, acknowledge, and fully live those lessons that emerged from it.



Figure 4 - Taking a stroll on the seashore

4.1 Nature/Human

During this time of investigation, I observed that in everyday life the relation with nature, in particular, the sea is not disappeared but rather silenced.

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

(David Foster Wallace’s speech at Kenyon College 2005 in Nichols 2018, p. xviii)

As the story of the three fish highlights sometimes we are so immersed in the monotony and the modernity of our everyday life that we forget to question and challenge it, to the point that we forget about it. We swim without noticing that we are swimming into the water, but we are in the water. The first time that I read the story, I didn’t quite understand it, but still, it made me smile. The story is indeed an invitation to question and wonder about water, the nature around us, the reality that we take for granted and in which we live. It is a reminder that “the question mark is more powerful than the exclamation point” (Nichols 2018, p. 229). And I think that my asking about the sea to people during these months had somehow a similar effect. The questions that I was asking weren’t searching for the right answer or some data to collect. They had the effect of a bucket of cold water. They were asking to break the silence, to stop to reflect on it, to go deep instead of ahead. In other words, they were searching for other question marks.

My aunt was taken by surprise, she never actually reflects on it, my mom and Marta had to make time to find the right words, other people couldn’t neither find the time, and Ibrahim needed to wait for “the *right* time” (Ibrahim) to heal its trauma before to talk about it, my grandma and Luigi and Michela couldn’t wait to share it. Everyone had their own time, their own embodied experience, and their relation with the sea. Nevertheless, the relation was there, mute, whispering, or shouting but was there. Everyone secretly hides a different intimate connection with the sea.

Therefore, the mere act of asking about the sea had the effect of highlighting the wound between nature (the sea) and humans that has been hurting our society, our lives, and the planet. The Western dualism human/nature has indeed been perpetuated by modernity and coloniality⁹ through the adoption of an anthropocentric view grounded on the notion of humanity as “earthlessness”, or I would say *sealessness*, (Vàzquez 2017, p. 2), forms of “classification, appropriation, extraction, consumption and pollution” (ibidem), and the idea of “endless progress” (ibidem, p. 9). As Plumwood underlines, “This ideology has been functional for Western culture in enabling it to exploit nature with less constraint, but it also creates dangerous illusions by denying embeddedness in and dependency on nature.” (2012, p. 15). In other words, the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of exploitation of coloniality has been reproducing the superiority of human over nature and therefore the domination and negation of the natural world and the silencing of our relations with it. This has led humans to be “disembodied, disembedded and discontinuous from the rest of nature” and the non-human (nature and animals) to be seen as “mindless bodies, excluded from the realms of ethics and culture” (ibidem, p. 16). However, due to the current crisis that

⁹ As Mignolo explains, modernity is “a set of diverse but coherent narratives”, while coloniality is “the darker side of modernity”, the logic hidden underneath those narratives (2018, p. 139-140). Decoloniality is instead a “set of creative processes leading to decolonial narratives” (ibidem, p. 146).

characterizes the Anthropocene¹⁰ (climate change, food insecurity, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, etc.), decolonial, feminist and ecologist scholars underline the need to heal the relation with the non-human world “situating human life in ecological terms and non-human life in ethical terms” (ibidem; Escobar 2015, p. 454). Indeed, adopting a decolonial approach and acknowledging the ecofeminist and post-humanist currents, the research aims at restoring “pluriversal, parochial, and ordinary worlds of relational responsibility to enact ecological belonging” (DeLoughrey 2015 and Escobar 2018 in Jackson 2021, p. 700).

The research refuses the “global design story” (Vázquez 2017, p. 6 in Jackson 2021, p. 701) that has been naturalized by the Anthropocene and listens to a plurality of local stories that embodied and narrate a different relational way of being and knowing through nature, in particular the sea. The stories challenge also the active/passive binary that sees the human as the expressive and active agents and nature as a silent and passive object (Rose 2013, p. 102), describing the sea as a friend, a teacher, a spiritual entity that has a voice, emotions, a soul, and hugs. *He was present in the most beautiful and carefree moments, but also in the saddest and most painful ones, silent and faithful, ready to rejoice with me or to avoid me drowning* (Marta). As emerged from these lines, Marta personifies the sea as a friend using, also her, the male pronoun. Instead, Ibrahim in his story takes a step even further and personifies himself with the sea and his mother with the wind. *I'm a wave and she is my wind* (Ibrahim). This is a powerful image used to transmit their relation that challenge the political image of the migrant as passive victim. He is a wave, he is resilient. This metaphor made me also to reflect on how even though the sea is part of his trauma, he still identifies with it.

Therefore, through the investigation of different relations with the sea, the research brings to unlearn a colonial relation with the sea grounded on the logic of domination, control, and exploitation and instead learn a mutual relation with the sea based on respect, care, and love.

4.2 Body/Mind

From a scientific and medical point of view, entering the cold water, surfing, and swimming in the sea improved physical and mental health (Paleschi, Allen, and Campbell 2022; The Surftherapie Foundation 2022; Demori *et. al* 2021; International Surf Therapy Organization 2018; Nichols 2018). Talking through the modern medical language, entering cold water increases immunity and metabolism, and consequently decreases the probability of becoming sick or having a cold, helps to sleep better, and reduces inflammation; moreover, the activities of surfing and swimming improve physical mobility and personal well-being (confidence, self-esteem, resilience) decreasing loneliness, depression, anxiety, and stress. However, the stories in this research go in part beyond this modern, biomedical, binary understanding of the body, health, age, and ability.

The research through the concept of colonial wounds refuses the “medical thinking” that “[proceeding] from the symptom to the lesion ... remains incapable of considering the possibility that the injury may not visibly mark the body in the expected ways, even as the pain itself is experienced in the body” (Fanon 1964, p. 9 in Ureña 2019, p. 1648). The colonial wounds are indeed invisible, hidden under the rhetoric of modernity and by the logic of coloniality (Mignolo and Vázquez 2013). They highlight “traumas and wounds occasioned by the lived experience of coloniality” and therefore they can't be identified by looking at the “traditional markers of pathology” (Ureña 2019, p. 1641). However, through the sea and the body, the embodied stories and the enfolded poetics make the colonial wounds visible, felt.

¹⁰ Anthropocene is a term used to indicate the current geological epoch “in which human activity dominates the development of global ecosystems” (Sterner *et al.* 2019, p. 2).

They challenge the medical modern understanding of “wounds” and “health” embodying a transition from health to healing. In the research, indeed, healing is understood as an onto-epistemological process of liberation held in the body that “depends on relations of reciprocity, care, tenderness and community” rather than “on technological and medical interventions” (Trejo Méndez 2021, p. 12).

Water highlights the connection between body, mind, and spirit welcoming all these three dimensions together. Indeed, the sea is not dominated by the same rules and logic that strictly divide the body and the mind as separate entities and that silence the spirit. A body that is not able to walk in the grass is able to swim in the water, an anxious mind that suffocates with air breathes underwater, a soul locked in a cage on the land, finds freedom in the sea. The stories show how, in the everyday life, the simple acts of going swimming in the sea, entering the cold water at a certain age, and going to surf when you have a disability break the stereotypical label of the old man/woman who had to stop live because his/her age and of the disabled who is not able to live because has a physical or mental disability. They make me wonder: *Whose body is healthy and strong?*

The stories, therefore, contribute to decolonizing the dichotomy old/young, health/illness, ability/disability, strong/weak, even though with some limitations. For instance, my experience of surf therapy as a volunteer doesn't completely refuse those dichotomies since this activity still uses some terms such as “therapy”, “disabled”, “rehabilitation”, “mental and physical health *intervention*” (Primacio 2020, my emphasis) that reproduce “medical thinking” and “narratives of normativity” (Ureña 2019, p. 1648, 1642). Nonetheless, through limnography, those activities have surfaced as a way of feeling alive, of living, and not being lived, in other words, as an embodied way of healing. Understanding healing as not letting the dominant pain narrative defines their story.

Water Body

The relation with the sea contributes to knowing, connecting, and feeling the body. Surfing “ties the body to the waves” (Ford and Brown 2005, ch. 5), entering the cold water activates the senses, *A thousand needles, excitement, anesthesia, wellness in the body and the spirit* (Luigi), and being underwater amplified them (Nichols 2018). This allows us to feel the body, to become aware of the material sensed bodily dimension that coloniality has erased. “The body, immersed, feels amplified, heavier and lighter at the same time. Weightless yet stronger.” (Shapton in Nichols 2018, p. 99-100). And while this weightlessness allows my grandma to do some movements that age wouldn't allow her on the land, it also allows me to carry the body of another challenging the idea of the weak female body. Therefore, it allows us to sense and know our body outside the dominant ontology and epistemology, signed by stereotypes and binary logic. In other words, it makes us challenge our internalized mind/body and human/nature dichotomies re-thinking ourselves as “ecologically embodied beings” (Plumwood 2012, p. 16). The body in the sea seems lighter because its density is like water's; our body is based indeed on 60% of water (ibidem). Therefore, going into the sea remember us that we *are* water.

Blue Mind

Water can help us in the transition from the “Red Mind”, the state of overstimulation and stress triggered by modernity that “exhausts us physically, mentally, and emotionally” (Nichols 2018, p. 150) or the “Grey Mind of numbed-out depression” (ibidem, p. 155) to instead the “Blue Mind”, “a state of calm centeredness” (ibidem). The stress, the obsession with control and the sense of alienation operated by the mechanisms of modernity and coloniality disappear in the water. “Being near, in, on, or under water” brings us back from the “Red

Mind spiral” reconnecting the mind with the body and therefore bringing our mind back focused on the embodied present (Nichols 2018). In other words, the sea allows us to take a deep breath, let go, and find peace in the mind. *A silent hug, it calms me* (Micaela). In the stories, the metaphor of the hug is recurrent to describe the feeling the sea transmits us lifting our physical and emotional burdens and welcoming our pain. The sea indeed helps us in carrying the colonial wounds, allowing us to perceive ourselves not as an individual but rather as relational beings. However, in this case, it emerges a tension that I can’t deepen here but that I want to underline; the sea indeed can be a possibility to heal the wounds but also the cause of these wounds. Therefore, the sea itself can be the heavy burden that one carries, like in the story of Ibrahim. Nonetheless, when the *right* time comes, it’s in the sea that he also finds his reconciliation.

Fluid Spirit

Swimming in the cold sea and surfing are activities that push the physical limits, challenge the mental boundaries set on land, and free the spirit, our inner child, our plural self. The sea allows our “intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on [us]” (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 16) to emerge. *It is memory of who I am* (Micaela). The sea has been described as *the mirror where I can contemplate the infinite, what the soul can only senses and craves* (ibidem). In front of the sea, we get to know our spirit outside the modern/colonial framework. In other words, through the sea and the process of healing the colonial wound body/mind/spirit, we are refusing within our bodies the production of boundaries that onto-epistemologically divide, organize, and control us (Maldonado-Torres 2017, p. 435). We refuse to embody rigid boundaries to become fluid waves.

4.3 Feeling/thinking

Throughout the research, it has been conducting an epistemological refusal of the coloniality of knowing (and being) to re-affirm those erased, denied, and silenced knowing-subjectivity (Motta 2016, p. 39). Through enfolded poetries, embodied stories, *sentipensar*, and the metaphor of the sea, this research refuses to reproduce rational thinking (and academic writing) as the only validate possibilities to be and know and unpacks the dichotomy thinking/feeling. In this way, it contributed to unveiling the binary logic, through which coloniality has been devalued and erased knowledges and dehumanized subjects, and the pain narrative through which social sciences has been maintaining the structures of power of coloniality.

The local, marginalized, and embodied stories of everyday life presented in the research have indeed re-valued an embodied and relational way of knowing that emerges “from the exteriorized borders of the modern/colonial world system” (Mignolo 2012 in Jackson 2021, p. 700). They have been a practical example of “border thinking” (Mignolo 2018, p. 149). Positioning outside the binary logic, in the in-between, the stories have contributed to the refusal of the idea that the mind is the only place through which we know, and that rational thinking is the only valid knowledge.

From the stories, we learn relational and embodied ways of knowing through the body and the sea. In other words, the sea and the body emerge as borderlands, as liminal spaces from where we unlearn coloniality of knowing (and being) and learn “an un-bordered liminal onto-epistemology” (Sheik 2021, p. 92).

Body as epistemology

“O my body, always make me a man who questions!”
(Fanon 2008, p. 206 in Ureña 2019, p. 1652)

The practice of decolonial embodiment in the research “offers a global perspective on local injustice that accounts not only for the historical consequences of colonialism and coloniality, but also the very real and embodied suffering of those subjects who bear these wounds.” (Ureña 2019, p. 1642). It has contributed to making visible the colonial wounds and the binary logic underneath them and to show a transition towards ways of knowing and healing the colonial wounds starting from “the concrete incarnated experiences of colonial difference and the wounds left” (Icaza and Vazquez 2016 in Icaza 2017, p. 29).

The choice of narrating through the body, combining thinking and feeling, has been helpful to refuse the Cartesian thinking/feeling and subject/object division. It contributed to re-valuing feeling and knowing through the body as an epistemology “founded in embodied, subjective, lived experience” (Ureña 2019, p. 1652) and re-humanizing those subjects who express and know through it. Therefore, it hasn’t been just a strategical stylistic choice to refuse the dominant narrative but also a mean through which put into practice and re-value the body as a way of knowing. This embodied epistemology goes to heal the violent and painful scratch that coloniality has been caused by leaving out the body perpetuating a disembodied epistemology and ontology (Ingersoll 2016). Therefore, from the stories, we learn an “epistemology of the body” (Ureña 2019, p. 1655) that consists in knowing through the senses, recognizing the body as ecologically, politically, socially, and historically embodied, perceiving the body as vulnerable and at the same time a place of resistance, and acknowledging the body as a place of harm and healing. The body emerges as liminal space, an onto-epistemological space where tensions are experienced and coexist and where questions arise (Trejo Méndez 2021, p. 2).

Sea as epistemology

*“It is not easy to explain
how is it that you have no more answers
by looking at the sea.”*
(Baricco 1994, p. 153; my translation)

The sea has been the main character both as a metaphor and an embodied reality. However, from the research, the sea emerges also as a way of (un)learning, as an epistemology.

In the sea, knowledge is constantly co-created with the encounters and interactions between the wind, the waves, the sky, and the self. Recalling the expression “seascape epistemology” by Ingersoll (2016), it doesn’t indicate “a knowledge of the sea” rather “a knowledge about [the sea] and the wind as an interconnected system that allows for successful navigation through them” (2016, p. 5). Indeed, as my sailing instructor Ciccio taught me when I started sailing, a sailor needs to learn to *read* the exact direction of the wind to navigate by looking at the sea. In the Ligurian local dialect they are called *crênza de mă*, the white, silverly, dark ripples that the wind blowing creates on the surface of the sea, the point of connection between wind and sea. The wind is writing on the sea an infinite poetry; we just need to (un)learn to read it.

The sea is constantly changing yet staying essentially the same.

Relentless movement (Micaela).

“It’s regularity without monotony” (Nichols 2018, p. 155).

A constant (Paola).

The habit of its presence never generates boredom (Marta).

“The perfect recipe to trigger restful involuntary attention” (Nichols 2018, p. 155).

A way to challenge the monotony (Michela).

The sea is an “always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries” (Anzaldúa 2002 in Trejo Méndez 2021, p. 2).

The line of the horizon that does not define but invites to look beyond (Micaela).

You never stop learning from him (Marta).

It is the lens through which I know.

From the research, therefore, it emerges a sea epistemology understood as a constant fluid movement between learning and unlearning. Knowing through the sea means constantly challenging the known and the self. Indeed, the sea constantly re-shapes our body; “knowledge and identity is constructed anew each time the body is affected by the organic and unpredictable sea.” (Ingersoll 2016, p. 126). We get to know the sea as a safe space where you can let yourself go, recharge, and relax, where you are understood and welcomed, and where you can be and learn outside the dominant onto-epistemology. However, we also learn that the sea can be a dangerous and feared space, where constant awareness is necessary and where you can’t ever arrogantly assume to know, stopping to question.

Through the constant movement and changing nature of the sea, we unlearn the rigid boundaries we learn in the land. In other words, the fluidity of the sea, evading from any border, delimitation, definition, demarcation, allows us to escape the fixed binary logic that instead limits us on the land. The sea transforms our “stone thoughts” (Baricco 1994, p. 153; my translation) in fluid waves that in a constant movement of (un)learning generate infinite question marks.

4.4 Conclusion

I started this research with the purpose and the need of healing the fracture thinking/feeling (subject/object) that always hurt me. I dive and investigate the depths of the sea and, there, I find infinite questions that move me towards a process of healing this colonial wounds. At the same time, this research also contributes to healing the grief of my grandpa that this year left me lost, adrift in the middle of that same sea in which I jumped. It helped me to live the pain without losing his memory, his joy, and love. This research process has therefore been a challenging, painful, liberating, and life-affirming process.

Started from the acknowledgment that the pain narrative, telling only one side of the story (the painful one), doesn’t contribute to a structural change but rather perpetuates that same colonial and binary logic that caused the violence (and the pain) in the beginning, the

research aims at refusing it. This refusal, however, hasn't been here translated into the elimination of the pain from the story, but rather into the inclusion of the missing part. The stories, therefore, narrate both pain and joy, fear and safeness, oppression and freedom, not as exclusive opposites but as generative relations. They narrate life. Reading the story of Ibrahim what remains to me hasn't been just his pain but how he lives through that pain without losing his humanity. He doesn't allow the pain to define him. As my grandma, Luigi and Michela, P. don't allow their "old age" and "disability" to stop them from living a full life. They re-story their narrative through the sea.

The research has been "a [learning] journey through epistemic borders of knowledge" (Clisby 2020, p. 5). From the embodied stories that surface from the sea, we (un)learned to sense and know our body outside the dominant epistemology (and ontology) sustained by the binary logic and, therefore, to look beyond the dualistic categories human/nature, mind/body, thinking/feeling, subject/object. The stories teach us the power of the question mark. They remind us of our being "ecologically embodied beings" bringing us to re-think the concept of humanity through relationality (Vàzquez 2017); they reawaken the connection between mind, body, and spirit that leads us to see and embrace the invisible colonial wounds and to embody a transition from the medical static concept of health to a decolonial collective process of healing; they re-value embodied, material, emotional, relational ways of knowing exploring the body and the sea as liminal spaces. Through enflashed poetries, an embodied narration, and *sentipensar*, I've sailed the Liminagraphy Sea facing its storms and learning its infinite possibilities. Liminagraphy not only allowed me to conduct an epistemological investigation on the colonial wounds through the sea, but it also allowed the sea, and the body, to emerge as epistemologies, as liminal spaces where the healing of the colonial wounds is possible. Flowing throughout the pages of this research, the sea teaches us that is in the borderlands that we (un)learn. In other words, it is in a constant fluid movement in the liminal space, in the in-between, in the relations that we know the world, we embrace our plural self, and we can heal our colonial wounds.

To conclude, this research has challenged me to embody the movements of the sea that I learned going surfing and sailing also outside the sea and brought me to explore the infinite sea I have inside. Unlearning to be a single self, I learned to embrace my contradictions and my plural self. Unlearning the boundaries of the binary logic, I learned the borderlands, where a constant process of acknowledging and questioning coloniality meets a daily decolonial process of refusing it and healing the colonial wounds. Unlearning the learned, I learn to question the unquestioned.

Appendix 1

Is *my* relation with the sea colonized?

I include here some parts of my methodological diary from August and September; personal reflections on my relation with the sea that I carried on in parallel to the research process and that contributed to my process of (un)learning and decolonizing the self.

Have been days, weeks, that I can't write. It's so chaotic and noisy inside my head that I'm struggling to find peace. I should flow like the sea while instead, I'm stuck, like a big heavy rock. Feeling like opening and reaching out but finding closures and silence. It hurts. How can I work when I'm not inspired? How can I be creative when I feel disconnected from everything and everyone? How can I flow in this research process while following a strict academic timeline?

In this month of research, I realize how much the relationship that one can have with the sea is private and intimate, and therefore, difficult to transmit or not open to being shared. With some people I didn't have to ask anything, they started to talk and share with me; every time that this happen was beautiful, overwhelming, and unexpected. However, usually, I'm the one who directly asks if they would like to share with me what the sea represents to them, by talking, writing, and drawing, or in any other way that they wanted to. I'm immensely grateful and honored when they decide to share with me, but I also understand and respect their decision not to do it. This transmitted to me how the stories about the sea are deep, complicated, and intertwined with personal life and inner self; they are stories of souls. I should share them in the research, honor them, and learn from them; so, why do I have instead this feeling of holding them like the biggest treasure, like a secret?

I'm hurt and angry because some people with whom I opened up and with which I was hoping to connect with, disappeared in an infinite silence. I'm hurt because I have been ignored, misunderstood, diminished, and judge after I talked about my research. It was already difficult in the beginning, but now every time it's then more difficult to share what my research is about, to share my story with the sea. Why am I so reluctant in sharing it?

I'm reading, talking, writing, and reflecting, but still, there is something that is holding me back. Why? What there is that is keeping me from flowing? What am I feeling that I can't understand? I'm an open, extroverted, and social person; I talk and share a lot, to the point that sometimes I then wonder "Why did I share that detail before?". However, there's always been one thing I've been more reserved about: the sea. I wrote about it in my diary, and I partially share it with my mom and Anna, my best friend, and Allegra, my boatmate. Nonetheless, the sea has always been something just mine, that I kept for myself only. My element, my dimension, my safe space, my mirror, my friend. My, my, my... Where does this possessive "my" come from? I always used it to define the exclusionary relation between me and the sea rather than to declare a domination or a property over the sea itself. But still, why?

I never question my relation with the sea, I reflect on it and its ups and downs and how it evolved over the years, but I never critique or truly shake it. However, I've noticed that since I started this research process, something changed: the more stories I listened to and the more the magical dimension of the relation was disappearing because the more its exclusivity was in the balance. Is the relation that I personally share with the sea magic, beautiful and powerful, because exclusive? It can't be. I can't believe it.

I suddenly felt my connection with the sea losing its deepness, peculiarity, and importance; it wasn't just mine, someone else was sharing my relation with the sea. For weeks, while listening to the stories and different relations with the sea, I have been in conflict with my colonized "I" who was reclaiming a certain exclusion or excellence over the other relations. Why? Thus, I start to question myself: is my relation with the sea colonized? Is this individualistic and possessive way of approaching the relation with the sea parts of the colonial legacy that still silently lives in our language, in our relations, in our everyday life?

I started this research by acknowledging my relation with the sea as an alternative way of knowing and being, positioned outside the dominant modern/colonial logic. And, as this research reveals, so it is. Nevertheless, I also learned that there was a colonized aspect in it that I didn't recognize in the beginning and that listening to different embodied stories and relations with the sea contributes to bringing out, acknowledging, and in part decolonizing.

This research process, and the persons and the stories who contributed to it, made me realize that I was thinking about coloniality/decoloniality in a binary way. At the beginning of the research process, after I've acknowledged coloniality in its shapes and being afraid of reproducing its violent logic and mechanisms, I pushed myself to the other side of the dichotomy, decoloniality. However, this research process, the application of liminagraphy and the fact that we live in a material world where everything is organized by colonial logic and through hierarchical relations made me realize the impossibility to completely refuse coloniality. I learned there are possibilities and impossibilities in decolonizing my way of being and knowing and, consequently, the relation I share with the sea. I learned that life is an entanglement of both colonial and decolonial life. I learned to know and be in the borderlands.

Appendix 2

Details of the stories

I present here the pivotal encounters that I had with whom¹¹, where, and when. Following liminagraphy, these encounters weren't interviews but rather fluid conversations, co-creation, and exchanges of knowledge. Among these, there have been many other encounters in everyday life of July, August, September, October, and November with the same people or others that have contributed as well to the shaping and flowing of the research. Here I present the details of the stories of the subchapter 3.1.

<i>Adriana</i> , my grandma, female, 77 years old, Italian	Albenga, July 12; August 24
<i>P</i> , male, about 50 years old, Dutch	Wjk aan Zee (the Netherlands), June 12
<i>Paola</i> , my aunt, female, 50 years old, Italian, nutritionist, and biologist	Loano, August 24
<i>Micaela</i> , my mom, female, 52 years old, Italian, teacher	Loano, August 28
<i>Michela and Luigi</i> , female and male, about 80 years old, Italian, retired	Loano, August 23
<i>Marta</i> , female, 20 years old, Italian, windsurfer	Loano, September 9
<i>Ibrahim</i> , male, 28 years old, Cameroonian, artisan	Loano, October 23

¹¹ For privacy, also here, I use only their name.

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