

## New Perspectives on Imagology

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# New Perspectives on Imagology

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## #JeSuisAmatrice: Identity through a Landscape of Wounds; Toward a Geo-Imagology

*Daniel Brandlechner*

### Abstract

Italy has experienced a high number of earthquakes. However, the identity of “the Italians” has not yet been defined by their “landscape of wounds.” Referring to an earthquake in central Italy (Amatrice) in August 2016, the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* published a controversial caricature of two wounded Italians standing alongside the “Lasagnes,” a pile of bodies layered like the well-known Italian pasta dish. By analysing the caricature’s text, intertext, and context, while drawing on imagology and geopoetics, this article aims to show how earthquakes are linked to Italian cultural stereotypes and national identity.

### Keywords

geo-imagology – geopoetics – earthquake – catastrophe – *Charlie Hebdo*

Geographical knowledge has often been used to construct “the other,” which is why geography can be regarded as a typical problem area of imagology. In the past five decades, studies have focused in particular on contrasting representations of the East and the West (cf. Beller 2007b), the Orient and the Occident (see also part 3 of this volume), the centres and the peripheries (Leerssen 2007), and the North and South (cf. Arndt 2007; Jakobsson 2009; Fjågesund 2014). A notable example of such a combination of geography and imagology is Franz Karl Stanzel’s *National Character as Literary Stereotype* (1980), where these differences are traced back to the old climate hypothesis based on a similar depiction of people from the North and South. In addition, Edward Said’s famous concept of *imaginative geography* ([1978] 2003, 49–73) provides a useful account of how geography interferes with cultural representation. More recently, Federico Italiano has shown in *Translation and Geography*

how cartographic knowledge is translated “not only across epochs, languages, and literary texts but also across media, in particular between the medium of writing and the medium of the map” (2016, 1). Finally, it is worth mentioning the anthology *Imagology Profiles: The Dynamics of National Imagery in Literature*, edited by the Lithuanian scholar Laura Laurušaitė: the third section “introduces the geo-imagological aspect and proposes theoretical links between imagology and literary topography” (2018a, 3).

Apart from cartography, however, previous studies in the field of imagology have paid little attention to other approaches arising from geography, the “knowledge of the earth.” So far, there are no studies that have explicitly related stereotypes to the knowledge of geomorphology (e.g. plate tectonics) or hydrogeography (e.g. the distribution of water on earth), nor studies of human geography (e.g. mobility) that have questioned its connection to stereotypes and identity in a historical-critical way.<sup>1</sup>

This is very surprising given the ongoing debate on the Anthropocene since 2002, the year in which Paul Crutzen published his famous “Geology of Mankind in Nature” and confronted the ecocritically oriented humanities with questions related to geology. Such questions are raised primarily in the wake of events that are perceived as catastrophic and therefore promote and challenge identities, as well as stereotypes: they result in mass mobility, refugee flows, and a division of the population into an “us” versus “the others.”

Consequently, I would like to focus on the aftermath of one of the most recent catastrophic earthquakes in the history of Italy, which took place in Amatrice in 2016. This article sets out to investigate how earthquakes are linked to Italian cultural stereotypes and national identity. With comparative imagology as a “working method” (Leerssen 2016, 19) and geopoetics as an “operative category” (Italiano 2016, 9), this article aims to show “a discursive logic and representational set of cultural and poetic conventions” (Leerssen 2016, 19). I understand geopoetics as “the result of a negotiation between a certain geographical imagination and the territorial, geographical discourse of a certain epoch” (Italiano 2016, 9). This will be achieved by extending geopoetics from literary texts (Italiano 2008) to non-literary texts, in order “to comprehend and to analyse the territorial, geographical and geo-ecological dimension [...] and finally the aesthetically encoded relationship between man and Earth” (ibid., 5). This article considers a caricature published in the French satirical magazine

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1 In this way, Laura Laurušaitė’s “Imagology as Image Geology” (2018b, 8) is more a metaphor than a geo-imagological approach.

*Charlie Hebdo* (entitled “Séisme à l’Italienne”)<sup>2</sup> to address the question of how earthquakes relate to Italian cultural stereotypes and national identity.<sup>3</sup>

According to Joep Leerssen, imagological research needs to “establish a threefold procedure, which can be rubricated as intertextual, contextual, and textual” (2016, 20). The same approach is adopted in this article, in which the core analysis is organized into three parts: in the first section, earthquakes are examined in a broader sense and I discuss the relevance of the geological location of Italy and its connection to historically important earthquakes that occurred there, such as the 2009 L’Aquila earthquake. Since all seismic activity engraves itself into the landscape and leaves traces, the landscape itself becomes an intertext, composed of various preceding texts. This section provides a step toward developing an Italian cultural history of earthquakes. In the second section of this article, I examine the context in which the earthquake occurred, focusing in particular on Italy as a nation. Which auto-images or hetero-images are associated with Italy? Before outlining some paths toward a geo-imagology (section four) and drawing a conclusion (section five), in the third section I analyse the “text,” which corresponds to a caricature published in *Charlie Hebdo* in the aftermath of the 2016 Amatrice earthquake. Soon after its publication, a transnational debate emerged, focusing on the use of national stereotypes. This contribution to disaster processing touched an open wound: is a caricature an adequate genre to negotiate the suffering of others?

## 1 Intertext: The Moving Wounds of Italy

According to plate tectonics, the surface of the earth is not solid but consists rather of tectonic plates floating on the lithosphere.<sup>4</sup> If two plates move toward or away from each other, this movement can lead to an earth tremor. Since Italy is located right on the boundary between the African and the Eurasian tectonic plate, it is susceptible to high seismic risk, which was first recognized in the 1970s. The historian Piero Bevilacqua (1996, 74) observed that 38 percent of all the 481 disastrous and very disastrous earthquakes in the Mediterranean

2 Félix (2016), “Séisme à l’Italienne. Penne Sauce Tomate, Penne Gratinées, Lasagnes,” *Charlie Hebdo* 1258 (August 31), 16.

3 Some of the ideas I discuss here can be found in my master’s thesis (2018) where I focused on the concepts of geocriticism and geopoetics and the representation of earthquake events in different media. In this article, I would like to focus more sharply on imagology and geopoetics in order to outline a new perspective on imagology toward a geo-imagology.

4 For a more detailed explanation to understand plate tectonics and earthquakes see Grotzinger and Jordan (<sup>7</sup>2014).

region between 1501 and 1929 had hit Italy. It is now a well-known fact that some of these earthquakes created what Serenella Iovino aptly calls a “landscape of wounds” in *Ecocriticism and Italy* (2016, 84).

A variety of studies in the humanities have shown that catastrophic events, such as earthquakes, are based on the “construction, selection and distinction by an observer” (Nünning 2012, 66). Many contributions to disaster research highlight the mediality of catastrophes.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that some of them have also dealt with intermedial contexts: in addition to newspapers and other forms of periodical media, disaster research is increasingly taking literature,<sup>6</sup> film, and visual arts into account (see e.g. Horn 2014; Rigby 2015). Iovino, too, in her chapter on the Italian landscape of wounds, has not focused on the “material wounds” (2016, 84) that earthquakes inflict. As a scholar of material ecocriticism, she is naturally interested in “their repercussion on community life and narratives, and the creative ways of social self-representation they have enacted” (ibid., 86). In the aforementioned *Ecocriticism and Italy*, Iovino studies the earthquake in the Belice Valley (Sicily, 1968), in Irpinia (Campania, 1980), and L’Aquila (Abruzzo, 2009) by examining the catastrophes as the “indispensable narrative” (2016, 87) based on a broad range of artists using different media, including writers, poets, visual artists, and filmmakers, who “have tried to rebuild their places through a shared imagination that would give voice to those worlds apparently lost forever, filtering their silences, baring their wounds, and transforming these storied materialities into signs” (ibid., 86).

The city of L’Aquila is a good example of how earthquakes have shaped the Italian cultural identity. On April 6, 2009, a major earthquake struck the city in the central Apennines, which is only about an hour’s drive away from Amatrice and was unfortunately largely destroyed. However, even a decade later, all the ruins are still present, and scaffolding, restricted zones, and cranes

5 For example: Lauer and Unger’s *Das Erdbeben von Lissabon und der Katastrophendiskurs im 18. Jahrhundert* (2008), Mihaela Gavrilă’s *Londa anomala dei media* (2012), or *Catastrophe & Spectacle* (2018) by Jörg Dünne, Gesine Hindemith, and Judith Kasper.

6 No one has probably studied literary earthquakes more extensively than Raffaele Morabito (2011). In the same year as ‘Fukushima’, and two years after the devastating earthquake of L’Aquila in 2009, he published *Il gran tremore. Rappresentazioni letterarie dei terremoti*, a chronological anthology of literary representations of earthquakes, starting with Aristotle, and ending with Quasimodo, Pirandello, and Turoldo. In addition to canonical earthquake texts that were written in the aftermath of the great earthquake of Lisbon in 1755, which led to extensive discourses, especially in German- and French-speaking countries—from Voltaire, Rousseau, and Kant to Goethe and Kleist one may find a lot of Italian-centred texts as well as texts by (male) authors of world literature like Dumas, Twain, Gorkij, or Canetti.



dominate the cityscape. Although some renovation work has begun, the historic centre has not yet been revived, confirming Iovino's observation that "the major narrative about L'Aquila's earthquake is told by its rubble abandoned in the streets, the collapsing palaces suffocated by disproportionate, outrageously costly and rapidly rusting scaffolding" (ibid., 113). This wound has not gone unnoticed by the world of culture and there is a long list of writers and directors who have made artistic contributions in relation to the earthquake and its consequences. A recent example is the film *Loro 2* (2018). Almost ten years after the event, the Italian director Paolo Sorrentino used the earthquake in L'Aquila to construct it as a real catastrophe, as the turning point in the life and career of Silvio Berlusconi, the former prime minister of Italy. After several inconsequential political and human missteps, the earthquake marks a distinctive point in the life of the protagonist within this biographical film.

## 2 Context: Images of Italy

Earthquakes are a recurring theme within Italian literature, film, and art, so one can say that the awareness of this specific disaster risk is very central to Italy's auto-image. Interestingly there is no evidence that the foreign image of "the Italians"—in terms of imagology: the *hetero-image*—is linked to high seismological risk. In this article, I deal with some of these geographically localizable images, and focus more precisely on the context of the *Charlie Hebdo* caricature which circulated in August 2016.

It is often the medium of literature that allows ethnotypes and stereotypes to be widely propagated, as Beller and Leerssen (2007) have shown in their critical survey *Imagology*. In his article on the "Italians" (2007a), Beller lists two dominant images of Italy, which are passed on through literature: (1) The first image goes back to eighteenth-century travel literature (cf. Beller 2007, 195–197). Foreigners from all over the world travelled to Italy in search of the remaining traces of antiquity. The best-known example is probably Goethe who travelled through Italy between 1786 and 1788. He documented this experience and later published a revised edition, his influential *Italian Journey*.<sup>7</sup>

7 Goethe in his *Italian Journey* noted on March 3, 1787, in Naples: "The earthquake [...] has unpredictable moods: one speaks here of earthquakes as of the wind and the weather, and in Thuringia of fire blazes." My translation. Original and complete quote: "Vom Erdbeben spürt man jetzt im untern Teile von Italien gar nichts, im obern ward neulich Rimini und naheliegende Orte beschädigt. Es hat wunderliche Launen, man spricht hier davon wie von Wind und Wetter und in Thüringen von Feuersbrünsten" (1913, 202).

(2) Beller (cf. 2007a, 198) associates Italy's second image with crime and criminal organizations, an image that has found its way to the public sphere through Verga's *Cavalleria rusticana* (1880), Pirandello's *Novelle per un anno* (1922), and Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* (1958), as well as through their film adaptations.

Literature and film are key media for transmitting stereotypes and national attributions. The challenge is to understand the full meaning of a certain image, a certain gesture, and to trace them back in time. Besides literature and film, however, there are many other media through which stereotypes and national attributions circulate, probably the most popular being food. In "Rhétorique de l'image," Barthes presented a broad perspective on the knowledge transfer from one nation to another through food. He studied the term *Italianicity* ("italianité"), and pointed out that "it isn't Italy itself, but the condensed essence of everything that can possibly be considered as Italian, from spaghetti to painting" (1964, 49).<sup>8</sup> By reading a French advertisement placed by the French food manufacturer Panzani, Barthes unveils the French myth of Italy. Barthes asserts that in France everybody would recognize the Italianicity of the Panzani-image whereas "Italians would hardly be able to perceive the connotation of the term [Panzani], nor probably the Italianicity of tomatoes and pepper" (ibid., 41).<sup>9</sup> The image shows several packs of spaghetti, a can, tomatoes, onions, peppers, and mushrooms falling out of a half-opened shopping bag against a wine-red background. Barthes points out that in France stereotypes such as *freshness* are able to immediately reproduce the Italian reference, while in Italy, nobody would decipher the Italianicity of the advertisement.

Barthes's observation once again becomes relevant in times of intensifying globalization. In view of the considerations concerning Italians and Italianicity, one can conclude that the high seismic disaster risk—in contrast with the auto-image of Italy—does not play a dominant role in the hetero-image of Italy. Due to its proximity to other European countries, one might think that the Italian earthquake risk would also prevail in European hetero-images of Italy. Interestingly, earthquake risks are rather associated with more distant countries such as Japan or Mexico.<sup>10</sup> Giddens offers one of the most famous definitions of globalization, which he describes "as the intensification

8 My translation. Original and complete quote: "italianité, ce n'est pas l'Italie, c'est l'essence condensée de tout ce qui peut être italien, des spaghetti à la peinture."

9 My translation. Original and complete quote: "les Italiens ne pourraient guère percevoir la connotation du nom propre, non plus probablement que l'italianité de la tomate et du poivron."

10 Arno Borst's (cf. 1981, 559) observation provides a possible explanation: since the early modern age, Europe has tried to exoticize the earthquake risk by localizing it either far

of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" ([1990] 1996, 64). After the earthquake near the Japanese coastal city of Sendai on March 11, 2011, the question of nuclear energy was once again raised in Germany. This is a good example of how an event occurring many miles away shapes local happenings. Another good example emerged from the aftermath of the Amatrice earthquake in 2016. Many Italian restaurants around the world put the famous *Pasta all'Amatriciana* dish on their menu to help donate one euro per meal to the earthquake victims. Nevertheless, such specific local happenings that took place throughout the world have failed to shape Italy's national identity. This becomes even more interesting in the light of imagological research that has shown that national attributions often arise during "historical tipping points" (Leerssen 2016, 20)—and natural hazards, like earthquakes, can definitely represent such events. However, these local happenings around the world have not yet shaped Italy's image as a country with a high seismic risk.

### 3 Text: Earthquakes, Italian Style

This lack of awareness is best exemplified by the aftermath of the earthquake that shook large parts of central Italy on August 24, 2016. The earthquake, whose epicentre was located in the province of Rieti, close to the centuries-old city of Amatrice, reached level 6.0 on the Richter scale.<sup>11</sup> In Italy, earthquakes of this magnitude take place every five to ten years. The last one occurred in L'Aquila in 2009. If adequate precautions have not been taken, these earthquakes can be very destructive: as a result of the 2016 earthquake, almost all buildings collapsed, leaving the old town of Amatrice completely destroyed. Furthermore, about 300 people lost their lives due to the disaster. Therefore, the Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia (or INGV) classified the

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from Europe (Turkey, China, Jamaica, Japan, India, Peru) or far from Europe's centres (Carinthia, Sicily).

11 "On Richter's scale, two earthquakes at the same distance from a seismograph differ by one magnitude if the size of their ground motions differs by a factor of 10. The ground motion of an earthquake of magnitude 3, therefore, is 10 times that of an earthquake of magnitude 2. Similarly, a magnitude 6 earthquake produces ground motions that are 100 times greater than those of a magnitude 4 earthquake. The energy released as seismic waves increases even more with earthquake magnitude, by a factor of 33 for each Richter unit. A magnitude 8 earthquake releases  $33 \times 33$  or 1000 times the energy of a magnitude 6 earthquake" (Grotzinger and Jordan <sup>7</sup>2014, 305).

earthquake as being destructive to very destructive (9–10) on the European macroseismic scale EMS-98, which measures the intensity of the damage. In contrast to the Richter scale, which does not have an upper limit, the European macroseismic scale EMS-98 only goes up to level 12.

The perception of catastrophes often oscillates between the local and the global. For example, natural disasters are, from a spatial point of view, local events. They affect only a small local area. Sometimes they cause destructive effects. Then, to restore order, the affected areas are dependent on official support, which is often accompanied by international attention. This process of transformation from the local to the global took place in the case of *Charlie Hebdo*. The French satirical magazine published a controversial caricature titled “Séisme a l’Italienne” on August 31, 2016, seven days after the catastrophic event. The caricature shows two wounded and bloodstained people, two *terremotati*. Interestingly, the Italian language has its own word for the social wounds caused by earthquakes. Used as a noun, *terremotato* refers to those people who have been injured by an earthquake or who are homeless and have to flee after an earthquake. The two *terremotati* of the caricature look to their left. There is a collapsed heap of rubble and corpses—blood and human extremities, mostly human feet, protruding from every level of the pile. The earthquake is illustrated as something terrible that kills and buries. It leaves behind its debris and grief and a certain sense of powerlessness, embodied by three figures in the caricature: the first figure (viewing left to right) does not speak, the mouth is shut; the second figure does not see, the eyes are closed; and the pile of rubble, representing the third figure, does not hear, as the buried bodies are incapable of hearing. The caricature does not differ much from the innumerable paintings of catastrophes that can be traced back to early modernity.<sup>12</sup> The scene can be interpreted as catastrophic in the sense that the figures are both spectators and victims of the catastrophe. As Hans Blumenberg puts it in *Shipwreck with Spectator*, spectators do not enjoy the sublimity of their object, the pile of rubble, but of their own self-consciousness (cf. [1979] 1997, 26). Thus, the use of a spectator is perhaps a fitting means of representing the disaster. But is a caricature an adequate genre to represent a disaster?

Comic theory defines a caricature as “the distorted presentation of a person, type, or action” (Ames 2017). The given caricature, however, does not declare this distortion on the visual level. In addition to the visual, the caricature makes use of written elements. Every figure is linked to a culinary dish, which is placed as an inscription above each of them (the first figure, “Penne Sauce Tomato,”

12 The essays in Dünne et al. (2018) elucidate images of catastrophes.

the second, “Penne Gratinées,” and the pile of bodies, “Lasagnes”). This is what Frahm would define as a “structural parody” (2002, 204).<sup>13</sup> Together with the title (“Séisme à l’Italienne”), the inscriptions written in French appear disparate and misleading: a typical catachresis. Are the Italians covered in blood? Or are they drenched in tomato sauce? What does the caricature actually mean? Similar questions are reflected in Luigi Pirandello’s essay on *Humourism*, which was published in 1908—the same year the Messina earthquake took place:

This decomposing, these digressions, these variations [...] are precisely a necessary and unavoidable consequence of the disturbance and interruptions of the organizing movement of the images by active reflection, which provokes an association for counterarguments: the images, instead of being associated by similarity or contiguity, present themselves in contrast: each image, each group of images awakens and recalls the opposites, which naturally divide the spirit, which, restless, persists in finding or establishing the most unthinkable of relationships between them.

[1908] 1986, 141<sup>14</sup>

Imagology can serve as a method for the analysis of *national topoi* (“Nationaltopoi”), a popular means of caricature (cf. Florack 2007, 159–160). “Séisme a l’Italienne” makes use of what Leerssen calls an *effet de typique*: “the characteristics presented as being meaningfully representative of the nation as a type” (2016, 17). As already described with reference to Barthes, Italian food can be considered such an *effet de typique*, which serves to represent the Italians as a type. Apart from that, it is also worth taking a look at the iconographic level of the caricature. The two earthquake victims are depicted with large ears, long red noses, and curly hair. The beard and breasts try to indicate that they represent a man and a woman. The man is illustrated as tall and lanky, and the woman as small and stumpy. They are barefoot and poorly dressed: white bloodstained undershirts and blue shorts. Is this because they were taken by surprise and had to flee quickly? Significantly, this depiction corresponds to the stereotypical representation of people from Southern countries. People from Italy and beyond have indeed criticized the caricature.

13 My translation. Original quote: “strukturelle Parodie.”

14 My translation. Original and complete quote: “Questa scompostezza, queste digressioni, queste variazioni [...] sono appunto necessaria e inavoidabile conseguenza del turbamento e delle interruzioni del movimento organatore delle immagini per opera della riflessione attiva, la quale suscita un’associazione per contrarii: le immagini cioè, anzichè associate per similitudine o per contiguità, si presentano in contrasto: ogni immagine, ogni gruppo d’immagini desta e richiama le contrarie, che naturalmente dividono lo spirito, il quale, irrequieto, s’ostina a trovare o a stabilir tra loro le relazioni più impensate.”

As already mentioned in the introduction to this article, geography is a typical problem area of imagology. Summarizing some of the most important aspects of Stanzel's seminal study on the influence of climate theory on the depiction of Southerners and Northerners, it is asserted that Southerners are often seen as "small, lively, lazy, and lustful, they have a nimble wit, strong imagination and are deceitful" whereas Northerners are seen as "free, slow, dull, [they] have a certain mechanical talent but lack a lively imagination" (1980, 110). Some of these attributions can also be visualized by the means of the figures discussed. The Italian writer Roberto Saviano (2016) recalled in a statement on the controversy which was disseminated via Facebook that many people read the caricature "as a manifestation of superiority or racism, or as the will to do evil."<sup>15</sup> Seen from Paris, where *Charlie Hebdo's* office is located, Italy is located in the South. Can geographical awareness be a possible explanation for the reaction?

#### 4 Toward a Geo-Imagology

The dispute over the caricature took place primarily via social media, a fact that leads to another observation related to imagology. Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann points out: "Whether the Internet, through the increasing information density, fights such stereotypes or rather fortifies them, would be a current imagological question whose answer is still open" ([2000] 2013, 188).<sup>16</sup> The internet is an immense storehouse of knowledge. In the case of national stereotypes, it provides easy access to knowledge. Today, a simple search on Google is enough to find out what clothes people in southern Italy wear or which dishes are typical of a certain region. One is no longer so dependent on stereotypes. Thus, in theory, the internet is able to fight them. In times of the spread of unverified, or "fake news," however, it has become very clear that the internet does not simply provide truths but calls for critical awareness in order to detect distortions and correct them.

This became very evident in the aftermath of the earthquake around Amatrice on August 24, 2016. The worldwide solidarity campaign circulated in

15 My translation. Original and complete quote: "Però, quella prima macabra vignetta, non l'ho letta come una manifestazione di superiorità o di razzismo, o come la volontà di fare del male, ma come la constatazione di un dato di fatto: a fare danni non è stata la natura ma gli abusi edilizi, gli edifici pubblici costruiti senza rispettare i criteri antisismici e quelli solo apparentemente messi in sicurezza."

16 My translation. Original and complete quote: "Ob das Internet durch steigende Informationsdichte solche Stereotype bekämpft oder nicht vielmehr befestigt, wäre eine aktuelle imagologische Fragestellung, deren Antwort noch offen ist."

the digital media under the hashtag #JeSuisAmatrice, which would not have been possible without social media. Under the hashtag, images of the typical local dish circulated via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram around the world. It is important to point out that the slogan refers to the expression *Je suis Charlie*, with which solidarity was expressed after the terrorist attack on the editorial staff of *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7, 2015. Immediately, #JeSuisCharlie became a symbol for the threatened public sphere and the democratic-legal order underpinning digital media (cf. Müller 2015). The slogan has since been reused in various contexts. In connection with proper names, it has been used to express international solidarity after political assassinations, such as after the death of Alberto Nisman (“Je suis Nisman”), of Gilles Cistac (“Je suis Cistac”), or of Boris Yefimovich Nemtsov (“Je suis Boris”). In connection with toponyms, the hashtag slogan was reused after terrorist attacks (“Je suis Paris”), massacres (“Je suis Orlando”), or after natural disasters. This was also the case after the earthquake around Amatrice. One week after the earthquake, however, the hashtag #JeSuisAmatrice marked the beginning of globally supported criticism of the Parisian satirical magazine. Following the publication of the caricature in *Charlie Hebdo*, users on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram published numerous statements distancing themselves from both the caricature and the magazine. This separation was realized with the hashtag #JeSuisAmatrice that was now equated with: *Je ne suis pas Charlie Hebdo*. All of this suggests that the internet, and especially social media, is not fighting against stereotypes, as might appear at first glance, but rather strengthening and reinforcing them.

## 5 Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate how earthquakes are linked to Italian cultural stereotypes and national identity, thus taking a first step toward a geo-imagology. I have considered the example of the Parisian satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*. The delinking of the caricature from its original context, the chronicle of a satirical magazine, and its publication in social media has shown what digital dissemination has to do with identity, attribution, and stereotypes. As Italy is a country with high earthquake risk, where major earthquakes occur every five to ten years, there are numerous disputes concerning this phenomenon within the Italian-speaking cultural landscape. In the first part of this article, I studied the phenomenon as a recurring problem that has created an intertextual landscape of wounds. Any new earthquake event in Italy releases the knowledge and fear of previous earthquakes, as was the case in 2016. In the second part, I compared the auto-image of the Italians with the hetero-image.



The perspective on the context allowed me to show that earthquakes are very much present in the auto-image of Italians but not at all in the hetero-image of Italy. In the concluding part, I focused on the caricature “Séisme à l’Italienne,” used here as a text, to understand how the discrepancy between auto- and hetero-images of Italy has become one of the leading reasons for the controversy, where the caricature struck a raw nerve. These findings suggest that there is a need for new perspectives on imagology in order to develop alternative concepts to analyse catastrophes and disasters, and that a reflection on texts such as the *Charlie Hebdo* caricature can serve as a starting point.

This calls for support of research necessary to examine how the representation of catastrophes and disasters can be perceived as either positive or negative in the context of one’s geopoetical knowledge. Take Japan, for example: current images of Japan underline the tectonic mobility of the country,<sup>17</sup> while Italy, paradoxically, remains immobile. Studies of this kind could also highlight the fact that the representation of the catastrophe in the arts could always be traced back to previous experiences, often taken from literature or film. As already mentioned in the introduction to this article, geographical knowledge has an enormous influence on the construction of “the other.”

I conclude these reflections by turning to the question of the comparability of catastrophes and disasters, and to Walter Benjamin, the author of the following short paragraph, who was not present at the Lisbon earthquake that occurred almost 200 years before his death on September 26, 1940:

One house after another collapses, one family after another perishes; the terror of the spreading fire and the terror of the water, the darkness and the plundering and the lamentation of the wounded and the lamentations of those who are in search of their relatives—to hear that and nothing but that would not be dear to anyone, and these are precisely the things that are more or less the same in every great natural disaster.

[1989] 1991, 220–221<sup>18</sup>

17 Take Elfriede Jelinek’s play *Kein Licht* (2011) or Yoko Tawada’s novel *The Emissary* (2014) as an example.

18 My translation. Original and complete quote: “Ein Haus nach dem andern stürzt ein, eine Familie nach der andern kommt um; die Schrecken des um sich greifenden Feuers und die Schrecken des Wassers, die Dunkelheit und die Plünderungen und der Jammer der Verwundeten und die Klagen derer, die auf der Suche nach ihren Angehörigen sind—das zu hören und nichts als das, würde niemandem lieb sein, und gerade das sind ja auch die Dinge, die bei jeder großen Naturkatastrophe mehr oder weniger dieselben sind.”



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