

*Lampedusa's Gaze: Messages from the Outpost of Europe*

What marks off the "self" is method; it has no other source than ourselves: it is when we really employ method that we really begin to exist. As long as one employs method only on symbols one remains within the limits of a sort of game. In action that has method about it, we ourselves act, since it is we ourselves who found the method; we *really* act because what is unforeseen presents itself to us.

(Simone Weil 1959 72-3)

Wir riefen Arbeitskräfte, es kamen Menschen.

(Max Frisch 1965)

In March 2011, *Globalpost* reports the recent events at Lampedusa in the following terms:

Over 10 days in February, the island of Lampedusa saw its biggest arrival of undocumented immigrants from nearby North Africa. Six thousand young Tunisian men and a handful of women, packed into fishing boats with as many as 200 aboard, made the perilous journey across 70 miles of open ocean to the southernmost Italian outpost. Carrying dreams of jobs in Europe and not much else, they arrived, wet and tired, on a rocky island of secret coves and crystal waters.<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph expresses the duality, the binary, oppositional identity the migration phenomenon has produced on Lampedusa: on one side, the island is described as traditionally known, as an out-of-the-way, exclusive tourist destination, boasting crystal waters and exotic landscapes, on the other, as a nightmarish warehouse of undocumented immigrants seeking a new life on this southernmost outpost of Europe. The report continues:

The overwhelmed Italian authorities quickly reopened a transit center, packing migrants into prefabricated dorm rooms in a facility built for 850.<sup>2</sup> With nothing to do but wait for transfers to other facilities on the mainland, the migrants walked the streets of Lampedusa's only town, passing time playing soccer and drinking coffee at the cafes on Via Roma.<sup>3</sup>

Not surprisingly, the report talks of Italian authorities being unprepared, overwhelmed, and for the most part unresponsive.<sup>4</sup> This is rather typical in Italy, as such episodes of unpreparedness have been witnessed especially vis-a-vis migration,<sup>5</sup> arguably the most significant social and political phenomenon interesting Europe, and particularly Italy, in the last 20 years. In fact, the Lampedusa events illustrate, paradigmatically, how Italian

authorities, politicians in the first place, have attempted to “resolve” a challenging situation first by ignoring it, and later by attacking and persecuting the same victims they are supposed to help, impacting negatively, in the process, both on the social and political discourse as well as on its practices.

The local population received the first arrivals with the responsiveness that is customary on this island which, according to Annalisa D’Ancona, one of two local activists who promote festivals and curate The Museum of the Immigrant, “has always been a place of passage . . . a place of hospitality and relief for those who travel between the two continents.” But, as the arrivals increased the national and international authorities remained unable to provide a clear course of action. Pressure started to mount, erupting in riots at the end of September. Again, only after the episodes of tension between an enraged population and groups of despairing and frustrated immigrants, Italian authorities flew the remaining immigrants back to Tunisia or to Sicilian and mainland facilities.<sup>6</sup>

What do such episodes tell us about Italy, about a nation, and metonymically about an entire continent, Europe, that are administratively relatively young and still in the formative process? Can they assist us in defining new sustainable political, social, and economic paradigms, in averting the quagmire of isolation, inaccessibility, discrimination, intolerance, and xenophobia that seem to engulf the European political discourse and its legislation at the moment?<sup>7</sup> Can the ineptitude of politicians, the obsessively prejudicial language of the media, be denounced as techniques to alienate the immigrants and to make them scapegoats of a larger, more dangerous new world order? And most importantly, what can authors, film-makers, and intellectuals do to restore a productive, thought-provoking, self-reflective examination of the current social system?

I chose to introduce this article with the events of Lampedusa because I think they help illuminate critical aspects of our reality. Hopefully, they can also assist us in finding new epistemological paradigms, disclosing ways of knowing that by necessity re-contextualize how we imagine Italy and Europe and, most crucially, how we live and articulate citizenry in both. Besides being the focus of many journalistic reports, in fact, Lampedusa, and the Mediterranean that surrounds it, have become symbols, metaphors of a condition of deterritorialization and of liquidity that is affecting our world and is impacting on our lives as individuals and communities. Hence the first objective of this article is to explore how Dagmawi Yimer’s two documentaries develop the concept of Lampedusa both as a geographic locus as well as a metaphor of the liquid condition in which the media and the political milieu tend to relegate undocumented immigrants. The second objective is to reflect on what meanings deterritorialization and liquidity have for the immigrants themselves and what methods they are applying to confront, resist, and challenge the images, assumptions, and mental constructs on immigration Western society has carefully crafted for popular consumption.

Lampedusa exudes geographic and political eccentricity: its geographic position *vis-à-vis* the Italian peninsula qualifies it as its most distant outpost. Its southernmost location, south even of Monastir and Tangiers, reflects its embarrassing cultural in-betweenness. Lampedusa is at the same time an Italian island and a minuscule landmass at the periphery of the nation, a piece of Italy in the Mediterranean that is closer to Africa than to Europe, lost at sea, marginal and inaccessible, territorially negligible. A predicament that is continually reiterated, in the interviews, in the articles, and in the

news: Lampedusa's inhabitants lament the desertion of the government and the absence of the state in their daily existence. Geographic distance translates into political insignificance and socio-economic marginality. In addition, thanks to the implementation of a governmental agenda subservient to European directives, Lampedusa now contains oppositional realities that further complicate its identity. The island is both a place of leisure and of suffering, with its known traits of unspoiled paradise for tourists on one side and its less exotic, and thus secluded, reclusion sites (CIE) for immigrants.<sup>8</sup> The geographic distance from Italy, its territorial marginality and cultural in-betweenness have rendered the island easily exploitable by Italian authorities<sup>9</sup> that have transformed it into an immigration warehouse away from public attention. A calculated move that was politically advantageous both in regards to the country's official responsibilities *vis-à-vis* European immigration law, and in regards to Italian citizenry, that thanks to Lampedusa's remoteness has been kept in the dark of the real situation and of political accountability.

And while the inhabitants thought of creative ways to help the immigrants with "caffè sospeso," where whoever can afford it and is in the mood, pays for the coffee of those immigrants who are not allowed to exchange their currency into Euros, Prime Minister Berlusconi announced the (later denied) purchase of a villa on the Southern side of the island.

#### *Media and the Politicians' Language on Lampedusa*

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's 2011 visit to Lampedusa, with his inappropriate and characteristically boisterous posturing and the traditional *cortège* of favorable journalistic attention, needs to be examined to understand how Italian media and the political world have addressed sensitive issues regarding human circumstances with discursive practices that are both intentional and negative in their communicative outcome.<sup>10</sup> I agree with Camilla Hawthorne when she recognizes that the language surrounding the Lampedusa events merits closer examination: In *Why Lampedusa Matters*, Hawthorne points to the problematic use of words such as "state of emergency," "flocking," "swamp," "exodus," "wave," "overrun," "flood," "inundated," "immigration mess," and in general to the use of alarmist rhetoric in an effort to stir up anti-immigrant sentiments.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, in her article Hawthorne notes the implementation of the following practices:

1. *Discursive slippage between refugees, crime, and violence.* Statements by Italian officials conflate higher levels of migration from Arab states with extremism, terrorism, violence, and weapons trafficking. This is a common strategy used by states to justify restrictive immigration policies. New arrivals are screened to determine if they are asylum seekers or economic migrants — a process that draws arbitrary boundaries between "worthy" and "unworthy" migrants.
2. *Use of language to hide the realities of immigrant detention.* Although Italian immigration centers have a sordid history of abuse and inhumane conditions, this reality is often masked in official statements, news reports, and even in the process of naming (one type of secure detention in Italy is known as a "Welcome Center"). Said one reporter: "There are no detention centers in Italy. In places like this, people can come and go as they please."<sup>12</sup>

3. *Alarmist reportages and tired media cliches.* As is all too common in immigration stories, journalists have resorted to catchy aquatic metaphors to describe the situation in Lampedusa: "Waves" of boats carrying Tunisian asylum-seekers to shore, "floods" of refugees, a "surge" of undocumented immigration, "tides" of migrants. Biblical metaphors have started to enter the fray as well: Italian officials have publicly voiced fear of a "Biblical-style exodus"<sup>13</sup> from North Africa. This kind of language has the potential to dehumanize an entire population of migrants, reducing them to a faceless, ceaseless "flow" that must be stopped.

Hawthorne's considerations are significant for us as they focus on two important dimensions of the immigration issue: the first is the language utilized by the media, with its tendency to hyperbole and generalization aimed at provoking anxiety, alarm, and distress. The second is the political language, which is hyperbolic, inaccurate, and biased, aimed at promoting dehumanization through criminalization<sup>14</sup> and annihilation of the "other" with the assistance of what Chomsky, quoting Reinhold Niebuhr, defined as "emotionally potent oversimplifications" (Chomsky, 1991). Here, the combined utilization of biblical terms and liquid metaphors<sup>15</sup> conflates the televised and media induced image of Lampedusa, which the public will remember as nothing more than a perplexing entity lost at sea, with the larger and most powerful image of the Mediterranean, the liquid form *par excellence* in the European imaginary.

The *Mare nostrum*, like Lampedusa, is simultaneously a *locus* of marketable beauty and unspoken, ignored or, as we shall see, silenced tragedy, a space crisscrossed by cruise liners and overcrowded boats of immigrants, insistently reminding us of the social and economic inequities existing between the North and the South of the planet.<sup>16</sup> In the Western literary imaginary, the Mediterranean conjures up metaphors of instability, uncertainty, flux, regeneration, and rebirth. More concretely, today it is linked, in the international news reports, with images of resistance,<sup>17</sup> drowning, and death. Housing extreme polarities, hope and despair on one side, allure and conspicuous consumption on the other,<sup>18</sup> the Mediterranean remains one of the most ambiguous of contemporary spaces, one of transit of material goods and wealth but at the same time, for many unfortunate immigrants, one of tragedy, death, and oblivion. It is unquestionably a space of obliviousness for the over 18,000 immigrants who lost their lives in its waters, a mass grave, we may accurately say here, of biblical proportions.<sup>19</sup> Yet the alarming loss of lives remains largely unreported, making the Mediterranean, for Europe, in political and historical terms, a *non-lieu*,<sup>20</sup> exactly like Lampedusa.

Hawthorne's attention to the liquid metaphors invites us to a more in-depth analysis of the discursive practices and narratives fashioned around the phenomenon of migration in the last few decades, as they have been able to produce the dematerialization of its protagonists, with the consequent loss, for the European populace, of the immigrants' physicality and actuality. In examining the liquid phenomenon it is opportune to draw on Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "liquid," which he conceived to illustrate the contemporary demise of the societal duties and bonds that tie individuals and communities together. The opposition developed by the Polish-British anthropologist is conceived as a binary structure, where the solidity of ethical obligations, mutual responsibilities and communal bonds that formed the structure of pre-industrial society, and were abandoned in the XVIII and XIX centuries to liberate and optimize business

practices, is opposed to the liquidity, or rather the fluidity, volatility, and unpredictability of human relations in the contemporary world (Bauman 2000 4):

*What all these features of fluids amount to, in simple language, is that liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape. Fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time. While solids have clear spatial dimensions but neutralize the impact, and thus downgrade the significance, of time (effectively resist its flow or render it irrelevant), fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it; and so for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy: that space, after all, they fill but 'for a moment'. In a sense, solids cancel time; for liquids, on the contrary, it is mostly time that matters. When describing solids, one may ignore time altogether; in describing fluids, to leave time out of account would be a grievous mistake. Descriptions of fluids are all snapshots, and they need a date at the bottom of the picture. Fluids travel easily. They 'flow', 'spill', 'run out', 'splash', 'pour over', 'leak', 'flood', 'spray', 'drip', 'seep', 'ooze.'* (Bauman 2000 2)

Bauman explores his well-timed dichotomy in modern reality in terms of what is lost, the stability of that “complex network of social relations” whose absence leaves the individual bare, unprotected, and the collectivity unarmed against the assault of what Thomas Carlisle described as the “cash nexus,” in other words the determining role of the economy as understood by Marx. According to Bauman, the solids presently under attack and ready to be liquefied are “the bonds that interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions – the patterns of communication and co-ordination between individually conducted life policies on the one hand and political actions of human collectivities on the other” (6). When we consider these two dimensions of society, the individual life choices (policies) and the collective (political) actions, we will notice the absence of what Bauman calls “connection, co-ordination.” More and more individuality and collectivity are disconnected, disengaged, alienated from one another, bypassing each other without ever meeting, and more and more often we realize that the order of things, that system which is sold by its agents as more liberalized and flexible, is instead rigid, unchangeable, and so diffuse as to be unreachable. Never has individuality remained drastically disengaged from the collective as in the representation of the phenomenon of migration. Observing the carefully selected, filtered, cut, and framed images, listening to the sound bites describing the Lampedusa arrivals, we clearly recognize that media and political language have managed to render their protagonists, both the undocumented immigrants and the people of Lampedusa, fluid, liquefiable, drainable, shapeless, in a word, transitory. The liquidity of the Mediterranean, coupled with the utilization of correspondingly symbolic metaphors employed in the syntax of politics and the media, following the techniques of homologation and dehumanization, have distorted, manipulated the physical reality of the immigrants, turning their materiality into immateriality, their presence into absence, their historicity into a void. The inhabitants of Lampedusa suffered a similar destiny as the island’s CDA was precipitously turned, by government decree, into a CIE, where the dramatic increase in the number of soldiers had *de facto* transformed its compound into an overcrowded and neglected prison. Useless were the protests of the Lampedusan people, who saw their

rights and those of the immigrants trampled, while their island was being transformed, after their demonstrations, in a heavily militarized zone.<sup>21</sup>

Italians watching the news reports or reading national newspapers remained and remain today largely unaware of the material reality of the situation, of the degraded living conditions and the blatant violations of the basic human rights perpetrated before<sup>22</sup> and on Lampedusa between 2009 and 2011.<sup>23</sup> Tourists sunbathing on the island's pristine beaches were unsuspecting while its inhabitants, who watch with dismay the exaggerated television commentaries, feared that they would, as they did, impact negatively on their livelihood.<sup>24</sup> Is this the end of the story? Will we ever know what really happened on Lampedusa and before Lampedusa? Is the liquidity of both the Mediterranean, the careful management of discursive practices, and the sophisticated use of our slippery linguistic codes going to engulf and absorb into oblivion the lives of thousands of men, women, and children that Europe has unceremoniously abandoned at sea? The filmic experiences explored in this article, Andrea Segre and Dagmawi Yimer's documentaries, *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008), and Yimer's recently released *Soltanto il mare* (2011), suggest constructive ways to knowledge and new epistemologies of resistance. At the intersection of individual agency and collectivity, of humanity and diplomacy, of hegemonic discourse and individual and communal narrative, the documentaries denounce the annihilating strategies of political discourses and challenge the tactical, preemptive silencing that pervades media narratives. Most crucially for our exploration, as it concentrates on the victims' stories and their efforts to combat liquefaction, it gives a response to the deliberate obliteration attempts, allowing the victims to regain, through the solidity of their presence and narrating voice, physical materiality and historical weight. Dagmawi Yimer's body is one of the many we see in these documentaries. Landed on Lampedusa on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006 as an undocumented Ethiopian fleeing an increasingly dictatorial regime,<sup>25</sup> Yimer arrived to documentary film by chance, as he attended a course of video-narrazione offered in a Roman school.<sup>26</sup> His first short documentary, entitled *C.A.R.A. Italia*, a report on the Centri di accoglienza per i richiedenti asilo, provides a snapshot of the reality of immigrant lives as perceived and recorded from within, from an insider's point of view. It is however his most recent documentaries that attract our attention. The first one, co-directed with Andrea Segre, records the consequences of the 'Respingimenti agreements' signed by Italy and Libya and enacted in 2009.<sup>27</sup> The documentary is an account of what lies behind and beyond words, policies, and diplomatic agreements, as it focuses unambiguously on those whose lives were affected by them. Before reaching the sea, the protagonists of *Come un uomo sulla terra*, Ethiopians fleeing their country, must confront the solidity of land and law. For them this translates into the interminable and life-threatening experience of desert crossing, from Sudan to Libya, hoarded in metal containers with no food or liquids. Over a thousand-mile trip aimed at weakening their resolve and debilitating both body and spirit. The arrival on Libyan territory coincides with the encounter with brutal officials and prison guards who will buy them for thirty dinars and dump them in overcrowded and filthy prison cells without clear indictment for months and years on end. The trucks, containers, prisons, jeeps and body bags, we will learn in the documentary, have been provided by the Italian government as part of the agreement signed with Libyan authorities in 2008. The accord was centered on the request for "respingimenti," (push backs) made by the Italian state to Libya in order to stop immigration to Italy from the

former's territory. The agreement included, or rather was centered, on the signing of lucrative business contracts between the two countries.

If we analyze the political language adopted by then Ministro Maroni, as it appears in the documentary, to describe both the situation and the solution produced by the government, we recognize that liquid metaphors like "flussi migratori" are coupled with seemingly neutral, harmless others, such as "respingimenti," words that are expected to become solid only far away from Italy and the attention of its citizens, metaphors that manifest their physical weight only on the bodies of undocumented immigrants and long before ever setting foot on Italian soil, in a preemptive attempt to liquefy, remove, and "sanitize."<sup>28</sup> Maroni's words clarify the government's efforts: "Il primo compito è impedire che arrivino, fare in modo, mettere in atto tutte le misure per impedire gli sbarchi."<sup>29</sup> The dyad liquid/solid is unmistakable here, as the Italian government expresses its desire to stop arrivals, to impede, that is, the materialization of the immigrant on Italian soil, in any way and by any means possible. Words such as "sbarchi, misure, compito, impedire, mettere in atto," with their cold, rational, and impersonal echo, have imperceptibly severed the link with what they actually represent, the individual human tragedies suffered in Libya and at sea as a result of diplomatic agreements. What Maroni's language is deceitfully hiding is not only the character of *do ut des* of the treaty, the lucrative exchange of economic deals that halting immigration entails for both countries, but most importantly the actual physicality that lies behind it, the massive weight of bodies that contains histories, languages, and identities. What Maroni's words point at is that at stake are not the lives of thousands of immigrants, by now rendered immaterial, but the very substantial trade of infrastructural development and economic advantages.<sup>30</sup>

As governments enter specific agreements, the immigrants, whose status as non-beings has already been politically inferred and linguistically constructed, start to lose their bodily substance as they start dying, physically and mentally, along the Libyan desert. After they are arrested by the local police, their journey into hot, airless containers will involve several attempts to, in Bauman's terms: "'flow', 'spill', 'leak', 'drip', 'seep', 'ooze'" them into nothingness. An attempt to "evaporate" them is described in the documentary. At their arrival to the prison of Kofhra, in southern Libya, police spray water on the hot metal frames of the containers overcrowded with starved, sick, hot, and dangerously dehydrated men and women. In Kofhra, they will remain in jail, a structure allegedly provided by the Italian government for their unwarranted detention, indefinitely. At their arrival there, locked in containers with no facilities and with only a bottle of water a day in the middle of the desert, they will have been reduced to weightlessness, forced to an absurd journey that will take them from prison to prison and from violence to violence, in Kofhra, in Misrath, back to Kofhra, in a pointless south-north-south direction. Liquidity and mobility are accompanied by uncertainty regarding their survival, while the Mediterranean remains a remote stroke of watery blue. Its crossing, their only source of hope, has been postponed by laws, regulations, and agreements, by rigid, uncompromising forms of control and domination.<sup>31</sup> The incarceration will continue without trial, appeal, or intervention from humanitarian organizations, whose visits have abruptly stopped amid the general silence. The documentary's close-up shots reveal the hardened faces and emotionless voices of the protagonists, who have materialized in front of Yimer's video camera. Relentlessly they

tell of beatings and tortures, of systematic rapes, acts of violence and savagery that have left deep physical and emotional scars. The protagonists' stories do not match the neutrality, detachment, and immateriality of the interior minister's words, their reality standing in crass contrast to what political discourse and media jargon have attempted to fashion, the representation of solidity as a vacuum. This attempt at rendering humanity a no-body is now confronted with the simplest but most unique of human elements, language. In Aristotelian terms, voice is common to all living beings, but only humans have the power to articulate voice into an ethical enunciation of meaning.<sup>32</sup> In his *Politics*, Aristotle highlights the relation between *phonē* and *logos*:

Among living beings, only man has language. The voice is the sign of pain and pleasure, and this is why it belongs to other living beings (since their nature has developed to the point of having the sensation of pain and pleasure and of signifying the two). But language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust. To have the sensation of the good and the bad of the just and the unjust is what is proper to men as opposed to other living beings, and the community of these things makes dwelling in the city. (1253a, 10-18)

The protagonists' stories, recorded by the interviewer in plain and low-key conversations, in modest living interiors, in long motionless close up shots, challenge the assumptions produced by the media of a clean, effortless, and painless solution to the problem of illegal immigration. The attempted (and all too often successful) dissolution of the body of the immigrants is rejected through the power of language, which establishes a *hic et nunc* that is situated both temporally and historically. Language is employed here as a narrative with manifold effects. Firstly, it reinstates the physicality of the speaker. It restores his/her humanity inasmuch as the speaker asks the audience not to feel pity but to reflect on ethical paradigms (right and wrong, knowledge and indifference, justice and responsibility). Finally, it declares the speaker's determination to citizenry, to the *dasein*. What was rendered liquid reclaims its solidity, defying the attempt to degrade human life and asking space through the resolution to political existence. The protagonists of Yimer's *Come un uomo sulla terra* declare their commitment to a *polis* at the same time as they recall the fundamentals of a community, ethical behavior expressed through language as the instrument of discerning just from unjust, narration of collective suffering and survival, recollection of violence and abuse (excruciating but imperative to combat forgetfulness), celebration of togetherness, endurance, and strength.<sup>33</sup> Humanity arises here from the articulation of language, while the solidity of human relations, of brotherhood, emerges from the liquid form in which the agents of information and political diplomacy had attempted to reduce the immigrants' body. The objective and meaning of the documentary's title, roughly translated into Like a Man on the Earth, become operative. The dyad of man and earth is relevant in its relation of reciprocity. Dependent as it is upon "terraferma," the body needs the earth's solidity, stability, and safety. As the title suggests, only when the body meets the land it becomes human, only the earth can grant a project, a future, and a form. Furthermore, the earth is also a symbol of a collective existential experience. Existence for humanity, as the immigrants' stories reveal, is possible only as a community and only on a common earth, in a belonging that is not bound by ethnic, racial, cultural or national paradigms. The earth is the abode of

the living, of humanity, but only in a super-national context. In this light, Yimer's statement at the beginning of the documentary, which coincides with the inception of his recollecting, is decisive. His refusal of any definition of self in ethnic terms ("sono un uomo") becomes the Leitmotiv of the narrative, the philosophy behind his intellectual engagement.

The voices of the survivors interviewed by Yimer are continuously juxtaposed to the official narrators of the story, revealing another tragic dimension, that of silence. Silence surrounds the reality of the recent immigration attempts, silence encloses the walls of the Libyan prisons, and silence envelops the violence of the Libyan police and the corruption of the Sudanese intermediaries. The media, the political world, the European and international humanitarian agencies have remained inexplicably quiet, although accounts of Libyan police selling detainees to Sudanese intermediaries had been percolating from various sources. Yet no authority, national or international, has taken the responsibility of denouncing the facts. Frontex, the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union, appears in the documentary as Yimer travels to its Warsaw headquarters to interview the director, Ikka Laitinen. Very approachable, Laitinen reports of the visit to the Libyan prisons:

We went there, we wanted to see what was happening there, express and exchange our views on what could be the possible cooperation. Frontex is a European coordinator. We coordinate such operational cooperation among the member states of the EU that are willing to participate. Our staff is about one hundred and fifty persons working here. The budget for 2008 is confirmed at seventy million Euros and the trend is increasing. Libya is a very important country in terms of irregular migration. Our interest is to establish partnership with those countries that are either countries of origin of illegal migration or countries of transit. And the philosophy behind that is that border control cannot be only carried out at the border. We have to act before the border where the problems arise, we have to cooperate and act across the border with our colleagues in third countries and then at the border and also behind the border.

The explanation of the agency's role and its main objectives is carried out in a conventional, even gracious manner, yet the words reiterate the sinister message Interior minister Roberto Maroni and minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini had sent at the beginning of the documentary. It is important to stop migration (note that the focus here is on migration and not on the actual bodies of migrants), before "it" comes in touch with European soil. In this way, in other words, migrants will be unable to materialize as recipients of the human and civil rights Europe bestows on its own citizens. What cannot escape in Laitinen's explanation are the neutralizing and dehumanizing effects of words such as "diplomatic partnership," "borders," "transit," "irregular," and "philosophy." To confront the issue of migration, as the documentary implicitly relates, European authorities and media have developed several techniques. On the one side that of silence, the distancing and obliterating effects that come from indifference, lack of information, half-truths and misrepresentation. On the other the manipulation of language, which becomes detached from the actual reality it is called to describe. Laitinen defines

Frontex' strategies as a "philosophy," ostensibly agreed upon at the European level and carried out as intellectual and ethical response to the problem. A *praxis* that will allow Europeans to sleep comfortably knowing that all necessary measures have been taken and all moral justifications found to safeguard their way of life. Europe's massive support of Frontex in its role of "coordinator" is a logical consequence of this "philosophy." The seventy million Euros of Frontex' budget for 2008 underline Europe's firm intention of impeding illegal migration at all costs and, when possible, of externalizing border control responsibilities to countries whose human rights record is, to say the least, questionable. Europe's "philosophy" seems to be constituted of evasive words but solid numbers."<sup>34</sup>

Laitinen's promptness in responding to the interviewer is weakened when the question falls on the specific matter of the visit to Libya and the prison in Kofhra.<sup>35</sup> In the answering process, Laitinen's demeanor and words start to lose potency: "Actually, I do not remember all the cities and I personally was not there and it's about one year ago. But this sounds familiar, the name of the city sounds familiar. Unfortunately I cannot keep the details of what the experts really saw there." Oddly enough, the report remained rather general in its statements, that, like the following one, seem to evade all actuality:<sup>36</sup> "As outcome of the visit in the desert regions of Libya, the members of the mission were able to appreciate the desert's expanse and diversity."<sup>37</sup>

On Yimer's pressing personal question: "Do you know anything of the treatment reserved to the detainees in the Kofhra prison," Laitinen gives what I would argue is a consummately diplomatic answer: "I do not have the details but I was told that there is much room for improvement." Diplomacy is the art of the generalized, the ambiguous, and the opaque, the perfect place to make a liquid and shapeless use of language. "Room for improvement," together with Laitinen's alleged lack of direct knowledge of the "details," and his vague recollection of the mission appear both hollow and insincere in the face of the horrors described by the detainees. Language can be mollified, liquefied, emptied of meaning, as in this case, where the nexus between signifier and signified has been deliberately broken.

The same vagueness, inconsistency, apparent lack of connection with the physical reality engulfs the term "respingimenti," which, upon viewing of the documentary, takes on a solid meaning of "condanna a morte," death penalty. With its introspective presentation of the facts by witnesses and victims and its sobering revelation of what is hidden behind the "solutions" sought in political and economic agreements, *Come un uomo sulla terra* challenges government and media reductive and essentializing practices, and rejects their attempts to dissolve people, facts, and governmental actions into the liquidity and vacuity of carefully crafted linguistic codes. The determination of the victims to speak out and record the tragic events into history, in what is clearly a painful *repêchage* of nightmarish memories, turns the experience into a compelling document. Their stories punctuate the map of a journey made of continuous attacks to the solidity of the human body and being, understood as self in relation to others. Yet despite the agony and anguish brought by physical deprivation, violence, and psychological warfare, in the face of the reiterated attempts to destroy the body through the degradation and humiliation of rape and torture, humanity is preserved by the logic of brotherhood and human alliance that is revealed as a recurrent element of the survivors' stories.<sup>38</sup> A brotherhood that gives purpose and meaning to their struggle even in the present and urges them in front of Yimer's videocamera. The urge to report, to help those who are

still in the Libyan prisons, is even greater than the shame, painfully evident on the faces of the protagonists and stronger than the depression that has befallen their silenced existences.

For Dagmawi Yimer, as for the many individuals that populate the documentary, the arrival in Italy coincides with the return to physicality, to solidity. Only by entering the European border can the survivors' status as humans be restored.<sup>39</sup> But before then, observes Yimer at the end of the documentary, Italy and Europe have enacted strategies, erected barriers to force the immigrants to succumb to a state of flux, of silence and, in due course, of non-existence. All the more important and significant is therefore the protagonists' determination to resist, to denounce, and to challenge the system. Their narratives call the dead back to life in a process of re-membrance that involves the return of what was made liquid to a state of solidity, of what was degraded to a state of humanity, and what was silenced<sup>40</sup> to the possibility of agency and historicity.

### *Soltanto il mare*

Dagmawi Yimer's most recent documentary (2010),<sup>41</sup> metaphorically closes the circle of his immigration experience with his return to Lampedusa. The visit's main objectives are revisiting the places of his arrival and meeting the residents to express his gratitude.<sup>42</sup> What seems to be at first glance an ordinary project, a project that developed on site, as Yimer himself revealed in an interview,<sup>43</sup> turns quickly into a more complex and multi layered undertaking. The main objective is to understand Lampedusa, a place that, for Yimer as for the multitude of the undocumented immigrants that landed there, had remained distant, concealed by the high walls, physical and psychological, that separated them from the island and the Lampedusani (Liberti 186).<sup>44</sup> The initial scenes reflect that distance, as the confused perception that both peoples, residents and immigrants, have of each other, is rendered in the juxtaposition of views of Lampedusa, observed through a framed opening where the island's rocky landscape conflates with the sea, and voices, intersecting, overlapping, interweaving, in the phonic background. *Soltanto il mare* mirrors, albeit with different protagonists, the narrative of *Come un uomo sulla terra*. There, Ethiopian refugees spoke of their ordeals to restore the tangibility of their suffering, the physicality of their being, here, the visit to Lampedusa is a journey of discovery, on both sides, of similar marginalities and silenced existences. Here, the protagonists are Italians but, as the Lampedusani recurrently lament in the documentary, Italians of sorts. All interviewed, men and women, young and seniors, express in fact frustration for a government that has forgotten them and exploited the island's remote location.<sup>45</sup> Their exasperation climaxes when they talk about the media, which they chastise for exaggerating and distorting the reality of the arrivals. The immigrant protagonist is also unique. This time, his trip started in Italy rather than in Africa. He travels with a name and documents to confirm it, he lands on the island as a resident, not as an illegal immigrant, as a director, not as a starved and dehydrated, unidentified body. Most crucially, this time he has brought his video camera, the same he used in his previous documentaries. A modest and yet important piece of equipment that can help him give Lampedusa solidity, historical presence, and to do so in a sort of psychological transfer, by giving the Lampedusani an opportunity to come in physical contact with an immigrant, the emblematic "other." *Soltanto il mare*, with its openness of structure, its

seemingly unstructured interviews of local fishermen, coast guard officers, authorities, and simple Lampedusani, quickly turns into a journey of discovery as the protagonists talk and look in each other's eyes, discerning for the first time since the beginning of the arrivals, their own "otherness," their historically and geographically determined brotherhood.

In his recently published volume *A sud di Lampedusa*, Stefano Liberti maps the routes that lead North African men and women, determined to find a solution to their basic economic needs, to the shores of the Mediterranean. Starting his exploration from Morocco, as far back as 2002, Liberti describes the content of his book as the product of an obsession, a drive that had led him to search for the reasons behind the "viaggi della disperazione" (journeys of desperation). His trips to Senegal, Niger, Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, and Lampedusa, reveal the economic reality of a continent devastated by corporate greed and by the aggressive hunt for natural resources, including land, water, and oil.<sup>46</sup> In 2008, Liberti concludes his travels by landing on Lampedusa, where he is shocked to find that the island had separated the two communities, islanders and immigrants, rendering them invisible to one another.

Aveva ragione Giuseppe. Lampedusa era l'unico posto in Italia dove non c'erano gli immigrati. Era un centro di transito e nulla più. Fra i nuovi arrivati e gli abitanti del luogo c'era una sostanziale indifferenza. I locali non volevano sapere nulla de "li turchi," ma non se la prendevano con loro . . . "Li turchi," da parte loro, non vedevano nulla di quel luogo che tanto avevano sognato: una banchina al porto, qualche uomo nella divisa grigia della guardia di finanza, le sbarre del centro di permanenza temporanea. E poi la nave che li avrebbe portati via, sul continente. (Liberti 189)

Yimer's words at the beginning of the journey and his interviews with the locals confirm Liberti's surprising findings. Any contact, any relation between the two groups had been deliberately prevented. Their two marginalities had become two solitudes, while the relation of trust and compassion that was traditionally formed between the Lampedusans and the so-called "Turks," the sailors landing for help on the island over the millennia, had been voided. What Yimer is attempting with this journey is thus more than a simple return, it is a revolutionary act aimed at reclaiming what risked to be lost amidst the liquidity of political narratives and media oversimplifications: the network of human relations which constitutes a collective's dignity, historicity, and solidity. Yimer's video camera moves sensitively, allowing the island and its residents to take shape in a variety of oblique narratives and borderline stories. Exploring the human as well as the natural surroundings, the director chances upon the unexpected, like the boat cemetery, the only document of the immigrants' passage. Located in a remote part of the island, it contains the vessels, seemingly awaiting an improbable demolition, that transported the immigrants to the Italian shores. Yimer records Lampedusa's many human dimensions in a non-hierarchical order, walking around town, meeting people on the streets, asking impromptu questions, letting men and women speak freely, spontaneously, inviting them to voice their issues unrestrainedly. As in *Come un uomo sulla terra, Soltanto il mare* shows a predilection for extreme close up shots that give the Lampedusani center stage, allowing them to articulate their experiences, explain their bond to the sea, and assert their disparate views of the immigrants from the point of view of their own physicality, of

their own body. What gradually saturates the scenes, as in the preceding documentary, is the sense of solidarity that results from the articulation of language, which recovers the meaning of the “Turk’s” humanity and the consciousness of the dangers and perils s/he faces when forsaken at sea. A regained understanding that does not hide a measure of perplexity and anger at the situation, as they begin to recognize that the inability of the state to help both communities has produced a distance and a silence that cannot be breached.

Intensely and straightforwardly, the Lampedusan communicate their down-to-earth humanity, exemplified in their battle for survival, yesterday at sea, today against political isolation and media falsifications. There is in their voices no sentiment of impotence, their participation is not that of the “defeated,” their perspective is ingrained in solidarity and brotherhood<sup>47</sup> that refuses any subordination to the existing. The video camera solicits them to a method, to the articulation of language, engages them in a narrative. The camera has empowered the actors to become individuals, its reversed gaze aimed at giving voice and not at silencing, by re-personalizing the island and filling the void produced by misinformation, by describing situations and not disguising truths or manipulating facts. A reversed gaze that Yimer develops from the first scenes of the documentary’s preview, where the close up shot of the sea leads gradually to the inclusion of his off-centered face, his eyes looking first down, to the waters, and then up to the sea cliffs of the island, foreshadowing a radically new epistemological experience. *Soltanto il mare*, like *Come un uomo sulla terra*, is deeply rooted in solidity. The view from the sea appears only in the introductory scenes while for most of the narrative the gaze is firmly positioned on the land. In *Come un uomo*, the necessity of solidity was stressed from the start, in the title itself. In *Soltanto il mare* (Only the Sea), solidity is illustrated in the recurrent scene of a jogger crossing the island at different times of day. A symbolic leitmotiv embracing Yimer’s manifold messages: life as a journey to a “terraferma,” as anguished motion towards being, as existential understanding. *Soltanto il mare* is the materialization of Yimer’s resolve to re-membrance, as the recovery of a perfectly preserved female body from the sea in *Io l’altro* illustrated Mohsen Melliti’s determination to remind his viewers of the solidity of the immigrant’s agony.<sup>48</sup> Yimer’s journey emblematically projects humanity against the background of a natural surrounding that transcends the limits of history. The sea is that wider horizon in *Soltanto il mare* as in *Come un uomo sulla terra* the earth was that land without borders.

### *Conclusions: From Abstraction to Concretization of Reality*

While abstraction gives the illusion of domination of reality in fact it distances the subject from the object, or, as in this case, from the other subject and its complexity. This is the deleterious consequence of media oversimplified linguistic codes, of political misrepresentation of the reality. Their semantic modes geared to the separation of what is not separable. Yimer’s objective in his visual narratives is to reclaim the body through the account and portrayal of suffering, a condition that was estheticized and reduced by the media into a fragmented common place devoid of linguistic articulation. The voices of the protagonists, in both documentaries, are able to restore the unity of the body through the repossessing of its organic reality. By recounting the stages of their suffering the protagonists recover what media narratives had rendered fragmented, disconnected,

and empty. Their stories re-establish in the viewers the sense of the intolerable and simultaneously leave space to the regeneration, the re-building of a reality alternative to that promoted by the media. Truth, virtue, and organic knowledge derive from a gaze that is still able to recognize good and to pursue it. In Carla Benedetti's words,

Nelle descrizioni di potere occorre evitare il punto di vista cosiddetto 'oggettivo'. L'osservatore è sempre dentro, e si deve sentire che lo è. Altrimenti la sua parola non avrà abbastanza forza né di critica né di verità. Lo sguardo dei colonizzati è anche il punto di vista di chi non ha cancellato il bene, il punto di parola del parresiasta . . . del poeta . . . Significa collocarsi e far crescere una zona di forza della parola, del pensiero, della virtù, della verità: una zona piena, che è la forma organica della conoscenza. (Benedetti 55)

Lampedusa and the Mediterranean are symbols, complex and evocative, of the contemporary human condition, and at the same time provocative places from where we can start to re-imagine both Italy and Europe. Like in Emanuele Crialesi's most recent movie, *Terraferma* (2011), Europe seems to oscillate between two opposite conditions: that of "terraferma" as firm ground after so much liquidity, a safe landing that offers the possibility of a new life for the immigrant and the possibility to realize a different European citizenry, and that of "terra ferma," an unwelcoming, indifferent, barren, dead place, unable to open itself to new challenges. Yimer's documentaries point in the first direction. There, Lampedusa emblemizes a place where marginalities meet and speak out to resist annihilation. A place that restores solidity, agency, a "terraferma" to contrast the funereal oblivion of the sea depths, where the "legitimate" governments of Europe and the hegemonic structures of power would compel the unwanted and unwelcome, the Baumanian "human waste," to lie without history or memory.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Jodi Hilton: "Tunisians, Italians find a common bond in a cup of coffee," *Globalpost*, March 3, 2011, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/italy/110302/italy-immigration-lampedusa-tunisia>.

<sup>2</sup> Two years prior to the most recent events, in 2009, the camp experienced the same overcrowding: "The UNHCR said the camp is so crowded that many detainees are sleeping in tents or under plastic sheets. According to the UNHCR, around 36,000 boat people made it to Italian soil last year - a 75 per cent increase compared to 2007 figures. Italy took more than half of the 67,000 immigrants who arrived by sea in Europe last year. The majority of Italy's illegal immigrants - around 31,000 - arrived on the island of Lampedusa, with others reaching Sardinia, Sicily and the Italian mainland." See Nick Squires, "1,000 Immigrants Break Out of Detention Centre on Italian Island of Lampedusa," *The Telegraph* (24 January, 2009), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/4332592/1000-immigrants-break-out-of-detention-centre-on-Italian-island-of-Lampedusa.html>.

<sup>3</sup> □□ few facts about Lampedusa: reasons for arrival to the island are civil wars, tyrannies, hunger and hopelessness in Somalia, Eritrea and in Sudan. More and more refugees arrive in poor health. Often they have injuries or burns caused by the boat engines. For the most part they are dehydrated and suffer from heat stroke. Hundreds of refugees don't survive the trip due to dehydration or exhaustion. Deaths: In 2008 the Refugee Council officially registered 649 dead boat people on the coast of Lampedusa but the real numbers are much higher. It is unknown how many boats sank unnoticed. *Fortress Europe* reports that

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more than 17.000 immigrants died since 1988 on their journey to Europe: Gabriele del Grande writes: “Giorno per giorno, da anni, il mare di mezzo è divenuto una grande fossa comune, nell’indifferenza delle due sponde del mare di mezzo. Dal 1988 almeno 18.856 giovani sono morti tentando di espugnare la fortezza Europa, dei quali 2.049 soltanto dall’inizio del 2011. Il dato è aggiornato al 16 marzo 2012. Ne abbiamo le prove.” <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/p/fortezza-europa.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Since Spain has sealed off its southern border, the Strait of Gibraltar and the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla forbid every passage, Lampedusa is Europe’s first shelter for refugees from Africa.

<sup>5</sup> In 2005, a journalist of the magazine “L’Espresso,” Fabrizio Gatti, lived 8 days disguised as Kurdish refugee in the Detention Centre on Lampedusa. Gatti kept a diary, later published, which revealed a series of serious violations of human rights: refugees were horribly abused and humiliated during the examination by the police. Hygienic conditions in the center were catastrophic, just salt water, no doors, no toilet paper, electricity or privacy. No refugee was brought before a judge although this is required by Italian law. “Io, clandestino a Lampedusa,” *L’Espresso*, 7 ottobre 2005, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/io-clandestino-a-lampedusa/2104770>.

<sup>6</sup> An Emergency communiqué denounced unequivocally the situation on the island: “Quello che sta succedendo a Lampedusa è figlio di una politica criminale che da molti anni i governi di questo paese stanno attuando nei confronti dei migranti. Migranti che, oltre a essere privati dei più elementari diritti umani, vengono deliberatamente usati per esasperare gli animi, costruire “diversi” e “nemici”, alimentare guerre tra poveri ... La tensione e la violenza delle ultime ore, a Lampedusa come a Pozzallo sono l’inevitabile conseguenza della politica di un governo che tratta gli stranieri come criminali, come problema di ordine pubblico, come bestie. Il sovraffollamento delle strutture, la carenza di assistenza di base, la privazione dei diritti fondamentali, oltre a essere una vergogna per un Paese che si vuole definire civile, comportano inevitabilmente l’inasprirsi del disagio e della violenza ... Confidiamo che i cittadini italiani abbiamo la ragionevolezza e l’umanità che finora è mancata al governo, quell’umanità che permette di capire che gli ‘stranieri,’ i ‘clandestini,’ i ‘migranti stagionali’ sono, prima che qualsiasi altra cosa, semplicemente ‘persone,’ esseri umani. E come tali devono essere trattati.”

<sup>7</sup> See the article by Alessio Genovese, *Hanno insabbiato tutto. Prove di regime a Lampedusa* (30 September 2011), <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/2011/09/hanno-insabbiato-tutto-prove-di-regime.html#more>.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the transformation of the Centri di Permanenza Temporanea (CTP) into Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione (CIE), the report provided by the Global Detention Project Programme for the Study of Global Migration of the Graduate Institute of Geneva ([global.detention.project@gmail.com](mailto:global.detention.project@gmail.com) - [www.globaldetentionproject.org](http://www.globaldetentionproject.org)) states: “In May 2008 the then-newly elected Berlusconi government declared a “state of emergency” in Italy, citing among other issues the “persistent and extraordinary influx of non-EU citizens” and the presence of Roma and Sinti nomadic communities. The declaration had a significant impact on the country’s migration detention practices. Following the declaration, the government adopted a “*Security Package*” aimed at facilitating expulsions, introduced a law criminalizing unauthorized presence in the country, and renamed the CPTs to “Centri di identificazione ed espulsione” (CIE), or “Identification and Expulsion Centres” (Massimo Merlino, “The Italian (In)Security Package Security vs. Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights in the EU,” *CEPS Challenge Paper No. 14*, 10 March 2009, Archive for European Integration, AEI, <http://aei.pitt.edu/10764/>). Among the penalties introduced was imprisonment “Moreover, Art. 1 of the new law decree has established that an individual “who doesn’t conform to the expulsion order issued by the judge is liable to one to four years of imprisonment” (p. 6). The military was also commissioned to perform immigration-related police operations across the country as the plan “foresees the use of 1,000 soldiers for the surveillance of the Centres of Identification and Expulsion.” Lastly, the status of “illegal migrant” was added to the list of aggravating circumstances (Art. 1(f) of the Italian penal code (Merlino 2009, cit., pp. 7-8).

<sup>9</sup> The Italian government bears the largest responsibility for the dramatic events occurring on Lampedusa since 2008, when, with a ministerial decree, it transformed the “Centro di accoglienza” into a detention and expulsion center. This change of status is reminiscent of what the island was from 1872 until Fascism, a sort of penal colony, where intercepted Libyan migrants on the way to Italy were detained until their deportation (Gabriele del Grande, *Il mare di mezzo*, Roma: Infinito, 2010, p. 165).

<sup>10</sup> Exactly a year after the events, Giovanni de Luna’s article in *Repubblica’s Venerdì’s* magazine (“Ma come è stato possibile credere all’imbonitore?” *Il Venerdì*, April 13, 2012, 1256: 57) dissects Berlusconi’s speech, now notorious as “Il discorso di Lampedusa,” examining the series of lies, false promises, and

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bizarre plans shouted by the former Prime Minister through a loud speaker in front of a worshipping and subservient audience made up for the most part of local authorities. See [http://www.youreporter.it/video\\_BERLUSCEROLA-LUI\\_SBARCA\\_A\\_LAMPEDUSA\\_-\\_30\\_Marzo\\_2011\\_1](http://www.youreporter.it/video_BERLUSCEROLA-LUI_SBARCA_A_LAMPEDUSA_-_30_Marzo_2011_1).

<sup>11</sup> *Why Lampedusa Matters*: <http://www.globalconversation.org/2011/03/13/why-lampedusa-matters>.

<sup>12</sup> In a RaiTre news report, dated Jun 20, 2011, the High Commissary for the UNHCR, Antonio Guterres, reiterated the UN's firm rejection of any "respingimenti" as envisioned and recommended by the Lega Nord at the 2011 Pontida meeting. In addition, the UN strongly discouraged the Italian government from criminalizing the refugees and from spreading fear and panic to alarm and frighten its citizens. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4ouXUjg\\_DQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4ouXUjg_DQ)

<sup>13</sup> The expression was repeated recently, during the Libyan civil war, when Muammar Ghaddafi threatened Italy and Europe to release all undocumented immigrants from Libyan jails. Following the threat, Italian Minister of Interior, Roberto Maroni, informed the media that Italy was expecting an exodus of "biblical proportions." See Francesca Angeli, "È un esodo biblico» Maroni all'attacco: l'Europa ci lascia soli," *Il Giornale*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011, [http://www.ilgiornale.it/esteri/\\_esodo\\_biblico\\_maroni\\_allattacco\\_leuropa\\_ci\\_lascia\\_soli/14-02-2011/articolo-id=505860-page=0-comments=1](http://www.ilgiornale.it/esteri/_esodo_biblico_maroni_allattacco_leuropa_ci_lascia_soli/14-02-2011/articolo-id=505860-page=0-comments=1)

<sup>14</sup> "È netta la presa di posizione dell'Alto Commissario Onu per i diritti umani, Navi Pillay, sui cosiddetti respingimenti. «Basta criminalizzarli» - «La pratica della detenzione dei migranti irregolari, della loro criminalizzazione e dei maltrattamenti nel contesto dei controlli delle frontiere deve cessare. Oggi - aveva sottolineato Pillay - partendo dal presupposto che le imbarcazioni in difficoltà trasportano migranti, le navi le oltrepassano ignorando le suppliche d'aiuto, in violazione del diritto internazionale." "L'Onu contro i respingimenti: "Violano il diritto internazionale," *Corriere della sera*, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009. [http://www.corriere.it/politica/09\\_settembre\\_14/onu\\_respingimenti\\_violazione\\_diritto\\_2d556380-a12c-11de-9cad-00144f02aabc.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/politica/09_settembre_14/onu_respingimenti_violazione_diritto_2d556380-a12c-11de-9cad-00144f02aabc.shtml)

<sup>15</sup> Hawthorne reflects also on the power of new technologies to forge new paradigms and new patterns of resistance, when asking: "How are technology, transnational connectedness, and social media changing the nature of borders? At a time when new media tools are allowing sentiments of political dissatisfaction to spread rapidly across borders, how will this impact patterns of migration and official responses to them? (*Why Lampedusa Matters*: <http://www.globalconversation.org/2011/03/13/why-lampedusa-matters>).

<sup>16</sup> See Jean Foucault, *Présentation*, in *Imaginaire du jeune méditerranéen*, vol. 31, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002, p. 11, and Orhan Pamuk, *La mer blanche est d'azur*, in *À propos de la Méditerranée*, Paris: Librio, 1998, pp. 43-47.

<sup>17</sup> The political and resistance movements that produced the Arab Spring have had as a corollary of new departures from the ports of Tunisia and Libya. A series of documentaries and news reports follow the protagonists and track their stories. From Tunisia (<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/2011/08/via-dalla-tunisia-biglietto-di-sola.html>; <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/2011/11/i-nostri-anni-migliori.html>), From Libya (<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/2011/12/non-e-ora-di-dormire.html>), from Eritrea and Ethiopia through Libya (<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/2011/09/un-video-mostra-il-ruolo-di-gheddafi.html>; <http://la1.rsi.ch/dossiers/player.cfm?uuid=7e867bda-549b-4d7c-8082-800f6eea8a7a>).

<sup>18</sup> See Gabriele del Grande, *Il mare di mezzo*, pp. 130-3, reports the loss at sea of a boat with 89 immigrants, between the 28 and 31 of August 2010. The loss of 89 lives was the result of negligence on the authorities on both sides of the Mediterranean and of the indifference of the many fishing crews that saw the boat but did not intervene.

<sup>19</sup> Cit. <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/p/fortezza-europa.html> and Gabriele del Grande's Blog, "La strage negata," <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/p/la-strage-negata-17317-morti-ai-confini.html>.

<sup>20</sup> I borrow the term from Marc Augé: "Si un lieu peut se définir comme identitaire, relationnel et historique, un espace qui ne peut se définir ni comme identitaire, ni comme relationnel, ni comme historique définira un non-lieu." Marc Augé, *Non-lieux, introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. La Librairie du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, Paris: Seuil, p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> See Enrico Montalbano, Emanuele Guida e Dario Riccobono's 2009 video *Lampedusa: Isola senza diritti*: <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/2005/12/lampedusa-isola-senza-diritti.html>.

<sup>22</sup> See Coluccello, Salvatore and Simon Massey. "Out of Africa: The Human Trade Between Libya and Lampedusa", *Trends in Organized Crime*, 10, 2007: 77-90. It is interesting to note here that the authors of the article utilize the liquid metaphor to describe the different, more diffuse and flexible structure and of

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organized illegal immigration: “The networks involved in this trade, however, do not conform to mafia-like hierarchical organizations but rather smaller, more complex and fluid criminal networks” (77).

<sup>23</sup> For a complete and comprehensive report of the human rights violations perpetrated in the Lampedusan CIE see <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/2012/01/lampedusa-le-immagini-dei-pestaggi.html>.

<sup>24</sup> “Youth in Lampedusa are even using [Facebook](#) to protest against the media's exaggerated coverage of their island, fearing that overwhelming negative reports will have a harmful economic impact on the area's tourism industry” (Hawthorne, *Why Lampedusa Matters*, cit.).

<sup>25</sup> For more historical background on the contested Ethiopian national elections of 2005 and the ensuing protests see Lahra Smith, *Political Violence and Democratic Uncertainty in Ethiopia*, USIP-United States Institute of Peace, Special Report, August 2007, pp. 1-20.

<sup>26</sup> For information about the documentary and its project see Marco Carsetti and Alessandro Triulzi, *Come un uomo sulla terra*. Book and DVD. Rome: Infinito, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> On February 2, *Fortress Europe* reports of leaked documents dated May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009 (ten days after the implementation of the first “respingimenti”), discussing Secretary of the Interior Maroni’s policy. In the documents, the American ambassador in Tripoli, Gene Cretz, informs Washington of three episodes (7-9-10 of May), confirming that in the first two cases the Italian Coast Guard returned the boats to the Libyan port. The European Court has opened an investigation based on the class action suit started by 24 Eritrean and Somali citizens against the government of Italy who deported them back to Libya on May 7th 2009. The court has requested the transmission of the case to the Higher Chamber, in view of the delicate matter at hand. The European migration laws of the last ten years are in fact in clear violation of the European Charter of Human Rights, that expressly prohibits collective deportations and recognizes the right to political asylum and the right to a trial in case of violation. The 24 deported, some of whom are still detained in Tripoli, were denied all these rights. Cfr. Gabriele del Grande, “Wikileaks: il cable sui respingimenti in Libia,” February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/2011/02/wikileaks-il-cable-sui-respingimenti-in.html>.

The respingimenti have officially ended but they continue amid the complete silence of the traditional media, as reported in an article by Moira Fusco on September 1, 2011: “Ancora respingimenti in mare, violate le normative,” *Voci Globali*. <http://vociglobali.it/ancora-respingimenti-in-mare-violate-le-normative/>.

<sup>28</sup> The word sanitize returns in the many “sanatoria” laws devised by the Italian government since the beginning of the immigration phenomenon. See Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy. The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> In reality, the number of immigrants coming on boat from North Africa is rather negligible, 15% of all arrivals from the continent. The majority of immigrants arrive by plane, with a regular visa whose expiration will be ignored. The majority of those arriving to Italy by boat cannot receive a visa from their home country. Eritrea is a good example of that. Besides not having offices granting visa, it considers emigration a crime punishable with forced labor (cfr. Liberti 2011b 203).

<sup>30</sup> Selex, a group controlled by Finmeccanica, was committed to provide “un sistema di controllo delle frontiere terrestri libiche,” with a contract that would allow the Italian conglomerate to make lucrative business in a country rich in natural resources but rather poor in infrastructure. In exchange, however, the Libyan government (through LIA, the Lybian Investment Authority), was going to acquire up to 3% of Finmeccanica, thus obtaining dangerous influence (with imposition of trusted Gaddafi men in its CDA) over the second largest Italian holding that controls the main industries in the military, aeronautical, and spatial sectors. See Antonio Mazzeo, “Gheddafi e il controllo dell’industria militare italiana,” *U Cuntu*, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 <http://www.ucuntu.org/Gheddafi-e-il-controllo-dell.html>.

<sup>31</sup> See Alessandro Triulzi’s “*Like a Plate of Spaghetti*.” Migrant Narratives from the Libya-Lampedusa Route,” in *Long Journeys. African Migrants on the Road*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 213-232.

<sup>32</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: University of California Press, 1998, p. 8. The following quote from Aristotle’s *Politics* is taken from Agamben, on the same page.

<sup>33</sup> This is also the objective behind the project of Archivio Memorie Migranti, as Alessandro Triulzi explains in “Per un Archivio delle memorie migranti, Made in Italy. Migrazioni e identità,” in *Zapruder*, n. 28, 2012, pp. 118-123. See also [www.asinitas.org](http://www.asinitas.org).

<sup>34</sup> As reported in the documentary, Italy had also earmarked several million euros in his budgets to confront the problem of illegal migration. Both the Berlusconi and the Prodi government, in a spirit of

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bipartisanship, had set aside, respectively, twenty three million Euros in 2005, twenty million Euros in 2006 (Berlusconi government), and six million Euros in 2007 (Prodi government). See *Come un uomo sulla terra*, cit. In addition, Hawthorne reports that at the end of February 2011, at the behest of the Italian government, Frontex deployed [Operation Hermes](#) to assist with the management of recent immigrants. *Why Lampedusa Matters*, cit.

<sup>35</sup> According to the European Mission's report of 2004, Al Kohfra is one of the three centers for illegal immigrants erected in Libya thanks to the Italian funding: "In 2003, Italy also supported the construction of a reception centre for illegal immigrants in Libya, and the construction of additional camps is planned." See the European Commission's *Technical Mission to Libya on Illegal Immigration*. 27<sup>th</sup> Nov-6<sup>th</sup> Dec 2004, Report, p. 15. On page 24 of the same document visits to various sites in Libya, included Kohfra, are "suggested."

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed story of the recent transformation of the Sahara as outpost of the Mediterranean with its own well developed migrant transit economy based on violence, illegal trafficking, and brutal profit making see Bensaad Ali, "The Mediterranean Divide and its Echo in the Sahara: New Migratory Routes and New Barriers on the Path to the Mediterranean," in T. Fabre & P. Sant Cassia (eds.), *Between Europe and the Mediterranean*. London: Palgrave, 2007, pp. 51-69.

<sup>37</sup> My translation: "Come risultato della visita nelle regioni desertiche della Libia meridionale, i membri della missione hanno potuto apprezzare tanto la grandezza quanto la varietà del deserto." *Come un uomo sulla terra*, cit.

<sup>38</sup> One of the female protagonists talks about repeated suicide attempts that are prevented by the group. In this case, the strength and attention of the collective were larger than that of the single individual. It would be interesting to study these episodes in depth as they reveal the power of collective care.

<sup>39</sup> One has to remember that many of these illegal immigrants will be recognized by the UNHCR as asylum seekers and given the status of political refugees, as is the case for the author of the documentary.

<sup>40</sup> The silencing of illegal immigrants continues in Italy as reported in the news. In April 2012, the picture of a gagged Tunisian immigrant being repatriated on an Alitalia plane directed to Tunis has surfaced on the web and caused a scandal. In Michela Marzano's article, "La compassione e le regole" (*Repubblica*, April 19, 2012: 1-38), the philosopher reflects on the symbolic meaning of gagging a human being. Depriving a person of the power of language is not, Marzano asks, like depriving him/her of humanity? I would argue that the answer to Marzano's question is well known by Italian authorities as they unfortunately resort daily to such dehumanizing practices in confronting the phenomenon of immigration. The snapshot taken on the Alitalia flight, we can easily presume, reveals just the tip of the iceberg of a series of deliberate violations of human rights carried out daily in Italy at the expense of immigrants.

<sup>41</sup> The documentary was made in collaboration with Giulio Cederna and Fabrizio Barraco and was produced by Prof. Alessandro Triulzi and Marco Guadagnino, with the support of [Fondazione Lettera27](#) and in collaboration with the [Archivio delle Memorie Migranti Asinitas Onlus](#). See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yetKgvzrnRE>.

<sup>42</sup> "The documentary is based for the most part on the island of Lampedusa, where I arrived in 2006. I came back to see it again and to understand it. This island has a close link with my present life in Italy. It is a land that has a physical and symbolic meaning for many others like me and that is why I returned, to see it and to meet the people that live here." (My translation) Dagmawi Yimer's interviewed at Milano Film Festival 2010. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=wclLgLmP1c0>.

<sup>43</sup> In a recent interview, Yimer reflected on the fact that the documentary took shape during his six-day stay on the island. Only after his visit, the director began to organize the pieces of the trip (See: "Intervista a Dagmawi Yimer," Milano Film Festival 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=wclLgLmP1c0>)

<sup>44</sup> "Lampedusa sembrava avvolta in una bolla assurda e contraddittoria: quello per cui era nota in tutta Italia, e ormai nel mondo intero, non si vedeva . . . L'isola viveva di un enorme rimosso. I lampedusani tendevano a ignorare gli immigrati che sbarcavano sulle loro coste. E lo stato, per non suscitare problemi, li nascondeva, cercava di renderli il meno appariscenti possibile" (186).

<sup>45</sup> It is not by chance or accident that Lampedusa has become the destination of so many arrivals. Its marginal, out-of-the-way location made it an ideal "centro di concentramento e smistamento" for undocumented immigrants. As Stefano Liberti discovered (*A sud di Lampedusa. Cinque anni di viaggi sulle rotte dei migranti*. Roma: Minimum Fax, 2011), no immigrant arrives to the shores of the island by himself, but is rather funneled there by the Italian Coast Guard: "Perché . . . arrivano tutti a Lampedusa?"

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Perché si vanno a recuperare le barche anche quando sono a cento miglia dall'isola, magari dirette da tutt'altra parte? Perché si vuole evitare che sbarchino in Sicilia, o magari a Pantelleria, l'isola dei vip" (190).

<sup>46</sup> In his latest volume, Liberti continued his search delving deeper in the issue of immigration to substantiate with data that the neocolonial invasion of Africa has impoverished and risks to starve entire populations. See *Land Grabbing. Come il mercato delle terre crea il nuovo colonialismo*. Roma: Minimum Fax, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> The notion of brotherhood is central to *Soltanto il mare* as it was in the previous documentary. Among the many significant encounters Yimer includes in his narrative is that with a shipwright. After telling his personal story of migration, Giuseppe Balistreri reveals that he is also the author of a short film: *Quello è mio fratello (That is my brother)*. Centered on the very issue of "clandestini," illegal immigrants, the movie elaborates the question of brotherhood as the protagonists gradually recognize that loving and caring need to exceed the limits of parental love, a father's love for his son in this case, to reach a universal dimension of love and care for the brother.

<sup>48</sup> The figure of the jogger, whom the filmmakers followed every morning at dawn, in his running tract around the island, came to signify the possibility of a new day, of a new experience ("Intervista a Dagmawi Yimer," cit.).

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. "Intervista con Emanuele Crialesi," Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Mostra internazionale di arte cinematografica, Biennale di Venezia. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRi37PzI75k&feature=related>.

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