

# Chapter 13

## Mediterranean Borders and Diaspora



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**Abstract** “And So Europe Dehumanized Itself”, the expression used by Toni Morrison regarding slavery, seems to have returned dramatically to current affairs. We seem to have plunged into a dystopian present in which the European Union, instead of governing the disruptive global migrations through appropriate policies, has expressed such nervousness – both at the popular and institutional levels – to give rise, in an unstoppable crescendo, to practices inspired by xenophobia and racism. It has led to the inhuman treatment of migrants (I refer both to shipwrecks at sea, a real massacre and to the torture and torture reserved for them in Libya with the complicity of European governments) and finally to the crisis of cohesion and solidarity between the countries of the union.

All this has led to a group of Palermo geographers, engaged for years in the study of cosmopolitan cities, to give a twist to their field of study and to thematize the problematic intertwining of Mediterranean frontiers and diasporas. The new action programme produced a manifesto (attached to this contribution) whose aim is to mobilize the national and international scientific community in order to develop new forms of geographical imagination (languages, models, practices) so as to overturn the lacerating current trends.

**Keywords** Metropolitan city · Mediterranean Sea · Border · Diaspora · European Union

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### 13.1 A Dystopia of the Present

The 11th September 2001 unveiled a new era in human history. The future has irrupted in the present and has taken history for granted. The description of an imaginary society and an undesirable community has been imposed on global public opinion as a reality. The attack on the Twin Towers has in fact destabilized the common sense of American and global citizens: something unheard of has happened – an attack on the territory of the only superpower still standing after the fall of the Berlin Wall – and it happened before all our own eyes. The whole world, or at least the majority, watched one of the most traumatic media episodes live: two skyscrapers that plummeted to the ground, knocked down by two aeroplanes that hit like bullets.

The reactions from world leaders, columnists from the mass media and public opinion itself as to what happened were split and inappropriate. A feeling of instability and uncertainty was palpable which was fed by the media and the rhetoric used by the political elite on a global scale. A catastrophic image of current society was imposed, which was littered with keywords such as “The West stabbed in the heart!” or “The war on terrorism”, sustained and advocated by American leaders to call on those around them to launch their European peers and other allied leaders in the Arab world into a military operation.

The effects on this imaginary society were and are devastating: from then on, the predominant narrative has shown us a world in which terrorism is lingering in the background like a ghost, waiting to hit, how and when it wishes, defenceless communities which are unprepared to face an invisible enemy hiding in the dark corners of daily lives in cities around the world. There are two questions: Are we really sure that terrorism is all that it seems? And furthermore, is it reasonable to think that war is the most appropriate strategy for dealing with it? I actually think that as a result of the attack, but more so due to the global reactions that it provoked, they weaken the interpretative models of the contemporary world and its main geopolitical issues.

Since the Twin Towers in fact, we have had an unpleasant feeling and deep uneasiness which arises from, amongst other things, not being able to fully recognize ourselves in the predominant narratives. That is why I speak of “a dystopia of the present”, and I really do mean it in its literal sense as “a description of an imaginary society and an undesirable community that has been *imposed* on global public opinion *as a reality*”. I maintain that the main, urgent task for the global scientific community is that of deconstructing the predominant image and to try to construct a more coherent imagination in the joint sense which is more corresponding to what is happening around us.

First issue: in affirming that the West was stabbed in the heart by the terrorist attack does nothing more than feed the dualistic image of the world which is at the core of the delusional proclamations made by terrorist leaders, which actually reverses it. It is as if the world really was split into two – and hardly integrated and interdependent – between an evolved, modern West and the rest of the world (the whole of the Arab states being understood as the origin of the terrorist attacks) underdeveloped in terms of their economic and cultural profiles. The situation

obviously is not like this, and mechanically reiterating the terms of this juxtaposition does nothing more than pour oil on troubled waters.

The second issue is more relevant and not at all straightforward. Terrorism is not as we are told, and it cannot be faced down from a military standpoint as we are led to believe. The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk helps us in this regard, when he reminds us that terrorism is a war tactic put in place by the great powers of advanced technology (let's think about the use of the atomic bomb in the past, e.g. or the use of drones nowadays) with the purpose of breaking the resistance of militarily weaker adversaries, but most of all, with the purpose of putting civilian resistance to the test. This is why terrorism cannot be conquered by war. It is nothing more than war in its most extreme sense. And in the same way that war creates hate and the need for revenge, terrorism does the same in uncontrollable ways.

In order to get reliable feedback on this outlook, we just have to look at the images of Dresden destroyed by the bombings during the Second World War, or the post-nuclear images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or even the photographs by Sebastiao Salgado<sup>1</sup> of "liberated" Kuwait and its wells in flames or, last but not least, the images that appear on our television screens of Aleppo, Mosul or Raqqa, "liberated" from the occupation by ISIS (Islamic State).

### 13.2 The Invention of Terrorism in the Twentieth Century, Wars and Global Crises

The last century has given the history of humanity something devastating, which consists of attacking the adversary by corrupting their living environment, perhaps irreversibly. The first instances of terrorism actually date back to the use of a toxic cloud by the German army during the First World War (in Ypres on 24th April, 1915). Terrorism cannot be conquered by war because it is not an enemy, but a mode of combat and war is its main growth medium (Sloterdijk 2015, pp. 82–83).

Incidentally, as Peter Sloterdijk observes: "every terrorist attack is understood as a counter-attack within a series which, each time, is described an initiation from the adversary" (2015, p. 98). The succession of events, however, appears to be significant: 1990–1991 First Gulf War; 7th October 2001: start of the war in Afghanistan characterized by operation *Enduring Freedom* and supported by the American government as a response to the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon; and in the context of the *War on Terrorism*, there will be the second Gulf War in 2003.

We must not underestimate, however, within the argument that we are presenting here that the involvement of the American army not only has effects on geopolitical

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<sup>1</sup>I am referring to the exhibition by Sebastiao Salgado, *Kuwait. A desert in flames*, shown in Milan from 20th October 2017 until 28th January 2018.

and military aspects but also on strictly economic aspects. As the economist Innocenzo Cipolletta stated:

The world has lived through two global crises which were separated by a brief interval: the petrol crisis of 1973 and the global financial crisis of 2008, which have sparked two difficult periods of recession all over the world. In both cases, the USA was and had been involved in the military plan with strong contingents – in the Vietnam War previously, in the international War on Terrorism later, and two active fronts in Afghanistan and Iraq. (2010, pp. XII–XIV)

The mechanisms and the American financial exposure which are determined by military expenditure and launched onto the world stage are clear, and they essentially consist of a notable increase in available funds on the international financial markets, thanks to the release of huge amounts of dollars (Cipolletta 2010, p. 9).

As Scott Anderson tells us in the report *Fractured Lands: How the Arab world Came Apart*, published in *The New York Times Magazine* on 14th August 2016, the process of destabilizing the countries in the north of Africa and in the Middle East, which was welcomed in Europe as the “Arab Spring”, quickly turned into a political crisis first and then, in quick succession, a series of tragic, destructive regional wars, with direct or indirect, declared or undeclared involvement of a number of actors from global geopolitics:

The emerging model is incredible. The majority of the twenty-two countries that compose the Arab world have been involved in the Arab Spring to a certain extent, but those that have been more deeply involved – Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen – are all republics, not monarchies. And of these six, the three that have been fully disintegrated, calling into question whether or not they can still exist as functioning states – Iraq, Syria and Libya – are all members of that short list of Arab countries created by the imperial powers of the West at the beginning of the 20th century. (Anderson 2016, p. 5)

The dystopic scene, which has given context to our research itinerary in recent years, arises from the complex entanglement between globalization, financial crises and neoliberal policies; crisis of the national states and delegitimization of the sovereign authorities (see, e.g. the European Union); processes of liberation from dictatorships, economic and political destabilization and the emergence of new roles and hegemonies in a large area extensively coinciding with the whole of the Arab states; and an uncontrollable increase of the diaspora and international migrations with a high rate of political refugees, asylum seekers and environmental refugees from Africa and Asia, heading through either regulated routes or predominantly unregulated ones, towards Europe.

### 13.3 Cosmopolitan Look and Listening Geographies

The dizzying overlap of processes of crises and mutilations of economic balances, political assets and cultural dynamics in place has forced a research group – created in a regional context like Sicily, which is heavily exposed to the overflowing and often tragic incidents that, even from lands afar, are offloaded onto the

Mediterranean – to investigate about ethical and scientific positioning with regard to the phenomena to be analysed and the action strategies to be adopted. Before our own eyes was a film that was much more incredible than the Twin Towers: a massacre of migrants in the ongoing shipwrecks taking place in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>2</sup> What happened is that a group of students who gathered for a national research programme dedicated to “Cosmopolitan cities”, on several occasions, has had to redefine both the method and the objectives of the research until they understood that the Mediterranean diaspora in progress (de Spuches 2011, pp. 102–119) constituted a true and very real epistemological challenge.

Showing a mutation under way on a global scale of the urban and territorial assets was the initial aim of this group of students. It was a large, organized group. A transnational research team coordinated by Ola Söderström had actually chosen Palermo to investigate on the entanglement between the cultural and urban dimensions of globalization processes. The *Urban Cosmographies: Research on Urban Change in Palermo* (2009) has proven how the Sicilian capital had in place a process that exposed the city to global flows of people, ideas and resources and made new landscapes and cosmopolitan urban schemes part of the spaces of its daily life. The actions on urban governance put in place by two administrations of the city from opposite sides (1992–2008) would be valued in light of the set of flows of mobility of people, knowledge and resources that the policies were able to intercept. Reading this dissertation and seeing the images that accompany it, anybody could form their own opinion on the efficacy of these policies, but they could not deny that from one or another, there is a new image of the city. Urban artefacts activate contrasting places and new identity positions that if they are a part of the chains of action that create them, they reveal the rhetoric which the different practices of urban governance and the cosmopolitan urban regimes are inspired by and linked to. The case in Palermo was then revalued by Söderström herself within a comparative framework on a global scale with other urban dynamics in Asian and African contexts.<sup>3</sup>

Another research experiment was developed in parallel which has provided a framework for comparison on a national scale, in this instance.<sup>4</sup> The composition of the research group has allowed for dynamics in place in different-sized cities to be focused on, from the big cities to the smaller ones, located in the north (Venice and

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<sup>2</sup> Since 1988, along the borders of Europe, at least 27,382 people have died, of which 4273 died in 2015 alone and 3507 in 2014. The data was updated on 2nd February 2016 and is based on the news reported by the international press. All the documentation can be consulted by visiting *Fortress Europe*, a website by Gabriele Del Grande. Another essential source for following the developments of the events is the ADIF Association Blog (the Association for Rights and Borders).

<sup>3</sup> A recent exhibition entitled *Cosmopolis. Explorer la mondialisation des villes*. Exploring globalizing cities (16th June to 10th September 2011) organized by the University of Neuchâtel was dedicated to research conducted between 2007 and 2011 on the ongoing transformations in Palermo, Hanoi and Ouagadougou.

<sup>4</sup> It is a national research programme entitled “The cosmopolitan city. Areas of contact, flows, geography” cofinanced by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research in 2007 (national coordinator: Vincenzo Guarrasi).

Trieste), the centre (Bologna and Pisa) and the south of Italy (Palermo and Bari). Therefore, just how widespread and detailed the mutation is in our country was able to be verified. An innovative methodology based on the surveys and active listening practices has allowed different urban contexts to be explored in the most intimate corners of daily life and to evaluate how deep the degree of involvement of the people and the places surveyed in a transition process was which involved the local and the global, at the limit between public space and private space. Opening up to other disciplinary experiments, the group from Palermo reached the understanding of how traumatic and disorientating the transition was and how unavoidable the need was to adopt an innovative research strategy. The Mediterranean diaspora therefore is imposed as the backbone of the research experiment and its printed products<sup>5</sup> and as a theme focuses on two events which, as we will see, were decided upon to bring to life the emblem of *the cosmopolitan city*.<sup>6</sup>

Spatial and time compression (Harvey 1993) had produced urban and territorial contexts the profile of which couldn't be described without adopting a "cosmopolitan look" (Beck 2005). Without bringing the "methodological nationalism" into the discussion which is, so to speak, congenital to social and territorial sciences and which consists of considering every socio-spatial natured event within the horizon made up of the single national states and their borders. During the research, the group from Palermo became convinced that, rather than exposing urban landscapes to a cosmopolitan look, a more appropriate strategy would be to impose the need to survey the methodological opportunities offered by "listening geographies" (Guarrasi 2011, pp. 46–59; Nancy 2004). Proceeding then by surveys, exploring what Clifford calls "contact zones" (1999) and trying to build "listening places", situations and contexts, which is, where the autobiographical narrative was made possible from the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.<sup>7</sup> The lives lived by the migrants found throughout the survey was so intense and involved with suffering that any type of generalization or abstraction was not advisable. The value of each human existence, which arose from the interviews, was such that it was seen as something singular and not able to overlap other experiences. The

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<sup>5</sup>Essays from Lorena Scarcella, Desiré Musumeci and Giulia Veca can be seen, for example, in the first volume entitled *La città cosmopolita. Geografie dell'ascolto* (Guarrasi 2011) and from Giulia de Spuches, Alessandra Di Maio, Manuela Lino and Angela Alaïmo in the second volume entitled *La città cosmopolita. Altre narrazioni* (de Spuches 2011) and the video from the author entitled *Il cacciatore di Piume*, filmed and narrated by Yousif Latif Jaralla, attached.

<sup>6</sup>In 2008 and 2009, the Faculty of Arts at the University of Palermo (chaired by myself from 2007 to 2010) joined an event entitled *Notte dell'intercultura e del dialogo*, which took place simultaneously across many cities of the Mediterranean Basin. The two editions are from Palermo with art direction, thanks to the passion of Gigi Garofalo and Daria Settineri. I would like to highlight the fact that the city of Palermo has made use of this and other experiments, as is evident from the success of the current Migrant Literature Festival (*Festival delle letterature migranti*).

<sup>7</sup>The most effective example of this methodological choice can be found in *Rapsodia in K* by Desiré Musumeci (2011) where she tells how a particular empathy between the interviewer and the interviewee gave rise to a poignant autobiographical narrative.

Mediterranean diaspora itself, by a mass exodus, was diversified and cut jaggedly into a variety and range of subjective experiences.

### 13.4 The Ethics of the Research in the Face of Singular Events and Subjects

Putting listening geographies into practice thus gathered the sense of measuring oneself against collective phenomena as well as with horizons of specific, singular events (Guarrasi 2014). All this even led us to accept, with regard to the field of research and the seriousness of the experiences that we bore witness to, an attitude that was inspired by the evocative phrase by Michel Foucault “human suffering must never be a mute reminder of politics” (2009) and to make our action programme enunciated by the French thinker:

We are nothing more than individuals that talk, doing so together, solely for a specific common difficulty to deal with what happens. (2009, p. 235)

A new confrontation strategy with governments and institutions was therefore imposed based on three simple principles of action:

- There are international citizens that have their rights, their duties and who are obliged to rebel against any abuse of power, whoever instigates it and whoever is a victim of it.
- It is the duty of these international citizens to always claim their rights over human suffering to the eyes and ears of the governments, since it is not true that they are not responsible for it. Human suffering must never be a mute remainder of politics. It is the foundation of an absolute right to revolt against who holds the power.
- We need to refuse the division of the tasks that is often proposed to us: for the individuals to show indignation and to speak to the governments and to act. The will of individuals must be elaborated in a reality where the governments have wanted to have full control, which needs to be eradicated little by little, day by day (Foucault 2009, pp. 236–237).

The research group was becoming more aware of the fact that without ethics and a coherent political position, it would not be possible to resist the policies put in place by the European Union and its individual states and the rhetoric contained within them. In our heads we made way for the conviction that in this work of resistance, we were not alone but around us was a constant band of intellectual critics, clearly deployed in favour of migrants, asylum seekers and political refugees. The silence was broken by Giovanni Maria Bellu, a correspondent from *La Repubblica*. His book, *I fantasmi di Portopalo* (2004), had actually shed a complex light on a matter on which on the contrary would have been kept quiet due to the collusion of so many. The tragedy took place on the night of Christmas in 1996, but the media echo was not heard until 2004, thanks to the courageous inquiry by the journalist from *La Repubblica*, showing the fearful entanglement between a dramatic matter and the banality of the demands of daily life, between the collective dimension of the event and the upsetting singularity of finding the laminated ID card of Anpalagan Ganeshu.

The story of the shipwreck off Sicily also focused the attention on the value in society of current investigative journalism. Regarding the searching and digging activity that alone could avoid the silence and oblivion, the removal of so many existences is mutilated by the experience of expatriation and exile. For this reason, I think it is important to highlight that on this island, touched by a human tragedy of this scale, it was not all viewed with dismay and silent habituation, but for a time, significant intellectual energy has been put in place in order to study and to understand the phenomenon. A group of Sicilian students has actually been grappling with an interdisciplinary confrontation whose field of study and observation about the obvious friction of the borders with the migration phenomenon are the difficult relationship between globalization, human rights and state policies.

### **13.5 The Massacre of the Mediterranean as a Horizon of the Events**

The European policies regarding migrants, political refugees and asylum seekers depict a tragic panorama of events around us. Each of them, in the trickle of succession, deserves to be dealt with for the value that it has within, but the series takes on a relevance which prompts for the most meaningful word “massacre” to be used, and it tends to take on the connotations of a true, real crime against humanity.

Facing a massacre of such a scale<sup>8</sup>, the task of thinking about the event is very difficult. As Alain Badiou suggests, in fact, thinking about an event involves three options: dealing with the choice, the distance and the exception. It therefore means becoming clear on the main choices of the thought, the distance between the thought and the power and the value of the event:

I sustain that a philosophical concept, in the sense understood by Deleuze, therefore like a creation, is always something that links a problem of choice (decision), a problem of distance (divide) and a problem of exception (event). The deepest philosophical concepts tell us: if you want your life to have sense, then you must take hold of the event, keep your distance from the power, be adamant in your decisions. (Badiou 2012, p. 11)

Thinking in this way about the event – and the place – constitutes a challenge both for philosophical thought and geographic research insomuch as it involves the need to make a breakthrough in the regime of consolidated thought and face a paradoxical situation. The key element, which I am pushed to highlight, is that critical thought is actually activated when it is in the presence of a paradoxical relationship, in other words, a relationship that is not as such. Being able to think about both the drama of the shipwreck and the banality of daily life isn’t so simple, nor is it natural,

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<sup>8</sup>In the shipwreck on 18th April 2015, the most serious to make the headlines, from the postwar period in the Western Mediterranean, at least 700 people perished. 368 died in the shipwreck off Lampedusa, another 400 on 12th April 2015. It is estimated that from 1st January to 20th April 2017, some 29,000 people arrived to the coasts of Europe, and another 663 died during the journey.



because there literally is a sea that separates the two, a sea which nowadays acts as a border.

The research group became convinced early on that such an ambitious project as that of thinking in original ways about an event, which was repeated with obsessive frequency before the eyes of everybody (and to the indifference of many), could not be carried out within the tight arena of scientific communication. In order to work on this breakthrough, we needed to work with a wider public. That is why the research programme had begun with two editions (2006 and 2007) of an event, as we have seen, called the cosmopolitan city, where the moments of scientific debate, the surveys of “areas of contact” and public manifestations including shows, music and art performance were all bound together.

### **13.6 And so Europe Dehumanized Itself: Art Performance and International Convention**

In 2014, an art performance once again triggered a new stage of the research. This time the initiative was taken on by Giulia de Spuches who decided to organize an open event for a public who were not involved in the work. She put on a show with actors, musicians and a singer under the title “And So Europe Dehumanized Itself”.

<sup>9</sup>The effectiveness of the show was based on reading truly dramatic pages from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), thus creating an emotional and intellectual connection between the tragedy of slavery and the disturbing destination that European policies expose the migrants to. In both cases, exercising power is so violent and transgressive for compromising humanity not only for the person suffering but also for the person who implements it.

The scientific point continued in November 2015, and it was brought together by way of a call for action, in the knowledge that the words of the scientific discourse were no longer enough to oppose resistance to the wave of advanced xenophobia and nationalism and more decisive conflictive actions had to be put in place. The participants made an effort to create new language and new practices, in the knowledge of the fact that the scientific and political commitment in place in previous years did not grab public opinion any more, overwhelmed by cruder words, but definitely more persuasive. The group of geographers from Palermo,<sup>10</sup> who had promoted the initiative, gathered what arose from the discussion and gave shape to the manifesto (which is attached) and which was reintroduced during the 32nd Geographical Congress in Rome (7–10th June 2017) in the session “The

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<sup>9</sup>The reading performances had two replicas, both in Palermo: the first at the Zisa Cultural Sites and the second at bar Moltivolti. Alongside Spuches’ performance, Irene Ientile, Filippo Luna and Lucina Marchese, who signed the texts, also appeared on stage.

<sup>10</sup>It is Giulia de Spuches, Francesca Genduso, Chiara Giubilaro, Vincenzo Guarrasi, Laura Lo Presti and Marco Picone.

Mediterranean: for a critical border geography” coordinated by C. Brambilla, A. Casaglia, R. Coletti, P. Cuttitta, G. de Spuches and V. Guarrasi.

### 13.7 The “Arab Spring” and the Regional Wars as a Backdrop to the Mediterranean Diaspora

Nowadays it is not possible to define a critical discourse in geographic terms about the Mediterranean as a border, if how much the geopolitical and humanitarian dynamics of the region becoming the most complex way from the so-called Arab Spring is not taken into account.

In this case too, I believe it is necessary to start from something that happened. As we read in *Preludio alla rivoluzione dove tutto è cominciato* by Manuel Castells:

IT began in the most unlikely of places: Sidi Bouzid, one woman of 40,000 people in an impoverished central region of Tunisia, to the south of Tunis: The name of Mohamed Bouazizi, 26 years old, a peddler, is now written in history as the person who changed the destiny of the Arab world. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, who exploded around 11:30am on 17th December 2010 in front of the headquarters of a government office, was his last outcry in protest against the humiliation of the repeated confiscation of his fruit and vegetable stall by the local police after he refused to pay a bribe. This last confiscation would have taken place on that exact day, one hour before. (...) Mohamed Bouazizi died on 3rd January 2011 in the hospital in Tunis, where the dictator Ben Ali had ordered him to be sent to sooth the angry crowd. (2012, pp. 2–3)

From there, within the maze of individual stories and collective dramas, a fire began which is very far from being put out. Two moments need to be kept together: individual and collective. If they are separated, all is lost, be it the whole or the decisive decision. Yes, because every human destiny designs a whole universe along its path. Scott Anderson is highly aware of it in his publication *Fractured Lands: How the Arab World Came Apart*, when he chooses to tell a story about wars, exoduses and unheard violence through the stories of six people that have been witnesses and protagonists since everything started in Sidi Bouzid:

All six are from different regions, different cities, different tribes, different families, but, together with millions of other people in the Middle East, they share a deep experience of decay: their lives have been changed forever due to the upheavals that took place in 2003 with the American invasion of Iraq, and then accelerated by a series of revolutions and insurrections which are known as the Arab Spring in the West. Nowadays they are still threatened by the Islamic State, with terrorist attacks and failed states. (2016, p. 3)

After a series of occurrences by a military and terrorist setup called IS (Islamic State), their attainment of cities and territories, after months of imposition on local people of an authoritarian and violent power, at the time of writing, their terror can be seen on the fields of combat. The geopolitical and military matter, as well as the economic and social issue, is still underway, and I do not dare to imagine the possible outcomes or reconstruct the key areas. The description itself of every event in the series cannot actually be anything but partial and subjective given that too many

parties are involved and each of them has a different perspective or a rival narrative. In geopolitical aspects, it is difficult to distinguish the heroes from the villains and the victims from the executioners. One thing that is clear to me is that we are not witnessing anything that looks like a “clash of civilizations”, and the victims are the ones that die (to whatever deployment they may belong), the ones that are fleeing their homes and their cities and the ones that leave behind communities, territories and environments that have been destroyed and going up against risky conditions with extreme vulnerability in unwelcoming lands and seas.

### **13.8 The European Agreements with Turkey and Libya**

With the purpose of stopping the influx of migrants to the Greek coasts, European leaders created an agreement with the Turkish government in March 2016. The agreement sets out, amongst other factors, rejecting irregular migrants; the creation of humanitarian channels to allow for the transfer from Turkey to the European Union of Syrians seeking asylum (with a one-in-one-out system: for each irregular migrant rejected, one exile from Syria is accepted); the liberalization of the visas for Turkish citizens plus economic aid for Turkey (up to a maximum of 3 billion euros before the end of 2018); and the opening of new options for Turkey joining the EU. The paradox is that one of the motivations adopted to create the agreement is the aim to carrying out “a provisional, special measure required *to put an end to human suffering* (my italics) and restore public order”.

Italy and Libya signed a bilateral cooperation agreement in February 2017 with the purpose of closing the Central Mediterranean route with the participation of Libya. The agreement was signed in Rome after a visit to Tripoli by the Italian Home Secretary, Marco Minniti. The old friendship and cooperation agreement which was signed in 2008 between Silvio Berlusconi and Muhammad Gheddafi were renewed, which set out, amongst other things, to definitively close the colonial dispute, with a payment being made by Italy of 5 billion dollars. The agreement proceeds on the premise that the fight against migrant trafficking is combated by stabilizing Libya, with European and bilateral cooperation and with an increase of Libya’s capacity to control its own land borders in the south of the country, as well as their sea borders.

The European governments recognize the efficacy of such an agreement with the aim of reducing the number of migrants arriving from the Central Mediterranean. The same European authorities, however, appear to be completely indifferent with regard to the appeals from the UN that they should take care of the migrants and the repeated, dramatic reports from the NGOs working on Libyan soil about the living conditions of the migrants stuck on African territory. The voices of human trafficker infiltrations are all the more insistent in Libyan institutions such as the coast guard and the detention centres.

### 13.9 The Affirmation of Nationalist Forces in Europe

The European Union is at risk of falling apart due to the outbreaks of souverainism, nationalism and the rejection of migrants, asylum seekers and political refugees (and environmental refugees). The first to sway was the free movement of citizens across Europe which was set out in the Schengen Convention. The clearest, strongest sign however, has been Brexit, in other words, the majority of voters in the United Kingdom (51.89%) that voted in favour of the choice to leave the European Union on 23rd June 2016. The electoral affirmation of far-right nationalist and openly xenophobic forces is also worrying, which include the Front National in France and the three extremist German movements (Republikaner, Npd and Dvu) or Haider's Fpo in Austria or for a liveable Netherlands and the Danish People's Party in Northern Europe, or in countries in Eastern Europe, where the xenophobic positions of governments and heads of state are highlighted, for example, in Poland and Hungary. What is also as worrying is the shift in nationalistic and xenophobic positions in centre-wing formations, as has happened in the recent Austrian elections with the affirmation of Sebastian Kurz's People's Party (Oevp).<sup>11</sup>

If the Mediterranean Sea is looked at in a mirror, it shows images of wars and devastation from the south and east and to the north, in Europe, there is political fragmentation and cultural dissonances which were completely unthinkable and unforeseeable a few years ago. National and supranational governments (the EU) are closed in on themselves and are only worried about their own survival. This all leads us to believe, and quite fairly so, that none of the dystopic dynamics under way could be resolved in any way without holistically intervening in the unhealthy relationship between this sea and these lands. The fluidity of the sea is actually ill-suited to supporting the role of a border between worlds whose plot is based on contacts, exchanges and cooperation.

### 13.10 New Research Perspective: The Cultural Turn in the Studies on Mediterranean Migration

In a space which is tending to establish a new configuration of the power and the *state of exception* (Agamben 2003), it produces legal vacuums, interruptions of the paradoxically legalized law and the extreme precarity of those moving between migrations, exiles and diaspora; frontiers and borders are the paradoxical places where research has been called upon to deal with it. And the answer cannot be radical: it must reach the foundations of the relationship between people, spaces and movements (Giubilaro 2016). If we are called upon to act to subvert this state of

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<sup>11</sup> Even if it falls out of this dissertation which is focused on the relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean, the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States is not reassuring whatsoever.

affairs and avoid the dystopia of the present, we cannot limit ourselves to verify that the limit works as a method, in other words, it produces and reproduces the multiplication of the work in the global world (Mezzadra and Neilson 2014); we need to try to build some imaginary spaces that are different to those which dominate and the systems that generate it and reiterate it day after day. To that end, the group of geographers working in Palermo has considered mobilizing the most innovative resources of a discourse which is inspired by cultural geography and cultural studies more in general.

In order to interrupt a spiral that exposes those moving and in intolerable conditions of risk and vulnerability, which produces political instability, war and devastation in the Arab world, which prompts nationalism, disintegrations and divergence in Europe, it isn't enough to put in place policies that are inspired by security or that appeal to civil welcoming and cohabitation. We must get to the root of this spatial issue and ask ourselves which are the terms of the relationships between people, spaces and movement in society nowadays.

Working from the notion of “diaspora” (de Spuches 2012) and “bare uniqueness” (Guarrasi 2014), theoretical research has gone in two directions suggested by the most innovative currents of cultural studies: questioning ourselves about the potential of the so-called mobility turn (Cresswell 2006) and from the visual studies explored systematically with the doctorate on European Cultural Studies at the University of Palermo.<sup>12</sup> The relationship between aesthetics and politics has been investigated on a wide spectrum of needs, from photography (Giubilaro 2016, 2018) to map theories and practices (Lo Presti 2017). Meanwhile, diasporic and border studies have been combined with the themes and outlooks suggested by the postcolonial studies (Genduso 2017; Proglia 2016).

### 13.11 Concluding Remarks

The Mediterranean poses an epistemological issue for European consciousness. In our research experience, this is revealed as such because it goes to the heart of our thoughts and feelings. It is European thoughts and feelings, I mean, but not only because of that. This resonates in our own bodies – and here I really do mean our own, those of the small research groups that thought they could live with such a decisive issue – because it has placed us before such radical questions that eat away at the roots of the possibility to recognize ourselves in the prevailing cultural trends and in the forms of identity professed even in our work and life environments.

True life is not lived in a false way” said Adorno in *Minima Moralia*. And Judith Butler, after having acknowledged that this phrase sounds different depending on the times in history when it was uttered, affirms: “... from the beginning we have to face two problems: the first consists of asking ourselves how we can live our lives well, inasmuch as to be able to

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<sup>12</sup>The three youngest writers of the Manifesto, Chiara Giubilaro, Francesca Genduso and Laura Lo Presti, have achieved the title of doctor from the doctorate degree.

argue that living a good life in a world in which the good life is structurally and systematically inaccessible for many people. The second problem consists of identifying what role this matter may have for us nowadays; in other words, understanding how the historical period in which we live conditions and pervades the role of the issue. (Butler 2013, pp. 13–14)

We have tried to translate these questions into other patterns on the relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean. Three questions arose, which I consider are still inexhaustive and which are as follows:

- Can the geographer's knowledge evade the loop of the border?
- Which hierarchy of humans lies behind the policies and rhetoric on migrations?
- Can the discourse on migrants lie behind the violence of criminalization as well as humanitarian solidarity?

The answer to the first question is no, not in Europe. This is for an obvious reason: the response does not require intellectual action, which is a brave, but rather shared political action. And Europe, as we have seen, is going in a completely different direction. To the second question, the answer is none, given that it is unthinkable if it is not in an anachronism and unacceptable racial and/or nationalistic tone. But even in this instance, we are shocked to see that Europe is going in another direction. Last but not least, the third question is the most dangerous, because it is based on systems of practice, which are not in agreement, but based on the same premises: those that live in the single states of Europe feel at home and are able to therefore open and close the access to others, how and when they want.

Nonetheless, the questions were not rhetorical. Therefore, we have reintroduced the 22nd session of the 32nd Italian Geographic Congress which was dedicated to the theme "The Mediterranean: for a critical geographer of borders". We were confronted by Italian and foreign colleagues within a widely shared theoretical framework and which led us to look at the Mediterranean as a border scape and to analyse the delocalization trends of borders and the dynamics of externalization and internalization under way in managing Mediterranean migrations.<sup>13</sup>

What point is this series of questions up to nowadays? I fear that we have not moved from the starting point, but not due to ignorance or lack of willingness. But rather because the truth cannot be told nowadays in Europe – as the tragic life and death experiences of Ilaria Alpi, Tullio Regeni or Daphne Caruana Galizia showed – too many links engulf the Mediterranean in a network of violence, complications and collusions. This will not stop us, however, from continuing to explore the intimate withdrawals of this world and to try to put the language of truth into practice.

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<sup>13</sup>The themes dealt with will be made partly public in the Acts of the Italian Geographical Congress which is being printed. I would like to highlight, by the way, that one of the most evocative readings about the Mediterranean, during that meeting, was made by Alessandra Bonazzi when she spoke about the Mediterranean as an interference regarding the immanence plan of the capital. Interference is both inside and outside, between exchanges of goods and the shape of national states.

## Annex<sup>14</sup>: Manifesto

### *And so Europe Dehumanized Itself*

#### Introduction

How does one lead a good life in a bad life? We have two problems: the first is how to live one's own life well, such that we might say that we are living a good life within a world in which the good life is structurally or systematically foreclosed for so many. The second problem is what form does this question take for us now?

Judith Butler's incipit for the *Adorno Prize Lecture* poses the key question of the most recent history of the Mediterranean. Are we still able to consider it as a migratory phenomenon involving Europe? And can Europe honestly state it is no longer adopting emergency policies, after several decades?

Between the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Mediterranean has turned into both a transit zone and a border zone, where Schmitt's ideas of a space of *nomos*, order and localization seem to fall on hard times and then finally into the space of a liquidable humanity. Within this event horizon, the dehumanization of Europe can be measured.

This manifesto finds its location in the Mediterranean and in the events impressed over several decades on its surfaces and bottoms. Here, the regimes of mobility control enacted by the so-called Fortress Europe are challenged everyday by the bodies of those women and men who stubbornly try to resist them. Here, the border unveils the differential and violent nature of its very functioning, ceaselessly reproducing silent cuts between desired and undesired mobilities, economic migrants and political refugees, livable lives and ungrievable deaths.

#### Positionings

The *call for actions* of the Palermo conference<sup>15</sup> aims at reflecting on the *status quo* of the Mediterranean issue and adopting a resistant positioning towards the rhetoric proposed by the nation-states and the EU.

Within the European policies on the migrants, within the continuous proliferation of highly nationalized discourses and within the "securing" of the borders and the widespread feeling of extremely racist ideas lie the traces of a process of

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<sup>14</sup>This annex was previously published by Vincenzo Guarrasi (2019): *Frontiere e diaspore mediterranee*, *Dialoghi Mediterranei*, 36. <http://www.istitutoeuroarabo.it/DM/frontiere-e-diaspore%20mediterranee/> Accessed 25 February 2020.

<sup>15</sup>A 2 days' conference was held in Palermo on the 10th and 11th of November 2015, and its title was *And So Europe Dehumanized Itself. Mediterranean Geographies in Action*. The title of the conference and of the manifesto is taken from Paul Gilroy's interview to Toni Morrison (1993). See [https://www.academia.edu/14524762/And\\_So\\_Europe\\_Dehumanized\\_Itself\\_Mediterranean\\_Geographies\\_in\\_Action](https://www.academia.edu/14524762/And_So_Europe_Dehumanized_Itself_Mediterranean_Geographies_in_Action).

dehumanization which is far from reaching its conclusion, feeding on that same modernity which stems from colonialism and still persists in the *colonialidad del poder* (Quijano 1992).

We should not forget that civilization and dehumanization can be considered the aspects of the process of conquest and cultural imposition committed by Europe and the *Western episteme* (Spivak 1999) against the rest of the world. The creation of an imaginary in which the “we” could act as a positive pole, as opposed to the “others”, has led to a new and ruthless hierarchization of the humankind. Through this process of material, economic and cultural subjugation, Europe has gradually dehumanized itself, losing sight of those human values in whose name it has always promoted and still promotes new war scenarios. Understanding how the relationship between “us” and the “others” is structured could serve as an epistemological tool to interpret the complexity of the present and to analyse current issues and ideological positions with a long-term perspective, aiming to grasp the continuities and discontinuities with the past. Therefore, the attempt to read our own times in the light of the colonial past can unveil the postcolonial condition of the Mediterranean space.

In the European policies, the construction of the Mediterranean as a border implies the sliding of the responsibilities of territorial control, because it mixes up the authority of the nation-states, the European directives and the financialization of risk management. There are persons getting caught on these tangles of control, and it is these persons that must be listened to; it is these geographies that must be written.

The events happening in the Mediterranean today contain a decisive call to our responsibility that is our capability to build up political and cultural responses aimed at radically questioning the unacceptable conditions the European governments have arranged at different scales – local, regional, national and transnational.

Moving from these events and their violent geometries of power, we intend to give rise to a collective discourse, which must be both antiestablishment and productive at the same time and must keep critical force and creative impulse together.

## Languages

In order to let emerge the complex architecture where migratory regimes take shape, it is necessary to make the different languages which give meaning to them resonate and collide, both in theory and in practice. It is a de-assembly and reassembly of words, images and voices to transcode and to decipher, to diagnose and to reconfigure in the light of a twofold critical gesture: on the one hand, we feel compelled to provide a not unitary and reifying approach to migration processes which effectively anesthetize and pathologize the polyphonic movement of bodies; on the other hand, we wish to activate, in the cracks and infiltrations of such regimes, alternative political spaces.

Our belief is that the Mediterranean represents the terrain of a fundamental battle on the modalities and forms which govern the representation of migrations in Europe today. This battle deals with different fields and scales, involving



heterogeneous and irreducible subjects and languages. If the struggle over representation is so widespread and composite that it makes every intervention inside of it difficult and elusive, then we need to open our discourse to different languages, exceeding the verbal dimension and reclaiming other gazes and grasps on the world.

In front of the media weight exerted by the “migration crisis” today – an excess which results in the proliferation of discourses, images, maps of migratory fluxes and routes, shipwrecks, fights, “invasions” as well as in the obsession of statistics and the numerification of bodies – we might get stunned by a vertigo of saturation and a resulting sense of distance.

One question, then, becomes urgent and leads us to react: How can one capture that moment in which certain phenomena and stories demand to be looked at and listened to in a different way? That moment when a change of perspective – another way of seeing, feeling and acting – is required?

To avoid falling into the trap of a unique discourse, we believe a polyphonic and polymorphic methodology must be implemented: audios, videos, images, maps and texts are the tools that have to rebound between each other, in order to reclaim the ethical and moral question that Judith Butler points out. Creating an archival network of the memories of these times is a responsibility that we feel we must not evade.

- *Laws, narratives and discourses.* Writing has the power to create and shape common feelings and public discourses, to address political choices and totally rewrite the identities of the migrants, turning them into subaltern subjects. This ability can be brought back to an essential critical horizon through the textual production of a complex and varied archive, and reading this archive can unveil the discursive background in which migration policies operate. This archive is composed of all those types of text – legal rulings, international agreements, political press or literary works, essays, narratives and public discourses – that depict the crucial rebound of these writings and words. That is the uniqueness of the voices, the acoustic of politics and also the cold tone of power.
- *Visual and beyond.* The visual field probably represents the most pervasive language usually employed to envision migrations on the public scene. Images of suspended boats on the sea surface and wreckages run ashore, crowds of bodies onto the docks and corpses lying on the beaches attract media attention, mobilizing a soundless battle where our gaze becomes both a battlefield and the real issue at stake. The visual representation of migrations with its deeply racialized implications ceaselessly reproduces objects and subjects of vision, which, today more than ever, we need to critically interrogate. If the spectacle of suffering runs the risk of sliding into a mute and unproductive empathy, then only by questioning the viewers’ location and the geometries of power underlying it can the visual become a space for political responsibility and cultural critique.
- *Cartographies.* Oscillating between Frontex’s operational cartographies and the contemporary map activism, we suggest that the map, especially in its digital transposition, has become the historical recording machine of the contemporary

geopolitical space. Thus, it configures, in all its evidence, the spatial arrangements in which the current necropolitical power (Mbembe 2003) consumes and justifies itself. Therefore, it becomes essential to train and multiply the critical looks to deconstruct the complex system of representations and processes within which the migratory visualities take shape in the cartographic arrangement. Our gaze should be able to understand how these visualities compete with the Mediterranean necropolitical space. And since these cartographic visualizations constitute a peculiar type of iconography, we must not cease questioning how they can be redirected towards new horizons and how they can and should be reconsidered and reconceived in order to accommodate, rather than to expel, the human.

### For a Situated Knowledge

Listening is a radical practice for us, at the root of other forms of thought so far discussed. If the meeting/clash with the other has proved to be the story of a silencing, a long process of foreclosure whose victims today are likely to be – or rather are – the migrants, activating, a listening dimension might mean creating a resonance space where the voices complement each other and subjectivities result from an exchange and not from a despoliation.

These are the coordinates within which we move. Each of us is called to abide by them or to change them, to divert the path and to disorient them. None of us has to claim all these languages together. It is around these theoretical coordinates and in their insuppressibly political sense that we intend to give rise to a politics of coalition (Butler 2015), within which the different positions can in turn be assembled into extroverted and dissonant forms.

In the dialogue between our alternative but shared positions, it is mandatory to trace new figurations that are resistant to the stasis of representation, by welcoming “new” subjects who cannot be tamed, measured and controlled. In short, we need to rethink the human where the European humanist promise has miserably failed.

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