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The Traces of Journeys and Migrants' Perspectives: The Knots of Memory and the Unravelled Plans

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Introduction

Choosing to migrate always involves the risk of facing a change that is not well-defined, with uncertain margins. Migrating to improve one's living conditions may be *the only chance* (Bauman 2007) open to a person for themselves and their families, especially if they are in situations of conflict, civil war or circumstances of extreme poverty which mean that *they are prepared to consider the possibility of dying in order to live*.

The journeys of death made to reach Lampedusa tell us about violated space, itineraries of trampled life (Deluigi 2012), existential projects fulfilled in young men, women and children and of hopes placed in the sea, often without them even having reached the desired and long-awaited land.

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The places of migration become life stories that cross unforeseen routes and leave traces made by screams, silence and tears, glances seeking peace, embraces that overcome the cruel night that witnesses the trafficking of human beings received in the suburbs of the reception centres.

Lampedusa, the Gate of Europe (Morrone 2009) receives and collects the lives and deaths of thousands of people who cross the Mediterranean Sea, pushed by the desire to save themselves. A small strip of land, a beautiful island, which can mean salvation, the end and the beginning of a journey, the landing place to strive for, the place to pass through in order to be reunited with other relatives, the gateway to a new chance. An island inhabited by a proud people, often forgotten by “the North” but one that continues to question itself, to act, to ask for help, attention and intervention for *humanity* that cannot be left alone and isolated.

The dramas of migration and the continual arrivals of migrants are described in *sea stories that become stories of land*, often lost in the tangles of an underground immigration that fails to free men and women, and oppresses those seeking peace and freedom.

Based on a series of my photographs shot on the island of Lampedusa in July 2013, I want to deepen the approach of intercultural education, dialogue and acceptance (Pinto Minerva 2002; Portera 2013; Catarci and Macinai 2015), which leads us from the Gate of Europe to the cemetery of boats. The pedagogical reflection is ready to perceive and focus on the meanings reflected in the migrants, themselves witnesses of the journey of *the human and inhuman*.

In particular, I will focus on the *many boundaries, borders, frontiers, thresholds that may be encountered in the journey*; the journey or rather journeys of others, of men and women like us, whose voice we can listen to and whom we can commemorate; populations that are breaking up and that, inevitably, lead us *to rediscover the sense of the hopes, illusions, fears, imaginaries of migrants*.

The main goal is *not to remain silent* in the face of the tragedies that continue to unfold in the sea and to *share reflection* to promote acceptance, confidence, reciprocity, solidarity and proximity on a small-scale, compared with the large-scale complex dynamics of power and conflict, which we are undoubtedly required to manage.

The Gate of Europe

The Lampedusa Gate¹ has a side that is visible to those who look at the sea and see its blue colour all around it, and a side that frames the waves for those observing the horizon from land. It is an open door, isolated in its context, with no fence, no boundaries, as if it had been placed there to symbolize the passage of those arriving and those leaving.

It is a symbolic gate, made of hands, number, feet, faces, fish and words that are waiting under the sun in silence. They are waiting for the hands, numbers, feet, faces, fish and words that land on the shore and flee. It is often a long wait that is consumed while the waves crash against the cliffs and the boatloads of people ply the Mediterranean Sea in search of land.

It is the door to the south, but also that of the north; it is a place for passing through and a space that marks a shift, taking a border that is apparently open and making it invisible. It is a passageway with which to immerse yourself in a solid State or disperse yourself in a liquid State, between land and sea. It is a symbol that is consumed, sunburned, beaten by the wind, made porous by the rains and corroded by salt: just like our existence, buffeted by life's elements.

The Gate of Europe was built in the southernmost point of the island of Lampedusa, in the southern vanguard of Europe, from which it silently points towards Africa. It looks towards Libya, a land from which the migrants leave and it is a monument to the memory of those who died in the sea. Mimmo Paladino, the artist who created it, aimed to make an installation that would explain the concept of *forced exodus* in a language that could be understood by everyone. "That is why I wanted the gate to be located as far away as possible from the town and as close as possible to the water and therefore to Africa" (Bolzoni 2008), also to remind future generations of the tragedies that have taken place in the sea and the thousands of people who have lost their lives in the hope of achieving better conditions.

The Lampedusa Gate is also a place of openness and meditation; its ceramics absorb and reflect light and it becomes both a sort of lighthouse pointing to the places of desperate migration and a passage to be crossed looking for new dreams. It is also the beginning of our thoughts that will lead us to search the migrants' *in-visible traces*, the steps and transits of their suffering and the possibility they dream of: reaching a strip of land

which, joining the dots in the infinite blue, becomes a means of approach and salvation. Unfortunately, not always and not for everyone.

The Cemetery of Boats: No More Engine

A powerless engine, this is the “trust-machine” for many people who want to cross the sea, and it is a symbolic object that costs money and also human life. An engine that is turned off, which held the power of hope amid so much despair. An engine of dreams, like the one that powers a human’s desire and need to set sail from their own land to reach new prospects.² What else moves people if not the pursuit of happiness, of better conditions of life, the opportunity to live and not just survive? (Fig. 2.1)

“All these people are leaving the country because they feel forced to do so. They have no alternative: if they stay, there is a good chance that they will be killed or forced to live in conditions of absolute poverty and if



Fig. 2.1 R. Deluigi, *The cemetery of boats: sunny silences*

they decide to leave, they know that they will run great risk and have a good chance of losing their lives. They seek asylum and protection from wars, persecution, dictatorship, atrocious prison sentences and unmentionable torture” (Reitano et al. 2014, 6–7). For the extensive criminal and smuggling organization this “human engine” has been a gold mine, assembled on unsafe wooden boards which take the form of boats, but which are really only unseaworthy vessels.

We can talk about a new form of mafia that “provides services” to people who decide to land in Europe by clandestine:

It is a perfect criminal system, and this one too is subject to a Cupola, composed of many different individuals and groups, organized on a transnational level with operating bases in the southern Mediterranean and logistic antennas in all Italian and European cities. [...] It is an inestimable way of circulating money: the migrations handled by the five criminal networks that control flows from Libya alone rack up an estimated annual turnover of from 260 to 300 million dollars. (Messina 2015, 75)

But the presence of alarming scenarios is not only a phenomenon applicable to money:

Since the year 2000, almost 40,000 people have perished on migration routes worldwide. Between January and September 2014, in the Mediterranean alone, more than 120,000 individuals were rescued, with an estimated 3072 having drowned (out of a total of 4077 reported deaths worldwide on migrant vessels), making it the deadliest sea in the world. Moreover, internal displacement and movements within a country's territorial borders are increasing at an even higher rate. (Malakooti and Davin 2015, 11)

For many people, migration is the only opportunity they have to change, to try out new hypotheses, to leave behind a suspended life in agonizing conditions and attempt to reborn elsewhere. The engine in the picture has done many nautical miles and now, in this abandoned condition, it reminds us that also *the motivation and new projects of the migrants can often “switch off”*, submerged under the surface of the sea or trapped within hostile and regimented borders. The freedom of men and women was violated and replaced by the absolute need to leave on a dangerous journey; *there were no more dreams but only needs* that clash with the bad conditions of life.

Where are they now? There are thousands of people that get to Lampedusa by boats. How many of them are still alive? How many have become invisible, and how many have reached their desired destination and embarked upon new life projects?

The horrors of the migrant's journey should not obscure the possibility of building a future that is an intrinsic part of migration, and all the hopes that have been shattered along the way. We cannot turn off the "*reflective engine*" that powers our existence in this world among involving presences, absences, plots and connections that remind us that we are all part of a human beings which cannot be defeated and crushed by unfair living conditions.

The Cemetery of Boats: Cutting Gashes

When human dignity drifted away, it was torn apart and during the navigation, it pierced the soft tissues of the soul, destroying the travellers' identities in a few days and nights. Migrants leave and abandon a *known space*, made by familiar elements and places, settling for a *denied living space* (simply consider the conditions on the boats) to imagine a *space they have hoped for*, where they can do new future plans. Those who receive migrants can perceive their *space* as a *distant and unknown element*, imagine the idea that led him/her to the new land and often feel a sort of *invasion of their own space*, firmly tied to the roots and traditions built over time by and for the local community (Fig. 2.2).

The time tied to the migrant's origin land becomes a *past time* of memory and remembrance; during the sea crossing the hours are dilated and are linked to the hope that one will survive, to launch her/himself into a future time full of possibilities. The welcoming country may perceive *the past* of the migrant as something *unknown*, with her/his strong bonds, it captures the *time of risk* to which people are subjected, but often looks forward to a "*temporary stay*" in the new land.

In the reception processes, the third factor to consider is relationship in which the perceptions of the migrants and their hosts can be very different. The emigrant has in the past *relations of origin*, with her/his family and friends, while in the present the subject approaches and becomes one



Fig. 2.2 R. Deluigi, *The cemetery of boats: sharp perspectives*

with strangers identity who need *relations of survival and dependence*, then she/he invests in the future in uncertain *relationships*. Those receiving the migrants may perceive their *relations* as being *far* from their homeland, and now transformed into something *functional* to achieve the goal of their journey, hoping for a *relationship of tolerance* for the future (Deluigi 2012, 36–37).

Foreigners in unknown lands, far away from their own locations. Lives exploited mercilessly by the Charons of the sea, wearing nothing on their backs and with coldness in their hearts. A migrant voice can make us understand better the drama of physical, psychological and inhuman crossing:

After three days the water supplies run out. Thirst and hunger take their place among the passengers as guests without a ticket. And heat joins them too, because the sun beats down relentlessly, and there are no trees

to protect you, not even the meagre oasis that you might have found in the desert. [...] We begin to lick each other. At least you are sending your companion's sweat down to your stomach. Sweat is salty, your skin is drenched in salt, but it is better than nothing. (Ba 2013, 128)

Humanity falls apart when faced with the death of the men and women in constant pursuit of well-being for themselves and their families. The fierce crash in deep waters accompanies the silence of screams that vanish into the air. Those who survive bear a heavy memory and existential load. This force, this weight, this hope and this poverty of chance should be welcomed to give people back their right to be human. If this does not happen, human plans are shattered, generating limitless poverty, raising barriers and boundaries between diversity. In this way, we flee from the invasion and contact with others and we leave life to be consumed, preferably in silence and far away from our unstable certainties.

The Cemetery of Boats: Balances in the Silence

Everything settles and stops in the sea-cemetery. But on the land there are objects that tell us the stories of lives and memories. Everything is laid out under the sun to dry. It is all left to wear away under the eyes of those still looking for a meaning (Fig. 2.3).

Nature takes possession of things, but when it takes hold of human lives, put at risk by the men who control the political and economic powers, we cannot remain silent. A silence that surrounds the cemetery of boats, interrupted only by the chirping of the cicadas, a reminder of that summer and other travel plans.

What geo-political routes can we take? And what existential directions can we plan? Migrants leave from Eritrea, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali and so on; the main routes depart from western, central and eastern Africa and converge in Libya in the form of journeys on foot, by bus and in overloaded trucks, heading for the north, the coast, the last part of the trip by boat. But in this exodus of men, women and children fleeing from



Fig. 2.3 R. Deluigi, *The cemetery of boats: the yield*

dramatic situations, many lose their lives crossing Africa to reach Europe as a distant mirage.

Sourou defines this exodus as the “*journey of the new slaves*” (Sourou 2011, 30) and the risk that migrants fall into the network of human trafficking becoming the “*last abject*” is very high. “Attention will be paid to the ‘insecurities’ and ‘vulnerabilities’ (of social, economic or political nature) of the victims of these practices, and their inability or reduced ability to protect or defend themselves against the associated risk and uncertainties, and to cope with their negative consequences” (Lazaridis 2015, 82).

Often people embark on a journey because they have “*no bearable choice*” in their local dimension (Bauman 2007).

The dust rises from the ground, gasping for rain and lands on the soles and feet and we cannot go away without changing anything; the place becomes memorial but needs witnesses to tell and experience stories

about their wandering and the plans they have made. The boat cemetery is the final destination of the unseaworthy vessels but cannot be the site of the end of many lives that have crossed the sea and are now in Europe. There are *stories that continue to exist and to resist* in front of the tough challenges that life presents them; in the diaspora of memory there are stories of success and defeat and there are many lives left hanging in a receiving system which no longer knows what path to take because it is no longer temporary.

The Cemetery of Boats: Mismatched Shoes

Shoes between the boats. What are the traces left by the migrants? Which destinies are interrupted? An everyday object connects us to the sense of the journey, of walking, undertaking and exploring new paths. Shoes that are mismatched, left behind, forgotten, lost (Fig. 2.4).



Fig. 2.4 R. Deluigi, *The cemetery of boats: broken trails*

This picture represents lives that are mismatched, left behind, forgotten, lost.

Calvino said: “Walking requires that at every step the world changes in some aspect and also that something will change in us” (Calvino 2002). The steps of irregular migration are often rushed, uneven, uncertain and generate very heavy changes and challenges.

Families divided and ties broken by a bet on salvation that is not always honoured. The missing lives cannot send any news to family members left behind, waiting to dissolve a doubt that alternates between life and death, between *the last chance and the final surrender*.

What prospects are there for people who arrive in Italy illegally? Due to the conflicts and civil wars, many of them are refugees and asylum seekers and their journey often runs aground in an collapsed emergency reception unable to develop new prospects.

Which method of receiving the migrants can we implement? In addition, how can we build a climate of inclusive community not based on the concept of “the invader and intruder”?

Italy is a country that has shifted its migration axis: *from the cardboard suitcases of emigrants to the unseaworthy vessels of immigrants*. Yet in the current European free circulation flows and those that are still blocked, we cannot seem to leave significant traces of inclusion, except in some good local practices. In this sense, Segre makes an observation on the migrants' stories that can follow three trajectories:

1. After twenty years of fear and urgency, we must clearly admit that we are not faced with an emergency, but we are in the heart of history and that this section of history will continue for decades. [...] 2. Europe [...] is investing more and more money with a view to managing the reception service. It does so silently because it wishes it didn't have to do so and because it is afraid that if this becomes common knowledge there would be an increase in the populist movements that continue to blow on the fake password 'we must stop them' [...] 3. [...] If the phenomenon is unstoppable and if funding increases, let's try to use it well and transform the challenge of receiving migrants into a challenge of civilization and growth [...]. (Segre 2015)

For the migrant, Lampedusa is hope, trust, the possibility of fulfilment, but also the point from which she/he can start rebuilding her/his own identity, history, network of relationships. It is important to assume, develop and disseminate an intercultural approach and this is possible if “we” promote the links between the *freedom, autonomy and responsibility* of the individual and the community, so that the coexistence of multiple subjects generates dynamics of *active citizenship* based on *shared responsibility, solidarity and participation* (Deluigi and Wright 2013).

The Cemetery of Boats: The Emptiness Inside

So, when the boats are stored and stacked one on top of the other, the center of the cemetery remains empty. Emptiness also inhabits every person, as a space in which it is easy to forget humanity and the life stories, memories, ideas and projects which have drowned into oblivion or vanished into the invisible life of the illegal immigrant. This is the space of remembrance loaded with debris, which feels the weight of the traces of the drama of the migration, until the wind changes direction, erasing the hard impact of images that represent the life stories and tales never told by the protagonists (Fig. 2.5).

Weaknesses not swept away by the waves, remain as indelible marks of men, women and children looking for another chance. Their memories recall bonds and rights left behind as well as dreams drowned and scattered projects. The memories of Primo Levi help us to understand how the empty space among the boats represents the abolition of human’s dignity. The suffering experience in other situations returns like the sea waves.

For the first time we realized that our language lacks words to express the demolition of a man. In a moment with almost prophetic intuition, the reality was revealed to us: we had reached the bottom. It is no possible to sink lower than this; no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen, and if they listen, they will not understand. They have even taken away our name; and if we want to keep it, we will have to find in ourselves the strength to do so, to manage somehow so that behind the name something of us, as we were still remains. (Levi 1958, 23)



Fig. 2.5 R. Deluigi, *The cemetery of boats: empty spaces*

The risk of losing everything, including life, is effective for migrants. Nothing remains under the sun, if not the vacuum, a reminder that new projects can have a hope, or that the time of memories becomes the only possible.

A heap of ruins are still drying under a chilling hot sun, waiting for new damp, unseaworthy vessels to bring the sea breeze that crossed the Mediterranean, *full of hope and without mercy*.

These boats have ferried loads of lives that have now been lost and they now remain motionless, letting time pass and creating voids with no memory and no meaning, so that daily routine takes over between distance and indifference. *The passage of time dims the meanings of experiences and blurs suffering*. We continue to live without having crossed the transit of the drama and expectation, the nightmare of chance and salvation. *And the non-sense of broken lives becomes ever wider, while the piles of (human) waste is still growing*.

The Cemetery of Boats: The Knots of Humankind

In these pictures the presence of a *human element could awaken in us the need to understand* and not to remain silent in the face of the migrations of death (Figs. 2.6 and 2.7).

We have a lot of names without bodies and a lot of bodies without names.



Fig. 2.6 R. Deluigi, *The cemetery of boats: human joints I*



Fig. 2.7 R. Deluigi, *The cemetery of boats: human joints II*

Although the bodies that contained them have disappeared, those names remain in the air because they were pronounced, and continue to live even far away from their human border. We do not hear them because we live submerged in the chaos of millions of venomous words. But those syllables live because they are recorded in the cosmos. [...] Names full of meaning, even if their meaning is difficult to grasp in its entirety. (Yimer 2015)

The knots of existence awake the minds and hearts of the wandering people and refuse to surrender before the cyclical end that hundreds of landings in Europe (and beyond) offer us.

They are knots of strength and weakness which leave the echo of lived and feared experiences and of chosen and forced life solutions. They are the knots of men and women who stop time from breathing and ask for a rest. In the cemetery of boats there are objects that tell us about people who fear desperate destinies, but cling to the hope of future projects, to *the scent that life still emanates when one has been under siege for too long.*

Leaving the shores of the self and remaining human: this is the real challenge for those who cross the stormy sea (the physical and the interior one).

The Coasts of Lampedusa between Memories and Plans

Lampedusa. Land of wonder and beauty, of calm weather and storms. Crystal clear blue sea, calm and welcoming, dark and deep. In the buzzing, shimmering air of a morning like so many others, I remember the lives and deaths by land and sea that take your breath away, leaving their mark on the shores of an island that asks for help, cries out for peace and entrusts migrant thoughts to the wind.

Migration flows continue and we cannot just rely on memory; we need to design an inclusive humanism guided by communitarian reasoning where identities and differences can give new forms to the spaces, the times and the relations in fairer contexts. We must renegotiate economic and political systems that have been made brittle by the power of the few and by the suffering of many, and initiate new ways of living together, exchanging ideas and enriching one another.

We need time to reflect and create life experiences in order to understand the choices and the reasons for migrating. We need to meet men and women who have decided to take other routes, who have invested everything in a faint hope that smells of life.

These choices are intertwined with the dreams and needs of those who embark on the journey and those who remain at home, scanning horizons too far away to be seen, and hoping that the revolutionary movement of migration can generate new opportunities for happiness.

We cannot escape the challenge of *being part of a migrant world*, made of roots that grow deep but also populated by people with feet with which we can move our identities to meet “the other”, *besides me, besides us.*

Let us take the risk of being wayfarers and travellers in an era that is constantly changing, of becoming an active part of it, expressing ideas designed to provoke thoughts and dialogue, launching out into common projects that can overcome *distant tolerance and nearby conflicts*.

Notes

1. The Gate has been inaugurated in 2008. The poetess Alda Merini wrote a poem for the occasion “Once I dreamed/ Once I dreamed/ that I was a giant turtle/with an ivory skeleton/dragging babies and children and seaweed/and waste and flowers/and they were all clinging on to me, to my hard rind./I was a turtle, staggering under the weight of love very slow to understand and quick to bless./So, my children, once they threw you into the water and you clung to my shell and I rescued you because this sea turtle is the land that saves you from death by water” (author’s translation, original in Italian).
2. La Manna G., responsible for the Astalli Center for Refugees (Italy) affirms: “We hear stories of violence and abuse on women and children, a true Calvary. Stories of homosexuals or albinos who choose to flee because in this or that country they are sentenced to death or persecuted; children enslaved for years; individuals who spend ten or twenty years in excruciating conditions, waiting for the opportunity to get to Italy”.

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