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Toward a New Poetics and Politics of Migration in Contemporary Italy.
The Archive of Migrant Memories as Digital ARTivism

Abstract: This essay discusses the on-line multimedia project *Archivio delle memorie migranti* (AMM) as a virtual storytelling space in which migrants in contemporary Italy exercise agency and resistance despite their disenfranchisement as political subjects. Focusing on the section "Self-Representations," I analyze some of the stories and narratives produced by migrants and refugees as powerful examples of "digital ARTivism" in the sense in which this practice has been enacted by contemporary Chicanx and Latinx cultural producers. Through a digital storytelling mode, AMM aims at facilitating the development of transnational migrants' activist consciousness. Such methodology, I argue, aligns AMM and the Italian border archive with the decolonizing epistemological reorientation that has begun to undo the Western project of coloniality/modernity. As migrant and refugee stories migrate from the entangled structures of the web into the intimacy of our homes, we are are called to reflect on the complexity of national identity and belonging. AMM's stories and self-narrations enable a re-visioning of contemporary Italy as a possibility for transnational citizenship and peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: *digital ARTivism*, *migrant memories*, *delinking*, *decolonizing*, *transnational citizenship*

> A world in which many worlds could co-exist can only be made by the shared work and common goals of those who inhabit, dwell in one of the many worlds co-existing in one world and where differences are not cast in terms of values of plus and minus degree of humanity.
>
> Walter Mignolo, "Delinking"[1]

1. Introduction

In the era of transmediality, digital storytelling has become a powerful tool to empower migrants' voices and visibility and build transnational, cross-cultural alliances that aim to dismantle the binary thinking inherited by the colonial framework of modernity and enact the possibility of alter/native knowledges and discourses. At a time when anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobia throughout Italy galvanize racist feelings with slogans such as *prima gli italiani* (Italians first) trumpeted by right wing political parties *Lega* (League) and *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy), alliances between citizens and migrants are key to affirm acts of resistance from below that might project us toward new practices of knowledge and territorial (re)mappings. The Archive of Migrant Memories (AMM) is a perfect example of what in this essay I call "digital ARTivism"[2] combining, as it does, creative forms of self-expression and memory-telling with a skillful use of multimedia language. As a community-building project, AMM lays the

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[1] Walter Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-coloniality", *Cultural Studies*, 21.2 (2007), 449-514, 499.

[2] My reformulation of digital ARTivism in this essay places the discourse surrounding the Italy/Lybian border in direct conversation with the US/Mexican one. In its early manifestations within the contemporary Chicanx artistic community, the neologism ARTivism refers to artistic works created with a strong political commitment to social justice. The term "digital artivism" has been used by Chicanx scholars to describe "a convergence between 'activism' and digital 'artistic' production." See Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre, "Chicana/oActivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color," in Anna Everett, ed. *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), 81.

foundations for a new border poetics and politics of migration in contemporary Italy by calling into questions practices of citizenship and belonging. As described in its website:

> The *Archive* of *Migrant Memories* [Archivio delle memorie migranti] is both a real and virtual space for stories, self narratives, and dialogues between people wishing to share their experience of migration with others interested in learning about what they went through and their feelings and reflections. AMM is a "community of practice" composed of people pursuing common goals from a variety of perspectives. Their activities range from the collection of testimonies to the production of personal narratives and life histories, from participatory audio and video production to the development of teaching materials aimed at bringing the migrants' real life experience into schools and making them available to anyone interested.[3]

Officially released in December 2011, AMM originated from the encounter between Italian scholars of colonial and postcolonial Africa, specializing in the area of the Horn of Africa, with a group of refugees and asylum seekers attending the Rome-based Italian language school *Asinitas*, and the various professional workers at the school itself.[4] Professor Alessandro Triulzi, AMM's director and former history professor at the Universitá Orientale in Naples, describes the motivations behind the project. He writes: "For 40 years I tried to handle the intricacies of the oral/written mix surrounding Ethiopia's western borderlands, till I came to realize that thousands of migrants arriving in my country were coming from my own areas of research in the Horn".[5] In reaction to the Berlusconi's government response and treatment of transnational migrants crossing the Mediterranean, and to counteract the media negative portrayals of their arrival, Triulzi joined a friend in Rome, who had started the *Asinitas* language school for recently-arrived Africans, in the hope to understand and explain both the reasons that forced them to leave their country and the predicament they would face upon arrival.[6] One of the key principles of *Asinitas*, whose name was inspired by "Giordano Bruno's praise of donkey's endurance and determination",[7] is to use students' own narratives, instead of textbooks, as the primary source of language learning. At the end of the year, the material gathered would become the required "reading" for the courses and a visible testimony to the kind of participatory pedagogy the school intends to promote. As Triulzi explains, "learning Italian was conceived as a necessary form of 'survival' for migrants who wanted to claim the memory and dignity of their migratory journey".[8] *Asinitas*' pedagogical model would be used by AMM once the migrants' collective memories "migrated" to the on-line multi-media Archive creating a space of listening that in Judith Butler's terms might be conceived of as "a highly transposable conception of political space".[9] It is, as a matter of fact, the migrants' presence, through their embodied voices/stories/narratives that makes AMM the site where migrants can exercise agency and action, resistance and rising up, despite their disenfranchisement as political subjects. As Butler states, "to be outside established and legitimate political structure is still to

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be saturated in power relations, and this saturation is the point of departure for a theory of the political that includes dominant and subjected forms, modes of inclusion and legitimation as well as modes of delegitimation and effacement".[10] Similarly, Italian-Australian scholar Joseph Pugliese has used the concept of "shadow archive," which he re-elaborates from visual culture theorist Alan Sekula, to discuss the subjugated knowlegdes and Arab past of Southern Italy and of his native Calabria in particular.[11] Reading bodies as living archives, Pugliese suggests, compels us to envision alternative epistemologies, epistemologies predicated "on relationality" that defy what he terms the "the techno-rationality" of official archives.[12] In such alternative epistemological spaces, even the most disenfranchised political subjects leave a trace.[13] The Archive of Migrant Memories (AMM) is the digital space that enables traces of resistance to manifest themselves in important ways, its goals and visions in line with similar decolonizing scholarly projects currently at work in contemporary Italy.

2. The Archive Between the Past and the Future

A work in progress, AMM is divided into four main sections (The Archive, Films, Schools, Projects) by juxtaposing images, sounds, and texts that allow viewers to experience the information on multiple levels. The website home page displays a powerful picture of Ethiopian-born filmmaker Dagmawi Yimer standing with his camera in front of the burned down building of the refugee detention center in Lampedusa. Two other persons accompany him. Although we cannot clearly see their faces, we conclude that they are part of Yimer's film crew, as one of them is holding a notebook in his hands and the other one appears to be taking a picture or video with his cell phone. Having arrived in Lampedusa on a boat from Tripoli in the summer of 2006, Yimer spent some time on the island's detention center. He would later attend the *Asinitas* language school in Rome and take classes in participatory videos. As a refugee, in 2010, Yimer would return to Lampedusa to meet the island's inhabitants and shoot *Soltanto il mare* (*Nothing but the Sea*), which he co-directed with Giulio Cederna and Fabrizio Barraco.[14] The film, produced by AMM, is important in that it presents the migrant's reverse gaze—from "speechless emissary," to use Liisa Malkki's characterization of refugees,[15] to active observer and subject of their own narrative. AMM's website home page, along with the short narrative describing the multi-media project's mission, which I have quoted above, effectively capture the new poetics of migration and resistance as they are currently articulated in contemporary Italy.

The "Archive" section of the website is divided into "Self-Representations," "Interviews," and "Research."[16] As a "sharing" cultural practice, the Archive promotes the idea of a "living" memory along with the notion of memory preservation usually enacted in museum practices. In Triulzi's terms, "AMM does not intend to have a dusty surface neither a character of impenetrability; on the contrary: we are convinced that it must reflect the open, gratuitous, and transparent character of the so-called *copyleft* applied to the most recent digital archives".[17] At the same time, AMM remains sensitive to the

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Joseph Pugliese, "Embodied Archives", *JASAL*, Special Issue: *Archive Madness*, 11.1 (2011), www.*openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/9789/9678*, accessed 10 November 2020.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Dagmawi Yimer, Giulio Cederna and Fabrizio Barraco, *Soltanto il mare* (*Nothing but the Sea*) 2011. Produced by Archivio Memorie Migranti, www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/film/produzioni-amm/soltanto-il-mare/, accessed 10 November 2020.

[15] Liisa Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology*, 11.3 (1996), 377-404, 377.

[16] There is also a Focus section with special attention to Eritrea and Lampedusa (not available in the English version of the website). As not all the content of AMM has been translated into English, my analysis of some of the narratives in the Self-Representations section is based on the website's Italian page, translated by the present author.

[17] Alessandro Triulzi, "Per un archivio delle memorie migranti", *ZAPRUDER*, 28 (May-August 2012), 124, trans. by the present author.

importance of the material it has been collecting and to the necessity to safeguard and protect the privacy of some of its members. Explaining the motivations for calling the multi-media project an "archive," a term that reminds us of closed, dusty buildings, Triulzi states that the project is, in fact, indebted to some of the international debates on postcolonial reconfiguration of the Archive, especially in the South African context.[18] In "Archive Fever," a key essay included in the influential volume *Refiguring the Archive*, Derrida argues that remembering can never be separated from forgetting and that "this future-oriented structure of the archive is precisely what confronts us with a responsibility, an ethical and and political responsibility."[19] Such comments deeply resonate with Italy's past, its present, and its future upon considering the collective amnesia about the country's colonial past and the myth constructed around the image of *italiani brava gente* (Italians, decent people). The Archive, Triulzi explains, "intends to leave a trace"[20] in the consciousness of the Italian society not only of the migratory phenomenon that in the past few decades has brought thousands of individuals from the African continent to our shores, but also of those echoes of colonial superiority and racism that are now resurfacing in our contemporary policies, most notably in the denial to extend the civil and political rights of citizenry to children born of immigrant parents.[21] Reading the testimonies gathered in the Archive section of AMM inevitably lead viewers/readers to self-reflection and inspiration for activism. As witnesses to the migratory-related policies that bind Italy's colonial past to its postcolonial present, it is our "ethical and political responsibility" to determine what kind of society we are going to build in the future.

3. Self Narrations, Multi-media Diaries, and Narrative Circles: Migrant Voices Speak

What exactly do migrant voices *tell us*, to those of us who care to listen?

In this section, I analyze some of the testimonies collected in AMM's "Self-Representations" section: the *Cerchio narrativo rifugiati somali* (Somali Refugee Narrative Circle), *Parole per il cerchio* (Words for the Circle), and the first episode of the multi-media diary DiMMi, focusing on Africa. Both in oral and written forms, these testimonies offer power examples of migrants' agency and restore dignity to their lives. The *telling* enables migrants to rearticulate their original journeys and reborder the migratory experience in an act of forceful contestation of state-demarcated borders and policies of inclusion/exclusion.[22] Stories, migrants' stories, but also reflections, narratives, and shared experiences are AMM's foundational principle. They create that "listening space" that in Triulzi's view becomes "memory action," or "a space in which narrated and shared memories become circular, reciprocal, narratable."[23] Even though the stories presented in the AMM's Archive do not contatin details related to the process of the self-narrations as it was first developed at the *Asinitas* school,[24] by reading the

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[18] Alessandro Triulzi, "Per un archivio delle memorie migranti", in Marco Carsetti e Alessandro Triulzi, eds., *Come un uomo sulla terra* (Roma: Infinito edizioni, 2009), 18-19.

[19] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever", in Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 46.

[20]Triulzi, "Per un archivio," in Carsetti e Triulzi, eds., *Come un uomo sulla terra*, 18, trans. by the present author.

[21] Ibid. For a visual critical intervention on the citizenship debate in Italy, see the documentary *18: Ius soli: il diritto di essere italiani* (2012) by Afro-Italian filmmaker Fred Kuwornu.

[22] Other acts of self-representations in the Archive section include stories by Yimer and Gabriel Tseggai; backstage dialogues from the film C.A.R. A. Italia, directed by Yimer and produced by AMM; a letter written by the brother of one of the victims of the October 3, 2013 Lampedusa tragedy; a diary written by Hassan Ahmed, a Somali who returns to his native country after 27 years; and the story of Hawani Debbea, an Oromo woman who escaped from Ethiopia after the Derg seized power in 1974. Yimer's "From Addis Ababa to Lampedusa: Story of a Journey" details his voyage from Ethiopia to Italy in spring-summer 2006.

[23] Triulzi, "Empowering," 62.

[24] See Gianluca Gatta, "Il caffè e la scuola: la pratica dell'insegnamento dell'italiano di Asinitas", chapter 5 in *Luoghi migranti fra clandestinità e spazi pubblici* (Cosenza: Pellegrini, 2012, Kindle Edition). Additional self-reflections on the experience of the

excerpts available in the Italian version of the website, readers can feel the empowering aspect of the storytelling experience and are humbled by the dignity of the telling.

In *Cerchio narrativo rifugiati somali* (Cn/1-9), we find the first format of collective self-narration conducted at the *Asinitas* school between January and June 2008. Among the participants were a group of Somali asylum seekers recently arrived in Italy, a cultural mediator, who occasionally served as interpreter, and some of the AMM members, including Professor Triulzi, Marco Carsetti, Dagmawi Yimer, and Sintayehu Eshete. Two Italian female writers of Somali origins, Igiaba Scego and Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, were invited to offer their personal reflections on the activities of the circle while also serving in the role of mediators during the self-narrations.[25] Reading through the words of the narrative circle, we *listen to* the heartfelt testimonies that migrants offer against the official narrative of irregularity or *clandestinitá*. The circle recreates an atmosphere of familiarity and the protagonists are invited to tell their migratory experience by reflecting on specific themes: reasons for leaving, conditions in their home countries, reflections on the difference between *house* and *home*, friendship/alliances made along the journey, names or loss thereof, mother, and death/remembering. The stories that unfold articulate powerful narratives of lives lived fully and abruptly interrupted by the experience of migration. They function as a powerful counter-discourse to media reporting too often reduced to mere images of invasion and illegality.

Reflecting on the experience as a participant in the narrative circle," Scego references her friend, African philosopher Filomeno Lopez, who locates the "treasures" of African cultures in the complex art of "Palabre," "the living world of storytellers" who at the nocturnal village gatherings alternate dialogues and songs while sitting around a campfire.[26] She remembers her nomad mother, who told her stories about these narrative circles where the discourse went "from fairytales with cruel hyenas to high politics".[27] Such form, Scego further explains, "connects us to ancestral moments of our own humanity," a knowledge-building process at risk of getting lost in/through the migratory experience and assimilation in the country of arrival.[28] By participating in the narrative circle, Scego learns that "listening is the greatest gift that they [the students] are giving me/us. They give us stories that we are listening to. It's not granted. It is a great lesson, what they are giving us: learning how to listen anew".[29]

When asked to share memories about the journey, Dag (Yimer) tells the circle that he did not say goodbye to his father, as he would have not believed what he was about to do. He also tells us of putting three books in his suitcase including an English-Oromo dictionary and grammar. This is ironic, as he himself acknowledges the inutility of those texts traveling, as he would have, through Amharic countries.[30] His story reminds me of the moment when I found myself face to face with the abandoned relic boats in Lampedusa, contemplating an empty suitcase. *What exactly do migrants bring on such journeys*? I wondered. How can the intimate details of their life prior to migration enter the public realm so that those of us on the other side of the border may begin to look at the migratory phenomenon as a complex, human experience implicating a wide range of actors and motifs? Perhaps what I was really

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narrative circles can be found in the on-line Italian magazine *Lo straniero*, www.migrazioniafrica.blogspot.com/2009/05/materiali-sul-cerchio-narrativo-dalla.html, accessed 10 November 2020.

[25] Cerchio narrative rifugiati somali—Cn/1-9, www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/cerchio-narrativo-rifugiati-somali-cn-1-9/, accessed 10 November 2020.

[26] Igiaba Scego, "Diario di bordo," *Lo straniero* 107 (May 2009), trans. by the present author, www.migrazioniafrica.blogspot.com/2009/05/diario-di-bordo-igiaba-scego-nel-2008.html, accessed 10 November 2020.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Cerchio narrativo rifugiati somali CN/2, www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/cerchio-narrativo-rifugiati-somali-cn-1-9/, accessed 10 November 2020.

looking for, on that day in Lampedusa, was a way to learn how "to listen," to understand the stories told through the objects abandoned on the boats.[31]

In the sixth narrative circle (CN/6), Scego comments on the loss of names for immigrants arriving in Italy or for their children born there. In her case, Igiaba Ali Omar Scego became Igiaba Scego, which is "a little strange," she notes.[32] Her comments prompt students to reflect on the origin and meaning of their own names in an empowering act of self-definition and identity reclamation. In the space of the narrative circle, they get rid of the label *migrant/clandestine/irregular* and reclaim their humanity through the meaning of their full names. Equally empowering are the self-narrations around the term dying/remembering in the ninth narrative circle (CN/9). A. tells us that in Muslim cultures, the burial ceremony must take place immediately. This is usually followed by the *rus* (the remembrance ritual) a year later. When Sandro (Carsetti) asks if the *rus* can take place in the absence of a body, adding that in some cultures this is not possible, the conversation shifts to the deaths in Europe, and in the Mediterranean in particular, and how the very culture of death has changed in Africa as a result of the changing economy. Whereas death in the past triggered fear and sadness, these days people take it for granted, seeing it more like an opportunity to be fed at a banquet.[33] As I. states, "I don't know if people continue to wish that somebody dies in order to eat. We don't know what will happen".[34] Such uncertainty about the future connects the life in the original homeland to the life in Italy and makes the audience reflect on the migrant's condition of "double absence," as articulated by sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad.[35]

Reading through AMM's self-reflections, we witness the interweaving of migrants' *(il)legal* status with aspects of their intimate lives. Their narratives become a window or rather a mirror through which Italian citizens may reflect on their own sense of identity as a nation with a troubled colonial past and with even more uncertain stance toward its postcolonial present and future. Within this context, the migrants' collective memory becomes our memory, one that entails, as Triulzi notes, "a potential re-reading of the national culture in its past, present, and future dimensions".[36]

In the current discourse surrounding citizen media, the reconfiguration of the concept of citizenship to describe various practices of belonging, identification, and struggles has emerged as as one of the most critical topics. As argued in Mona Baker and Bolette B. Blaagaard's study, the citizen in citizen media often transcends the concept of the nation-state confined by a passport or an identity card and focuses instead on individuals "stranded between nation-states" and often forced to live in "a landscape of liminality".[37] Terms such as media citizenship and cultural citizenship are now widely used, often in tension with the concept of legal citizenship bounded to the sovereignty of states. The experience of the narrative circles archived in AMM presents readers/viewers with a timely opportunity to expand the idea of legal citizenship in contemporary Italy and reflect on the differentiated meanings that such a complex concept entails, including, perhaps, the idea of an "activist citizenship" in which the claim for

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[31] I discuss Lampedusa's "boat cemeteries" and my research experience on the island in a chapter of my work in progress tentatively titled *Mediterranean ARTivim: Art, Activism, and Migration in Europe*. For a recently published critical study on media representations and art practices in the Mediterranean and specifically around the island of Lampedusa, see Federica Mazzara, *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle, and Aesthetics of Subversion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019).

[32] Cerchio narrativo rifugiati somali CN/6 (Il nome), www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/cerchio-narrativo-rifugiati-somali-cn-1-9/, accessed 10 November 2020.

[33] Cerchio narrative rifugiati somali CN/9 (Morire/ricordare), www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/cerchio-narrativo-rifugiati-somali-cn-1-9/, accessed 10 November 2020.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Sayad Abdelmalek, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Malden: Polity, 2004).

[36] Triulzi, "Per un archivio" (2012), 124, trans. by the present author.

[37] Mona Baker and Bolette B. Blaagaard, "Reconceptualizing Citizen Media: A Preliminary Charting of a Complex Domain", in Mona Baker and Bolette B. Blaagaard, eds., *Citizen Media and Public Spaces: Diverse Expressions of Citizenship and Dissent* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 13.

rights and justice replaces the Arendian principle of "the right to have rights".[38] According to Isin Engin, "Time and again, we see that subjects that are not citizens *act* as citizens. They constitute themselves as those with 'the right to claim rights'".[39] New sites of contestation, belonging, and identification are a tangible sign of the way in which citizenship is changing in the contemporary age of mobility and migration, calling into question the notion of citizenship as a fixed status of the body politics and opening its boundaries to a new vocabulary and new expressive modes.[40] In Italy, where citizenship is still defined by *ius sanguinis*, therefore by a notion of citizenship as "status",[41] migrants' role in subverting such definition is taking place in/though various "sites," and all the more significant, perhaps, through various "actors".[42] As Triulzi notes, "not only are migrants and asylum seekers in Italy today claiming rights and citizenship; they are asking *us* to give citizenship, and therefore dignity, to their story, a story of marginalization and emigration, of diaspora and exile, which is part of the daily living, which is the living history of the society we live in".[43]

In the section *Parole per il cerchio* (Pcn/1-5) ("Words for the Circles"), Ali Farah reports on some of the keywords used in the narrative circles as a stimulus for the self-narrations, adding that in most cases the discussion begins with students recognizing the impossibility to fully translate such words into Italian. The case of *home* is quite illuminating as it offers further reflections on citizenship and belonging mentioned above. Students begin by thinking of the distinction, in English, between *house* and *home*, a distinction that recalls a similar differentiation, in Somali, between the words *guri and daar,* albeit with different nuances. Ali Farah states: "In English house and home are not the same thing: home is the intimacy, the abode, the place of the soul," to which H. replies: "You can change your *house* . . . but it is difficult to move your *home*".[44] In the stories of the narrative circle related to the same theme, the participants, thinking about what constitutes *home*, share memories of books, those repositories of knowledge, which hold the key to the future.[45] Forced by circumstance beyond their control to abandon their books (and their education) they rediscover, at the *Asinitas* school, the sense of empowerment that knowledge brings. We can understand why I., then, says that the school "feels almost like home". "At the school, you are encouraged, motivated, literally: your soul is being built" he adds.[46] It's a beautiful expression that of "building your soul," as Ali Farah also notes. "Perhaps," she states, "the soul is indeed our first home, the place where we need learn to co-habit with ourselves".[47] Soul-building toward a more tolerant and less racist society is unquestionably what Italy needs to avoid that the "wars" described by migrants, when telling the reasons for leaving their country, reach us in our *houses* under the form of an open conflict between citizens and migrants, those who rightfully belong and those who should be

[38] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 296.

[39] Isin Engin, "Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen," *Subjectivity*, 29 (2009), 367-388, 371.

[40] A growing body of scholarship on migrant resistance movements has brought attention to the implications of these struggles for the notion of citizenship and borders. See among others Imogen Tyler and Katarzyna Marciniak, eds. *Protesting Citizenship: Migrant Activism*s (London & New York: Routledge, 2014).

[41] Engin, "Citizenship in Flux," 369.

[42] Echoing Pierre Bourdieu, Engin, argues that "the 'sites' of citizenship are fields of contestations around which certain issues, interests, stakes, as well as themes, concepts and objects assemble." Such terminology, he goes on to explain, moves us toward a notion of citizenship not so much defined by fixed categories (such as states, nations, cities, sexualities, etc.) but by "fluid and dynamic entities" whose boundaries are always shifting. Engin, "Citizenship in Flux," 370.

[43] Triulzi, "Per un archivio" (2012), 120, trans. by the present author.

[44] Cristina Ali Farah, "Parole per il cerchio (Pcn/1-5)", www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/parole-per-il-cerchio-pcn-1-5/, accessed 10 November 2020.

[45] "Cerchio narrativo rifugiati somali- CN/4 (Casa, House/Home)".

[46] Ibid.

[47] Farah, "Parole per il cerchio (Pcn/1-5)".

excluded, deported, or left to die at sea. As Triulzi states, "the message of the circle is that we must somehow create a circle among ourselves to avoid being encircled from the outside".[48]

In a country in which migrants are primarily confined and defined by their condition of *illegality*, their bodies spectacularized by border policies and a media apparatus that continues to spin the narrative of "threat" or "invasion," the possibility of these subjects to become active participants of their narrative might appear unthinkable. Yet, cultural practices such as the ones enacted by the narratives of AMM are a hopeful sign of change in an Italy which, despite a provincial thinking that affirms otherwise, is already a transnational and multicultural reality. In *Luoghi migranti: fra clandestinità e spazi pubblici*, Gianluca Gatta takes us on a journey through the various "thirds places" *or luoghi terzi*, a term he borrows from sociologist Ray Olderburng, where migrants are significantly contributing to public debates.[49] A café in Lampedusa, the Rome Termini railway station and its surroundings, the Asinitas language school in Rome, to mention just a few cases he discusses, are all *third places,* places in which migrants have the opportunity to meet and interrelate in a wide range of conversations and social interactions, re-creating their *clandestinità*, both in the juridical-administrative sense of the term and in the meaning that permeates the national imaginary, and powerfully "breaking" into the "public sphere".[50] The *Archive of Migrant Memories* (AMM) constitutes a further example of migrants' "breaking" into the public discourse surrounding migrations, their stories and memories providing the foundations of their newly found *homes*. By sharing the stories of their migratory experience, they affirm a presence beyond the mere materiality of their bodies. They "break" into the political realm and public imaginary as dignified *storied* subjects asking to be heard and treated as such.

The stories collected in *DiMMi* in *The Archive of Migrant Memories* (AMM) add the power of the spoken word to the migrant's testimonies. The word *DiMMi*, the Italian acronymous for *diari multimediali migranti* (multimedial diaries by migrants), is also the Italian for "tell me," a clear indication of the emphasis placed on the shared act of storytelling. As stated in the AMM description, "Self-representations, mostly in writing but with words that are often supplemented with images, signs and audiovisual material, their aim is to rearticulate the turning points and crossings of the authors' lives and journeys and to share their experience with others".[51] The migrants' multimedial diaries are part of a project supported by the Tuscany region whose goal was to create a special section at the National Diary Archive, housed in the townhall of Pieve Santo Stefano, a little village in the Tuscan and Emilian Apennines.[52] Originating from the autobiographical tales of the 2017 edition of *DiMMi* competition, the migrant stories were published the following year in the volume *Parole oltre le frontiere* (*Words Beyond Borders*).[53] Thanks to the collaboration with Bologna Neu Radio (https://www.neuradio.it/) and NEU DRAMA, AMM offers the stories of Azzurra, Dominique Boa, Judith, and Ibrahim Khakeek Jalloh both in audio version and through a powerful 25-minute dramatic performance first directed by Andrea Biagiotti at the teatro comunale di Pieve Santo Stefano in 2019.[54]

In *"Certi sogni non possono avverarsi mai"* (*"Some Dreams will never be able to come true"),* we meet Azzurra, a nineteen-year-old Nigerian, *othered* by birth as a result of her albinism. Similar to twins

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[48] Triulzi, "Il cerchio e la scuola", *Lo straniero*, n. 107 (Maggio 2009), trans. by the present author, www.migrazioniafrica.blogspot.com/2009/05/il-cerchio-e-la-scuola-alessandro.html, accessed 10 November 2020.

[49] Gatta, *Luoghi Migranti*, 70, trans. by the present author.

[50] Ibid. First coined by the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, the concept of public sphere, has been expanded beyond the bourgeoise society of XVII-XIX century Europe to include other discursive genres and marginalized areas. For further discussion, see Paolo Jedlowski and Olimpia Affuso, eds., *La sfera pubblica: il concetto e i suoi luoghi* (Cosenza: Pellegrini, 2010).

[51] www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/the-migrants-memories-archive/self-representations/?lang=en, accessed 10 November 2020.

[52] www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/projects/dimmi-diari-multimediali-migranti/?lang=en, accessed 10 November 2020.

[53] Alessandro Triulzi, Patrizia Di Luca, Natalia Cangi, eds., *Parole oltre le frontiere* (Milano: Terre di Mezzo, 2018).

[54] www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/the-migrants-memories-archive/self-representations/?lang=en, accessed 10 November 2020.

in traditonal Nigerian Ibo culture, albinos in Azzurra's community are believed to be affected by a terrible disease and killed. As a result, when Azzurra was 7 years old, her family had to move to another part of Nigeria. Azzurra considers herself a "survivor" of albinism, not a victim. Along with albinism, she would also develop vision problems, another handicap that would make her subject to bullying and hatred. Azzura's story of growing up in Nigeria details the struggle between the heart and the mind. The heart causing her so much pain suggesting that she should give up; the mind telling her to continue to fight and be strong. Azzura's albinism is an apt metaphor for the many forms of discrimination immigrants experience once they arrive in Italy. If in Nigeria, it was the condition of Azzura's skin that set her apart from her peers, in her country of arrival, it will be her immigrant status to cause rejection and humiliation. Despite the many adversities, she remains defiant and determined to keep fighting. She states: "Some dreams will never be able to come true and for some of us the act of dreaming is a forbidden act. But even though the struggles and the challenges are always part of my life, I have never given up hope. I have never stopped fighting my battles in order to win them".[55] Whereas the title of her story suggests defeat and hopelessness, her voice powerfully affirms resistance and survival.

In "Sogni Spezzati*"* ("Broken Dreams"), Dominique Boa, born in the Ivory Coast, asks when African children will be finally free from slavery. Connecting past and present, his monologue addresses directly Africa, "the cradle of civilization . . . repository of natural resources with the potential to feed the entire world".[56] Who's responsible for such an unequal global economic system that forces so many African youth to migrate, Dominique asks? The histories of colonialism and neo-colonialism are woven in Dominique's dramatic monologue raising the questions that most Italian citizens prefer to ignore— the root causes of contemporary migrations out of Africa within the global economic lanscape. He evokes the first generation of African leaders at independence--Sekou Touré, Patrice Lumumba, Nkwame Krumah, Thomas Sankara, Nelson Mandela and Muammar Mohammed Gaddafi, visionary leaders who dared to dream of an independent and self-determining pan-African continent. With their active agenda for social reforms, they would become threatening and dangerous figures to the ex colonial rulers determined to control Africa's destiny. Most of them would be assassinated by their formal colonial masters or their agents. Yet, Dominique concludes, their blood was not shed in vain, their legacy still alive in the consciousness of many African youth.

In "Mi chiamo Judith" ("My Name is Judith"), Cameroon-born Judith tells us of her dream of becoming a stylist, a dream broken by the the prejudice of immigration. She tells us how immigration does not kill only the body but also the psyche. In Judith's case, immigration caused the end of her marriage leaving her to raise four children alone: a single immigrant mother living in a nation that refuses to recognize her children, born within the borders of its territory, as Italian citizens.

In "La testimonianza" ("The testimony"), Ibrahim born in Liberia during the last civil war, tells of his migration across the desert, of his detention in Lybian prisons and kidnapping by the armed group Asma Boys, and of his final journey across the sea to arrive in Italy. Ibrahim's story is dramatized in such a way that we hear him on the run, scared, his story ending with the sound of the crashing waves of the sea.

Like the other stories in AMM's Self Narrations, the diaries in *DiMMi* present the first-person accounts of men and women living real life experiences, re-signifying the word *migrant*, a word that, by the end of their telling, acquires a whole new meaning. In AMM's vision, after listening to the dramatization of Azzurra's, Dominique's, Judith's, and Ibrahim's stories, viewers will begin to see not only their struggles but also their hope; not only the tragedies of migration, but also the challenges and

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[55] Parole oltre le frontiere. Storie. migranti #1 Africa--Diritti di memoria, trans. by the present author, www.mixcloud.com/neu_radio/parole-oltre-le-frontiere-storie-migranti-1-africa-diritti-di-memoria/, accessed 10 November 2020.
[56] www.mixcloud.com/neu_radio/parole-oltre-le-frontiere-storie-migranti-1-africa-diritti-di-memoria/, accessed 10 November 2020.

rewards of integration in a society that is already a multicultural reality. It is only through the interactive process of telling and listening, the DiMMi diaries suggest, that we can set the foundations for the development of a truly multicultural, interconnected society.

One of the key arguments in the current debates on citizen media is the ways in which unaffiliated individuals and collectives reclaim public and digital spaces performing citizenship acts aimed a significant transformation of themselves and their communities. As conceptualized by Baker and Blaagaard,

> The concept of citizen media encompasses the physical artefacts, digital content, practices, performative interventions, and discursive formation of affective sociality produced by unaffiliated *citizens* as they act in public spaces(s) to effect aesthetic or socio-political change or express personal desires and aspirations, without the involvement of a third party or benefactor. It also comprises the sets of values and agendas that influence and drive the practices and discourses through which individuals and collectivities position themselves within and in relation to society and participate in the creation of diverse publics.[57]

As unaffiliated individuals, the transnational network of volunteers, social workers, academics, and migrants that collaborate to AMM are a grassroots organization that do not follow the agendas of a corporate structure or political party. They operate instead from within the moral basis of what Karina Horsti terms "cosmopolitan solidarity"[58] across spatial and communal boundaries and across generations. Over the years AMM members have joined forces with various educational projects and organizations, such as the Mutti Prize for migrant cinema and ICSBA (Central Institute for Audiovisuals of the Ministry of Culture in Rome) in a spirit of "joint agency" and a "renewed effort at art advocacy and in accompanying and empowering transnational migrants arriving, crossing, or staying on in present-day Italy".[59] They have promoted outreach activities in Italy's primary and secondary schools with the goal of "build[ing] bridges for dialogue between different worlds".[60] Overall, AMM's network of initiatives (see the Projects section) has been enacting a political praxis aimed at forging a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant national discourse on migration, a discourse increasingly permeated by ignorance and racism. As Triulzi states,

> Building the AMM along with the subjects and actors of migrations, along with the network of volunteers and operators on the ground is, in fact, both pedagogical praxis and welcoming; it is bearing witness and allowing to bear witness; it is restoring the voice to those who do not or do not believe they have a voice by allowing that same voice to be expressed and recognized; it is leaving a trace of *themselves* in a multicultural *us* that is painfully, in spite of everything, taking shape in our country.[61]

4. The Archive as "Delinking" Methodology

Throughout the years, AMM has been sending a message of cross-cultural collaboration and connection across differences to challenge oppressive modes of thinking and empower migrant voices. AMM is the

[57] Baker and Blaagaard, "Reconceptualizing Citizen Media", 16.

[58] Karina Horsti, "Temporality in Cosmopolitan Solidarity: Archival Activism and Participatory Documentary Film as Mediated Witnessing of Suffering at Europoe's Borders", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22.2 (2019), 231-244, 232.

[59] Triulzi, "Empowering," 69. For further information on the projects in which AMM has been involved, see the section "Progetti" on the website's Italian version.

[60] Archive of Migrant Memories--Schools, http://www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/en/schools/, accessed 10 November 2020.

[61] Triulzi, "Per un archivio,", 19-20, emphasis and trans. by the present author.

digital "third place" conceptualized by Gatta that aims to produce a mode of consciousness similar to the decolonial performativity enacted by ARTivist cultural producers within the US/Mexico border. As a work of "digital ARTivism," AMM "delinks," in Walter Mignolo's use of the term, Western and European theoretical walls by re-orienting us toward "other principles of knowledges and understanding and, consequently, other politics, other ethics.[62] In a chapter included in *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media* (2008), Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre discuss the work of Chicana public artist Judith Baca with the youth in the Los Angeles area as "a movement that advances the expression of a mode of liberatory consciounsesses",[63] the mestiza consciousness theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa. In 1996, Baca founded the César Chávez digital mural lab located in the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, California, to help empower Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x youth to reclaim their stories through art and digital production. According to Sandoval and Latorre, "Baca's working relationship with these young people can be regarded as a collaboration between intellectual and artistic equals, at the same time as it can be defined as a mentor-mentee type of association".[64] While operating in a significantly different cultural and geo-political context, the goals and aspirations of AMM share interesting parallels to Baca's project of youth empowerment. Through participatory videos and digital storytelling, AMM aims at facilitating the development of migrants and refugees' activist consciousness. Through the network of outside activities and various cultural projects, including the collaboration with local schools, AMM is committed to advance a pedagogy of multiculturalism and tolerance, leading toward cultivating the form of *pluri-versality* Mignolo has been passionately advocating for in his work.[65] Italy's future, and that of the entire Europe, depend upon it.

AMM's "delinking" orientation can be further contextualized within current academic debates in Italy aimed at remapping cartographies of knowledges while bridging disciplines and geopolitical diaspora spaces. A group of scholars from the University of Bari "Aldo Moro," led by Paola Zaccaria, have been using ARTivist thinking and poetics to discuss Mediterranean and Transatlantic connections, what Zaccaria has termed a "TransMediterrAtlantic consciousness".[66] Titled "Un/Walling the Mediterranean: Local, National and Trans-border Artivist Practices for a Poetics and Politics of Hospitality and Mobility," this interdisciplinary project aims at decolonizing knowledge and consciousness and delegitimizing contemporary border regimes still grounded on the quintessentially Western construction of the nation-state.[67] Inspired by the border critical thinking of Mignolo and other Latin American scholars of *modernidad/colonialidad* and filtered through the theoretical articulations of Chicano/a/x studies, the "un/wallers" work toward new epistemological cartographies in which "an other thinking"[68] is not only possible but utterly desirable.[69]

Almost two decades ago, Gloria Anzaldúa laid out the parameters of ARTivist poetics that are now influencing Trans-MediterrAtlantic ARTivism. Theorizing from the border, which she defined as a

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[62] Mignolo, "Delinking," 453.

[63] Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism", 82.

[64] Ibid., 84.

[65] Mignolo, "On Pluriversality", www.convivialism.org/?p=199, accessed 10 November 2020.

[66] Paola Zaccaria, "Gli archivi incarnati del TransMediterrAtlantic," *From the European South*, 1 (2016), 239, www.europeansouth.postcolonialitalia.it, accessed 10 November 2020.

[67] For major details on the project, see "s/murare il mediterraneo", www.smuraremediterraneo.wordpress.com/, accessed 10 November 2020.

[68] Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2000), 66.

[69] Crucial to the research team's methodology, as a University located in the Southern region of Apulia, is the affirmation of a "Southern critical thinking" that acknowledges the historical roots of the Mediterranean extending back to Arab, Norman-Swedish, and Greek foundations, "delinking itself" from both the Renaissance and Risorgimental history. Zaccaria, "Gli archivi incarnati," 243-45.

"Nepantla state" (Nepantla is the Náhuatl word referring to an "in-between state"),[70] Anzaldúa reclaimed her identity as a mestiza living in the US/Mexican borderlands. She writes: "The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage. Border artists cambian el punto de referencia".[71] The interaction between border poetics and ARTivism is tantamount to such epistemological ruptures. The artist from the border moves along multiple routes, including linguistic code switching, forging art that crosses genre, media, and discourses. It is an art that conveys a powerful political message. In the US/Mexican context, it challenges the imperialism of the United States, and, by affirming a mestizo/a culture, it resists assimilation by both the US and/or Mexico; in the Mediterranean, it challenges and subverts EU borderization policies and strongly rejects the racialized violence of national sovereignty. As stated by Zaccaria, "The un/wallers, just like the artivists, know that whenever 'cultured bodies' cross borders across marine routes, they leave behind remains, imprints, even wisps of dreams".[72] The migrants whose stories are collected in AMM are those "cultured bodies" who have crossed borders and navigated sea routes carrying along dreams and visions for a better future. Conjugating political-cultural analysis with creativity, AMM uses a diverse range of media to tell a counter narrative aimed at fracturing the geographies of power governing irregular migrations in the Mediterranean and opening "breaches in the walls/borders/nationalisms"[73] that offer hope for a future of hospitality and mobility in contemporary Italy and Europe at large.

If ARTivism "speaks through all kinds of media," as Zaccaria reminds us,[74] ARTivists must be aware of their positionality and of the limitations of cyberspace in creating a truly egalitarian society.[75] Members of AMM are adamant in pointing out that the main goal of encouraging migrants to use digital storytelling is to create that "listening space" through which their stories can arrive in our home not as representation of ethnic alterity but as a reflection of our own identity in a country that is slowly and painfully coming to terms with its changed national character. As "social enablers",[76] they acknowledge the distance (literal and figurative) separating their experience, as Italian citizens, from the experience of the migrants whom they are trying to empower. Yet, they see hope in the digital potentialities of the web and its ability to break down walls and barriers. On this point, Zaccaria notes:

> Yes, there is an enormous material, geopolitical and experiential gulf between the privileged positions of activist researches, of artists' performative politics, and the actual, perilous journeys of transnational crossers who continue to physically throw their bodies across state lines. But the 'gesture' itself, that of fracturing the geography of power and the border that demarcates it, is inscribing a geo-corpography of knowledge and of space that is bringing about a revolutionary strategy: a disruption and fracturing of the border paradigm, in both its historical and contemporary applications.[77]

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[70] Gloria Anzaldúa, "Border Arte: *Nepantla, el lugar de la Frontera*", in AnaLouise Keating, ed., *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham and London: Duke U.P., 2009), 180.

[71] Ibid., 177.

[72] Paola Zaccaria, "A Breach in the Wall: Artivist no-border Atlases of Mobility," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 26.1 (2017), 37-53, 40.

[73] Ibid., 41.

[74] Zaccaria, "A Breach in the Wall", 47.

[75] Whether or not digital media actually achieve such egalitarian goals has been a matter of contested debates. In Baca's case, Sandoval and Latorre write: "Conscious of digital media's liberatory potential as well as its persisting exclusion, Judith Baca's artivism provides real-world and on-the-ground strategies for youth of color to enact empowerment through digital technology." Sandova and Latorre, "Chicano/a Artivism", 83.

[76] Ibid., 84.

[77] Zaccaria, "A Breach in the Wall," 49-50.

The Archive of Migrant Memories is that "geo-corpography of knowledge"[78] and space connecting Africa to Europe via the Mediterranean by building alliances that defy borders, ethnicities, and all forms of political inclusion and exclusion.

5. Conclusion

The Archive of Migrant Memories offers powerful examples of how works of cultural production can result into productive ARTivist resistance practice. By adopting participatory methods, migrants' storytelling generates a new, interactive mode of communication so that "migrant memories" become part of the collective heritage of an ever-changing Italian society. If death and tragedy are frequent images associated with the Mediterranean today, this multimedia project clearly testify that the Mediterranean is very much alive in generating ideas, building cross-cultural alliances and promoting forms of what Gianluca Solera terms "citizen activism"[79] that call for ruptures and re-arrangements of the current socio-economic and political order. Whereas the narrative of the so-call clash of civilizations has, at least since 9/11, focused on the difference between Christians and Muslims, it is imperative, Solera argues, that we recognize that "the source of the problem was not and is not a clash of identities, but the clash of opportunities, the clash between those who have them and those who have not."[80] AMM's ARTivists practices are crucial in re-orienting such a discourse. Through different media and from a wide spectrum of positionalities, AMM's project promotes the vision of the Mediterranean as a "new frontier of transnational citizenship"[81] with open possibilities for shared development, cultural respect, and peaceful co-existence.

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[78] Zaccaria, *TransMediterrAtlantic*, 6.

[79] Gianluca Solera, *Citizen Activism and Mediterranean Identity: Beyond Eurocentrism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

[80] Ibid., 113.

[81] Ibid., 127.