AFTERWORD

THE MEDITERRANEAN AS A STAGE: BORDERS, MEMORIES, BODIES

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My aim in this afterword is to provide a semiotic analysis that captures the contemporary discourse on the Mediterranean and identify potential links to the historical reasons, power relations, colonial archives and memories that constitute what Sandro Mezzadra calls the "postcolonial condition."[1] Semiotics, history, cultural studies, feminist and postcolonial perspectives and critical race studies help me to redefine the Mediterranean in a symbolic frame reproducing those meanings that convey memories and violence, protest, resistance and conflict.

Today the sea is no longer a space regulated solely by international law and State jurisdiction, but a space of governmentality. By space of governmentality I mean a space defined by the collaboration of a number of institutional and non-institutional actors (governance) in the management and biopolitical control of global and transnational trajectories of people, products, and capital mobility. I interpret it here as invested in a specific exercise of power that reaffirms the symbolic and discretionary nature of its modern borders and of the border in general. Borders are deconstructed and reorganised across space according to the unceasing re-articulation of international power relations, national sovereignties, market technologies and systems of measurement and control on a global scale.[2]

A conception of the sea in terms of a border, or rather as a set of (often de-territorialised) borders that cut across lands, waters, and continents, is

1 Sandro Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale: storia e politica nel presente globale* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008).

2 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Saskia Sassen, *A Sociology of Globalization* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method or The Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

grounded on the acknowledgement that borders, in the Mediterranean like anywhere else, no longer exist only "at the edge of territory, marking the point where it ends" but "have been transported into the middle of political space."[3] "This is particularly apparent today in Europe: proliferation, mobility, and deep metamorphosis of borders are key features of actually existing processes of globalisation."[4]

From a semiotic point of view, the symbolic nature of the border, which cuts across the global political space, reveals the Mediterranean as a "stage" where boundaries are repeatedly performed. Here I am expanding on the idea formulated by Paolo Cuttitta,[5] who understands Lampedusa to be a "proscenium." I venture to widen this stage to the entire Mediterranean, and to see it as a "gate." The Mediterranean has been, in fact, the gate through which a number of symbolic and material postcolonial effects must pass: the bodies of migrants—the *risky bodies* and *bodies at risk* identified by Daniele Salerno[6] on the basis of his critical analysis of the security systems made operational or enhanced within the "frame" of the War on Terror[7]—as well as the memories of colonial and post-colonial violence.[8] As a stage, it is an "empty signifier" that becomes "solid"—full of meaning—according to the discourse that it sets up and that shapes it. As a "gate" it is configured as a constant carrier of border counter-representations.

The stage, the border, the gate, the memories and the body are the thematic nodes of my contribution, which aims to reconnect the essays in this volume to a geography that puts the Mediterranean at the centre. Here

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[3] Étienne Balibar, *We, The People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 109.

4 See Sandro Mezzadra, *Diritto di Fuga. Migrazioni, Cittadinanza, Globalizzazione* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2006); Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method*; Louise Amoore, ''Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror,'' *Political Geography* 25 (2006): 336–51.

[5] Paolo Cuttitta, "'Borderizing' the Island Setting and Narratives of the Lampedusa 'Border Play'," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 13, no. 2 (2014): 196-219.

6 Daniele Salerno, **"**Risky Subjects in Time of Terror: A Semiotic Perspective in the Critical Approaches to Security in Europe,**"** *Versus* 123 (forthcoming).

7 Louise Amoore and Marieke De Goede, eds., introduction to *Risk and the War on Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

8 Gaia Giuliani, "The colour(s) of Lampedusa," in *Fortress Europe, Border Lampedusa. Migrations across the Mediterranean sea in cultural and comparative perspective*, ed. Gabriele Proglio and Laura Odasso (London: Palgrave, forthcoming); Gaia Giuliani, "Monstrosity, Abjection and Europe in the War on Terror," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* (2016): 1-19.

the sea plays a symbolic role straddling past and present, taking up space between new governmental regimes and old forms of domination, between neocolonial devices and de-colonial practices.

The Mediterranean as a space of memories

The Mediterranean sea is a "semantic potential,"[9] a frame in which memories are spatialised: "a space that speaks of our social reality but also, and perhaps in the first place, of what have been the transformations that our reality has undergone, and of the values that in that same space have been inscribed. That space then speaks of our memory, while producing, rewriting, interpreting, and sometimes deleting it."[10]

My argument is grounded in the notion of the postcolonial archive[11] as a set of entropic colonial texts, constantly reinterpreted, transfigured, dissimulated, concealed and even denied but never fully disappearing.
These texts constitute—even in their absence—the lens through which we look at/to the world. Consequently, I interpret the sea as an archive of memories: I read it as a place that connects texts and perspectives, allegedly consistent and linear yet extremely confrontational, in a time when the Mediterranean shows very clearly its own postcolonial tensions.

To enable the Mediterranean to perform its endowed function, that being the containment and performance of the material devices that regulate national and international mobility between and from the former colonial areas towards Europe, it is necessary to also construct it as the place in which a number of symbolic devices operate in order to regulate the resurgence of colonial memories. In the space of the Mediterranean those memories *become discourse*, a containing discourse, designed to cover up and hide both the postcolonial symbolic archive and the material reasons for the migration. Nowadays, such a discourse reactivates the colonial archive of the *monstrous*,[12] constructed in Colonial Modernity as "the abject"[13] that denies and at the same time reaffirms and strengthens

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9 Patrizia Violi, "Global and local: Encyclopedic meaning revisited," *Semiotica* 206 (2015): 89–108.
10 Patrizia Violi, *Paesaggi della memoria. Il trauma, lo spazio, la storia* (Milano: Bompiani, 2014), 21.
11 Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science*, no. 2 (2002): 87–109.
12 Gaia Giuliani, *Zombie, alieni e mutanti. Le paure dall'11 settembre a oggi* (Firenze-Milano: Le Monnier/Mondadori Education, 2016); Giuliani, "The colour(s) of Lampedusa."
13 Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Édition du

the role and identity of the Western coloniser.

It reactivates the *figures of race*, defined as images that sediment transnationally over time and crystallise some of the meanings assigned to bodies, which are gendered and racialised in colonial and postcolonial contexts. They include that of the black man depicted as physically strong, with lower mental capacities and sexually dangerous; that of the Eastern European man as barbaric and violent; that of the Asian man as a natural-born scam artist and involved in illegal and immoral business; that of the Arabic must-be-unveiled submissive woman; that of the Muslim man as fanatic and treacherous; and that of the black woman as a reassuring de-sexualised Mammy or a threatening hyper-sexualised Jezebel.

These "figures" recombine in a series of discourses that, on one hand, legitimise the colonial past (and its regulatory violence) and, on the other hand, help dissolve the existing ties between that past and our postcolonial present (inhabited by the subjective choices of migrants). These discourses function as a legitimising practice for those specific (and ever-changing) colour lines [14] that contextually shape the biopolitical apparatus (legislative, political, social and cultural) of inclusion, exclusion and differential inclusion of the people who are entering the "gates" of Europe or already did. During a time of the so-called refugee emergency, these discourses are tailored to the figures of the threatening Muslim subject (male) and (some) victimised women and children who flee the Middle East as refugees. Those figures are based on texts and images constructed since the Crusades and the Reconquista, strengthened further by the Enlightenment and Positivism, and by ideas of the indomitability and fanaticism of the "Semitic race."

Draining and refilling the Mediterranean

In order to satisfy the regulatory function assigned to the Mediterranean, the selective reactivation of the colonial archive must be determined by the double practice of emptying and filling its semantic space: it has to be filled with omens of disaster (the "death" of the supposed "Us" as conveyed by refugees, migrants and terrorists invading its space) and therefore by practices of bio- and necropolitics [15] (left to die in the

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Seuil, 1980).

14 Here I transpose in postcolonial contexts the concept of "the colour line" articulated in 1902 by William E.B. Du Bois (1989) in order to describe the proliferation of figures of race through the colonial, imperial and post-colonial borders.

[15] Achille Mbembe, **"Necropolitics,"** *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

Mediterranean and/or made to die by the hands of the Libyan or Turkish armies). At the same time, it is emptied of its history, reduced to a non-place—a fault line that connects worlds discursively created as distant, and conversely structurally connected by the effects of the Mediterranean's North-South unequal relations. The emptying of the Mediterranean has much to do with the practice of hiding the multiple encounters between its many shores. Those encounters marked the entire ancient, medieval and modern history of the three Mediterranean continents, as shown in the essays by Gabriele Proglio and Andrea Brazzoduro. The multivocality within and along the borders of Europe, which resulted not only in terms of the constellation of religions inhabiting Europe, but also in terms of the specific relation the different cultural, religious as well as political minorities built with the early modern state and then its nation-state, has long been and still is denied.[16] This denial has generally been functional to the construction of a mythological narrative of Europe as a result of a natural-like and historically linear process, and consequently as grounded in "the same civilisation." The practice of emptying the Mediterranean entered a further stage in the decades following anti-colonial wars and independences: the future of those liberated countries will not have anything to do with the legacies of colonialism, and former colonial metropoles will not have any responsibility. Nowadays, this practice is made effective with the purpose of transforming the Mediterranean into a space that could be legitimately occupied by the strategic rationality of control and management devices that transform migrant and refugees into *working bodies*: these bodies produce money *on the border*,[17] and become highly exploited labour force *within the European borders*.[18]

The practice of emptying makes the Mediterranean sea into a sort of *mare nullius*: a configuration that extends to the Mediterranean the meaning that substantiates the construct of *terra nullius,* which founded, and is still operating in, settler colonial Americas, Australia, Israel-Palestine (at the core of Olga Solombrino's contribution) and South

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16 Roberto Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
17 Within the security/humanitarian industry; Glenda Garelli and Martina Tazzioli, "Warfare on the Logistics of Migrants Movements: EU and NATO Military Operations in the Mediterranean," *Open Democracy* (June 16, 2016), accessed July 29, 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/mediterranean-journeys-in-hope/glen da-garelli-martina-tazzioli/warfare-on-logistics-of-migrant-movem.
18 Nick Dines and Enrica Rigo, "Postcolonial Citizenship and the 'Refugeeization' of the Workforce: Migrant Agricultural Labor in the Italian Mezzogiorno," in *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe: Contexts*, *Practices and Politics,* ed. Sandra Ponzanesi and Gianmaria Colpani (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

Africa. Thus, the Mediterranean becomes a space "of conquest" for new geopolitical settings. At the same time, its same borders, intended as already inherent to the European Self, are to be defended against their constant "crisis."[19]

The crisis is generated by the overflow of direct and indirect effects of colonial and post-colonial violence: the social and symbolic pressure exerted by migrants, whose subjectivity lies precisely in reclaiming their own right of mobility,[20] subverts the geography imposed by Europe as well as by the official national narratives enforced by regimes and majority parties in the countries of emigration. It draws counter-maps that make the Mediterranean into an "open," or unstable, space.[21]

The subversion of institutional narratives of national homogeneity and internal pacification is operated by the micro-narratives that Andrea Brazzoduro discusses in this volume. These narratives challenge the institutionalised "collective" memory that Homi Bhabha describes as the convergence of "nation and narration"[22] and Chakrabarty[23] as a History contrasted by irreducible subaltern stories. In the homeland, this narrative often imposes social segmentations and hierarchies of power (as exemplified by the cases of Libya and Lebanon, discussed here by Nancy Porcia and Rosita Di Peri respectively). In the many diasporas, it fosters forms of cultural and social control over the emigrant population (as argued by Laura Odasso in her discussion of the agreements on the matter of Moroccan emigration signed by Morocco with France and Belgium respectively).

In becoming the stage where borders imposed by governance and management of global mobility are continuously performed, the Mediterranean also becomes the stage where the constellation of memories and the conflicting diasporic and nomadic identities are constantly revivified and recombined in a multiplicity of deconolonising projects. In other words, the Mediterranean becomes the space of practices having to do with the emergence of projects and bodies of resistance.

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19 Sandro Mezzadra, "Borders and Migration. Emerging Challenges for Migration Research and Politics in Europe" (lecture, Berliner Institut für empirische Integrations und Migrationsforschung, Humboldt Universität, Berlin, June 23, 2016), accessed July 27, 2016, http://www.euronomade.info/?p=7535.
20 Nicholas De Genova, Sandro Mezzadra and John Pickles, eds., "New Keywords: Migration and Border," *Cultural studies* 29, no. 1 (2014): 55-87.
21 Ibid., 12.
22 Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
23 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Decolonial practices and narratives

In Italy, the emergence of micro-narratives of experiences and memories has been recently thematised by a few important visual documents. These include *Mediterranea* (2015), directed by Jonas Carpignano, on migrant workers rioting in Rosarno in 2010; *Fuocoammare* (2016), by Gianfranco Rosi, on the landings in Lampedusa; and *Mare Chiuso* (2015), by Andrea Segre and Stefano Liberti, on the transit of migrants in Libya under the agreement between former Prime Minister Berlusconi and Colonel Gaddafi. These works fall within the genre of *docufiction engagé*, whose explicit positioning within the "migrant Mediterranean" finds its first example in *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008), by Andrea Segre, Dagmawi Yimer and Riccardo Biadene—which engages with the transit of both men and women migrating from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia through Sudan and Libya. A further important example is provided by the more recent documentary *Oltre il mare* (2010), directed by Yimer together with Fabrizio Barraco and Giulio Cederna, on the personal migration experience of the director himself, who crossed the Mediterranean from Libya and landed in Lampedusa in 2006.

In these products, the biographical narration of a collective dramatic phenomenon originated by aspirations, wishes, hopes, and a subjective "right to escape"[24]—akin to a postmodern transposition of the Atlantic *Middle Passage*—[25] becomes a place of "identification" through a shared experience, in the words of Paul Gilroy,[26] of contestation, resistance, and subversion.

The practices of decolonisation discussed in this volume, along with the positioning I just mentioned, contribute to a comprehensive pan-Mediterranean, transnational, intra-European mapping of micro-narratives of resistance. This mapping has recently been at the core of Renate Siebert's important work[27] on the eccentric trajectories of the Algerian liberation, read along the two key figures of the Algerian feminist artist and filmmaker Assia Djebar and the Martinican intellectual and activist Frantz Fanon. The lived experience of memory and mourning in Algeria

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24 Mezzadra, *Diritto di Fuga.*
25 Gianni Gatta and Giusi Muzzopappa, "'Middle passages,' musealizzazione e soggettività a Bristol e Lampedusa," *Estetica. Studi e ricerche* no. 1 (2012): 167-181.
26 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).
27 Renate Siebert, *Voci e silenzi postcoloniali. Frantz Fanon, Assia Djebar e noi* (Roma: Carocci, 2012).

as well as in France are at the core of the analysis, which pays particular attention to the season of murders and massacres that characterised the Nineties, when the hegemonic purpose of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) implied the slaughter of civilians, activists and intellectuals amongst Siebert's friends.

Through Fanon's and Djebar's reflections on colonialism, racism and sexism, her volume aims at un-silencing the voices of the subaltern—women and men whose micro-narratives of resistance have been denied public recognition—while investigating the responsibilities of anti-colonial formations and parties and postcolonial governments in the making of violence and repression.

Bodies and the Mediterranean

The body is the "object" signified by both the border regime[28] and the migrants' subjective re-semantisation; it is the empty signifier through which the practice of symbolic decolonisation reveals the power of signification of the border regime itself. The body is a central issue in Siebert's volume, where it appears both as an object of racism and as an object of sexism, in the light of Fanon's concepts of *alienation* and *negative dialectics* and the idea articulated by Djebar that *every woman is a wound*.

As a visual text that encapsulates both border transgression and the border regime's reorganisation, the body has been thematised by the French-Algerian artist Zined Sedira in several works (*Floating Coffins*, 2009; *Decline of a Journey I* and *II*, 2009 and 2010; *Lighthouse in the Sea of Time*, 2011) that connect space, colonial memory, body, and migration and that have been explored by Gabriele Proglio[29] through the lens of the concept of *space invader* articulated by Nirmal Puwar.[30] The body is also central in the works of some Serbian artists, an analysis of which is provided in the collective volume edited by Sandra Ponzanesi and Gianmaria Colpani, *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe.*[31] Representations

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28 Sabine Hess and Bernd Kasparek, eds., *Grenzregime: Diskurse, Praktiken, Institutionen in Europa* (Berlin: Assoziation A, 2010).

29 Gabriele Proglio, "Percorsi e visioni di donne nordafricane. Reale e visuale: quali confini?," in *Donne per l'Europa*, ed. Luisa Passerini and Federica Turco (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2014), 174-188.

30 Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (New York: Berg, 2004).

31 Sandra Ponzanesi and Gianmaria Colpani, *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe* (London-New York: Rowman&Littlefield, 2016).

of the figure of the "Yugoslavian woman" after 1994 are here taken into consideration in order to unravel the construction of a "superior" European identity faced with its "backward" internal Other. Milica Trakilović's essay investigates the ongoing (colonial) discourse that describes the Balkan Peninsula as a barbaric place, violent and conflictual "by nature", due to the indomitable hyper-masculinity of its population which transforms men into beasts and women into masculinised objects.

The body as a place of re-semantisation of the subversive and tragic experience of migration is also central in the art works *Infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso* (2012), by the Albanian artists Arta Ngucaj and Arben Beqiraj, on the sinking of the boat *Katër I Rades* (rammed by a corvette of the Italian navy off the coast of Puglia in 1997), and *Asmat-nomi* (2014), by Dagmawi Yimer, which narrates the tragic shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa on October 3, 2013, where nearly 400 people—mostly from Ethiopia and Eritrea—drowned (see Salerno 2015). They represent a contrapuntal response to the Western hegemonic discourse around migration to Europe, able to bridge past and present, Europe, the Mediterranean, and Africa. Their goal is to re-subjectivise the experience of migration, giving back a face (Ngucaj and Beqiraj) and a name (Yimer) to the people who were involved in the drowning. This operation is meant to remove the survivors' experience from the official de-responsibilised and impersonal enumeration of dead bodies, and return to the protagonists and their loved ones the "right to mourn."[32] Such practices are in fact narrative and aesthetic forms of decolonisation, which find notable contributions in the present volume. The subjective experience of the body in transit between Albania and Italy has also been recently thematised by Daniele Vicari in *La nave dolce* (2009), a documentary that focuses on the lived stories of the passengers aboard the *Vlora*, an Albanian cargo ship that left Durrës and anchored in Bari in August 1991. In this text the voices address the subjective memories of the events, shaped by the hopes, aspirations, and traumas of the Adriatic *Middle Passage*.

The body in transit through Africa, the Mediterranean, and Italy is at the core of the documentary *Asmarina* (2014), edited by Medhin Paolos and Alan Maglio, on the complex re-articulation of the Italian-Eritrean identity in a "postcolonial condition" that sees the tension between, on the one hand, a Duboisian "double presence" of Eritrean migrants and Italians of Eritrean origin in Milan, and, on the other, the memories of the colonial relations between the Horn of Africa and Italy. This experience can be read alongside the Moroccan migration to France and Belgium at the core

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32 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009).

of Laura Odasso's essay in this volume, the migration of Eritrean caregivers to 1970s Italy investigated by Sabrina Marchetti (2014), and the historical enquiry on the migration of Somali students and young Eritreans, Ethiopians and Libyans to Italy between the Fifties and Seventies (2014 and 2016).

In conclusion, what I have proposed here is a reading of the Mediterranean as an "unstable space." As such, it is constantly resignified by border control devices and processes of subjectivation, which are inscribed in the migratory experience through the reorganisation of (neo)colonial power relations by postcolonial hegemonic institutions and discourses—in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Lybia, Lebanon and Palestine—and by decolonial strategies of contrast and resistance against those same discourses and institutions.

A conception of the Mediterranean as a "cultural object"[33] which is all but "natural," being itself a social construction[34] and therefore inherently unstable *in itself*, has two significant consequences. First of all, it reinforces—in line with semiotics—the idea that the sign-Mediterranean is necessarily unstable, being constantly re-signified, reinterpreted and re-articulated. Second, and more important, it testifies to the re-signifying power of the subversive actions, aspirations, forms of protest and resistance of those who move across the transnational "political space" referred to by Balibar. Not only does this reading valorise the ongoing practices of decolonisation and emphasise their transformative capacity — in line with the essays collected in the present volume—but it also addresses the issue of decolonising knowledge. The Mediterranean is an excess space—as argued by Gabriele Proglio in the introduction. In fact, it is a space that is constantly emptied out and re-filled with rhetoric and meaning, which re-colonise its physical and symbolic dimensions; the Mediterranean becomes then a semantic excess that generates "crisis." Decolonising knowledge about/of the Mediterranean means acknowledging and fostering this crisis, breaking the homogeneity of its hegemonic narrative, dislocating the view from the hegemonic position, identifying the devices that reproduce the epistemic power relations, and placing the production of knowledge along those symbolic and spatial axes that enhance multivocality, resistance, and conflict.

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33 Patrizia Violi, introduction to *Effetto Med. Immagini, discorsi, luoghi*, ed. Patrizia Violi and Anna Maria Lorusso (Bologna: Fausto Lupetti, 2011), 7-39.
34 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

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Decline of a Journey I and II. Video and audio installation by Zineb Sedira. 2009 and 2010.

Floating Coffins. Video and audio installation by Zineb Sedira. 2009.

Fuocoammare. Directed by Gianfranco Rosi. 2016.

Infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso. Directed by Arta Ngucaj and Arben Beqiraj. 2012.

La nave dolce. Directed by Daniele Vicari. 2012.

Lighthouse in the Sea of Time. Video installation by Zineb Sedira. 2011.

Mare Chiuso. Directed by Andrea Segre and Stefano Liberti. 2012.

Mediterranea. Directed by Jonas Carpignano. 2015.

Oltre il mare. Directed by Dagmawi Yimer, Fabrizio Barraco and Giulio Cederna. 2010.