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Crisis, Deceleration, and the Visual Poetics of Refusal
Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio's *Sudeuropa* (2005–7)

> [T]he migration crisis is declared a new crisis with Western countries positioned as its victims, even though for four centuries nearly eighty million Europeans became settler-colonists across the Americas and Oceania, while four million indentured laborers from Asia were scattered across the globe and the transatlantic slave trade kidnapped and enslaved fifteen million Africans. Colonialism, genocide, slavery, and indentureship are not only conveniently erased as continuities of violence in current invocations of a migration crisis, but are also the very conditions of possibility for the West's preciously guarded imperial sovereignty.
>
> Harsha Walia, *Border and Rule*

For going on two decades, photojournalistic and humanitarian archives have produced a spectacularized iconography of Mediterranean migration-*as-crisis* that is entangled with the exigencies of the securitarian state. Emblematic in this respect was Massimo Sestini's 2015 World Press Photo Award-winning *Rescue Operation*, which captured a boat full of migrants in aerial perspective from an Italian Navy helicopter as they awaited intervention by Operation *Mare Nostrum*. Sestini subsequently launched a campaign titled *Where Are You?*, which offered web viewers a high-resolution version of the image with powerful zoom capabilities so that anyone could identify individuals aboard the ship featured in his photo. The site prompts visitors, "If you recognize yourself or somebody you know on this boat, please contact us. We would like to hear your story and what happened after the rescue."[1] Paolo Pellegrin's photo essay *Desperate Crossing*, for the *New York Times Magazine*, deployed similar techniques, aimed at highlighting the mass migration phenomenon-as-crisis. These are two prominent examples, but this border crisis imaginary – relentless and chronic – is so ubiquitous, so embedded in many minds' eyes that displaying examples would be gratuitous. These visualizations are instantiations of a photojournalistic and humanitarian gaze that seeks to capture the suffering of black(ened) people on the move in moments of extreme distress and vulnerability, repeatedly, persistently, and without their consent.[2] They are examples of what Christina Sharpe has described as strategies of "containment, regulation, punishment, capture, and captivity and the ways that manifold representations of blackness become the symbol, par excellence, for the less-than-human being condemned to death."[3] Like the

border regimes they subtend, these images of seemingly interminable – and, critically, anonymous – mass departures, shipwrecks, and arrivals are spectacular, and according to their makers, intentionally so; the crisis imaginary mobilizes spectacle to solicit empathy, action from within Fortress Europe and beyond.[4] They are decidedly less curious about what anthropologist Cristiana Giordano has called the subjective and "stumbling" temporalities of people on the move. For Giordano, the trauma of border crossing does not sufficiently account for experiences of migration that register more subtle and enduring traumas – for instance, indefinite waiting in camps or detention centers, prolonged detours, or what Jonathan Echeverri Zuluaga has called "*errance.*"[5] Privileging the trauma of border crossing fails to accommodate experiences of extended periods of "exploitation, repetition, or the unfolding of fragmented memories," as Giordano puts it.[6] So invested in trumpeting the urgent "here and now" of crisis, these press and humanitarian images fetishistically stage and reaffirm the thingness of borders, rather than stressing their status as bundled practices or global regimes of governance.[7] Even designating human mobility across borders of imperial nation-states as *migration* risks participating in their reification.[8] The photographic crispness of the images bespeaks the moral clarity they seek to engender among Europeans, prompting humanitarian and securitarian interventions alike. As Sestini's high-resolution, zoom-ready *Where Are You?* project makes plain, "humanitarian reason is but the obverse of securitarian management," as Debarati Sanyal has argued. Humanitarianism, like the securitarian state, "envision[s] the irregular migrant as a body to be saved, contained, policed, moved around, encamped, kept out, or expelled; in short, as a body to be managed," she explains.[9] In privileging masses, swarms, and "human flow" (as artist Ai Wei Wei titled his 2017 human migration epic), the border crisis imaginary also evokes and (re)produces what theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay has called "imperialism as unstoppable movement" – a naturalized and inexorable forward march, without possibility of interruption or reversal.[10]

In its seemingly incessant repetition, the visual archive of Mediterranean migration-as-crisis should thus be understood not simply as a collection of representations of border crossings, but also as material sites for the (re)production of borders themselves. Just what constitutes the nature of these borders has been called into question by those working within black studies to address the Mediterranean scenario. Taking Nicholas De Genova's influential reading of the "border spectacle" as an example of how Marxist political economic interpretations of the border as a site of exclusion by and large fail to account for the constitutive nature of antiblackness and slavery in the emergence European colonial modernity, power, and policing, P. Khalil

Saucier and Tryon P. Woods have argued that borders are sites for the *preclusion* of black bodies. If in De Genova's formulation, the border spectacle is a "scene of [migrant 'illegality'] and 'exclusion,'" Saucier and Woods argue instead that "the scene," echoing Saidiya Hartman's landmark 1997 book, "is one of subjection – and more pointedly, an infinite reproduction and refraction of subjection, a mise-en-abyme."[11] Saucier and Woods thus argue that the consequential or primary border at stake today in the Mediterranean is not the one between imperial nation-states and their constitutive outsides, but instead the one separating blackness from humanity as conceived by a European humanism that was premised upon "slavery's mapping of human relations."[12] The thingness of the border enacted by the crisis imaginary thus refers as much to the materialization of the geopolitical boundary as to the dehumanization of black(ened) people in distress who attempt to cross it.

Yet there is also a visual archive (or perhaps we might say, with Iain Chambers and Marta Cariello, "repertoire")[13] that is at odds with the instrumentalization and immediacy of the one described here. Contemporary film and multimedia installations by Isaac Julien, Ursula Biemann, Andrea Segre, Elisa Strinna, Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen, Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani, Dagmawi Yimer, and the duo Invernomuto (Simone Bertuzzi and Simone Trabucchi), as well as the artists I will discuss below have long challenged Europe's patronizing common sense about blackness, borders and representation.[14] Collectively, they employ diverse strategies that resist the realist, documentary mode that so often traffics in black suffering, as Saucier and Woods, Sharpe, Smythe, and other thinkers of the Black Mediterranean have noted.[15] This counter-archive or repertoire deploys techniques such as disjunction, deceleration, abstraction, even concealment. If Giordano, an anthropologist, is interested in a subjective temporality that *exceeds the time of crisis* as it manifests in the lived experiences of those subjected to Europe's brutal border regimes, this essay asks about what it means for visual aesthetics and/or poetics to "stumble," or perhaps even to court stumbling as a *desired* mode, rather than an error.[16] In what follows, I propose a connection between this "stumbling," by which I mean the decelerated and disjunctive tempos of the works under consideration, and an attempt to reinscribe, dilate, or unsettle the urgent, "here and now" temporality prescribed by border crisis imaginaries. My aim in doing so is to attend more fully to the continuities between contemporary border practices and earlier forms of antiblack subjection and colonial violence. Indeed, to return to Saucier and Woods, "What we are facing today is a new declination of an old and repressed issue that haunts and composes the European project and modernity itself: the 'black Mediterranean' is a constituent unit of analysis for understanding contemporary forms of policing Europe's borders."[17] These are some of the

considerations that orient my thinking about cinematic *deceleration* (slow motion, long takes, disjunction between sound and image) as a counterforce to the border crisis imaginary, and they converge in a remediated colonial archival film from the 1980s that, as I have argued elsewhere, might be considered one of Italy's first (though belated) postcolonial films.[18]

Deceleration and 'Continuities of Violence': Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's *Dal Polo all'Equatore* (1984-86)

Early film pioneer and colonial enthusiast Luca Comerio's (1878-1940) vast personal archive – which included his footage of everything from polar expeditions to popular processions in India and Russia, D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume, a colonial mission in Eritrea, and big game hunting in Uganda, all shot in the first two decades of the 20th century – had been languishing on the verge of ruin until 1981, when the Milan-based art duo Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi discovered Comerio's tattered reels [**fig. 1; fig. 2**]. Their feature-length experimental film *Dal Polo all'Equatore*, made between 1984 and 1986, is equal parts homage and critique, archival excavation and reinscription. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi took advantage of a hand-cranked optical printer they'd purchased in the late '70s and named their "analytical camera" to re-shoot Comerio's footage, enabling them to scrutinize every frame, zeroing in on otherwise marginal subjects, adding layers of color, and adjusting the film speed, which was slowed down to last at least twice as long as the original footage.[19] Images of unspecified landscapes, people, and animals from, as the title suggests, "the Pole to the Equator," reorganized and color-tinted make up the film's primary content. An eerie ambient score composed between San Francisco and Los Angeles by Keith Ullrich and Charles Anderson enhances the meditative, trance-like pace of the images' movement onscreen. No narrative voiceover or subtitles guide viewers or provide an authoritative take on the reworked images.[20] The film's poetics proceed by other means: immersed in the polychronic flow of image and score, visual rhyme and rhythm, at times synched up with the ambient audio and at others not, consistently remind viewer-listeners of the disjunctive present of the footage we are watching.

The film's memorable opening sequence is drawn out from two or three to roughly eight minutes in duration, and presents viewers with landscapes captured from a moving train – an icon of nineteenth-century colonial modernity's speed, forward movement, and progress, as well as an important symbol of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century colonial film history to which Comerio's original footage belongs.[21] Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's train moves through rocky Alpine landscapes in slow motion, lulling viewers into an altered

relationship to both the image and to the passage of time [**fig. 3**]. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's train, offered to viewers through a manipulated film speed, incongruous color tints, and an ambient score that are radically decelerated, thus stage an audio-visual suspension or delay of "imperialism as unstoppable movement," thereby pointing to an alternate or (to say it with Azoulay) "potential history," one in which the inexorability of racial capitalism and colonial modernity are called into question.[22] *Deceleration* seems then to announce that the reworked film will deliver none of the all-encompassing tour of imperial spoils that its original title – and title card – promised. Instead, turned on its head, their film maps Western modernity's slow, corrosive, peripatetic march around the globe, illustrating, rather than mastery, its inherent and widespread violence.

Taking as a point of departure Harsha Walia's claim (transcribed in the epigraph above) about the "continuities of [colonial] violence in current invocations of a migration crisis," Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's film might thus be read as a key point of entry into visual works about the Mediterranean border that resist the representational demands of crisis. As Walia charges, "crisis" as a category is deployed by contemporary nation-states as a means of shoring up their "preciously guarded imperial sovereignty." Similarly, Cristina Lombardi-Diop has remarked, "[T]he Mediterranean stages a 'crisis' that is not a state of exception […], but a state of repetition of the subjection of Black life through the same old means: borderless apparatus[es] of surveillance, containment, captivity, forced displacement, forced labor, the slave markets, and dehumanization."[23] Crisis relies upon exceptionality or emergency, rather than continuity or contiguity with earlier colonial forms; *Dal Polo all'Equatore* dwells instead in the time-space of the latter. Here, in the early years of the great contemporary migrations of people from Albania, the Philippines, Morocco, Nigeria, Eritrea and beyond to the Italian peninsula, is a rare perspective that evokes the world's ongoing entanglements with a range of colonial mobilities – from the temporal (a present inhabited by the past), to the aesthetic (the motion picture as a tool of imperial dominance and its potential undoing), and the human (from settler colonialism to mass migration). *Dal Polo* thus troubles neat lines of distinction between colonialisms past and present; its deceleration refuses "the slicing of time into past, present, and future," challenging viewers to experience the present as inextricable from the histories of racial capitalism and colonial modernity first produced by Comerio's lens, and later remediated by Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi.[24] Deceleration emerges as a crucial aesthetic technique for foregrounding the continuities in antiblack subjection and colonial violence that subtend the visual rhetoric of crisis in today's border regimes.

"Live from Lampedusa": Cuomo and Iorio's *Sudeuropa* (2005-7)

Berlin-based artists Maria Iorio and Raphaël Cuomo's *Sudeuropa* is an experimental film about Mediterranean crossings made between 2005 and 2007, set on the island of Lampedusa some years before it became a metonym for the world's deadliest border.[25] *Sudeuropa* deploys varied techniques of *deceleration* – both literally (slow motion footage) and more figuratively (by making the present-tense of the audio-visual experience radically disjunctive). These techniques are used to stage, over the course of a rather quiet forty minutes, the thwarting of vision, the failure of representation. Their camera registers this failure in fleeting moments: in the background of a sequence of a hotel chef preparing food, a static frame lasting several seconds offers viewers an out-of-focus kitchen wall, before which sits an ambiguous object with the word Lampedusa scrawled on it; the final "A" is partially obscured by tape or a sticker and embellished with scribbles and indecipherable text [**fig.4**]. Later, the camera lingers on a close-up of a partially ruined wall painting depicting a boat full of migrants inside Rome's Flavian Amphitheater (or Colosseum), full of scrapes and tears that expose the porous stone beneath. "Lampedusa" appears in the bottom right corner of the frame, its painted letters tattered and scuffed such that we can barely make them out. A yellow cord or hose runs horizontally across the foreground and seems to remind viewers of what remains outside both the painterly and cinematic frames [**fig.5**]. Both of these images, one blurry and partially obscured and the other composed of chipped paint on a crumbling wall, are fleeting and unremarked in their appearances. I read them as compelling distillations of the film's decelerated counter-aesthetics, which refuse the representational tempos and transparency of crisis.

Cluttering the profilmic with vehicles, walls, fences, or the backs of journalists and their video cameras, Cuomo and Iorio consistently obscure our vision of the objects of both the mass mediatic and the touristic gaze, faintly evoking that famous paradox that characterizes Lampedusa in the collective imaginary: the "wretched" scenes of subjection, and the stunning beauty of its sparkling waters [**fig. 6; fig. 7**]. The film hinges on several similar disjunctions – between presumed grammatical correctness and an Italian spoken fluently by two voiceover narrators whose speech is subtly marked by foreignness: traces of accents, grammatical slippages like gender and number agreement inhabit and estrange the Italian we hear, in what the artists call "un italiano approssimativo."[26] Furthermore, the subtitles in both Arabic and French evoke a multi- or trans-lingual space that produces the Mediterranean as what Franco Cassano has called a "multiverse," as opposed to the "origin" of Eurocentric universalism.[27] Other disjunctive elements include a voiceover that

32

ventriloquizes tourist interviews: "I thought I'd see *clandestini* here, but I don't see them;" "we see them on TV, but we don't see them here."[28] These perplexed observations about missed visual encounters are coupled with images of migrants at work for the tourist industry – setting up beach chairs and umbrellas, cleaning hotel rooms, cooking in a kitchen, making coffee in a hotel bar[29] [**fig. 8**]. Cuomo and Iorio's camera regularly frames these working people partially obscured behind walls, or through tightly cropped close-ups that show arms, midsections, backs – rarely a frontal or full body view – thereby refusing the rhetoric of exposure that prevails in border crisis iconography [**fig. 9**]. These withholding images poetically refigure the oscillation between the mass-mediated hypervisibility of migration-as-crisis and the mundane invisibility of migrant labor. The disjunction between voice and image is compounded in several sequences, as the narration refers only obliquely to the images offered: as one narrator relates a story about a German journalist in search of a scoop to bring back to the capitals of the European mainland and who boards a helicopter accompanying a pushback mission, we observe a brusque cut from the blurred kitchen wall we saw earlier to a ceiling fan that recalls the helicopter's propellor [**fig. 10**].

Further plays between mobility and stasis abound. For instance, the camera lurks at a great distance, "capturing," with a shot that approaches photographic stillness, primarily black(ened) people going about their suspended daily lives – *waiting* – at a detention center, the antithesis of movement, while the voiceover lists off trucks, helicopters, and airplanes – speedy vehicles that are marshaled by securitarian regimes to track and discipline their past and potential future movements *giorno e notte* (day and night) [**fig. 11**]. Piles of grounded boats at Lampedusa's *cimitero delle barche* (boat cemetery) are captured from a slow-moving vehicle [**fig. 12**]. Several seconds of dead time framing an empty tarmac from behind a gate is interrupted by an airplane taking flight, abruptly crossing our field of vision as the camera remains fixed in place.[30] Taken together, these elements have a cumulative effect that I am here calling *deceleration*, in so far as – like Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi – they disorient, or trouble, viewers with regard to time. Through the accumulative and disjunctive temporality of the audio-visual experience that they offer, Cuomo and Iorio draw us into an altered rhythm of reflection on the scene of Lampedusa, one that stands counter to its spectacularization in both the touristic and crisis imaginaries. In so doing, it interrupts the mediatic doctrine of immediacy, inviting viewers into contemplation of our uneven relationships to the sea and to historical time.

The film's opening sequence subtly produces the sea as a site of historical inscription. It opens with a black screen, and the audio of crashing waves situates us – despite the dark emptiness of the frame – on the beach, that

liminal space between sea and land that's irreducible to one or the other. After several seconds, this meditative state is interrupted by an out-of-focus aerial view of a harbor, in a seemingly cropped shot that stubbornly denies us a view of the built environment.[31] Instead, placid blue water and the many small boats anchored in it occupy the frame. Rather than a windswept diegetic soundscape, or one dominated by a helicopter's propeller, we continue to hear the gentle rhythm of the waves, anchoring the acoustic to the shore while the visual field is suspended far above it. A serene voiceover narration, laid over the sound of the waves, welcomes us, pausing for several seconds before situating us in Lampedusa [**fig. 13**]. The narration goes on to describe, in part elliptically and in part verbatim, what we later gather is a TV broadcast promoting the tourist industry, featuring an interview with Lampedusa's then mayor Sergio Bruno Siragusa (*Forza Italia,* 2002-7), claiming that *l'immigrazione clandestina* ("illegal immigration") has had no impact on tourists' ability to have a good time. As we hear this narration of the broadcast, the visual field is dominated by the blurred edges of the island's coastline, captured from a helicopter – an instrument of both mediatic and military surveillance – but slowed down in parts such that as viewers we feel ourselves buoyant, as if bobbing on the sea's surface, rather than far above it [**fig. 14**]. In their description of this sequence, Cuomo and Iorio remark on the duality of the helicopter footage, which they repurposed from a Canale 5 Mediaset broadcast on regional folklore:

> These are vaunting the beautiful panorama, the Mediterranean Sea, the wonderful landscape, propitious for holiday pleasures on the Italian island Lampedusa, the southern limit of the national territory. We can understand later that these images of the coastline at the same time attest to the surveillance of this territory. Filmed in close collaboration with the authorities, they actually trace the regular patrol routes of the military and police helicopters which secure the Italian border and prevent any uncontrolled arrival of people who left Tunisian and Libyan shores in order to reach Europe by boat.[32]

The effect of these strategies of withholding, layering, and accretion is far from the swift, crisp, military-style aerial surveillance and exposure evoked in the photojournalistic imagination and exemplified by the photos by Sestini and Pellegrin with which this article began: it is decelerated, disjointed, disorienting. The narration refers to a visual field that is absent; the helicopter lingers contemplatively over the coastline, which is characterized not by boats full of people in distress but instead by the many geologic strata along the steep cliffs of Capo Ponente that have long registered Lampedusa's encounter with the sea.

Situated further south than Tunis and Algiers, it is often pointed out that Lampedusa is much closer to Tunisia than to Sicily or the Italian mainland, and

that the island lies at the symbolic "crossroads" between European and African cultures and continents. The connections here are not only symbolic; they have a material dimension, as well. Geologically, Lampedusa is formed by a limestone *horst* ("mass" or "heap" in German) – a term used to name a kind of topography created when the earth's crust is pulled apart.[33] Lampedusa broke off from the African continent around two million years ago – sometime between the Neogene and the present Quaternary (which contains our current Anthropocene). The images of the steep edges of the striated coastline, which Cuomo and Iorio's film foregrounds in the opening sequences, thus also register this relatively recent (at least on the geologic time scale) material connection and rupture between land masses, which interrupts the neat demarcation of past from present, as well as terrestrial and maritime imperial borders.

What does it mean to begin a film about the so-called migration "crisis" this way? To begin from a state of meandering suspension and blurred vision, rather than from the clarity of frontality and focus? These opening shots appear as approximate visualizations of what Iain Chambers calls in a related context "signs that blur the vision and scratch the lens of transparency." For Chambers, transparency is the conceit of a "possessive, panoptical gaze," and blurred vision and scratched lenses are instead instantiations of Deleuzian "lines of flight" from the mandates of colonial modernity.[34] By foregrounding the striated coastline as an image of geologic deep time and offering us the sea as slow space, this opening sequence asks viewers to consider alternatives to the accelerated, progressive temporalities proffered by racial capitalism and colonial modernity and the decisive crisis iconography they require – blurred, or decelerated temporalities, such as those found in Reinhardt Koselleck's "sediments of time,"[35] geologic *deep time*, or *residence time,* a concept which Christina Sharpe borrows from oceanography and describes as, "the amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave the ocean;"[36] the kind that remind us, like Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's film, of those many violent "pasts that are not past" (writes Sharpe, paraphrasing the late Haitian intellectual Michel Rolph Trouillot's incisive claim that "pastness [...] is a position")[37] – and offer us an image of time, inviting us to link today's state-sanctioned mass drownings in the Mediterranean not only symbolically or analogically, but *materially*, to the purported pasts of slavery.[38] As Sharpe points out, "Human blood is salty, and sodium has a residence time of 260 million years."[39] With *residence time*, Sharpe addresses the unfathomable breadth and *longue durée* of "the wake," whose contemporary

antiblack manifestations she finds in both mass incarceration in the US, and in regimes of migration and detention in the Mediterranean. Cuomo and Iorio's blurred, sedimented coastline thus draws Lampedusa into these much vaster imperial currents and their recursive tempos.

In *The Black Maria*, poet Aracelis Girmay's elegy to the hundreds of primarily Eritrean victims of a shipwreck near Lampedusa on October 3, 2013 (and countless other histories of antiblack violence before and after), Girmay ponders: "How not to / assign all blackness near the sea / a captivity?"[40] Cuomo and Iorio's refusal of scenes of black subjection at the border seems to echo this question in a sequence that connects the carceral regimes of the Mediterranean border to a black humanity that contemplates the sea from land without being made captive by it. It begins with a sequence that couples blackness with self-directed mobility (rather than the passive status of shipwrecked victim in need of succor). It features Mansor Diouf driving a car across the island to Capo Ponente, which I have suggested appears in the film as a figure for the *longue durée*, insofar as its striated edges foreground geologic stratification as it meets the sea. Diouf is photographed in a tightly cropped side profile shot (evidently from the car's passenger seat) that features only his eyes, nose, and mouth as he drives along, looking out and including a few POV shots that approximate his vantage point as he surveys the barbed wire fencing, watchtowers, and police vehicles that characterize parts of Lampedusa as a carceral space [**fig. 15**]. The sequence picks up again some minutes later, this time with the long shot from a fixed and distanced camera of mostly black(ened) men behind a barbed wire fence at a detention center, described above as an example of the film's decelerated mode, and subtly evoking the carceral technologies we first saw observed from Diouf's perspective in the driver's seat. A cut opens a new sequence featuring Diouf, this time in a medium shot that includes his head and shoulders and reveals his bright collared shirt featuring a bold, contemporary Ankara, or African wax, print: a deep blue with white lines that cut through it, resembling undulating waves; a pattern made up of recurring green lips and what appears to be tubes of lipstick, akin to a kind of archipelago against an aquatic backdrop. Standing before Lampedusa's telecommunications control tower and an overcast sky, Diouf looks around at his surroundings once again. The faint sound of a helicopter forms a sound bridge with the previous sequence at the detention center, when the offscreen narrator had imitated the sound with a "ratatatatatata," as he listed off the surveillance technologies deployed to track migrants' movements. The helicopter can be heard briefly above the sound of waves crashing and sea birds squawking; Diouf looks up to the sky, confirming the helicopter's existence within the diegesis. Then he turns his back to the camera, and with square shoulders faces the sea from on high,

atop the cliffs of Capo Ponente [**fig. 16**]. This sequence's eloquent conclusion thus evokes Girmay's pressing question about how to resist subsuming the encounter between blackness and the sea with horrors such as the Middle Passage or its contemporary afterlife in the mass grave of the Mediterranean. It therefore obliquely refers to an entire tradition of black diasporic (and more specifically Caribbean) thought that has contemplated this very relation, from Paul Gilroy and Édouard Glissant to Sylvia Wynter, Derek Walcott, Kamau Braithwaite, Dionne Brand, NourbeSe Philip, Rinaldo Walcott, and many others.[41] Dionne Brand nods to this body of oceanic thought that places the "Door of No Return" of the Middle Passage at its center when she writes, "To look into this water was to look into the world," and "Derek Walcott wrote, 'the sea is history'". Brand continues, "I knew that before I knew it was history I was looking at."[42] Perhaps in this brief but stirring sequence, so out of synch with the standard visual archive of black(ened) people on the move across the Mediterranean, Diouf's presence – with the sea inscribed on his body in vibrant hues as he contemplates the sea as a repository for the inscription of history – makes a similar suggestion.

Might *cinematic deceleration* as explored in these pages thus be an aesthetic mode capable of restoring the fractured etymological bond between crisis and critique (from the Greek κρίνω, or *krino*: to separate, judge, decide)? Much of what crisis rhetoric seems to accomplish is a stifling of critique, denying us the slow time needed to ponder, to speculate, to gather enough information to make a decisive judgment. Crisis – with its emphasis on the here and now – also forecloses duration, protracted experience, or wandering. And yet this is how crisis is lived for many of those subjected to it today – from COVID to the Mediterranean border, to "slow violence" (Rob Nixon) on the front lines of climate change, quiet mass expropriation in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse, or the chronic and quotidian undervaluing of black lives and futures. And yet, in another sense, there is something paradoxical about the durational quality of crisis itself. For Lauren Berlant, "the *genre of crisis* can distort something structural and ongoing […] into something that *seems* shocking and exceptional."[43] Similarly, Janet Roitman has written about crisis as a *mode of narration* and has compelled us to ask if the concept of enduring, ongoing, seemingly eternal crisis is not itself an oxymoron.[44] In its contemporary formulation, crisis often functions as a nostalgic ideological fantasy, positing a future return to the ostensible normalcy of a projected past. Cuomo and Iorio's deceleration suggests an alternative method for comprehending the Mediterranean border today, one that carries us away from the crisp, decisive iconography of crisis and closer to its porous, contingent, and subjective dimensions. This passage from crisis to critique is evinced not only on screen, through their visual poetics of refusal, striation, and deceleration, but also

behind the scenes – through their production practice itself, which they have described as being composed of the slow time of daily encounters and connection – shared dinners, afternoon teas – with participants in their film project. "Siamo un po' reticenti all'idea di una 'visione etica,'" the artists have remarked, "Tentiamo di mettere in atto una *prassi* che sia etica – processo di trasformazione che contribuisca a *creare* una realtà." In distinguishing an ethical *vision* from ethical *praxis*, they implicate themselves in a process of filmmaking that intervenes in the real in order to reshape or transform it, in relation. Cuomo and Iorio's remark about the limitations of an "ethical vision" on the border, which appears in a 2020 interview conducted with the artists during a series of public screenings of their film in Palermo and Marseille, may or may not have been an subtle reference to a critically acclaimed film that was released about a decade after theirs, and which took "ethical vision" as its guiding metaphor.

Coda: Rosi's *Fuocoammare* (2016) and Humanitarian Affect

Made some ten years after Cuomo and Iorio's *Sudeuropa,* Gianfranco Rosi's *Fuocoammare* (*Fire at Sea*, 2016) is also set on Lampedusa, and somewhat playfully foregrounds *vision* (and in particular the "lazy eye") as central to its ethical project [**fig. 17**].[45] Upon its release, Rosi's *Fuocoammare* was breathlessly hailed by enthusiastic critics as a revival of Italy's most celebrated cinematic export – one that at the time of its emergence in post-WWII Italy was exalted by some for its unflinching drive to reproduce "reality."[46] I'm referring here to that quasi-mythological body of films by De Sica, Rossellini, Visconti and others and that came to be known as Italian neorealism, and which renowned French film critic and theorist Andre Bazin memorably referred to as "reconstituted reportage."[47] Another of neorealism's renowned theorists (also a practitioner), Cesare Zavattini, described it thus: "The cinema's overwhelming desire to see, to analyze, its hunger for reality, is an act of concrete homage towards other people, towards what is happening and existing in the world."[48]
Of course, despite its rhetoric of exposure, numerous blind spots characterized the neorealist moment, and have impacted the way it continues to function as a kind of common sense, or a necessary point of reference for any "serious," historically informed discussion of Italian film.[49] As Lorenzo Fabbri has argued, neorealism "functions as a placeholder for a foundational [post-World War II] national fantasy" about Italy as an innocent and childlike nation.[50] As such, Fabbri writes, "neorealism contributes to a retelling of Italy's past that avoids any decisive confrontation with Fascism."[51] Neorealist aesthetics and the myths that proliferated about it in the wake of influential

readings by Bazin, Deleuze, and others relied heavily not only on the "gritty" imagery of the ruined cityscape, the pile of rubble, or the bombed-out building, but precisely upon the brutalized (white) body. Parallels can be drawn between Rosi's sparse method – characterized by a fragmentary, episodic structure, and a visual poetics of exposure, and a lack of voiceover narration – and what Karl Shoonover has argued is neorealism's "use of physical suffering to dramatize the political stakes of vision and the need for extranational eyewitness".[52] It is in precisely such a frame that Rosi himself places *Fuocoammare*'s most horrific scenes of black(ened) death and dying.[53]

The scenes in question, which I will not rehearse here, appear in a roughly 15-minute sequence of the film's final quarter – a relatively extended period of screen time given that until this point there are only brief and sporadic intrusions of the migration narrative into the mostly quiet and at times quaint portrait of the lives of the tenderly humanized and charismatic white(ned) Lampedusan characters – Samuele with his lazy eye and slingshot; Zia Maria as she makes her bed under the loving eyes of Mary and Padre Pio; Pippo, the DJ, contemplating an aria as it plays for his listeners, all of whom are seemingly untouched by the mass tragedies unfolding nearby.[54] The sequence presents Rosi's participation in a sea rescue carried out by the Italian Navy. Several stylized shots of helicopters, ships, control panels, and search lights aestheticize the border-as-militarized spectacle [**fig. 18**]. When asked in an interview how he responds to critiques that his film exploits the tragedy by making a spectacle of it, Rosi evokes his duty to expose the situation to an international audience: "ritengo sia doveroso che il mondo sappia di questa situazione."[55] "The world must know about this situation," insists Rosi, as he evokes the neorealist rhetoric of exposure proffered by Zavattini.

Fuocoammare received exuberant international praise, culminating in its winning the Golden Bear at Berlin. One suspects that Rosi's goal was achieved: that is, that the desired "extranational eyewitnesses" Shoonover describes with regard to neorealism's challenge to global viewers had indeed been assembled and made to watch. Upon the film's release, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi brought 27 copies of the DVD to his EU colleagues, proudly declaring that the film represented "Italian values" and the "poetics of reception in Lampedusa."[56] With *Fuocoammare,* critics applauded Rosi for continuing his cinematic search within the margins of global modernity, outside the limelight, to places like Rome's ring road (*Sacro GRA,* 2013), the lives of boatmen on the Ganges (*Boatman,* 1993), the Juárez of shadowy hitmen and narcotrafficantes (*El sicario - Room 164,* 2010), etc. And yet, at the time of Rosi's filming, Lampedusa would have been hard to classify as a marginal space. For one, it certainly would not have been so if contemplated from the perspective of the tens of thousands who have died trying to reach

it. Furthermore, as Cuomo and Iorio's *Sudeuropa* had explored a decade before, the island has long been at the center of mediatic portrayals of the deadly Mediterranean route, and among the most spectacularized global borders; like Ferguson, its very name had already been made synonymous with the many (extra)legal tragedies and crimes – and local resistance and solidarity – that continue to unfold there. Rosi's film simply picked up where media outlets left off, taking viewers upon rescue missions in real time. The film indulges crisis spectacle and antiblack subjection rather than offering a critique of the policing of the island and the representational frenzy (mass media and artistic production alike) that itself (re)produces Lampedusa as a border between Europe and Africa. Rosi's film is thus complicit with the conditions it seeks to denounce.[57] Like the crisis imaginary to which it belongs, *Fuocoammare* shores up the thingness of both the border and the black(ened) people who die trying to cross it.

Part of what is so remarkable about Cuomo and Iorio's quiet film *Sudeuropa* is how it seems an anticipatory critique of Rosi's film – a proper decade prior to Rosi's work on what would become an international blockbuster. The critical reception that fawningly enshrined *Fuocoammare* among works by the neorealist "masters" was not off the mark; I would suggest, however, that the basis of the film's canonization as neorealist might not, however, lie in its radical ethics, nor in its "political *impegno*" (whose politics? Renzi's? the EU's?), but instead in its ideological function – as a means of mobilizing humanitarian affect in order to once again exculpate *italiani brava gente* from the border regimes that continue to make a mass grave of the Mediterranean.[58] Saucier and Woods' remark about this recurring strategy within humanitarian and securitarian discourse alike is apt to describe Rosi's project and Renzi's warm reception of it. "Black Africans are deployed in order to illustrate the tension between good and bad Italianness, and more broadly, Europeanness," they write.[59] Cuomo and Iorio's decelerated film instead employs a poetics of refusal – suggesting *not only* that visualizing Lampedusa and its perilous waters through the lens of crisis (re)produces the border and the suffering of those who attempt to cross as "things," but also drawing Lampedusa into the *longue durée* of broader histories of racial capitalism and colonial modernity, and their continuities with the present in a way that both anticipates and continues to animate discussions of "potential histories" (Azoulay) and alternate futures in and across the Black Mediterranean.

PLATES

1 Title card, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, *Dal Polo all'Equatore* (1984-6).

2 Big game hunting in Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, *Dal Polo all'Equatore*.

3 Slow moving train in Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, *Dal Polo all'Equatore*.

4 Lampedusa as blurred background in Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio, *Sudeuropa* (2005-7).

5 Tarnished Lampedusa in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

6 Traffic jam at the port in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

7 Denying mediatic capture in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

8 "I thought I'd see *clandestini* here," Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

9 Invisible labor in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

10 Fan as helicopter in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

عربات، مروحية، طائرات
fourgons, hélicoptères, avions

11 Waiting at the detention center in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

12 Lampedusa's boat cemetery in slow motion, Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

13 "Welcome… to Lampedusa" Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

14 Blurred coastline in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

15 Mansor Diouf in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

16 Mansor Diouf contemplates the sea in Cuomo and Iorio, *Sudeuropa*.

17 Samuele in Gianfranco Rosi, *Fuocoammare* (2016).

18 "Lazy eye," Rosi, *Fuocoammare*.

1. "Where are you," accessed January 7, 2025. https://www.massimosestini.it/wru.html. I remain grateful to Valeria Dani for bringing this photo and the related project to my attention.

2. For Achille Mbembe, "Blackness does not exist as such. It is constantly produced. To produce Blackness is to produce a social link of subjection and a *body of extraction*, that is, a body entirely exposed to the will of the master, a body from which great effort is made to extract a maximum profit." Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, translated by Laurent Dubois, John Hope Franklin Center Book (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 18. Similarly, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson refers to the ontological plasticity of "black(ened) people" who are "cast as sub, supra, and human *simultaneously* in a manner that puts being in peril because the operations of simultaneously being everything and nothing for an order – human, animal, machine, for instance – constructs black(ened) humanity as the privation and exorbitance of form." Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*, Sexual Cultures (New York: University Press, 2020), 35.

3. Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 21.

4. The scholarship on Lampedusa's spectacularization is considerable. For a representative sample, see: Paolo Cuttita, *Lo spettacolo del confine: Lampedusa tra produzione e messa in scena della frontiera*, Eterotopie, 144 (Milano: Mimesis, 2012); Nick Dines, Nicola Montagna and Vincenzo Ruggiero, "Thinking Lampedusa: Border Construction, the Spectacle of Bare Life and the Productivity of Migrants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 3 (2015): 430–45; Alessandra Di Maio, "Framing Migrant Memories: Lampedusa's Fragmented Archives," *Altre Modernità*, n. 27 (2022):1-17; Teresa Fiore, "From Exclusion to Expression in A Sud Di Lampedusa and Come Un Uomo Sulla Terra: Visualizing Detention Centres along Italy-Bound Migrant Routes," *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 49–64; David Forgacs, "Coasts, Blockades and the Free Movement of People," in *Italian Mobilities* (London: Routledge, 2015), 175-200; Giovanna Faleschini Lerner, "From the Other Side of the Mediterranean: Hospitality in Italian Migration Cinema," *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1–19. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/45h010h5; Aine O'Healy, "Imagining Lamepdusa," in *Italian Mobilities* (New York: Routledge, 2016) 152–74; Federica Mazzara, *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and Aesthetics of Subversion*, Italian Modernities (New York: Peter Lang, 2019); Simona Wright, "Lampedusa's Gaze: Messages from the Outpost of Europe," *Italica* 91, no. 4 (2014): 775–802. See also: Alessandro Triulzi, "Working with Migrants' Memories in Italy: The Lampedusa Dump," *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* 7 (October 1, 2016): 149–63 and *Border Lampedusa*, edited by Gabriele Proglio and Laura Odasso (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.

5. Jonathan Echeverri Zuluaga, "Errance and Elsewheres among Africans Waiting to Restart Their Journeys in Dakar, Senegal," *Cultural Anthropology* 30, no. 4 (2015): 589–610.

6. Cristiana Giordano, "Catastrophes," in "Refugees and the Crisis of Europe," special issue of *Cultural Anthropology*, edited by Mayanthi Fernando and Cristiana Giordano (2016) (no page numbers).

7. On borders as repetitive practices, see: Nicholas De Genova, "The 'Crisis' of the European Border Regime: Towards a Marxist Theory of Borders," *EuroNomade*, March 16, 2016, http://www.euronomade.info/?p=6912. On

borders as regimes of global governance, see: Harsha Walia, *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2021), 14.

8   Nicholas De Genova. *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 6.

9   Debarati Sanyal, "Calais's 'Jungle': Refugees, Biopolitics, and the Arts of Resistance," *Representations,* no. 139 (2017): 5.

10   The reference here is to photos of evacuees from Palestine during Nakba that inaugurated the modern Israeli state in a conversation about Azoulay's *Potential History* with writer and photographer Teju Cole at the International Center for Photography (2020).

11   P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, "Ex Aqua: The Mediterranean Basin, Africans on the Move, and the Politics of Policing," *Theoria* 61, no. 141 (2014): 55–75 (59).

12   Ivi, 64.

13   Chambers and Cariello write, "Thinking *with* the Mediterranean allows us to trace a history that questions and interrupts the institutional organisation of events and knowledge. Other scales of interpretation bring into play the potential of dissonance and a reworking of the inherited world into unexpected interpretations. Here, repertoires more than archives emerge as sites of constant re-elaboration and re-assemblage". Marta Cariello and Iain Michael Chambers, "Mediterranean Blues: Archives, Repertoires and the Black Holes of Modernity," *California Italian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2020): 1-17. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4qg5h4dv

14   Though I would characterize these works as experimental to distinguish them from commercially distributed documentary and narrative works, experimental does not always mean oppositional or subversive.

Even some among the examples I mention here as examples of a counter-archive or repertoire might be critiqued for operating in the mode of crisis spectacle. In addition, while most of the artists listed here have made works about Italian border regimes, part of how sovereign borders materialize as violence is through their reification, so I hesitate to categorize these works along national lines. I draw here from Ariella Azoulay, who writes that the logic of partition, "serves imperial ends by making it impossible to see one global regime that needs to be abolished". Ariella Azoulay, "Open Letter to Sylvia Wynter: Unlearning the Disappearance of Jews from Africa," *The Funambulist Magazine,* June 29, 2020, https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/reparations/open-letter-to-sylvia-wynter-unlearning-the-disappearance-of-jews-from-africa-by-ariella-aisha-azoulay

15   SA Smythe, "The Black Mediterranean and the Politics of Imagination," *Middle East Report (New York, N.Y. 1988)* 48, no. 286 (2018): 3–9.

16   Cristiana Giordano, "Exceeding Crisis. The Psychic Life of Drawings," *Anthropology Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2020): 77–98.

17   Saucier and Woods, "Ex Aqua", 64.

18   The present article develops an earlier reading of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's film alongside Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* (1973) and Dagmawi Yimer's *Asmat* (2014) through the lens of haunting, spectrality and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial time lag. Portions of this description thus also appear in: Rhiannon Welch, "Anachronism, Displacement, Trace. 'Scarred Images' and the Postcolonial Time Lag," *California Italian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2017): 1-26. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4fw6g9m6

19   Barbara Casavecchia, "Stop Forgetting. An Interview with Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi," *Frieze,* February 22, 2006, video, https://www.frieze.com/video/stop-

forgetting.

[20] This lack has led some to critique, misguidedly, in my estimation, the film's aestheticization and commodification of "the Other". For a cogent discussion and critique of this position, see Jeffrey Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards Making History in Avant-Garde Film* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 21-22.

[21] Robert Lumley, *Entering the Frame: Cinema and History in the Films of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi*, Italian Modernities 10 (Oxford; Peter Lang, 2011), 53-54.

[22] "Potential history is a form of being with others, both living and dead, across time, against the separation of the past from the present, colonized peoples from their worlds and possessions, and history from politics". Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 43.

[23] Cristina Lombardi-Diop, "Preface," in *The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders and Citizenship*, edited by The Black Mediterranean Collective (Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 4.

[24] Azoulay, *Potential History*, 43.

[25] Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio, *Sudeuropa* (Belgium: ARGOS, 2007).

[26] This formulation is drawn from an interview with the artists conducted in the fall of 2020, accessible here: Maria Iorio and Raphael Cüomo, *Sudeuropa. Intervista con Maria Iorio and Raphael Cüomo*, intervista, *ATP DIARY*, August 23, 2020. http://atpdiary.com/intervista-con-maria-iorio-e-raphael-cuomo/.

[27] Franco Cassano, *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 137.

[28] *Clandestini* is best translated with the English "illegals," both conceptually and in terms of the political affects it bundles. It does not exist as a legal category in international or European law. Its usage in Italian largely corresponds to the (racist)

moral panic over immigration that began in the 1990s and culminated in the Bossi Fini law of 2002, which criminalized undocumented border crossing. It peaked in 2005—the year Cuomo and Iorio began making *Sudeuropa*—and has been dropping ever since. (This is an approximation I gathered with Google Ngram data.).

[29] The name of each person who appears in the film is listed in the credits, along with the jobs they are seen performing, in both French and Arabic: Abdelhamid Boussoffara, Bader Belrhazi, Mansor Diouf, Sebastian Groza, Csaba Szekeli, Sana Ben Mahmoud, and Hamouda Mejri. Crediting those photographed is another means of countering the anonymity that prevails in border crisis iconography. In her article calling for a politics of abolition rather than hospitality in the Black Mediterranean, Ida Danewid has argued that, rather than a new phenomenon resulting from global migration, "the birth and development of the world capitalist system depended upon the exploitation of racialised, coerced, and *migratory* labour". "'These Walls Must Fall': The Black Mediterranean and the Politics of Abolition," *The Black Mediterranean. Bodies, Borders, and Citizenship* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 145–66 (148).

[30] In her reading of the film, Áine O'Healy reads the airport sequence as suggestive of the Italian state's secretive and illegal pushbacks to Libya, which were already likely occurring in 2006. O'Healy, "Imagining Lampedusa," 167.

[31] These blurred, decelerated aerial views might be a subtle critique of aerial reconnaissance, documentary, and the Futurist avant-garde as colonial modes of seeing, evident in Futurist *aereopittura* in works by Tullio Crali, Gerardo Dottori, and Tato (Guglielmo Sansoni) and LUCE documentary reels aimed at surveilling the built environment or the fantasy of "empty land." See, for example, *Il viaggio del Duce*

(1937) which includes aerial footage of Cyrenaica. See Giornale Luce, "Il viaggio del duce," Archivio Luce, March 17, 1937. https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000027122/2/il-viaggio-del-duce.html?startPage=100&jsonVal=%7B%22jsonVal%22:%7B%22query%22:%5B%22*:*%22%5D,%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20,%22temi%22:%5B%22%5C%5C%22Regia%20Aeronautica%20Italiana%5C%5C%22%22%5D%7D%7D. For more on Futurist *aereopittura,* see: Emily Braun, "Shock and Awe: Futurist 'Aeropittura' and the Theories of Giulio Douhet," in *Italian Futurism: Reconstructing the Universe,* edited by Vivien Greene (New York: Guggenheim Museum of Art, 2014), 269–73. For an analysis of contemporary artistic works treating Italian colonial temporality that take up the colonial legacies of *aereopittura,* see: Tenley Bick, "Postcolonial Retrofuturism: Alessandro Ceresoli's *Linea Tagliero* Prototypes," *Neo-Futurism,* Special Issue of *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* 13 (2023): 313-343.

32   "Maria Iorio and Rapahël Cuomo, 'Sudeuropa' synopsis," accessed January 7, 2025. https://www.parallelhistories.org/pages/Sudeuropa_MaghrebConnection.html

33   The term was coined by Austrian geologist Eduard Suess. From 1883-1909, Suess composed a four-volume treatise known in English as *The Face of the Earth*, a text which is still considered one of the foundational texts of the disciplines of paleogeography and plate tectonics. The emergence of modern European scientific disciplines–particularly those dedicated to amassing ostensibly objective data about peoples and places and classifying them–is inextricable from imperial practices of expansion, extraction, and exploitation–of both living beings and the earth's material resources.

34   Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings. The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2008), 11.

35   Koselleck (1988) also stands out for having conducted the most extensive genealogy of *crisis* in European intellectual history.

36   Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 41.

37   Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 15.

38   This brings Cuomo and Iorio's film into conversation with artist Christoph Büchel's controversial installation *Barca Nostra* (2019), which shocked audiences at Venice's Biennale because it consisted of the very boat that was once packed with between seven hundred and a thousand people and sank off the coast of Libya, en route to Lampedusa on 18 April 2015 (constituting the deadliest single shipwreck in the Sicilian Channel). Rinaldo Walcott writes: "*Barca Nostra* asks us to reckon with the history of the *Amistad* and the *Zong* as not behind us: in *Barca Nostra* the present and past meet, the Middle Passage is firmly globalized". Rinaldo Walcott, "The Black Aquatic," *liquid blackness* 5, no. 1 (1 April 2021): 63–73.

39   Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 41.

40   Aracelis Girmay, *The Black Maria: Poems*, American Poets Continuum Series 153 (Rochester, NY: BOA Editions Ltd., 2016), 33.

41   Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy: Rights Of Passage: Islands: Masks* (Oxford: University Press, 1973); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997); Marlene Nourbese Philip, *Zong!*, Wesleyan Poetry Series (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2008); Derek Walcott, *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948–2013*, first edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014); Rinaldo Walcott, "The Black Aquatic," *Liquid Blackness* 5, no. 1 (2021): 63–73; Sylvia

Wynter, "1492: A New World View," in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas. A New World View*, edited by Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington; London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 5–55; and "Columbus, the Ocean Blue, and Fables That Stir the Mind: To Reinvent the Study of Letters," in *Poetics of the Americas: Race, Founding, and Textuality*, edited by Bainard Cowan and Jefferson Humphries (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 141–63.

42 Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001), 12.

43 Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 7.

44 Janet L. Roitman, *Anti-Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 11.

45 In contrast, as I discuss above, Cuomo and Iorio have expressed reservations about an "ethical vision" insulated from collective praxis and the conditions of artistic/cinematic production.

46 This appraisal of neorealism – that it is somehow more "real" than the "escapist" cinema of Mussolini's fascist regime – relies upon a stubborn (and false) binary that is as old as European cinema itself: the "fantasy" of Méliès vs. the "reality" of Lumière.

47 André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, Vol. II (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 20.

48 Cesare Zavattini, "Some Ideas on the Cinema," *Sight and Sound* 23, no. 2 (1953): 64.

49 Ruth Ben-Ghiat's (2015) work on fascist "empire cinema" has shown that many of the techniques and practices celebrated as "neorealist" (non-professional actors, location shooting, etc.) are also common in the regime-sponsored films produced during the *ventennio,* well before the storied emergence of neorealism after WWII. Saverio Giovacchini (2011) has argued that the neorealist narrative of white male victimization subtended the erasure of Italy's then very recent and as-yet unresolved colonial past, by contributing to the myth of *italiani brava gente*, Italians as inadvertent or benevolent colonizers. And Noa Steimatsky (2011) has pointed out that as the neorealists turned their backs on the studio system in favor of the 'reality' offered by life on the city street, they seem to have willfully overlooked the vast displaced persons, or refugee, camp that *Cinecittà* – the Italian studio city – had in fact become in the immediate postwar years.

50 Lorenzo Fabbri, "Neorealism as Ideology: Bazin, Deleuze, and the Avoidance of Fascism," *Italianist* 35, no. 2 (2015): 194.

51 Ivi, 184.

52 Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision. The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 15.

53 I refer here to the sequence capturing many lifeless bodies and people suffering from dehydration, all of whom appear to be from the Horn of Africa; for the white European audiences to whom this film is addressed, they would appear as dead and dying black bodies. They constitute what Saidiya Hartman calls in the opening of *Scenes of Subjection*, the "terrible spectacle" (she is quoting Frederick Douglass) and the routine nature, the causal display, of black suffering. Though people from the Horn of Africa may not identify as black, border regimes *blacken* them (in both Achille Mbembe's and Zakiyyah Jackson's terms) – in particular, people attempting to cross through Libya from East or West (sub-Saharan) Africa are routinely interpellated as black and subjected to violence as a result.

54 The long, transnational history of the racialization of Sicilians and their inclusion in or exclusion from the category of whiteness between mainland Italy and the US is beyond the scope of this essay. Here, I use 'white(ned)' to refer to the subject position

that appears naturalized by Rosi's camera as those who belong in Lampedusa and its nostalgically rendered rural landscapes, as opposed to predominantly black(ened) migrants who appear in his film, who are instead marked as coming from elsewhere and photographed exclusively in relation to the state and its securitarian technologies (rescue ships, military helicopters, medical screenings and other forms of biopolitical surveillance, etc.). In a different but not unrelated context (mass incarceration in the US), Nicole Fleetwood (2020) has suggested "carceral visuality" as a term to describe a "set of rehearsed images created by the state and by nonincarcerated image makers" to "[reinforce] the idea that the primary relationship of people in prison is to the punitive state". Carceral visuality is also apt to describe the border crisis imaginary deployed in Rosi's film. Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 16.

55 Giulia Rosmarini, "Gianfranco Rosi. L'intervista al regista di *Fuocoammare*, Orso d'oro a Berlino," *LifeGate*, May 13, 2016, https://www.lifegate.it/gianfranco-rosi-intervista.

56 Renzi remarked that his goal in sharing the DVD was to "spiegare che questo è un pezzo dell'Italia, sia dal punto di vista del cinema che dal punto di vista dei valori che rappresenta," tightening the articulation between Italian national values and national cinema, whose global expression has long been neorealism. Salvatore Frequente, "Migranti, Renzi: 'Porto 27 Dvd di *Fuocoammare* al Consiglio Europeo,'" *Corriere Della Sera*, March 7, 2016, https://www.corriere.it/spettacoli/16_marzo _07/migranti-renzi-portero-27-dvd-fuocoammare-consiglio-europeo-e8f1d986-e458-11e5-9e78-e03cf324c1ba.shtml. This was a period in Italian public and political discourse when *accoglienza* (or hospitality)

was among the "ethical" alternatives proposed to the criminalization of undocumented migration inshrined in the 2002 Bossi Fini Law. For more on this as it pertains to the (sculptural) arts at the Lampedusa border, see: Tenley Bick, "Porta di Lampedusa, Porta d'Europa: Contemporary Monumentality, Entropy, and Migration at the Gateway to Europe," in *Migrants Shaping Europe, Past and Present*, edited by Helen Solterer and Vincent Joos (Manchester University Press, 2022), 131–66.

57 Similar arguments appear in: Federica Mazzara, "My Review of *Fuocoammare* (Fire at Sea) by Gianfranco Rosi," *MOVING BORDERS: Migration and the Aesthetics of Subversion*, June 10, 2016, http://movingborders.blogspot.com/2016/06/my-review-of-fuocoammare-fire-at-sea-by.html. See also: "*Fuocoammare*: Considerazioni Del Collettivo Askavusa," *Askavusa*, https://askavusa.wordpress.com/2016/02/24/1428/.

58 For a similar argument, see: Miguel Mellino and Giuseppe Orlandini, "*Fuocoammare*. Frammenti di un discorso umanitario," *Opera Viva*, https://operavivamagazine.org/fuocoammare/.

59 Saucier and Woods, "Ex Aqua," 67.