

From One Rim to the Other: Lives That Matter.

Tunisian Mothers, Families and Italian feminist collective organize to know what happened to disappeared Tunisian migrants.

One year ago, in the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution, almost 26.000 Tunisians migrants burnt the frontiers between the Northern and the Southern rim of the Mediterranean, leaving towards Europe and reaching the coasts of the Italian island of Lampedusa.

Many of these boats sank, in that Mediterranean Sea that, due to the EU migration management and containment politics, is becoming more and more a Sea of deaths. However, some boats disappeared: while their departure is attested, what happened afterwards is not clear. It is not clear if they reached the Lampedusa coastline or if they ever reached the island. It is not clear either if they sank as no shipwreck has been attested around the days of their documented departures. And this lack of clarity becomes the tragedy of these migrants' families who, for over a year, have been lacking news about their sons.

The four missing boats left the Tunisian village of Sfax in the following days: March 1st, March 14th and March 29th 2011, heading toward Lampedusa, carrying a total of about 250 Tunisian men.

Disappeared migrants' parents started to organized in the late Spring, demanding the new Tunisian government to account for the lives of their sons. During the summer, the group was joined by the Italian Milan-based feminist collective "Leventicinqueundici" and the protest was turned into a specific request: that the Tunisian government should provide the fingerprints of the 250 missing Tunisians to the Italian government for a cross checking in their databases to establish if these people had entered Italy. The families and the Italian feminist collective organized across the Mediterranean building a movement that connected its two Rims and whose name is inspired exactly to the space of this common struggle: "From one rim to the other: Lives that matter".

In November 2011, "From one Rim to the other: Lives that matter" released a petition asking for the collaboration of Italian and Tunisian authorities on the fingerprints exchange to help Tunisian families trace their sons. The petition was signed by thousands of people.

On December 18, 2011, a series of demonstrations took place, simultaneously, both in Italy (Milan and Parma) and in Tunis to support the struggle of the families.

In January 2012 a Tunisian delegation of parents of disappeared migrants came to Italy to push Italian and Tunisian governments to endorse the campaign and to collaborate and cross-check fingerprints as the campaign "From one Rim to the other: Lives that matter" had demanded.

The Tunisian government finally sent the fingerprints around mid-March, after many sit-ins in Rome in front of the Tunisian embassy and in Tunis in front of the Italian embassy – where, on

March 30th, hundreds of Tunisian mothers besieging the Italian embassy – and after a meeting with the Italian authorities. However as of today no official response has been issued yet.

Last week three Tunisian mothers attempted suicide, showing the level of exasperation of these families who have been waiting to know what happened to their sons for over a year and who have been kept in a limbo by both the Italian and the Tunisian government.

Thus, we advocate for the responsibility of Italy and Tunisia in letting people die in the Sea, claiming at the same time the necessity to account for people's lives.

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First Petition for missing Tunisian migrants

(English version at the bottom of the page, after the Italian, Arabic, French version)

<http://www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article995>

Last Petition published on April 24, 2012

<http://leventicinqueundici.noblogs.org/?p=1010>

Fires

It is hard to write anything meaningful when a mother sets herself on fire and when, soon thereafter, two other mothers try to commit suicide. It all happened in Tunis in these past few days. Jannet Rhimi has been treated at the hospital for severe burns since Thursday. After her gesture, two other mothers acted the exasperation of more than a year of waiting on their own bodies. The sorrow for the disappearance of their sons is a sure thing. However, confronted with such extreme gestures we should all ask ourselves what is going on and how we could mobilize so that these mothers' bodies won't have to keep burning in order to speak.

We also have been silent lately, we who, together with the mothers and the families of disappeared Tunisian migrants, have organized the campaign "From One Rim to the Next: Lives That Matter." What is there left to say, in fact, after the endless initiatives (sit-ins in front of embassies and prefectures and letters to ministers) that didn't break through the silence, the taking time, and the lack of clarity on the part of Italian and Tunisian institutions? What can we write? A petition is

usually written to communicate something, to denounce something, to call to some kind of action. We didn't know anymore what to do and how to make our voice heard, after the common action on March 30th this year, with the sit-in in front of the Tunisian Embassy in Rome and the one in front of the Italian Embassy in Tunis. In Tunis, the mothers once again showed their radical ways, their radical claims as women when they besieged the Italian embassy forcing their life request into it, while, at the same time, denouncing the migration government policies (based on pacts and bilateral agreements) which produced the disappearance of their sons and denouncing that migration government that keep being silent about what happened to their sons. On April 11, together with a delegation of Tunisian families in Italy, we had a meeting in Rome with the Immigration department of the border police. During this meeting we were told that the digital support containing the first 142 fingerprints had arrived from Tunisia and was still being analyzed by the Italian forensic police service for a comparison with the fingerprints of Italian databases. The analysis of the second slot with 112 fingerprints, we learned, had not started yet. A few days later, Tunisian institutions followed up with informal updates on the fingerprint analysis results, and then with denials of these very updates. So was the fingerprints' check over? Was it not completed yet? Why was it taking so long to carry it out? Did it produce negative results?

After more than a year, this lack of updates and transparency exacerbated the sorrow and made room for all sorts of hypothesis about the disappeared Tunisians. Anyone approaching this story without making the necessary time to understand what happened will develop the impression of a collective delirium. Let us start unpacking it from the beginning. Some mothers and some family members recognize or think that they recognize their sons from videos in the Italian news. Others receive phone calls from their sons from their boats telling them they are close to the shore, close to having arrived. How long should it really take to an Italian-Tunisian team to work on these clues, to understand if those boats did indeed arrive, to identify the people in the news videos, to trace the phone calls that had been received by the families? But no team has been put on the job either by Italian or Tunisian institutions. In the meantime – a meantime that has been lasting for over a year – any hypothesis becomes possible. It is the first time that something like this happens: some families demand about their sons, pretend to know, reclaim their sons, dead or alive. These families' claim goes against their country's law, which institutes "clandestine emigration" as a criminal offense in complicity with the European Union migration management regime and establishes quotas for regular visas in line with the Italy-Tunisia bilateral agreements. These very migration quotas enact at the same time death quotas, the quotas of excluded migrants who die crossing the sea. It is the first time that families organize and confront institutions in this way and it may be seen as another domino effect stemming out of the Tunisian revolution. It is an effect of the Tunisian revolution

towards Europe, following the same route that many young Tunisians took after the revolution, embracing their conquered freedom as a freedom of movement. It is the first time that we witness this: mothers who, with their own bodies and the pictures of their sons, besiege the embassy of a destination country, shouting their sons' names and bringing two banners into the embassy bearing the script, in Italian and Arabic: "From One Rim to the Next: Lives That Matter. Earth Belongs to All Men and Women." It is also the first time that we witness something else: two countries' representatives being forced to meet to exchange fingerprints not to deport people as it usually happens but to answer the families' demand about where they are. It is not by chance, then, that it's been taking so long to perform this fingerprint cross-check and that now, while the check should be approaching the end, nobody seems to know how to take responsibility about it and how to talk with the families who forced institutions to this fingerprint exchange. It is a new situation: bilateral agreements tend to be war agreements whereby fingerprints are instrumental to people's disappearance; this time instead fingerprints have been mobilized in the name of life, in a language that demands for sons, dead or alive.

In the meantime, during this very long time, a delirious language has been building in the letter of policies. This delirium spread at the level of common sense. Some examples. At the beginning of April, on her way back from Libya, an Italian minister announces that Italy will pay for renewing of the Kufra detention center, which she called "holding center", and which is instead a well-known concentration camp and a rape camp for the women "held" there, which Italy had already financed in past years. Moreover, a UNHCR spokesperson suggests to use commercial boats for patrolling activities in the Mediterranean so as to "promptly intervene" to prevent tragedies. The same Italian minister, the one mentioned above, also presses Tunisia for new agreements that would comply with human rights standards while strengthening border enforcement along the coastline, as if the right to live, that very right that those enforcement activities were preventing, was not itself a human right. And finally the European Court for human rights condemnation of Italy; the so called Hirsi case received by everyone, anti-racist organizations included, as a victory against push-back at sea policies enforced by Italy and Libya starting from 2009: 15,000 Euros were recognized as a reimbursement to 24 Somalian and Eritrean citizens who had been violently pushed back to Libya, together with other 200 migrants. Italy settled for a total of about 360,000 Euros for its two years of complicity with incarcerations, ill-treatments, rapes and the "Libyan" deaths: not even the price of a one bedroom apartment in an Italian city.

Throughout these months we would have liked, together with Tunisian mothers and families, to burn this craziness, to unmask this delirious policy language and win at least one battle against

these very policies. We would have liked to finally be able state, with the families, “From one Rim to the Other: Lives that Matter” and we would have liked for this to be the description of a reality. We would have liked to be able to claim this not as a protest but as a reality. We would have liked to have been able to say, for once, that we had been able to make those lives matter “from one rim to the other,” the lives of the families’ sons who burnt the frontiers and whose families kept looking for them, and our lives who, together with them, are more and more immersed in the fences of lives that do not matter. Instead, the body of a mother is burning and the hands of her husband who tried to extinguish the fire are burning too. And in the meantime two more mothers have tried to commit suicide.

This is not the time for petitions. Maybe this is the time to ask one another how to keep stating, against these policies, that lives matter.

Le Venticinqueundici

<http://leventicinqueundici.noblogs.org/>