

Making lives count against those who have decided to disregard them

More than 80 people are missing. This is the story told by the survivors of the last shipwreck which happened close to Lampedusa coasts the night of September 6. And while Italy was staging the rescue machine, as it's been the case for many years now, something new was taking place in Tunisia. At first it took place on the web, then in other Tunisian cities – a demonstration in Tunis in front of the foreign affairs ministry, another demonstration in Sfax, a general strike in El Fahs, in the governorship of Zagouha, the place where some of the missing migrants were from – and also through the anger of parents and relatives. All of that made the Tunisian government move; indeed, during the first days the government was blamed not only for immobilism but even for indifference since it took part to a collective marriage celebration instead of proclaiming a national mourning for the shipwreck. At the moment, a delegation headed by Jaziri, the Tunisian Secretary of Immigration, is in Lampedusa, where, the newly elect mayor Giusi Nicolini expressed words of mourning underlying how “absurd it is that people should arrive in this way”. A hint, even if just a veiled one, to the issue of responsibilities, beyond the usual set phrases usually pronounced in these circumstances.

Indeed, this is the point: who is responsible for the shipwreck? The shipwreck of the last Thursday only the last of a long series of deaths and missing people that happened over years in the Sicilian Channel and other places in the Mediterranean. A marine cemetery that has been submerging the lives and the desires of thousands and thousands of bodies, women, men and children. Each time that a shipwreck happens, flows of comments follow, many or just a few, in a large or small amount, depending on the emotion aroused. And then again another silence, waiting for the next shipwreck. Of course, something new is happening after the shipwreck on Thursday and it would be absurd not to see it; as after all something new has been happening in Tunisia for several months, since the mothers and the families of other “missing” people begun to demand both to Tunisian and Italian institutions to account for the life of their sons, those sons who left Tunisia in the aftermath of the revolution, acting the freedom that they had just gained as a freedom of movement. However, as the group of women that supported the struggle of these families, we would not want turths to be evaded as usual. We would not want this to happen also this time when, with words, also riots came.

The responsibility for those deaths is not in the water. Nor does it lay in the slowness the rescue operations, even if it is important to investigate this issue each time. It is not even a problem of refining control systems and technologies, as we've been reading in these days in some appeals promoted by European associations which circulated via web. Controls are already there, with all their technologies, the most fine-tuned and advanced technologies, exactly aimed at producing this outcome: bodies that can cross and ghost bodies, deaths, or missing migrants' bodies, whatever name one wants to use. It is not even the “human trafficking” racket that should be called in to account for this because, with the deaths of migrants, that racket is part of the present migration policies. And it is not even the Tunisian government that should be blamed for its few costal controls, for its initial immobility and lack of sensibility, even if this governmental line is offensive. Or to put it in better words, this is not the real problem. Sure, the issuing of a national mourning, instead of the celebration of a wedding would have been a significant step but even the act of mourning and a collective cry sometimes may function to cover instead of unveiling responsibilities.

During these days, as something new is happening, we all run the risk to be deceived, to be part of a “big deception”, if we stop claiming forcefully that those lives should count. The claim should be addressed against the multiple actors of the migration government policies dictated by the E.U. agenda. Among these actors: Italy and the former and current Tunisian government who allowed those policies, border patrol agencies, intergovernmental organizations supporting the idea that migrations should be governed. These actors are the sole responsible for those deaths and for not answering the crucial question: why those women and men could not take a shipping line boat, an airplane, any of the means of transportation European citizens are allowed to take to cross that short distance that separates the two rims of the Mediterranean sea? Who gets to decide on the difference about these two mobility options? And why such decision? Those policies have inscribed in their logic the notion of “externality”: deaths, the Mediterranean as a maritime cemetery, the slowness or even the “zeal” in rescue operations, the outcomes of migration control technologies which is aimed to filter the existences of those who may cross – to be expelled or to be illegalized – from those who will be submerged by the sea's unintended complicity.

Tunisian migrants told us clearly that they don't intend to be bridled in this account of “externalities”, enacting their freedom as a freedom of movement – i.e. that particular type of freedom without which the word freedom is just an empty word. First in 2011 and now in 2012 after this last shipwreck, the mothers and families of the young Tunisian migrants teach us that these “externalities” are lives, sons, existences and desires.

These are lives that matter and, to make them count, we should claim this against those who have decided to disregard them.

This is the message coming from Tunisia this days, we think: a collective rebellion against migration policies understood as part of an economic government over lives which is swallowing up these very lives on both rims of the Mediterranean.

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