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## Objects, Debris and Memory of the Mediterranean Passage: *Porto M* in Lampedusa

Federica Mazzara

This article will consider the current migratory passage in the Mediterranean towards Lampedusa with a focus on memorial objects. The arrival of refugees' boats, often victims of shipwrecks, on the island of Lampedusa, over the past decades, has produced a large quantity of "debris", which the locals stored in improvised "cemeteries" of boats that were also used as the island's landfills.

Within the island, the local Collective *Askavusa* has played a central role in rescuing whatever they could from the wrecked boats, including private photographs, shoes, pots, religious texts and other personal items that accompany the migrants on their often deadly passage of the Mediterranean.

We do not know if the owners of these objects survived the journey. However, they have come to serve as material testimonies to a continuing perilous global transit, which has exposed the inadequacies of European and international policies that continue to illegalize the right of refugees to move and survive. *Askavusa* has not simply collected the surviving

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22 objects, it has created a space called *Porto M*, where the objects are dis-  
23 played to the public, in order to preserve something tangible from the  
24 often traumatic memory of the passage. *Porto M* is not a traditional  
25 museum, it resists a logic of mummification and exoticism. The objects  
26 provide the raw material for an ongoing project that also deals with recy-  
27 cling and rebirth in artistic works that become the symbol of what I here  
28 define as an “aesthetics of subversion”, which is meant to offer a new  
29 narrative around the migratory experience of these mostly faceless and  
30 nameless travellers.

31 The article will raise questions revolving around the complexities of  
32 bearing witness to this historical moment, commonly characterized as  
33 posing a great “threat” to the stability of the borders and identity of  
34 Europe that plays a complex role as passive bystander, perpetrator and at  
35 times “saviour”: What memorial strategies are used in order to resist the  
36 dehumanization perpetuated by the media and a dominant political dis-  
37 course, according to which the boat migrants and refugees of Lampedusa  
38 are nothing more than an undefined and repetitive “dark” mass of unde-  
39 sired others? Identifying the objects that may provide a testimony for  
40 those who cannot speak, I shall suggest, will contribute to a process of  
41 subjectification of the migratory experience, where from debris, waste  
42 and anonymous mass, migrants eventually become subjects of power,  
43 subverting the dominant discourse revolving around their invisibility as  
44 “boat people”.

## 45 **Migratory Memory Practices**

46 At times of global migratory passages there is an urgent need to docu-  
47 ment this daring human endeavour. Museums of migration all around  
48 the world have attempted in different ways throughout recent history to  
49 meet this challenge, with Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration  
50 being one of the most famous examples.

51 It goes without saying that when it comes to museum practices in a  
52 global context, one has to consider and question the role that museums  
53 traditionally have, which is generally to preserve national identities and  
54 a sense of cultural belonging. Migratory passages force us to reimagine

memory and exhibition strategies in light of cultural diversity that is usually kept at the margin of the mainstream national narratives. 55 56

There are important and fundamental issues to be considered when it comes to the sustainability of processes of memorialization put in place by Western societies in relation, for instance, to postcolonial contexts. Have the countries, which have originally performed colonial oppression and are implicitly responsible for most of the current migratory passages from Africa, the right to engage in processes and strategies of memorialization of these very passages? And if so, how to proceed in this very challenging undertaking? 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64

In a recently concluded research project called “Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernities and Museum Practices”,<sup>1</sup> Iain Chambers and a group of researchers mainly based at the University of Naples, L’Orientale, have carried out an important study of museum practices in light of contemporary migration. Among the main aims of the project there is an interest in developing a reflection on the question of memory and belonging on a transnational scale in order “to raise awareness of the link between diverse forms of memory and heritage and the enhancement of mutual recognition for building a more inclusive approach of European identity.”<sup>2</sup> 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74

Starting from the premise suggested by Chambers that the museum “does not so much conserve and transmit memory as produce and elaborate it”,<sup>3</sup> this article is interested in investigating the processes of production and elaboration of memorialization in spaces directly affected by migration, such as *Porto M* in Lampedusa. 75 76 77 78 79

The main challenge faced by museums as conceived in traditional terms within a migratory context, is to overcome national borders. As a space that aims at embracing cultural difference, museums need to question their traditional role of archiving dead matters that reflect a well-established, fixed and definite identity. In contexts of mobility, according to Chambers, the museum “loses the stability of a storehouse of institutional memories and shifts into a more fluid, de-territorialised and re-territorialised configuration” of both the represented and the repressed.<sup>4</sup> A more fluid configuration implies first of all a less institutionalized setting of the museum space, a redefinition of the practices of representation and a subversion of the process of spectatorship. As suggested by Lidia 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90

91 Curti in an article emblematically titled “Beyond White Walls”, museums  
92 in an age of migration should promote an “interruption of the archive”,  
93 that prioritizes the performative dimension of the memorial event.<sup>5</sup>

94 The compulsion to exhibit the “other” is part of a wider representa-  
95 tional discourse revolving around migration from a Western perspective,  
96 whereby migrants and refugees are the subjects of otherization, lack-  
97 ing any form of voice. Legal, political and media discourse reflect this  
98 strategy of subjugation and promote a shared set of values and meanings  
99 around migration that finds its confirmation in social behaviour. Within  
100 this logic, the subalterns cannot speak, they are only granted a collective  
101 speech that essentializes their cultural difference. Museums should then  
102 promote “complex rites”,<sup>6</sup> whereby the objectification of the others—  
103 which is typical of Western institutionalized practices when it comes to  
104 the representation of cultural difference—is replaced by a new scopic  
105 regime, a new way of seeing. In this new regime, the “subalterned” are  
106 given a voice and the right to claim a different status than that of vic-  
107 tims and/or invaders of national bodies, while the physical boundaries,  
108 the “white walls” of the museums are also overcome. This reorganization  
109 of the memorial space, in light of contemporary migrations, entails the  
110 possibility of generating new memories and a new aesthetics that in the  
111 context of this article I define as an “aesthetics of subversion” (Mazzara  
112 2015, 2016a, b).<sup>7</sup> The subversion promoted by a new memorial practice AU2  
113 implies first of all the reassessment of the margin, which in bell hooks’  
114 terms, becomes a “space of radical openness, a profound edge”,<sup>8</sup> in other  
115 words, a space where it is possible to perform a certain form of resistance.

116 In museums as potential spaces of subversion, migrants become sub-  
117 jects of power who challenge the fixed, self-contained, imagined com-  
118 munity of the nation by activating a logic of exposure that reveals an  
119 uncomfortable shared memory, between the insiders and the outsiders  
120 of that community. This, according to Iain Chambers, transforms the  
121 museum into “a venue able to promote affective strategies of memorial-  
122 ization”, where “the sensorial bodies of spectators are activated and take  
123 us beyond the compulsion to exhibit into an altogether more porous  
124 political space”.<sup>9</sup> A place currently reflecting this potential is, as we shall  
125 see, *Porto M* in Lampedusa.

## **Porto M: From Debris to Objects of Memory**

126

*Porto M*, which can be translated into English as ‘Harbor M’—where M stands for many different things according to their founders, including *Mediterraneo* (Mediterranean), *Migrazione* (Migration) *Militarizzazione* (Militarization), *Mare* (Sea), *Memoria* (Memory), *Miscuglio* (Mixing) and *Mobilizzazione* (Mobilization)—is the base of a local association called *Askavusa* (which means ‘barefoot woman’ in Sicilian dialect). *Askavusa* was founded in 2009 following demonstrations against the creation of a new Centre for Identification and Expulsion (CIE) on the island, as a result of the increasing number of arrivals from Libya. This represents the first attempt by *Askavusa* to subvert the process of militarization that is still ongoing in Lampedusa.

The purpose of the association is generally to promote anti-racism and multiculturalism, especially in relation to the arrival of boat migrants and refugees, while the collective also supports counter-information about the island, documenting its state of abandonment and isolation; all this within a wider struggle against capitalism and class issues that has at times resulted in obstructing their initiatives, including the museum project.<sup>10</sup> Currently, one of the main aims of the collective is to challenge the process of militarization of Lampedusa, as the result of the patrolling of the Mediterranean Sea to resist immigration. This process of militarization reflects a wider discourse on the “Spectacularization of the Border”<sup>11</sup> that has created a state of emergency strongly challenged and opposed by *Askavusa*.

In order to carry out its political battles, the collective has fostered and encouraged a series of events with the aim of propagating a different image of Lampedusa than the one of the “sentinel of Fortress Europe”, perpetuated by the political discourse and the mainstream media. *Askavusa* has encouraged a process of rehabilitation of the border, being aware of the socio-economical and political marginality that Lampedusa encapsulates; an island on the border of Europe, not simply for those who arrive there from outside—the refugees and migrants—but also for the dwellers of this tiny land who feel isolated, forgotten and left behind, despite the island functioning as the stage of a global “crisis”.

160 Among the most important initiatives supported and organized by  
161 *Askavusa* was the *LampedusaInFestival*, a yearly film competition, which  
162 represents a moment of exchange, dialogue and analysis of contemporary  
163 issues revolving around migration, borderization and militarization. The  
164 festival has been an important showcase for the collective, where also  
165 migrants and refugees have been involved in various ways, especially in  
166 its first editions: as artists presenting their film projects and performances  
167 or as participants in debates and dialogues.<sup>12</sup>

168 The participatory method used by the collective ascribes to the pro-  
169 tagonists of the migratory passage the possibility of self-representation  
170 and self-narration. These participatory acts facilitated by the collective  
171 represent, according to Brambilla, “counter-hegemonic borderscapes”,  
172 which refer to those practices that articulate alternative subjectivities and  
173 points of view and allow a potential subversion and substitution of a  
174 hegemonic discourse:

175 The *LampedusaInFestival* reveals that migrants are gradually contributing  
176 to overcoming the binary opposition between oppression and resistance at  
177 the EU southern external border, highlighting the urgency to focus our  
178 attention on a critical questioning of the ways in which more ambiguous,  
179 subtle strategies for existence and living in and across the Euro/African  
180 borderland are constructed by migrants, despite violent and oppressive  
181 border and migration regimes.<sup>13</sup>

182 According to the perspective of this article, these practices of active  
183 participation in a counter-discourse to a mainstream narrative about  
184 immigration into Europe—via Lampedusa—are an effective way of  
185 displacing the border dimension of the island, revealing its potential to  
186 become a “site of conflict”, in bell hooks’ words, while also including the  
187 migrants and refugees into the political space of representation. In this  
188 process of displacement, migrants and refugees gain the possibility to  
189 come out of the invisible mass to which they are commonly relegated, in  
190 order to recover a subjectivity that reflects the right to claim a voice in the  
191 constitution of a new citizenship.

192 Unfortunately, *Askavusa* has recently decided not to run the yearly  
193 Festival in the next years, and to replace it with a series of events, not

## 10 Objects, Debris and Memory of the Mediterranean Passage...

necessarily using cinema as a preferred medium, throughout the year. 194  
This was partly due to their resistance to accepting any funding consid- 195  
ered inadequate, in line with their struggle against capitalism: 196

We started growing a strong hatred for the capitalist system, for the cul- 197  
tural hegemony of the media, and for all culture that is financed by banks, 198  
by foundations such as ENI, for example, or by other organizations that on 199  
the one hand destroy entire territories and produce poverty and exodus, 200  
and on the other they wash their hand and conscience by supporting festi- 201  
vals and films revolving on so-called “social” issues.<sup>14</sup> 202

Within this tension between the recognition of the importance of 203  
migrants’ subjectivity and the collective’s struggle against the capital- 204  
ist system, *Askavusa* has undertaken an important, complicated, and at 205  
times contradictory journey—still ongoing—that deals with the heritage 206  
of the migratory passage docking in Lampedusa and that has found in 207  
*Porto M* its *raison d’être*. 208

*Porto M* is the heart of the collective. It was originally born with the 209  
intention of storing some objects that the members of *Askavusa* had 210  
found in Lampedusa’s Imbriacola landfill where the migrants’ boats were 211  
abandoned. It has now become a much more elaborate and political space 212  
that reflects the collective’s agenda to resist any attempt to “spectacular- 213  
ize” the island as a militarized border. The story of *Porto M* is fascinating 214  
and full of controversies. I will summarize some of the most important 215  
passages that led to the birth of this highly critical space. 216

The idea of collecting objects that originally belonged to those under- 217  
taking the journey by boat from Africa towards Lampedusa, was first 218  
explored by the leader of *Askavusa* Giacomo Sferlazzo in 2005. Sferlazzo 219  
is a musician and a visual artist and, since childhood, he has been inter- 220  
ested in recovering material from processes of deterioration, in order to 221  
instil a new life in them, usually through a process of artistic remodelling. 222  
The recovering of the migrants’ objects started by chance, when—during 223  
an inspection in the landfill, later called the cemetery of boats—Sferlazzo 224  
came across a series of wooden boat boards and a worn Koran that most 225  
probably belonged to one of the travellers. From this first meeting with 226  
the objects came his first work, *Verso Lampedusa* (Fig. 10.1), which 227





Fig. 10.1 *Verso Lampedusa*, Giacomo Sferlazzo (F. Mazzara screenshot)

AU3

AU7

228 Sferlazzo realized by recycling fragments of boat boards and worn texts  
229 left behind by the migrants.

230 This act of recovering and rebirth of wasted objects belonging to the  
231 “wretched of the Earth” is particularly meaningful because it reflects a  
232 broader idea of “rehabilitation” of human waste, or “wasted lives”, to use  
233 Bauman’s words, lives that are considered to be like “trash” in the eye of  
234 global capitalism; lives like those of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees  
235 themselves, perceived in the mainstream Western discourse as “redundant,  
236 rejects and refuse of society”.<sup>15</sup>

237 With its founding in 2015, a still ongoing process of recovering was  
238 instigated by the urgent need to save these objects from the inevitable

destruction of the boats on which the migrants and refugees travelled. 239  
 The idea of displaying these objects came only afterwards. Originally they 240  
 were stored in the houses of the members of the collective, who had no 241  
 clear plan for what to do with them. 242

The search for objects in the landfill became consistent and system- 243  
 atized in 2009, when Sferlazzo found a box containing letters, pictures, 244  
 religious texts and music CDs coming from Ethiopia, as they later 245  
 found out. The experience of collecting the “migrants’ objects” has been 246  
 described by the Askavusa’s members as a “macabre” journey, difficult to 247  
 cope with: 248

Every day we found something that was leaving us speechless: pictures, 249  
 diaries, shoes, cooking tools [...] ghosts and all sorts of energies were wan- 250  
 dering in the landfill, the chorus of the last ones was reaching our bowels; 251  
 they were looking for bodies to stand with, mouths to shout with, fists to 252  
 fight with, eyes to cry with, eyes to smile with.<sup>16</sup> 253

It is in that very moment that the artist and the other members of 254  
 the Collective realize that that casual search, that Sferlazzo defines as an 255  
 “archaeology of the soul”, highlighting the spiritual component of that 256  
 experience of search and recovering, was bringing them towards a more 257  
 political journey. As Sferlazzo states: “the ruins I found were political 258  
 ruins, the ruins of a European continent still founded on the dominion of 259  
 the other”.<sup>17</sup> Only after numerous reflections and discussions, a decision 260  
 was taken that these objects should be shared with the public, according 261  
 to a strategy that has evolved over time and in various and complex ways. 262  
 At the end of 2010 an installation with migrants’ objects was arranged in 263  
 the first Askavusa’s headquarter (see Fig. 10.2). 264

AU4

The objects were displayed randomly and free from any attempt to 265  
 define their story, belonging or function. No labels, no cases were used 266  
 to ‘protect’ them, to fix them in an ordered space and time. Worn shoes 267  
 were hanging from a blue ceiling, floating on an imagined sea/sky, sug- 268  
 gesting a space in-between life and death. The objects were there as wit- 269  
 nesses of an incomplete past, as mementos of a journey where Lampedusa 270  
 is more than a simple destination, it is a place that participates in and 271  
 shares the marginality and displacement experienced by the migrants and 272



Fig. 10.2 F. Mazzara, *Museum of migration in the first Askavusa headquarter*

273 refugees. In the same room Sferlazzo's work of art, *Nell'aria, nella terra,*  
274 *nel mare* (In the Air, on the Earth, in the Sea) (Fig. 10.3), that recycles the  
275 wasted objects of migrants, was displayed as suggesting a possible rebirth  
276 from the waste, the outcast, the forgotten.<sup>18</sup>

277 As Alessandra De Angelis suggests:

278 Sferlazzo reassembles and reworks what he finds with incredible care, an  
279 almost loving devotion, always ready to find new meanings in the encoun-  
280 ter between his artistic vocations and the others' desire for self-expression.  
281 His goal is also to give voice to the remains of a spiritual travel from both  
282 sides of the sea, which is confined to silence because of the political, and  
283 primary urgencies of the situation.<sup>19</sup>

284 In the following years Sferlazzo and the collective were approached  
285 by several people who started developing an interest in the project of



**Fig. 10.3** *Nell'aria, nella terra, nel mare*, Giacomo Sferlazzo (F. Mazzara screenshot)

recovering the “migrant objects”. Among them, the Sicilian art restorer 286  
Giuseppe Basile started a dialogue with them in 2011, about the pos- 287  
sibility of archiving and preserving these objects with the idea of even- 288  
tually displaying them in a local museum. This genuine interest led to 289  
a fruitful collaboration that was interrupted by the death of Basile in 290  
2013 and after the collective changed its view about the possibility of 291  
engaging in a museum project, due to a series of unfortunate events, that 292  
discouraged *Askavusa* to pursue this project.<sup>20</sup> In July 2013, as a result 293  
of the collaboration between *Askavusa* and Basile—which also involved 294  
other organizations that had showed a serious commitment to the heri- 295  
tage of the Mediterranean passage and to the realization of a museum of 296

297 migration in Lampedusa<sup>21</sup>—a temporary exhibition was organized with  
298 some of the objects. The exhibition called *Con gli oggetti dei migranti*  
299 (With the objects of migrants) represents the very first attempt to put in  
300 place a more structured exhibition practice in relation to the “migrants’  
301 objects”, found in the cemetery of boats in Lampedusa by Askavusa. This  
302 exhibition, organized by Gianluca Gatta and Costanza Meli,<sup>22</sup> was con-  
303 sidered the germ of what was already defined as an Archive and Centre  
304 of Documentation in the Mediterranean, the Museum of Migration of  
305 Lampedusa and Linosa,<sup>23</sup> which aimed at including a very well-planned  
306 series of activities, such as the collaboration with international artists  
307 in residence, who were expected to make use of some of the migrants’  
308 objects in their works of art,<sup>24</sup> according to the strategy of recycling  
309 already adopted by Sferlazzo. Yet despite this modest approach proposed  
310 by the *Associazione Isole*, and all the others who were sharing the enthusi-  
311 asm for the creation of a Museum of Migration of Lampedusa, *Askavusa*  
312 quit the project at the end of 2013, in order to pursue the original idea of  
313 an uncompromised display of objects that should not count on any form  
314 of institutionalized commitment and on any attempt at categorization  
315 and fixation.

316 This choice marked the birth of *Porto M* in 2013, which, according  
317 to *Askavusa*, is a place that must reflect first of all the political commit-  
318 ment of the collective’s members inside the island, their effort to make  
319 their voice heard for the migrants’ and locals’ rights. *Porto M*, the anti-  
320 institutional museum is defined by the collective as a space in which  
321 to pursue “practices of memory, politics and community”, and where  
322 to exhibit the objects of the migrants. *Porto M* is now located inside a  
323 cave—once used by shipwrights—that faces the little dock commonly  
324 used on the island for disembarking the migrants.<sup>25</sup> This location is par-  
325 ticularly meaningful for the project pursued by Askavusa, which is to  
326 recover a memory that is related on the one hand to the current experi-  
327 ence of Lampedusa as a destination of the African and global diaspora, on  
328 the other to the gradually lost identity of the island as a fishing spot with  
329 a strong tradition of boat crafting. As in their first exhibitory attempt  
330 in *Askavusa*’s first base, in *Porto M* the migrants’ objects are displayed  
331 without following a specific scheme. When entering the space through



Fig. 10.4 F. Mazzara, *Main entrance of Porto M*

the massive door covered with colourful wooden boards from the boats 332  
found in the landfill (Fig. 10.4), one gets the impression to be, as Gianluca 333  
Gatta suggests, inside a lost and found office, where the objects seem to 334  
wait for their owners to bring them back home.<sup>26</sup> 335

They are objects that suggest a humble domestic environment: On the 336  
left side, a few wooden shelves with objects that suggest personal care: 337  
toothbrushes, toothpastes, deodorants, wet wipes, combs, brushes and 338  
medicines; on a lower shelf is found a series of mobile lamps presumably 339  
used at night in the boats. Above the main door, other shelves display 340  
some food items, mostly canned food and pasta. On the right side, we 341  
find an interesting exhibit of objects made of pots, pans and teapots, all 342  
arranged symmetrically (Fig. 10.5), giving a sense of an ordered and tidy 343  
domestic space. 344

Next to this, a series of sacred books (including worn Bibles and 345  
Korans), with their torn pages open, are framed above by a golden iso- 346  
thermal blanket, one of those used to wrap the migrants after their rescue, 347  
and a little wooden statue, the whole forming a sort of shrine reminiscent 348



Fig. 10.5 F. Mazzara, *Pots and pans in Porto M*

349 of the prayers of hope and sorrow that migrants must perform during  
350 their journeys (see Fig. 10.6).

351 The latter arrangement suggests that behind what seems to be a ran-  
352 dom juxtaposition and positioning of objects, there is a very careful and  
353 diligent way of proceeding, a precise aesthetics that even if it does not  
354 rely on labels or textual explanations, still reflects the complicated rela-  
355 tionship that *Askavusa* has developed with the objects that, according  
356 to the Collective, “keep and release energy”.<sup>27</sup> The energy released by  
357 the objects is, according to *Askavusa*, impossible to define and fix and  
358 therefore it interrupts any logic of archiving. The objects talk back to  
359 different viewers, as symbols of a historical global passage, but also as  
360 tangible memories of the individuals behind these objects, who have car-  
361 ried them in their journeys and imbued them with hope and affection.  
362 This is well shown in the short documentary by Somali journalist Zakaria  
363 Mohamed Ali, *To Whom It May Concern*,<sup>28</sup> that follows his journey back



**Fig. 10.6** F. Mazzara, *A temporary installation of religious texts and an isothermal blanket*

to the island of Lampedusa, where he had previously arrived as a boat ref- 364  
 ugee, in order to recover friends' objects lost or taken by the police once 365  
 rescued and disembarked on the island. Mohamed Ali goes back to the 366  
 centre, where migrants and refugees are taken after being rescued, to ask 367  
 about those objects: "where can the belongings of the people who landed 368  
 be found? They are the memories that we've lost, the materials we are 369  
 looking for. Is there any place where things get thrown away, or maybe set 370  
 aside?" (Mohamed Ali, 2013).<sup>29</sup> The guards of the centre have no answer 371  
 to Zakaria's questions. They do not know where these objects are, they 372  
 cannot admit these objects are commonly taken to the landfill, because 373  
 considered as waste, and—even worse—potential carriers of disease. 374

This is how the role played by *Porto M* becomes crucially important. 375  
 Despite the criteria of improvisation and random juxtaposition, the col- 376  
 location of the "migrants' objects" in *Porto M* suggests a sense of care 377



## F. Mazzara

378 that reflects the collective's commitment to protect these objects. The  
379 *Askavusa* members define themselves as the "guardians" of the objects  
380 displayed,<sup>30</sup> while pursuing a political action that targets global injustices.  
381 The subjectivities of migrants, the personal stories behind these objects,  
382 is less prioritized in the latest approach the collective has developed with  
383 the objects, and with the issue of migration in general; however, they  
384 clearly state that the journey is not over and that their refusal to archive,  
385 name or restore the objects is not necessarily the right one, but it is their  
386 subversive way to frame a very complicated issue that deals with memory,  
387 ethics and trauma:

388       With this, we are not trying to say that studying the objects, identifying  
389       and naming them, is a wrong thing. We do not know what is right and  
390       what is wrong. We do not know what other people should do. We only  
391       know what is the direction we want to take in relation to these objects  
392       (something that is never definitive). Everyone has their own motivations,  
393       arguments to bring forward.

394       We are simply searching for the road that brought us to that landfill.<sup>31</sup>

395       As part of the future development of *Porto M*, *Askavusa* intends to pro-  
396       vide some informative boards that will further help an understanding of  
397       their political commitment and agenda and document an uncomfortable  
398       shared memory. As specifically explained in the website for the current  
399       crowd-funding of *Porto M*:

400       Alongside these objects, the collective will put together information  
401       boards to illustrate the causes that lead thousands to flee their countries,  
402       to explain neo-colonialism, to inform viewers of the processes of *milita-*  
403       *risation* and *media abuse* that have been operating on the island of  
404       Lampedusa, and to shed light on the conditions within migrant deten-  
405       tion centres.<sup>32</sup>

406       *Porto M* as a heritage space has therefore the potential to offer a different  
407       view on the current experience of migrating towards the Western world,  
408       a different and subvertive narrative that reveals the potential to interrupt  
409       the archive. Apart from being an expository space, *Porto M* is also a place  
410       where other cultural initiatives take place, including book presentations,

performances and debates, while a small library in memory of Thomas Sankara has been located.<sup>33</sup> In other words, *Porto M* suggests a more fluid configuration of memorialization that implies, first of all, a less institutionalized layout of the museum space and a redefinition of the practices of representation by performing an aesthetics of that prioritizes the performative dimension of the memorial event.

From the perspective of this article, heritage spaces have the potential to offer a different view on the current experience of migrating towards the Western world, a different narrative that reveals an open archive, constantly negotiated for and with the migrants and refugees in an attempt to promote acts of dissent towards any effort to institutionalize memory. This subversion should aim at activating the gaze of the observer and the objects displayed. In *Artforum Features* Tania Bughuera, a Cuban installation and performance artist, suggests that in the not-so-new twenty-first century we should look for a museum:

that abandons the idea of *looking* for the idea of *activation*; one that is not a building or even a fixed space but a series of events and a program; one where the institution gives up authority; one that is dedicated to research into the practical usefulness of art; one where art entails actual social transformation [...]. One where [...] objects are contextualized instead of historicized. One where things are not exhibited but activated, given use-value instead of representing it. One that is not a structure but a moment; that is not a place to visit but a presence.<sup>34</sup>

A process of activation is what can make a heritage space, such as *Porto M*, highly political, where the expository process is open and evolves and where, the performance of the “complex rite of memory”,<sup>35</sup> can find a possible expression.

## Notes

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445 Ferrara (Milan: Politecnico di Milano, 2012), 23.
- 446 4. Chambers, "The Museum of Migrating Modernities," 31.
- 447 5. Lidia Curti, "Beyond White Walls," in *Cultural Memories, Migrating*  
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449 di Milano, 2012), 188.
- 450 6. Curti, "Beyond White Walls," 188.
- 451 7. Federica Mazzara, "Spaces of Visibility for the Migrants of Lampedusa:  
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- 456 8. bell hooks, *Yearning. Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (London:  
457 Turnaround), 149.
- 458 9. Iain Chambers, "Voices in the Ruins", in *The Ruined Archive*, ed. Iain  
459 Chambers, Giulia Grechi, and Mark Nash, (Milan: Politecnico di  
460 Milano, 2014), 11.
- 461 10. To learn more about this complexity see, Gatta Gianluca, "Stranded  
462 Traces: Migrants' Objects, Self-Narration and Ideology in a Failed  
463 Museum Project," *Crossings. Journal of Migration and Culture* (2016).
- 464 11. The concept of 'Border Spectacle' was first introduced by Nicholas De  
465 Genova in the context of the Mexican American border (see Nicholas De  
466 Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life,"  
467 *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419–447 and *Working the*  
468 *Boundaries: Race, Space, and 'Illegality' in Mexican Chicago* (Durham,  
469 NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
- 470 12. To learn more about the genesis of the Festival, see Ilaria Vecchi, 'The  
471 Experience of the Askavusa Association: Migrant Struggle with Cultural  
472 Activities,' *Crossings. Journal of Migration and Culture* (2016).
- 473 13. Brambilla Chiara, 'Navigating the Euro/African Border and Migration  
474 Nexus through the *Borderscapes* Lens: Insights from the  
475 LampedusaInFestival,' in C. Brambilla, J. Laine, James W. Scott, and  
476 Gianluca Bocchi, *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border*  
477 *Making* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 111–122.
- 478 14. Askavusa, *Porto M*: <https://askavusa.wordpress.com/con-gli-oggetti/>.  
479 Assessed 1 August 2016. My translation.
- 480 15. Zygmund Bauman, "Wasted Lives: Modernity's Collateral Casualties," in  
481 *Breaching Borders: Art, Migrants and the Metaphor of Waste*, ed. Juliet Sreyn  
482 and Nadja Stamselberg (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 29.

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16. Askavusa, Porto M: <https://askavusa.wordpress.com/con-gli-oggetti/>. 483  
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17. Giacomo Sferlazzo, “Un’idea di museo. Il progetto di archivio e documentazione sulle migrazioni di Lampedusa,” in *Bibbia e Corano a Lampedusa. Il lamento e la lode. Liturgie migranti*, ed. Arnoldo Mosca Mondadori, Alfonso Cacciatore and Alessandro Triulzi (Brescia: Edizioni La Scuola, 2014). My translation. 485  
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18. In the meantime, *Askavusa* obtained permission to recover and expose 490  
three intact boats that became part of the journey of subversion that 491  
started with the collection of individual objects. As Gatta observes: “The 492  
boat—in this context—becomes the symbol of a condition of precari- 493  
ousness that leads to solidarity [...]. The boat is the symbolic tool used 494  
in order to affirm, here and now, a different way of experiencing the 495  
relationship with those engaged in the crossing of the black 496  
Mediterranean”. Gianluca Gatta and Giusy Muzzopappa, “Middle 497  
Passages’, Musealizzazione e soggettività a Bristol e Lampedusa,” *Eстетica. 498  
Studi e ricerche* 1 (2012): 178. My translation. 499
19. Alessandra De Angelis, “A Museum at the Margin of the Mediterranean. 500  
Between Caring for Memory and the Future,” in *Cultural Memories, 501  
Migrating Modernities and Museum Practices*, ed. Beatrice Ferrara (Milan: 502  
Politecnico di Milano, 2012), 37. 503
20. The whole story is described in detail in the *Porto M’s* homepage, where 504  
the Askavusa collective tries to explain the series of complicated events 505  
that led them to the decision not to create a museum of migration in 506  
Lampedusa (<https://askavusa.wordpress.com/con-gli-oggetti/>). Also see 507  
Gianluca Gatta’s recent article that provides a criticism of the decision of 508  
the Collective to abandon the project (Gatta Gianluca, “Stranded Traces: 509  
Migrants’ Objects, Self-Narration and Ideology in a Failed Museum 510  
Project”). 511
21. Including Fondazione Migrantes, Legambiente, the Archivio Memorie 512  
Migranti and the Associazione Isole. 513
22. The exhibition showcased some objects, including some texts (diaries 514  
extracts and letters) restored by the Sicilian Regional Library according 515  
to the directions of Basile. 516
23. The museum received administrative approval in February 2013. 517
24. The first artist in residence was the Palestinian artist Emily Jacir. 518
25. The dock is called *molo favaloro* and is now fenced and patrolled. 519
26. Gatta, Muzzopappa, “Middle Passages,” 172. 520
27. Porto M homepage: <https://askavusa.wordpress.com/con-gli-oggetti/> 521

- 522 28. Mohamed Ali Zakaria, *To Whom It May Concern*, video, Rome: 17',  
523 Archivio Memorie Migranti, 2013.
- 524 29. From the English subtitles of the film.
- 525 30. This expression was used by Giacomo Sferlazzo, during my interview  
526 with him in July 2015.
- 527 31. Askavusa, Porto M: <https://askavusa.wordpress.com/con-gli-oggetti/>.  
528 Accessed 1 August 2016.
- 529 32. Askavusa, Porto M—spazio di lotta, memoria e storie di mare: [https://  
530 www.produzionidalbasso.com/project/portom-spazio-di-lotta-  
531 memoria-e-storie-di-mare/](https://www.produzionidalbasso.com/project/portom-spazio-di-lotta-memoria-e-storie-di-mare/). Accessed 1 August 2016.
- 532 33. Sankara was a Burkinabè political leader. The library is made of books  
533 donated by those who sustain the Askavusa's collective project and *Porto M*.  
534 The books mainly revolve around issues of neo- and postcolonialism.
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600 165–179.

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607 *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture*, titled “Lampedusa: Cultural and  
608 Artistic Spaces for Migrant Voices”.

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