

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

The Mediterranean Sea as border space: a geo-literary analysis

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades
doctor philosophiae (Dr. phil.)
im Fach Kulturwissenschaft

eingereicht

an der Kultur-, Sozial- und Bildungswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Humboldt - Universität zu
Berlin

von Ruzzi, Silvia

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Dr. Sabine Kunst
Präsidentin der
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Prof. Dr. Claudia Becker
Dekanin der Kultur-, Sozial-,
und Bildungswissenschaftlichen Fakultät

Gutachter:

1. Prof. Dr. Stefan Willer
2. Prof. Dr. Markus Messling

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 17.09.2021

The Mediterranean Sea as border space: a geo-literary analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	4
Introduction	6
1. Methodology	7
2. Border Fiction	11
3. Mediterranean Studies	14
4. Overview of the structure	16
I. Bordering the Sea: geopolitics and aesthetics at the Mediterranean borderscape	20
1. Bordering the Sea: migration across the Mediterranean borderscape	22
1.1 Past contributions to Mediterranean Studies	24
1.2 The Mediterranean Sea as border space(s)	31
1.3 Concluding remarks	44
2. Border Aesthetics	46
2.1. Border Fiction	51
2.2 Mediterranean Border Fiction	53
II. Bordering the Strait	62
1. A Sea of hope: Lalami's <i>Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits</i>	68
2. A Sea of revenge: Pajares' <i>Aguas de venganza</i> [Waters of revenge]	88
III. Bordering the Mediterranean central route	108
1. Dreams interrupted: Catozzella's <i>Don't tell me you are afraid</i>	112
2. Fire at sea: Khaal's <i>African Titanics</i>	134
IV. Speculations on the Mediterranean borderscape	156
1. <i>Le Baiser de Lampedusa</i> : intimacy at the Mediterranean borderscape	158

2. A different <i>sea-graphy</i>	171
V. Conclusion	178
Bibliography	192

Abstract

The primary focus of my dissertation is the analysis of the ways in which the Mediterranean Sea is rendered and modeled as a border space in five border literary works published from 2005 to the present. Treating the Mediterranean Sea as both the topic of literary analysis and the element of aesthetic representation, I investigate these works to examine the imageries of the maritime border as they transpire in literature. In so doing, I am seeking to provide a paradigm for comprehending the Mediterranean border as a dynamic, multi-scaled, ubiquitous, (in)visible and performative construct. The corpus of analysis comprises of literary works published in different languages and countries, notably from around the Mediterranean Sea, that address the theme of clandestine migration, transmigration, relocation and the social and cultural challenges they bring forth. The five border novels span genres, including bio-fictional narrative, Catozzella's *Non dirmi che hai paura* (2014) [*Don't tell me you are afraid* (2016)], speculative fiction, Charfi's *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* (2011), composite novel, Lalami's *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* (2005), detective fiction, Pajares' *Aguas de venganza* (2016) [*Waters of revenge*] and realist one interlaid with folktales, Khaal's *African Titanics* (2008 English transl. 2014), becoming the staging of critical investigations about the maritime border.

The dissertation proposes a geo-literary reading of border fiction, working its way out from a large body of theoretical writing on borders born of the social sciences and the humanities — cultural studies and literary criticism. The project aims to put these two larger disciplines into conversation with one another by taking into consideration the socio-cultural, literary and political contribution of border fiction. In this line, my dissertation is a contribution to Border Studies, Border Aesthetics, and Mediterranean Studies.

Keywords: Mediterranean Sea, Border Aesthetics, Border Fiction, clandestine migration

Zusammenfassung

Der Schwerpunkt meiner Dissertation liegt auf der Analyse der Art und Weise, wie das Mittelmeer als Grenzraum in fünf literarischen Werken, die von 2005 bis heute erschienen sind, dargestellt und wiedergegeben wird. Indem ich das Mittelmeer sowohl als Gegenstand der ästhetischen Darstellung behandle, analysiere ich diese Werke, um die Symbolik der maritimen Grenzen, wie sie in der Literatur auftauchen, zu untersuchen. Auf diese Weise versuche ich, ein Paradigma für das Verständnis der Mittelmeer-Grenze als dynamisches, vielschichtiges, allgegenwärtiges, (un)sichtbares und performatives Konstrukt zu entwickeln. Der Korpus der Analyse umfasst literarische Werke, die in verschiedenen Sprachen und Ländern, vor allem im Mittelmeerraum

veröffentlicht wurden, und sich mit dem Thema der *clandestine migration*, der Transmigration, der Abwanderung und den damit verbundenen sozialen und kulturellen Herausforderungen, die sie auslösen, befasst.

Die fünf Grenzzromane umfassen verschiedene Genres, darunter die bio-fiktionale Erzählung von Catozzella *Non dirmi che hai paura* (2014) [Sag nicht, dass du Angst hast (2016)], die spekulativ Fiktion von Charfi *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* (2011), die *composite novel* von Lalami *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* (2005) [Hoffnung und andere gefährliche Bestrebungen], der Kriminalroman von Pajares *Agua de venganza* (2016) [Gewässer der Rache] und der realistische, teilweise volksmärchenhafte Roman, von Khaal *African Titanic* (2008, Englische Übersetzung, 2014), die zur Inszenierung kritischer Untersuchungen über die maritime Grenze werden.

Die Dissertation schlägt eine geo-literarische Lesart der Grenzliteratur vor, die sich aus einem breiten Korpus theoretischer Schriften über Grenzen aus den Sozial und Geisteswissenschaften – Kultur und Literaturwissenschaften – herausarbeitet. Das Projekt richtet sich darauf aus, diese beiden Disziplinen miteinander ins Gespräch zu bringen, indem der soziokulturelle, literarische und politische Beitrag der Grenzliteratur berücksichtigt wird. In diesem Sinne ist meine Dissertation ein Beitrag zu *Border Studies*, *Border Aesthetics* und *Mediterranean Studies*.

Schlagwörter: Mittelmeer, Border Aesthetics, Border Fiction, clandestine Migration

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the tightening of migration policies both within and beyond EU borders attempts to hinder migrants' clandestine¹ crossings through increased border surveillance, international agreements between EU and non-EU countries. The implementation of migratory restrictions and refoulement operations at sea have turned the Mediterranean Sea into a dangerous space for the crossing of the precarious vessels used to reach Europe. The “expulsion machine” (Law 2014: 123) in response to clandestine migration has forced migrants to choose even more perilous routes, strengthened their reliance on human traffickers and has inevitably caused an increase in fatal crossings across the Mediterranean Sea.

Migratory phenomena across the Mediterranean Sea have led to a proliferation of literary productions scrutinizing different aspects of the clandestine migratory practice to the European shores (König 2016 and Frank 2017). This body of work narrates the recent transformations of migratory patterns, the causes of contemporary African migration to Europe, and the plight of migrants. The fact that many authors write about the current migration across the Mediterranean Sea is significant of a shared sensibility about the urgency of this issue. Yet, even though many written narratives touch on the topic of migration and the living conditions of the migrants who have successfully made it to Europe, few depict the treacherous experience of maritime crossing itself. The five novels analyzed in this dissertation stand out in the way they vividly describe the emotion-filled experience of crossing clandestinely the Mediterranean Sea, and how migrants not only face the tightening of EU borders in the form of fences, border patrol and surveillance technology, but also how they circumvent the *shape-shifting* feature of the Mediterranean border as it oscillates between being beyond, at, and within the “traditional” geopolitical space.

The choice of designation between migrant, asylum seeker, and refugee is always politically and ideologically charged (Gallien 2018: 738). Reasons for migrating are manifold and a person may cross labels (asylum-seeker, refugee, economic migrant, etc..) depending on the legal environment, and his or her journey is likewise open to different readings. The reasons may include the hope for a better life elsewhere, longing for joining family or friends elsewhere, and fear of physical, social and economic forms of violence. Throughout the project, I consistently employ the term *migrant* to describe individuals who cross or attempt to cross the Mediterranean borderscape², avoiding the recourse to categories such as asylum seeker or refugee. In this light,

¹ Following Coutin, I define *clandestine* as “a hidden, yet known, dimension of social reality” (Coutin 2005: 196). Human smuggling and migration journeys are established practices and as such, migrant routes become shared knowledge, despite migrants' precarious legal status. By employing the word *clandestine* one highlights the combination between the visible, though prohibited, smuggling and migration practices and the vulnerable position that migrants embody by being rendered invisible to legal protections.

² The term borderscape defines an area, shaped and reshaped by transnational movements, that goes

the use of the term *migrant* is to avoid discriminating between people because of their motives for migration, and it is defined in such a way as to make clear the argument that any migratory endeavor becomes a way to relocate, for everyone, despite what they are moving away from.

The thematic features that the border literary productions share are, first, their physical location, the Mediterranean borderland; secondly, the sea as a border space; and finally the characters' intended crossing of the maritime border. No matter how diverse the border novels might be, the common motif running through these productions is that the Mediterranean border is imprinted upon them: it not only pervades these literary productions but binds them together across languages, locales and genres. The Mediterranean border represents a code for interpreting these works, and a category that connects all these works together. Hence, it is the generator of the story, and it functions as a fictional space not only as a setting but also as the constructor of the aesthetic basis of the narrative. In other words, the maritime border is not a “container” in and around which the plot is written, rather it is an active force and a creative engine that shapes the narrative (Moretti 1997: 3).

1. Methodology

The methodology that will guide my project draws from two approaches: geocriticism and border aesthetics.

The first belongs to a growing body of criticism, variously labeled spatial literary studies, literary cartography, or geocriticism, that has stressed the importance of a geographically informed approach to literary criticism. Scholar contributions like Robert Tally's *Spatiality* (2013) and Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011) make a strong case for geocriticism as a way to articulate the dialectical nature of the relations between literary productions and their real-world referents. Consequently, geocriticism finds its application in studying literary representations of geographical referents, is based in the field of literary studies, more specifically comparative literature, and multifocalization is its chief characteristic (Westphal 2011: 119, 122). Adopting a geocritic lens to the study of literature amounts to arguing that any literary representation “is included in the world, in an enlarged reality, and in infinitely adjustable space that is in direct contact with a plurality of discourses” (ibid: 116). Also, it means to consider fiction as more than the consequence of external influences since the literary process is an active constructive practice “in which cultural systems of meaning and literary processes [...] are equally involved and in which reality is not merely reflected, but instead first poetically created

beyond the idea of a clear-cut territorial division focusing instead on the precessual, re/de-territorialized and dispersed feature of the border, and its ensuing regimes and ensemble of processes. Thus, it is not contained in a specific location, it is not recognizable in a physical space, rather it is tangentially distinguishable in struggles to clarify inclusion from exclusion. The term indicates the complexity and vitality of, and at, the border and it must be understood as “an entry point, allowing for a study of the border as mobile, perspectival, and relational” (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007: x).

and then iconically enriched” (Erll and Nünning 2005: 281). This is precisely why some of the most important insights into the de/re-construction of the Mediterranean border emerge from endeavors that explore how representative practices themselves have come to shape the same very border. Thus, in the present project, the geocritic approach to literature investigates the maritime border both *in* texts and *as* a text, elaborating a contemplation on the way “bodily natures and discursive forces *express* their interaction whether in representations or in their concrete reality” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014: 2 italics in original).

In regard to Mediterranean border fiction, the fictional representation³ of the Mediterranean border is likely to exert an influence over the “real”, the “reality”, since each of the literary production takes on the double faculty both to describe reality and to have an impact over reality, or, more accurately, over the representation of reality. Indeed, fictional representations contribute to the extra-literary reality in which they unfold. This assumption is based on the understanding that space and its fictional representations are intertwined. The maritime border informs the texts that produce the fictional representation of it. Conversely, the fictional representation acts upon the border, influencing the way it is perceived.

Since literature is not a mere reflection of *real-world* spaces but also an active means in comprehending them, literary productions give access to imaginaries about the border and can enlighten the logic behind its existence, opening up a space of critical imagination, where the representation of the border is constantly (re)modeled and challenged. On this ground, the contribution of Mediterranean border fiction emerges not from “authentically” depicting the clandestine border-crossing experience, but from engaging the process of representation. Accordingly, literary productions do not provide mere representations of the border, but also have the potential to define the delimitation itself, that is, to reflect upon and negotiate the unstable concept of border, its aestheticised entity, and henceforth to have an impact on the very notion of the border. This approach is particularly useful in the critical (re)formulation of the duality of border literature -as either a form of knowledge or critique to current border issues. That would apply to the authors and works included in this project, all of which register concerns with the current Mediterranean border spatialities and employ fiction in order to revise one's own way of seeing, perceiving and interpreting the Mediterranean Sea itself, allowing for what Tally calls an “exercise of literary geography” (Tally 2013: 85). In so doing, Mediterranean border fiction engages, transforms, or challenges dominant spatial orders, suggesting alternative ways of looking at the maritime border, insofar as it promotes an understanding of the potential role of fiction in the present as well as in the future.

³ Representation has to be understood as re-presentation, thus evolutionary and transgressive, and not a static image of a perpetual present (Westphal 2011: 145). Representation reproduces the real or, better an experience of the real. For we must not forget that human space only exists in the modes of his experience, which, is the creator of the (geopoetic) world. Any work, no matter how far from sensed reality is part of the real – and, perhaps, participates in forming the real (ibid: 85).

The second approach, border aesthetics, refers to the investigation of a poetics of space, which is in turn related to the broader field of spatial studies in the human sciences, based on the contributions of social scientists and cultural theorists such as de Certeau (1984), Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994) and Soja (1989). Border aesthetics is a means of comprehending the aesthetic feature of borders, the practice of bordering — defined as the strategy of ordering through spatial bordering and othering through the territorial and maritime fixing of order —, and borderscaping. Thus, it consists of an investigation on both the inner polyaesthetics of literature and its extra-literary entanglements. Exploring the field of border aesthetics signifies opening up a theoretical space, in which the maritime border shows its constructed and contested entity, and it is revealed for what it consists of: cultural artifacts, discursive processes and political formations, that allow it to surface as a polysemic entity. The assumption that frames the following pages is based first on the belief that the critical stance of fiction in relation to bordering practices renders it a field for inquiry for geopolitics and border studies, and secondly on the idea that literary productions and borders have undertaken a more-than-representational link that discloses the geopolitical strategies at work in the spaces concerned with the Mediterranean border and its border-negotiations. As van Houtum suggests, in order to comprehend the complexity of borders and movement across them, it is necessary to investigate both “the implicit ethics of the aesthetic design” of border representations and “alternative visualization through [...] alternative mapping forms [which] could dismantle this taken-for-granted attitude to border mapping” (van Houtum 2012: 416). From such perspective, alongside the analysis of the aesthetics of borders — conceived as the ways in which aesthetics reproduces and it is reproduced by borders — the study of narratives, which could range from policy discourses, geographical texts, and literary productions, brings about a much-needed perspective in the field of border(ing) studies⁴. Literary productions may be a symbolic system and a negotiation of the world through the figurative and the imaginary, but the premise that leads my project is that that aesthetic can no longer be considered simply an illustrative process of a social reality. The idea behind such frame is that the border as a representation is far from being objective: it does not have a pre-existing significance, rather it is the product of a sum of interpretations and re-interpretations. The Mediterranean border does not exist in and of itself, but is socially and culturally produced and inscribed with significance: “the reality of the border is created by the meaning that is attached to it. A line is geometry, a border is interpretation” (Van Houtum 2012: 142). Understood along these lines, the border is not so much an artefact as a belief, “an imagination that creates and shapes a world, a social reality” (Van Houtum et al. 2005: 3).

The Mediterranean border is therefore the consequence of a tangled maze of intertextualities, in which rhetorical devices and border figures — which include, for example,

⁴ See also Newman and Paasi (1998) and Del Sordi and Jacobson (2007) who claim that “borders have become predominantly interpreted as the communication of practices, as stories narrated by some and contested by others” (ibid: 100).

hyperbole, metaphor, similitude — are some of its constituents. Mediterranean border fiction is at stake here, as Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe claim, since literature is “a creative and performative force in the activity of bordering; it is a site of creation, also in the context of borderlands” (Schimanski and Wolfe 2010: 39). Thus, rhetorical figures employed in the representations of the Mediterranean border are not only configurations of the maritime space, but they function as deviations from one possible meaning. They offer a shift towards another implication or conception about the border. Thus, they can be analysed as keys to border concepts.

Aesthetics, as employed in the present project, is not an abstract and de-politicized academic field (Rosello and Wolfe 2017: 4), rather it participates in the apprehension of the world through the opening of a gap from which to negotiate its configurations and the approaches to it (Hofmann and Messling 2017: 23). It is not an aesthetics that rests on a transcendental judgment of beauty, but an aesthetics (an *aisthetics*⁵) that is based on an embodied experience of the world. By delving into the *aisthesis* of border fiction, it is possible to explore the Mediterranean border in literature as brought forth by literary mediations. Rather than withdrawing the works from the extra-literary reality, an aesthetics of poesis and aisthesis invites an exploration of how we relate to reality at different levels and modes of experience and existence. Accordingly, an aesthetic reading of literature offers a perspective from which to tackle and question the values that inform resolutions in the political spheres. It is therefore an aesthetic that is not indifferent but highly critical of ideology (Moslund 2015: 46-7). This reaffirms the assumption that aesthetics and politics, and thus represented and actual borders, are interrelated fields.

Border aesthetics is envisaged as an interdisciplinary concept that crosses the academic divide between border studies in the social sciences and border theory in the humanities, and as dell' Agnese and Amilhat Szary suggest, it is pivotal to border studies because “it enables to re-frame the narrative setting of our conceptual work” (dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015: 11). Following their contribution, border aesthetics is worthwhile because not only is an investigation of a specific element — the border — in the relationship between spaces *represented* on one hand and the spaces *of representation* on the other, but it constitutes a set of strategies to investigate narratives about the border. Thus, border aesthetics is considered fundamental to the political and, in exploring how choices of form, medium and genre contribute to shape and transform borderscapes, it engages in a political conversation articulating what Rancière defines “the distribution of the sensible”: the particular way through which aesthetics drafts maps of the (in)visible, sayable, and doable in order to create new forms of political aesthetics to counteract the desensitizing logic of media spectacle.

⁵ *Aisthesis* is the Greek root of the word “aesthetic” and refers to that which is produced by bodily feeling or sensory experience.

2. Border Fiction

My approach to analyzing the maritime border begins with the premise that any border is an imagined construction that exists in a double sense: by virtue of representation or implicit understandings, and as a means by which entities — nations or supranational categories — conceive their “unity”. It is not only imagined, but also an arbitrary dividing line which works on a social, cultural and psychic level. As such it consists always of metaphors and as a “part of the discursive materiality of power relations” (Brah 1996: 198). As will be analyzed in the literary analyses, figurative language predominates at the moment of describing, comprehending and approaching the border and, as Taylor suggests, the ways in which space and social surrounding are represented are “often not expressed in theoretical terms, but are carried in images [and] stories” (Taylor 2004: 23) which are, however, always open to different readings and interpretations. It is in this context, that the focus of the dissertation is on the figurative language employed in representing the Mediterranean border available in literary praxis. I consider the term “figure” as a vessel of meaning between two divergent realms of significance, whose effect is not to produce a simulated similarity between concepts, but to facilitate knowledge of the border through a process of either familiarization or defamiliarization. Throughout the project my use of the term “figure” derives from the contribution of Bernard Westphal for whom, a figure is an interface and the terrain where fiction and reality engage in their role play (Westphal 2011: 99) and from the contribution of Hawkes for whom all languages — whether scientific, historical, or literary — are by nature figurative and do not deliver absolute truth about the world, but only structures with which to comprehend it, in the attempt to construct conceptions of reality. A cultural conceptual framework of reality is therefore not an autonomous objective reality, for reality is always experienced and this experience is mediated figuratively (Hawkes 1972: 38-9). The focus on border figures as the move for reading border texts is appropriate since first the border itself is an artificial construction fueled by an imaginary aspect of necessary division between “imagined communities”, and secondly, through the figures' analysis, it is feasible to gain knowledge of how the border becomes conceptualized and, at the same time, conceptualizes the world. On this ground, the imaginative dimension of the border is a key component because “a border may be read as, among other things, a semiotic system, a system of images and imaginations” (Sidaway 2007: 163) that calls forth acts of reading and interpretation. Insofar as border aesthetics analyses the literary stratifications of the border, it plays a pivotal role in understanding the correlation between the geography of the “real” and the geography of the “imaginary” (Westphal 2007: 170). It is therefore feasible that border fiction could be relevant outside of the field to which it has traditionally been assigned.

A core premise of this project is that the border — as an abstraction and a lived reality — requires an interdisciplinary approach and a multifocal perspective. Although the project is

primarily literary, theoretical frameworks and concepts from other disciplines, such cultural studies and migration studies, are employed to interpret the literary texts. Therefore, the geo-literary analysis of the following pages finds its application in investigating aesthetic representations of the Mediterranean border through a comparative and multi-focal lens. My approach is comparativist, and foregrounds the importance of situating the Mediterranean border within literary and socio-cultural contexts. The increasing diversification and multiplication of bordering sites rouse a fundamental question: from what perspective should this multiplicity be considered? A multi-focal perspective on the study of the Mediterranean border does not privilege a single point of view. It does not necessarily mean occupying the subaltern standpoint — which is but one perspective —, rather it assumes different nodal points of aesthetic productions around the Mediterranean Sea. A multi-focal approach encourages an investigation transgressing the institutional structures that often separate literature and language studies by nation and region⁶. Such an approach prompts “border seeing” which not only recognizes that it is feasible to consider the border from different sides, but, as Rumford suggests, it aspires “to look from the border and more importantly to *see like a border*” (Rumford 2014: 50 italics added). Adopting a border gaze, the analysis of the five literary productions will depart from the border itself, and it is therefore not placed on one side or the other, but actually *on the border*, unveiling and questioning its formation. This approach suggests moving towards a multi-sited approach, enabling the multiperspectival view suggested by Chris Rumford that critically defines border studies as “seeing like a border” as an alternative to “see like a state” (Rumford 2012). Also, applying the Mediterranean border as a lens to investigate literary productions written from its shores, decentralizes the hegemony of nation-based literary study and highlights the coexistence of multiple linguistic traditions in a single geographical-cultural space.

The scope of the border gaze as approach to literature has the ambition to create a pluralistic dialogue but makes a mockery of any attempt at mastery. Nonetheless, it urges the exploration of a wide spectrum of literary productions — by no means exhaustive — related to border crossing and clandestine migration from Africa to Europe. In line with a geocritic approach, the border gaze favors a geocentered perspective, which places the border at the center of debate (Westphal 2011: 112). Hence, the spatial referent, the maritime border, is the basis for the investigation, not the author or his or her work. By placing more emphasis on a particular space, the border, one ensures that the textures of all focal points constitute a plethora of representations (Westphal 2011: 131) which is more suitable for comprehending the polyvalence of the maritime border. Even though I am aware that approaching a border entails a choice of

⁶ My understanding of literature echoes Monegal's discussion on national literature. The scholar writes: “literature has never been a system of enclosed, self-contained units, but instead a web of influences, interference, reception, translation, intertextuality and so on” (Monegal 2005: 244). Such understanding of literature suggests that approaching Mediterranean border fiction does not imply privileging certain texts produced in the so-called center from those produced in the periphery.

standpoint⁷, such a multiple border needs to be analyzed through a multifocal strategy, which allows us to perceive it from different perspectives simultaneously and prevents the risk of focusing on one side only. Derived from only a single literary source, the perception of the border is restricted, and therefore less productive. If confined to the analysis of a single text, border aesthetics becomes lopsided. Yet, to undertake a full-scale geocritical investigation of the Mediterranean border would be impossible. Therefore, I have limited the literary corpus to five novels and I narrowed the scope to those that have been published from 2005 onwards. The time frame coincides with the formation of Frontex — the European border and Coast Guard Agency — in 2005 which functioned to intensify the fortification of EU's external borders through the integration of border forces between member states and their cooperation with non-EU countries. The move did not decrease the number of clandestine migrants attempting to reach Europe, but, rather, has led migrants to use alternative and increasingly perilous routes which in turn led to an increment of fatalities between 2005 and the present⁸. Increasing controls in the Mediterranean waters have thus turned the sea into the “deadliest stretch of water” (UNHCR: 2012) and stricter border patrols since Frontex's implementation have prolonged migrants' routes and their detention in non-EU countries, and have contributed to further human violation taking place (Strik 2013).

A further elucidation is called for in face of the broad use of such a highly applicable notion as border — along with boundary, threshold, and limit — in divergent academic contexts. In the humanities and cultural theory, borders have been defined as contact zones (Pratt 1992), spaces of negotiation (Bhabha 1994) and rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) alluding to border crossing as forms of transgression or identity formations. Various studies have implied the benefit of such an approach in the practice of literary analysis, without employing the term border aesthetics (see for example Hicks 1991). Others (Moretti 1997 and Schimanski 2006) have alluded to the ongoing considerations of national spaces as imagined constructs (Anderson 1991), to post-colonial inflected discourses of hybrid identities and third spaces (Bhabha 1994, Anzaldúa 1987) and to the temporal feature of border-crossing (Benito and Manzanar 2006).

The constitution, the purpose and the meaning of any border has to be comprehended in its frame of reference, its specific context and historical circumstances. For that reason, in current times of clandestine Mediterranean crossing and border enforcement, the Mediterranean border is understood as an enclosing and confining space, a complex social institution marked by tensions between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing (Mezzadra 2015: 130). It is removed and dislocated in the attempt to restrain, block and filter the passage of certain bodies. Its goal is not to arrest mobility but to tame it: not to produce a generalized immobilization, but a strategic application of immobility to specific persons. It consists therefore of a “systematic instrument of population management” (Walters 2006: 199), an apparatus of surveillance (Fassin

⁷ This point refers to the insight that any attempts to comprehend the border are limited by a particular situatedness, as it is impossible to see space in its totality (Westphal 2011: 126).

⁸ See Brain and Laczkó (2014) and the “2014-2019 Missing migrants project”.

2011), dividing populations through disciplinary mechanisms of border security: surveillance and technology, military patrols. It works like an “antivirus software” which is structured to block “malicious incoming traffic, while the non-malicious can smoothly cross its threshold” (Walters 2006: 255), and resembles an “asymmetric membrane” (Hedetoft 2003), disproportionally channeling the flow of people and things between inside and outside. By keeping certain groups of people out and allowing others to enter, EU border controls express a powerful statement about which kinds of bodies belong to the European space, and which bodies are perceived as not belonging. This filtering practice of the border raises questions about who is granted the right to mobility, and who is cast-off, consigned to a form of (im)mobility.

Considering the maritime geophysicality, order and power become something that is dynamic, constantly modified and reproduced as the moving forces that constitute its entity — currents, waves and tides. These forces construct unstable spaces which are continually challenged and transformed through new practices of movement and control. Such perspective highlights the dynamic nature of the Mediterranean border as well as the strategic practices of tactics and counter tactics that are constantly changing. The assumption of an unstable space, always in motion and in continuous modification, matches the significance that borders have achieved in the last two decades: from territorial lines marking the nation-state to a mobile networked system of control and surveillance, from a material division to an immaterial, and finally from a linear demarcation to a zonal one. Borders are no longer understood only as lines on a map but as spaces in their own right —borderlands and borderzone — and, more importantly as processes — bordering. Borders are institutions that enable and/or prevent the passage of flows; which means that they have become fundamentally mobile, designated to be portable as the persons and goods they monitor, and virtually ubiquitous which does not mean less concrete.

3. Mediterranean Studies

Contested meanings of the Mediterranean Sea abound: a mythical space characterized by spatial and historical continuity (Braudel 1949), the most vigorous place of interaction between different societies on the face of this planet (Abulafia 2011: xii), Europe's cultural heritage (Cacciatore 2003: 17), a watery continent (della Dora 2010: 1), a threatening Mare Aliorum (Fogu 2010: 7), Europe's Rio Grande (Hadj-Adbou 2014: 115), Europe's new frontier where the question of war and peace has come to the forefront (Fabre 2009: xii), a transit zone of migration, “a massive graveyard” (Van Houtum and Mamadouh 2008: 98), a crack where human lives sink (Bensaâd 2006: 12) and a laboratory of neoliberal regimes for the selective control of migration (Barbero 2012: 753). These divergent interpretations expose the complexities in comprehending the maritime basin. Yet, they reveal that the sea is a contested discursive practice that strives for

definition, having been constantly emptied out and re-filled with rhetoric and meaning (Proglia 2014). Rather than being just a geographic category, it is a cultural and geopolitical “reality” that is imaginatively constructed as a space that hosts diversity of cultural and historical regimes, a paradigm for cross-cultural relations, an area framed by both fragmentation and connection, a place of migration and regulations, of clashes and contacts, and finally a critical component in current Euro-African relationships. The political and cultural struggle for its definition and interpretation reveals something of the present world order.

In approaching the Mediterranean Sea, I build on works such as Chambers (2008), and Giaccaria and Minca (2011), that challenge any simplistic conception of the Mediterranean Sea itself, bringing into question binary oppositions between center and periphery, land and sea, inside and outside. The mentioned contributions propose to approach the Mediterranean Sea as a space irreducible to a single comprehension, an “intricate site of encounters and currents” (Chambers 2008: 32) where “the complex geopolitical, cultural, and historical space of the Mediterranean concentrates our attention on the question of cultural crossovers, contaminations, creolisations, and uneven historical memories” (ibid: 28). It is a space that “proposes a multiplicity that simultaneously interrupts and interrogates the facile evaluations of a simple mapping disciplined by the landlocked desires of a narrow-minded progress and an homogeneous modernity” (ibid: 25) and, in current times of migration, it represents a conflictual and fragmented space, “a fracture” (Giaccaria and Minca 2011: 353) that aims at blocking the continents' entanglement “into quarantined realms” (Chambers 2008: 3, 8).

Mediterranean border thinking means putting the maritime border center stage. This leads to the adoption of a more fluid border cartography in which the supposed stability of the border is set to float; susceptible to drift. As a fluid border cartography, the maritime border encourages different approaches that escape conventional constraints of land-based assumptions revealing a border reality that is essentially inconsistent and in continual flux and, therefore, defies strict interpretations. Indeed, the mentioned controversies around the term Mediterranean are not accidental but they reveal the often mutually exclusive interpretations of it, rendering the definition of *a* Mediterranean not only paradoxical, but also unfeasible. They also reflect the polysemy of the term border itself, a concept that corresponds with a variety of definitions. As Balibar notes

the idea of a simple definition of what constitutes a border is, by definition, absurd: to mark out a border is precisely, to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it. Conversely, however, to define or identify in general is nothing more than to trace a border, to assign boundaries or borders [...]. The theorist who attempts to define what a border is, is in danger of *going round in circles*, as the very representation of the border is the precondition of any definition (Balibar 2002: 76 italics added)

The inability to propose a straightforward response to the question “what is a border?” — an

impossibility inherent in the very fact that offering a definition indicates the tracing of a border — has been and continues to be at root of the productivity of Border Studies (Cooper and Tinning 2019). However, in order to avoid *going round in circles*, a Mediterranean border gaze can unveil insights about mobility, stasis and national belonging in current times. It represents therefore not merely a critique of essentialized interpretations about the Mediterranean but, rather an attempt to stress its entity as a socially constructed space (Lefebvre 1991), implicated in issues of powers and symbolism (Bourdieu 1989) and whose mythical unity turns out to be an ideological and romanticized (European) interpretation that falls short in current times of migration.

The Mediterranean border, besides being a crucial object of investigation, provides a viewpoint on existing global processes. In this sense, the border does not only offer a fundamental angle from which to engage the politics of migration and its aesthetic reproduction, but it also offers an advantaged perspective from which to develop analyses of other processes that shape the contemporary global world. Allowing the border to function as a prism for debates on the shifting global order, it is feasible to achieve a different perspective, one that stresses on the production and volatility of spatial and temporal demarcations as well as their importance for the formation of landscapes of power (Rajaram and Grundy Warr 2007: xxvi).

4. Overview of the structure

The first chapter “Bordering the Sea: geopolitics and aesthetics at the Mediterranean borderscape” is divided into two parts. The first one entitled “Bordering the Sea: migration across the Mediterranean borderscape” offers a historical overview of the broader conceptual and discursive framework that animate contemporary understandings of the Mediterranean Sea and outlines concerns about the current status of the maritime basin as a border space — a space of mobile limits, often transgressed and therefore questioned and interrogated. This subchapter provides a context in which to situate the five aesthetic productions about Mediterranean border-crossing. The second subchapter entitled “Border Aesthetics” is devoted to theorizing border aesthetics, a mode for analyzing literary productions that derives from and focuses on the experience of border-crossing. The latter subchapter begins by tracing the significance of *aesthetic* as a concept, from its Greek inception *aisthesis* (to perceive, feel, sense) to its recently proposed reappearance in Border Studies in the first decade of the 21st century. It formulates a critical reflection on aesthetics and social imaginaries, seen as the frameworks in which borders have been figured. Also, it stresses on the importance that border aesthetics as a theoretical starting point does not mean to aestheticize already existing borders by converting them into fiction, or reducing the border to merely a narrative, rather it means to question the assumptions that create the border, since the border “itself” is a product of the aesthetic rules that frame the realm of the social and political.

The three chapters that follow are devoted to the geo-literary analysis of two border-crossing sites: the Strait of Gibraltar and the Central Mediterranean route. While each chapter delves into a geo-literary analysis of a border-crossing site through a comparative analysis of two novels, the investigation pays particular attention to the aesthetic dimensions of the maritime border, such as the connection between borders and literary genres — biofiction, composite-novel, detective, realistic interlaid with folktales and speculative fiction in particular —, the presence of border figures (invisible wall, void, liquid hell, demon, etc.) and the emotions that border-crossing rouses (dread and awe or feelings of freedom and rebirth).

The second chapter “Bordering the Strait” offers a comparative analysis of the two novels: Laila Lalami's *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* (2005) and Miguel Pajares' *Aguas de venganza* [Waters of revenge] (2016). Both are set in the first decade of the twenty-first century and narrate the attempted border-crossing across the Strait of Gibraltar. The two novels narrativize the various stages of the migrants' journey, focusing on the life of the migrant before and after s/he has (un)succesfully crossed the Strait from Morocco to Spain, and their plot take place against the backdrop of recent European visa restrictions — one of the causes behind the exponential increase in clandestine migration across the Strait.

One one hand, the composite-novel *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* centers on four characters' border-crossing experience which is individually complete, yet connected to the other stories in the novel through the shared experience that unfolds at the Strait of Gibraltar. Through its intrinsic episodic structure, the novel conveys uncertainty and incapacity to a unified narrative of migration, offering a complex mosaic of migratory accounts that cannot be confined to a single story. On the other, the detective genre of *Waters of revenge*, with its inherent function as a commentary on contemporary political and social context, presents a specifically intriguing instance of border fiction. Through the literary conventions of the detective genre — tension, pursuit, and intrigue —, the novel addresses competing conceptions of justice and of the meanings attributed to crime and violence at the border. It describes the entanglements between smuggling and corruption in the world of clandestine migration, and tackles the issues of criminality and human rights in settings in which multiple readings of statehood and geopolitical powers are at stake. Pajares employs the genre of detective fiction to enhance the exploration of border deaths and to inquire into violence, corruption and crimes happening across the Strait.

The third chapter “Bordering the Mediterranean central route” focuses on the comparative analysis of the two novels: Abu Bakr Khaal's *African Titanics* (2008) [2014] and Giuseppe Catozzella's *Non dirmi che hai paura* (2014) [Don't tell me you are afraid (2016)]. Composed in a semi-realistic style as a first-person narration interspersed with poems and folktales, *African Titanics* is set in the first decade of the twenty-first century and it describes the clandestine journey of the protagonist from the Horn of Africa towards the coast of Tunisia. The embedded poems and folktales are complete and self-contained unites within the narrative, but function as

extensions of the essential aspects of the plot of the border novel: namely, the complexities at the heart of the migratory project, the seaborne clandestine crossing, and the migrants' experience of a repulsive sea that stands in stark contrast to the touristic image of the romantic Mediterranean — bathed in sunshine, and consumed by mass tourism.

Catozzella's *Don't tell me you are afraid* is the fictionalized account of the life of Samia Yusuf Omar, a promising athlete from Somalia who aspires to take part in the London Olympics of 2012. She lives to run, and her desire for running forces her to sacrifice more than she can possibly expect — her own life. Opting to write a bio-fictional novel — a literary format that employs fictional techniques to narrate a story based on an actual biographical figure —, Catozzella explores and models the migratory journey of Samia Yusuf Omar, providing references to real-life stories of migration. Thus, through the genre of the bio-fictional novel, the literary representation designates another coordinate in the configuration of the Mediterranean borderscape, a space from which the stories of those who attempted the maritime crossing can be (re)invoked, (re)formulated, and (re)examined. Catozzella's novel belongs to an emerging sub-genre of Italian migrant literature that narrates the experience of clandestine migrants, emphasizing the need for a tolerant approach towards migration and contributing to a comprehension of clandestine mobility as a facet of today's globalized world. However, it has to be noted that the literary descriptions of Samia's attempted Mediterranean crossing and her migratory journey contribute to the depiction of the young protagonist as naive, unprepared, and as a victim. While it is true that the novel stresses the importance of not leaving migrants' deaths unperceived, unseen, and uncounted, it is also true that Catozzella's “good” intentions are somehow paternalistic towards the powerless and wounded female migrant. Such paternalistic perspective depicts a reductive imagery of the migrant as ingenuous and, in some cases, helpless, which projects or resurrects stereotypical understandings of the migrants as victimized and vulnerable subjects. Whereas the fourth chapter focused on the border aestheticization of the Central Mediterranean route, it also offers a discussion of the role that literary productions play in the construction of “the humanitarian border” (Walters 2011) which projects a perspective of migrants as victims and individuals who need to be saved and rescued. As will be argued, while novels like *Don't tell me you are afraid* are urgently needed because they offer a space for negotiation and reconciliation of unspeakable pain, they should however avoid manipulating the vicarious experiences of suffering as a means towards promoting a false solidarity or a benevolent attitude, and being turned into an artifact showing and selling pity and benevolence.

The fourth chapter “Speculations on the Mediterranean borderscape” delves into Mounir Charfi's speculative novel *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* (2011) that, through a narrative mode that undermines realism and the close association of the ordinary and the fantastic, creates a counterfactual representation of the Mediterranean border. In the novel's literary cartography, notions of center and periphery lose their normative coordinates while the indeterminacy of the

border location suggests that it can also be imagined and positioned at any point, both at the edge and at the very core of the Mediterranean borderscape. Through the speculative genre, the novel proposes to unlock the authority of a unique accounting of geography that supports and perpetuates existing hegemonies and, in so doing, it re-assembles the Mediterranean geographical space, cracking the institutional frame and allowing for other versions to be heard.

The fifth and concluding chapter recapitulates the implications of aesthetics that engages with geopolitics, it stresses on the importance of aesthetics in the study of the Mediterranean border, and it provides a critical reflection on literature's capability to relate to the political and social spheres that surround it. In so doing, the chapter addresses the relevance of border aesthetics within the theoretical field of border studies, and it highlights the need for an engagement with aesthetics as generating an important critique of current Mediterranean border issues.

I. Bordering the Sea: geopolitics and aesthetics at the Mediterranean borderscape

The last two decades have experienced an increase of scholarly interest in the Mediterranean Sea as a framework for academic inquiry — including social, cultural, literary, art and sociological studies — and for investigating contemporary policy, whether political, social, environmental or economic (Catlos 2017: 2). Defining the Mediterranean Sea has been – and it still is – a difficult endeavor. Nevertheless, what scholars do agree on is the fact that, far from being an unequivocal concept or merely a geographical entity, the Mediterranean Sea is a “contested concept” (Moisseron and Bayoumi 2012: 9) whose polysemous nature reveals that, as a cultural and ideological formation, it is both a “political category and a culturally-laden geographic signifier” (Silverstein 2002: 33). As both a concept and a cultural formation, it is a “reality” that is imaginatively produced, forming a world composed of multiple narratives, encouraging as well as stirring political angst. To write about the Mediterranean Sea is to manoeuvre through an unsettling space and the narration that arises is “[a] fluid and fluctuating composition” (Chambers 2008: 2). Conflicting academic interpretations around the Mediterranean abound in literature which leads to the perception of this basin both as a homogeneous and continuous place and a heterogeneous and discontinuous place. Notwithstanding the shared assumptions of the Mediterranean Sea as a taken-for-granted notion (Guarracino 2007: vii), there does not seem to be a common comprehension of this body of water.

Engaging with the dispute about the definition of *a/the* Mediterranean space does not require uncovering a solution to such a problem, rather it invites critical reflections on the reasons why mutually exclusive interpretations about this basin abound within the field of Mediterranean Studies. Moreover, any analysis of the Mediterranean means not only to prove its complexity as a field of study, but also to avoid the comforting utopian perspective of a unified sea whose glorious past made possible the growth of the civilizations that surround it. The objective of the present chapter is not to suggest an alternative theory about the Mediterranean, but rather to elaborate a new comprehensive approach aiming at the complexity of the Mediterranean area while analyzing its shared and conflicting elements.

Especially in the field of mobility and migration, there is an urgent need to structure comprehensive concepts and analysis around notions of movements, migrations politics, border-crossing narratives, and bordering processes across the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, the contemporary Mediterranean Sea is far from being the meeting point of differences, rather it represents “both a proximate space in which ambitious foreign policy can flourish and the worryingly close location of an invading 'other' which needs to be contained” (Godin and Vince 2012: 2). In terms of clandestine migration, it has become “a mere border of Europe” (Bechev and

Nicolaidis 2010: xi), it has been associated with scenarios of threat and tragedy and it has been turned into a “postmodern cemetery” (Gjergji 2015: 159).

Looking at the Mediterranean through the lens of Border Studies will lead to a better comprehension of the current state of mobility, border crossing and border enforcement. In this regard, the first part of the present chapter will be dedicated to an overview of past contributions about the Mediterranean Sea and to the analysis of it as a maritime border, while the second part will explore the contribution of the aesthetic dimension in the investigation of the Mediterranean border.

1. Bordering the Sea: migration across the Mediterranean borderscape

In recent years, following a supposed decline in relevance of the nation-state, a growing interest in aspects related to globalization have inspired scholars to shift towards the allegedly borderless worlds of seas and oceans. Since the 1980s, historians and anthropologists have moved from models stressing the stability of bounded cultures to ones insisting on fluidity and connectedness, and thereafter, scholars became interested in reconsidering the world in fluid terms. Authors of academic researches on globalization often employ watery metaphors — fluidity, circulation, flows — (Appadurai 1996) in an attempt to analyze the unlimitedness of movements of capital, commodities, ideas and people. The frictionless sea has thus come to be the medium of circulation par excellence, and it symbolizes the increasing porosity of borders in a globalized world⁹(Bauman 2000, Chanda 2007, Inda and Rosaldo 2008). However, in the past two decades, the tightening of migration policies all over Europe and beyond EU borders, which has aimed to strengthen a water-barrier between Europe and its “southern beyond”, compels for a consideration of the maritime space, the Mediterranean Sea, as border space(s). This maritime area, which has been perceived as a mythical space characterized by spatial and historical continuity (Braudel 1949) has become a “solid sea” (Boeri 2002), an important fulcrum for European geopolitics, and a heavily bounded place defined by power relations that manifest themselves through bordering processes.

Mediterranean migration is not a recent phenomenon, nor can it be considered as a temporary one. Over the last twenty-five years, mobilities across the sea have experienced different routes and selected entry locations according to particular conditions: through the Strait of Gibraltar and the Adriatic Sea in the beginning of the nineties, the Canary Islands in the 2000s, increasingly from the Maghreb -Libya in particular- since 2011, and greatly through the Eastern Mediterranean since 2015 (Panebianco 2016: 442). Clandestine migration across the sea takes place in an area which has no visible territorial delimitation but which is constituted by an elastic border zone that encompasses the whole territory extending into and including Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. Even though jurisdictionally the Mediterranean Sea does not represent a maritime legal void, it does raise images of a void where migrant vessels are concerned, in particular when they capsize and persons drown. Indeed, unaccountability, impunity, and exception at sea persevere. In an almost too literal example of biopolitical governmentality, the migrants, who are

⁹ The perspective on globalization presented here, following the interpretation of Zygmunt Bauman (2000), is that it involves increasing liquidity. Accordingly, liquid phenomena do not hold their shape for long time. They are fixed neither in space nor in time and, by being opposed to any sort of fixity, they are in continuous flow. Bauman has gone so far as to describe the current phase of modernity as liquid, stressing the fact that fluidity and liquidity are “fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity” (Bauman 2000: 2).

caught between death and detention facilities, enter the spiral of the sovereign ban (Agamben 1998) and necropolitical zones of exception (Mbembe 2003).

Through a Mediterranean border gaze, this chapter seeks to shed light on issues related to the current state of border crossings, border enforcement, violence at the border, and mobility across the Mediterranean borderscape. The assumption that guides the present chapter is that the notion of seas as politically neutral (Horden and Purcell 2006: 723) and as frictionless entities is highly misleading along with approaches focusing on liquidity and permeable exchanges that promote hybridity and communication. It is fundamental to note that by overstating metaphors of fluid borders and cohabitation of cultures and religions, one risks ignoring first the asymmetric connections constitutive of geopolitical borders (Dainotto 2003: 7) and, second, that the Mediterranean is a liquid space turned solid and divided into differing depths by impervious corridors and subdivided by high barriers which function as funnels of entry and exit that react to the discourse of inclusion through exclusion¹⁰ (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013b).

Even if the Mediterranean Sea has been in the past interpreted as “the most vigorous place of interaction between different societies on the face of this planet” (Abulafia 2011, xii) and a space defined by flows and in which cultural and ethnic dissimilarities could be reunited (Braudel 1949), the division between its shores seems nowadays to be more evident than ever. It has, thus, become an insurmountable border, epitomized by the image of the ‘Fortress Europe’¹¹, and it has evolved into “Europe's new frontier, its horizon, the place, both real and imaginary, where the question of war and peace has come to the forefront yet again” (Fabre 2009: xii).

¹⁰ Exclusion is increasingly graduated and modulated in divergent forms of control and selection, giving rise to a complex structure of excluding inclusion, and respective including exclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013b: 7). In its elemental term inclusion refers to the process of making a part of a structure and, from the Latin term *includere*, to confine. The term “differential inclusion” has been taken up by migration scholars as means to account for the complexity and ambiguity of border regimes, since the relationship between migrant and sovereignty cannot merely be reduced to either inclusion or exclusion. The term challenges the concept that inclusion is always an unequivocal good, given that inclusion “can be subject to varying degrees of subordination, rule, discrimination and segmentation” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013b: 159).

¹¹ Divergent images or analogies have been employed to describe the current migrant phenomenon of the twenty-first century. Fortress Europe is one; a military propaganda term dating back to World War II and still employed to define the ways in which Europe monitors its borders. In light with the contribution of William Walters, the application of the term 'Fortress' may be valid as a political intervention, but the image of walled continents only slightly conveys a sense of the mechanisms of power at stake (Walters 2004: 240). Border politics is not reducible to the Fortress impulse of erecting walls, but it contains within itself a tendency that takes the politics of internal and transnational security outwards, beyond its geopolitical delimitations, into its neighbors' countries. In this light, the border regime extends its reach and its strategic field of intervention beyond grasp. Moreover, it has to be noted that the designation of 'Fortress Europe' suggests a clear and undebatable awareness of 'Europe' defined in relation to what and where Europe is divided from. Yet, the answer to the question 'where Europe begins and ends' is controversial and open to discussion (Rumford 2007).

1.1 Past contributions to Mediterranean Studies

A major work on the Mediterranean is Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1949), and since its publication, there have been only scarce investigations that try to revise his contribution in order to establish a contemporary analytical framework for this body of water (Schäfer 2014: 61). In his seminal work, the French historian of the *Annales School* establishes the Mediterranean region as an analytical category, offering the reader a rich account of the Mediterranean milieu and the role that it has played in history. He depicts the geography, economy and society of the Mediterranean region of the 16th century and conceives the Mediterranean landscape as the setting of historical events, as well as the environment for the development of uniquely Mediterranean attitudes. In his contribution, he considers the physical setting of Mediterranean, its climate and geology as principles by which cultures come to be defined and share common traits.

In the introduction, Braudel claims that the Mediterranean defies easy categorization and that absolute interpretations or narratives are inadequate to summarize the several experiences of its different peoples and places. Indeed, it consists of thousand things at a time; “ [it] is not even a *single* sea, it is a complex of seas” (Braudel 1995 [1949] : 17 italics in original), it is not a landscape, but countless ones, not a civilization, but civilizations crammed together. Yet, pages later, he argues for a physically and culturally unified Mediterranean employing concepts such as shared climate, similar physical characteristics and uniformity of landscape and way of life. His interpretation, resulting from his historical approach that privileges the chronicle of civilizational continuities - what he named *histoire de longue durée* – stresses the connecting property of waters that determines patterns of unity and coherence. This enables him not only to recognize motifs of continuity but also to focus on relationships between Mediterranean populations and cultures; the entire sea shared a common destiny with similar difficulties and general trends. In his view, the Mediterranean attains a “retrospective legitimacy as a 'global' historical entity that deserves to be studied for itself, as a sort of 'historical character' that imposes itself as a protagonist” (Zolo 2007: 15). Although Braudel's *La Méditerranée* was highly original at the time of its writing, the genesis of his contribution was thoroughly intertwined with French colonialism in Northern Africa and with the French geopolitical notion of *Méditerranée*, understood as a geographically united, historically unique and essentially European space.

Almost half a century after the publication of Braudel's *La Méditerranée*, the historians Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell published their attempt to recount the history of the Mediterranean. In their work, *The Corrupting Sea* (2000), they concentrate on the eras prior to Braudel's periodization, yet they conceive their account as logically following Braudel's *Méditerranée*. Even though, they grant more importance to detail than to macro perspective, they

build their account on Braudel's notion of Mediterranean unity, arguing that Mediterranean unity is a consequence of connectivity between microregions. Accordingly, the Mediterranean Sea is a land-locked sea with several islands, interlocking coastal lowlands and navigable lagoons and rivers, and it “may be conceived as a large zone of net introversion: an area within which internal contacts are [...] more numerous, dense or durable than external ones” (Horden and Purcell 2006: 30). The fact that, within the Mediterranean region, so many differences conglomerate is considered a peculiarity of this area and its distinctiveness is a consequence of “the paradoxical coexistence of a milieu of relatively easy seaborne communications with a quite unusually fragmented topography of microregions in the sea's coastlands and islands” (ibid: 5). The scholars' approach stresses the fluidity and modularity of the manifold interrelations tying together the shores of the sea. Indeed, following the path of Braudel, the Mediterranean is where Europe, the Levant and northern Africa connect and represents a “milieu of interlocking routes onto which the coastlands and harbour faced” (ibid: 11).

The previous two academic works on the Mediterranean follow the pattern of the region's unity and spatial continuity, offer a vision of this basin as a historical and geographical entity and, while Braudel favors the idea of a natural and cultural unity of the Mediterranean sea, Horden and Purcell prefer to understand it as a topography of microregions, a fragmented world, but nevertheless united by its very connectivity. Both of them support a scholarly tendency that, according to Pedrag Matvejević, has afflicted the Mediterranean discourse with commonplaces such as “sun and sea, scent and color, sandy beaches and islands of fortunes [...] oranges and olives and myrtle, palms and pines and cypresses, pomp and poverty, reality and illusion, life and dreams -such are the commonplaces plaguing the literature, all description and repetition” (Matvejević 1999: 12).

Matvejević's publication *Mediterranean Breviary*¹² inscribes itself in a line of criticism concerning the Mediterranean academic field itself. In his work, Matvejević criticizes the fault lines that have appeared within it; especially the repetition of obsolete paradigms and the inadequacy of any single discipline in recounting the Mediterranean. The author claims that “[t]he Mediterranean is not merely history” (Matvejević 1999: 1), “[it] is not merely geography” (ibid: 7), “Mediterranean cultures are not merely national cultures” (ibid: 11) and “the Mediterranean is not merely belonging” (ibid: 12). The first section of *Breviary* consists of a short compendium of the features of Mediterranean landscapes, flora, fauna and populations, in which the writer pays homage to forgotten crafts and tools that are no longer in use. In the second section, entitled “Maps”, Matvejević suggests that cartographic representations are still the points of reference for our comprehension of this basin but they can only “reveal the wrinkles of the Mediterranean, not its face” (ibid: 98). Accordingly, by transferring knowledge, conception of space and worldview,

¹² Here, I employ the literal translation of the original publication of Matvejević's *Mediterranean Breviary* which was kept in both the Italian and French translations, whereas the English translation carries the title *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*.

maps influence the mental schemes we construct about a specific space, but they can be neither comprehensive nor geographically accurate. In the third section, entitled, “Glossary”, the writer mixes philology and literature, history and fantastic stories. He shows how words, nautical terms and measures vary widely from dialect to dialect and from language to language. However, they also transfer from one culture to another and he demonstrates that, within the Mediterranean region, semantic borrowings and linguistic differences exist side by side.

Each section of *Mediterranean Breviary* corresponds to a particular perspective about the Mediterranean — phenomenological, cartographical and philological — that aims to complete the others. Nevertheless, these mosaic pieces do not offer a response to what the Mediterranean is, and do not provide with a complete methodological approach. And, that is the point that Matvejević wants to make: it is unfeasible to disentangle the complexity of the Mediterranean or to understand it only from one point of view, since this basin “will not abide a scale incommensurate with itself. We do it an injustice by approaching it from a Eurocentric point of view, that is, as an exclusively Latin, Roman, or Romance creation, or from a pure pan-Hellenic, pan-Arab, or Zionist point of view, that is, on the basis of a particularistic criterion, be it ethnic, religious, or political” (ibid: 11). His view comments upon the previous two and challenges the notion of a cultural continuum encompassing all the countries around its shores. For Matvejević, to ascribe a single definition to the Mediterranean would be a trivial attempt, and a unique Mediterranean narrative is unfeasible since a single or unitary Mediterranean does not exist. In this sense, the Mediterranean area is “real” in its geographic existence, but it is artificial in the sense of the reinvention of habits, images, shared cultural practices and belongings.

Offering a contrapuntal perspective on Horden and Purcell's notion of connectivity, recent criticism focuses on bodies of water, relating/opposing the Mediterranean Sea to other maritime logics. In particular, Édouard Glissant suggests that

the Mediterranean [...] is an inner sea surrounded by lands, a sea that concentrates (in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin antiquity and later in the emergence of Islam, imposing the thought of the One) [whereas] the Caribbean is, in contrast, a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. A sea that diffracts (Glissant 1997: 33)

Glissant's Mediterranean is understood — again — as the cradle of civilizations and monotheism, and as a homogeneous entity connecting its shores. Similarly, the historian David Abulafia claims that the connective feature of the sea makes it a suitable model to apply to other contexts as different as the Baltic “Mediterranean of the North”, the “Atlantic Mediterranean”, the eastern European “sub-Mediterranean” Adriatic, Aegean, and Black seas, but also the “Japanese Mediterranean” and the “Indian Ocean Mediterranean” (Abulafia 2011: 64-67).

Yet, reflecting on seascapes, two thoughts occur: first the Mediterranean does not deserve its reputation as “la mer de l'un” (Rosello 2012: 208) and second, the interconnected paradigms of maritime space functions as a shorthand to address the manifold forms of unevenness produced by

globalization (Morris 2006). Thus, one should avoid looking at the Mediterranean through the lens of “nostalgia for a lost grandeur” (Botta 2010: 5) which risks encouraging the proliferation of desires rather than facts, based on uneven relationships and exchanges. And, if it is accepted that the Mediterranean is an imaginatively constructed identity, “it is in need of being rethought and reinvented” (Cassano 1996: 9), in the effort to stimulate an alternative discourse to the self-absorbed and self-referential one. In light of these remarks, it is fundamental to pay attention simultaneously to the destabilizing potential of the maritime fluidity and the very real forces that this fluidity generates — forces such as border enforcement, persistence of global inequalities, and neo-colonialism. It is important to underline that, even though the sea is still charged with narrative and philosophical imagination, its waters, though strictly connected, are entangled with stories of capitals, politics, and persons and are often in conflict with each other.

The interpretation of the Mediterranean Sea is also a matter of words. The term “Mediterranean Sea” was introduced by the Romans, and is a sort of misnomer, as Predrag Matvejević explains (Matvejević 1999: 206). The adjective and noun Mediterranean is from the classical-Latin *mediterraneus*, — like its synonym, *meditullius* — was the opposite of *maritimus* and referred to a place “in the middle of the land” (Gonzalez Calleja 2000: 37). Originally, the term referred to a place *on* land, and not something *between* lands. In antiquity, the Romans referred to the entire sea as *Mare magnum* (the Great Sea), *Mare internum* (the Interior Sea), or *Mare nostrum* (Our Sea). The Greeks called it *Mesogeios* (in middle of the earth), while the Arabs termed it *bahr al-Rum* (sea of the Romans) and later *bahr al-Shamm*¹³. However, from late antiquity onwards, *Mare mediterraneum* has been the most favored term (Nichols, Küpper and Kablitz 2017: xiv) by the Romans, whereas the Greeks referred to it as *entos thalassa*, “inner sea” in opposition to the ocean which was known as *éiso thalassa*, “outer sea”. Nowadays, in Turkish and Arabic, the Mediterranean sea is called the “white sea”: *Ak Deniz* and *bahr al-abyad*¹⁴, respectively (ibid: 211). If the history of the term itself offers a semantic evolution, it also gives the idea of the overlapping of meanings. Accordingly, the Mediterranean is a fertile field of connotations and its significance has changed in accordance with the perspective. As Bernard Pingaud, already in the end of the fifties, writes: “to reflect on the Mediterranean, analyze this vague and attractive concept [...] is to wonder about the relationship between the real and the imaginary, between a desired existence and a lived existence [...] The Mediterranean is nothing else than the image we make of it¹⁵” (Pingaud 1959: 3).

The above mentioned interpretations, however, presume the “objective” existence of a

¹³ Shamm corresponds to present-day Syria and Lebanon.

¹⁴ The emergence of the term *bahr al-abyaa* dates back to the end of XIX century. According to Benantar, the first to employ such a term was the Egyptian author, Rif'aâ al-Tahtaw (Benantar 2001: 80).

¹⁵ The quoted passage is my own translation. The original is the following: “réfléchir sur la Méditerranée, analyser ce concept vague et séduisant [...] c'est s'interroger sur les rapports entre le réel et l'imaginaire, entre une existence désirée et une existence vécue [...] La Méditerranée n'est rien d'autre que l'image que nous nous en faisons” (Pingaud 1959: 3).

geographical entity named Mediterranean, which is considered to be natural evidence, and on which the “speculations” over the Mediterranean as a field of enquiry are based¹⁶. In them, the maritime basin is understood to be a region that, although fluid, remains bounded enough in order to be described as a space with specific features and a shared sense of meaning. These readings share firstly an implicitly cartographic vision (through which the Mediterranean Sea is mappable), and secondly the notion that the Mediterranean is a taken-for-granted concept (Guarracino 2007: vii). The “translation” of the Mediterranean into a bounded geographical space results in a “disciplined epistemological framing and political management of that very space and its social and cultural reproduction” (Giaccaria and Minca 2011: 348). In this way, the sea represents “a reality that is imaginatively constructed” (Chambers 2008: 10) whose unified entity is supported by the natural evidence of its physical features, and by a discourse that tends to essentialize and naturalize a complex set of spatial practices and understandings. In this sense, the Mediterranean is a constructed idea, a discursive formation, which has created hierarchical and authoritative paradigms to comprehend this area politically and culturally. Scholars on the Mediterranean have drawn their claims from the physical features of this sea; their arguments are elaborated by the investigation of its nature, and their results lead to the comprehension of this basin as an ontological unified reality on which humankind and populations depend. Their views have indeed privileged what the scholar Ian Chambers defines as “a discriminatory mapping” (Chambers 2008: 17) which does not recognize the historical pluralistic formations of the Mediterranean. Such a discriminatory mapping started at the end of the nineteenth century when seemingly neutral disciplines such as archaeology, geography and the study of the classics determined the Mediterranean basin as an integral part of Europe. To consecrate such vision, the Southern and Eastern shores were arranged in the Conference of Berlin (1884-85) according to the spheres of interest that were fundamental to both the foreign policies and nation building of France, Britain, Germany, and Italy. The appreciation of the Mediterranean Sea in the 21st century continues to exist under these specific shadows and, in this way, perpetuates a neo-colonial/imperial logic.

And yet, as soon as the broad and diverse literature on the Mediterranean is considered, it is evident that methodological uncertainty and ontological instability abound. The obstacles of comprehending the Mediterranean Sea as a whole stress the fact that this sea escapes measures and categories. As Matvejević suggests, no single discipline does justice to this sea (Matvejević 1999:1). Not even cartographic representations of this sea do justice to it. Although maps might represent points of reference to grasp the Mediterranean Sea, they can offer only a partial

¹⁶ The anthropologist, Michael Herzfeld criticizes the way in which scholars are still discussing the unity of 'the' Mediterranean as a construct when almost all comparable categories have been deconstructed or reconstructed. (Herzfeld 2005, 45). He questions the concept of the Mediterranean as a field of inquiry per se. According to him, one should think of the Mediterranean as a sequence of “a” Mediterraneans: narratives and counternarratives, not as a locked hermeneutic system but rather as a system open to all Mediterranean perspectives and voices. On the model of Edward Said's neologism, Herzfeld has coined the term “Mediterraneism”, stating that the term “can be treated as much more than an ideology – a program of active political engagement with patterns of political hierarchy (ibid, 51).

representation (ibid: 98). They can never be comprehensive and geographically accurate. Following Matvejević's contribution, to ascribe a single definition to the Mediterranean would be a trivial attempt, and a unique Mediterranean narrative is unfeasible since a single or unitary Mediterranean does not exist (Cassano: 1996: xxiv). Consequently, since it is unfeasible to disentangle the complexity of this sea, no approach to the Mediterranean offers a response to what this in-between body of water is. Any analysis is charged with conceptual problems as any interpretation relies on the belief in the existence of a geographical object named the Mediterranean and, thus mistakenly presumes a specific and single entity which can be spatially described and defined. Therefore, within Mediterranean Studies, the main issue that continuously affects investigations of the sea lies in the evasiveness of the term, its resistance to precise definitions and fixed characterizations. The notion of the Mediterranean as a stable object of analysis remains disappointingly unattainable.

So, if the Mediterranean Sea was invented by European geographers during the 19th century, as Chambers¹⁷ and Horden and Purcell¹⁸ claim and if its interpretations are embedded in discursive practice and power relations the question of how it is possible to further analyze and interpret this sea in current times of migration arises. Moreover, if it is accepted that the Mediterranean Sea is a cultural and geographical construct, which in itself is an artificial interpretation, and thus inherently unstable, continuously re-signified, re-articulated and reinterpreted by re-signifying forces of (subverting) actions, there are two outcomes. The first is that the concept of the semiotic sign — Mediterranean — and to a larger extent to the sign — border — is unstable, being continuously re-signified, re-defined and re-articulated. The second refers to the re-signifying power of practices of those who cross it. These two consequences valorize the transformative capacity of the Mediterranean entity; an “excess space” (Proglia 2016: xii) which is continuously emptied out and re-filled with rhetoric and meaning.

Thus, whereas there is no doubt that the physical Mediterranean exists in all its facticity, its artificial construction remains problematic. Far from being a clear concept, the Mediterranean is what Moisseron and Bayoumi define as a “contested concept” (2012: 19), a debatable entity (Vazquez Montalban 2000: 15) a portable notion, a puzzle (Theodoropoulos 2000: 21) and a shorthand encoding assumptions about everything from diet to romantic temperament. Within Mediterranean Studies, there seems to be at least two shared opinions: the first one refers to the belief in the “real” geographical existence of this sea, and the second one relies on the

¹⁷ According to Chambers, the Mediterranean as an object of inquiry is the result of modern geographical, political, cultural and historical categorizations: “[i]t is a construct and a concept that linguistically entered the European lexicon and acquired a proper name in the nineteenth century. There it simultaneously offered both the origin and the contemporary theater of European power” (Chambers 2008: 12)

¹⁸ For the two historians, Horden and Purcell, the term “Mediterranean” is firstly employed as synonymous with Western and Eurocentric perspective, and secondly, “[i]t emerged as a by-product of the general conceptualization of space under a heading with terrible future, *Lebensraum*” (Horden and Purcell 2006: 728 italics in original).

Mediterranean artificiality regarding its habits, images, shared cultural practices and belongings. Understandings of the Mediterranean have shifted and opposing concepts fluctuate according to shifting economic, political and social realities. As Silverstein claims, the polysemous nature of the Mediterranean Sea reveals that, as a cultural and ideological construction, it is both a “political category”, and a “culturally-laden geographic signifier” (Silverstein 2002: 33). Its enduring socio-political significance is reflected in its manifold and changing representations, including literary productions. The latter insight will be further explored in the chapters dedicated to the literary analysis of the five novels and, while the detailed investigation will reveal divergences in aesthetic approaches, it will also suggest the diversity of the representations of any border. The contested meaning of the Mediterranean border exposes its complexity to disclose that is more than a geographical category. It is a cultural and political entity that emerges as a place of crossing and bordering, and a critical component in Euro-African relationships.

Once it is acknowledged that it is impossible to talk about the Mediterranean without referring to the power of representation, the cartographic abstraction, and the construction of images and imaginaries and, consequently, without considering it as a “modern geographical, political, cultural and historical classification” (Chambers 2008: 12), it is possible to argue that the Mediterranean Sea in current times of migration imposes itself as a concrete place for spatial governmentality¹⁹, a space concerned with the government of population. Its fluidity invites us to think of “the unstable location of knowledge” (Chambers 2008: 27) and of the unstable production and reproduction of borders. Its social construction asks for a reflection on the power of symbolism and images which imply spatial hierarchies (De Certeau 1984), and its entity represents both a natural space and an invented one, a real and imagined space²⁰ (Soja 1996).

To conceive the maritime border as 'natural' — and therefore to instantiate nature as a border — means to accept the idea that the body of water constitutes a hindrance. This correspondence between nature and border configures the maritime entity as a natural limit, which subsequently seems “naturally” to impede the flow of circulation of persons, goods and ideas. Hence, the maritime border comes to serve as a line of demarcation that encodes “inside” and “outside”, and it is invoked as a reason not to trespass the body of water that has, particularly

¹⁹ The concept of spatial governmentality derives from Foucault's elaboration of the concept of governmentality, a neologism that combines both government and rationality. Governmentality alludes to the rationalities and practices of governance as well as the strategies that produce social order. It focuses on the “how” of governance rather than the “why” (Foucault 1991). By employing the term spatial governmentality I mean a space determined by the cooperation of several institutional and non-institutional actors in the management and biopolitical control of transnational courses of people, commodities, and capital mobility. I consider the space of governmentality as invested in a precise exercise of power which reiterates the symbolic and discretionary nature of its borders.

²⁰ According to Soja, Thirdspace is “a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings” (Soja 1996: 2) and additionally it represents a “creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the 'real' material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through 'imagined' representations of spatiality [...] Everything comes together in Thirdspace:” (ibid: 56).

at the end of the 20th century, emerged as an ideological divide. The naturalness of the maritime border recreates itself as a hindrance, so that the hindrance becomes the interpretation of the border, and the reason why it should not be transgressed. Hence, nature is mobilized to justify a north-south narrative of division, and the “natural” border is deployed in the service of an ideological defense of supposed homogeneity. Considering the etymological roots of geography -*gē*, meaning earth, and *grafia*, meaning writing, the maritime border that the migrants cross is an “inscription in the landscape – a sort of earth writing” (Foote 2003: 33). The crowning achievement of this naturalizing logic, meanwhile, comes when it succeeds in rendering this mental switch invisible, whereupon it becomes natural that a border should be monitored because it is natural (Rosello and Saunders 2017: 28).

If the production of space is connected to the production of knowledge and power, the Mediterranean Sea reveals the simultaneous coexistence of dominant spaces of power and counter-hegemonic space and discloses strategies of governance that attempt to manage global mobility. It is an unstable set of relations and order, it is a contact zone, a “social space where cultures meet, clash and bridge with each other, often in the context of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 1992: 4), it is the locus of asymmetries and encounters, of intense political and diplomatic activities, and the scenario of ongoing bordering practices both inside and outside the EU. Once it is acknowledged that the physical Mediterranean is inseparable from the discourse(s) and symbols about it, it is possible to “get away from the tiresome ontological debate” (Herzfeld 2005: 50) and focus instead on border issues of power, governmentality, order and (im)mobility across it. Hence, even if any single categorization is doomed to fail, it is useful to “reinterpret” this sea by focusing on its status as border, thus, a concrete and material entity in itself. Such a conception of the sea in terms of a border, or rather as a set of borders that split continents, nations, lands and water, is based on the recognition that borders no longer appear only “at the edge of territory, marking the points where it ends” (Balibar 2002: 109) rather they “have been transported into the middle of political space” (ibid). When the increased mobility of people across it is taken into consideration, fixed representations of borders and barriers fade away into a more fluid and complex geography.

1.2 The Mediterranean Sea as border space(s)

Given the cultural, religious and political differences within the Mediterranean, it is remarkable that historians and anthropologists have underlined its unity, considering it as a homogenous cultural space in which traditions and customs of its inhabitants bear similarities. The approaches celebrating the uniformity of this basin tend to overlook that, since antiquity, this

sea has been a complex site of encounters, currents and clashes, and that any research instead should be leading towards issues of “cultural crossovers, contaminations, creolisation, uneven historical memories” (Chambers 2008: 28), colonialism, post-colonialism and sea-crossings. As distinct from Braudel’s view, the focus should be not on a supposed coherence and unity of the Mediterranean, but rather on diversity, asymmetry, interconnectedness and clashes of multiple interests, cultures, aspirations within a given historic space. Thus, the analysis of this maritime basin stresses the necessity for a pluralism of meanings and perspectives, as well as for the investigation of conflicts, disputes and crossings.

This would lead to the understanding of a pluriverse Mediterranean where the populations surrounding it are intermingled through clashes and exchanges. Consequently, to understand the Mediterranean implies necessarily to realize that it is, and has been, a sea of migrating cultures, of shared encounters and distinctions, of resonance and dissonance, and divergent histories that construct a fluid and unstable archive. To read the Mediterranean Sea as a “post-colonial sea” (Chambers 2008: 23-49) means that the making of the contemporary Mediterranean is strictly bounded to its colonial past. The phenomena of contemporary migrants crossing the Mediterranean basin and the deaths at sea during this dangerous journey have a far-reaching history. With European imperial expansions towards the sea's southern coasts in the 19th century, a selective and uneven mobility regime emerged across the basin. While European settlers moved in great numbers towards colonized lands, the northbound mobility of colonized populations was subjected to selective filtering, which led to early cases of deaths at sea (Clancy-Smith 2011). Setting limits between a “European Self” and a “Mediterranean Other” was undoubtedly a crucial task in the conceptualization of the Mediterranean as a colonial space. European colonialism in the Mediterranean cannot be understood without considering the quest for modern Europe's origins in ancient Greece and the fact that such a quest occurred as both an originator and a consequence of modernity/colonialism. The creation of the European South has been trapped between the foundation of a distance between the “civilized” Northern Europeans and “corrupted” Mediterraneans (Horden and Purcell 2000) and the acknowledgment of a cultural cohesion between European modernity/coloniality and its Mediterranean past. This process was Orientalist and colonial, in that its goal was the establishment of a cultural alterity and hence a political and economic rule over the southern Mediterranean, but it was also concerned with the need to conceive European modernity's Mediterranean roots (Giaccaria 2012: 299). Like any Orientalistic discourse, Mediterraneanism is cultivated by the production of an Other which is both mythologized and marginalized, idealized as origin and condemned as pre-modern. The links between older sea routes — the triangular slave trade — and today's global flows must be taken into account in any project committed to exploring decentered ways of comprehending the contemporary situation. As will be discussed in the third chapter, the point is not to correlate the Middle Passage to the current migratory flows across the sea, rather to highlight that

contemporary clandestine maritime crossings are part of a longer history of migration and displacement that is related to the broader history of imperialism and colonialism.

As Iain Chambers claims

in the face of contemporary migration, there are frankly far too few willing to listen to those phantoms that constitute the historical chains that extend from Africa five hundred years ago to the coasts of southern Italy today and which link together the hidden, but essential, narratives of migration in the making of modernity. To negate the memory evoked by the interrogative presence of the modern migrant is somehow to register an incapacity to consider one's own troubled and always incomplete inheritance in the making of the present (Chambers 2013: 79).

Current migrants' crossings from the South to the North, are the reminders that this basin, resolutely conceived as the source of European culture, has always been part of an "elsewhere". Therefore, to grasp its essence means to make reference to its "borders and limits between an inside and an outside, between the cultivated place of the domesticated scene and the strangeness and disturbance of the external world" (Chambers 2008: 41). In the same line of thought, the Italian scholar Franco Cassano, in *Il pensiero meridiano* [Southern thought] (1996), suggests that nowadays when we think about the Mediterranean, it means to put the border, that line of division and contact between people and civilization, at the center of analysis. Since it functions like a screen, the sea-border reflects the image of Europe, registers its limits (Cassano 1996: xxiv), and reminds how legacies of the past still endure in contemporary constellations.

The Mediterranean is a porous historical and cultural door; its history is about contacts, as much peaceful as they are violent; but it has been transformed and solidified through the impositions of limits, and the increasing rigidity of identities connected to appropriate forms of passage: documented and undocumented. If clashes and exchanges were common practices in the Mediterranean, the contemporary movement of restriction and blockage suggest the opposite, and its waters are home to a mass graveyard (Fabre 2000: 99). Nowadays, the very right to move across the Mediterranean has to face border control, confinement, and surveillance. Circulation and migration are highly hierarchical: passages for the transit of goods, material, capital and a particular category of people have been opened, while simultaneously channels of exclusion and confinement have been produced. Instead of being a homogeneous stretch of water, it reveals the discontinuities of current times during which it comes to be "simultaneously an arena wherein social conflicts occur and a space shaped by these conflicts" (Steinberg 2001: 20), an unstable space in which the border regime is perpetually challenged by bodies struggling for their right to move, and "the setting both for sharp socioeconomic contrasts and for several kinds of migratory phenomena, which derive from global inequality and instability" (Ribas-Mateos 2001: 22).

As it has been argued, most of the literature on the Mediterranean that has been

published²¹ has often celebrated this sea as a space of movement, exchange and intense relations of communication and commerce. This has generated an image of the Mediterranean as a comforting hybrid space, and has encouraged an outburst of discourses around the frictionless characteristic of the sea²². The lack of limits at sea seems to suggest that the sea is a principle of eradication, a free and empty space²³, the smooth place par excellence in which one finds oneself disoriented because it “is a field without conduits or channels” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 371), the absolute challenge to geospatial investigation, a “non-signifying field [that] bears no message” (Barthes 1972: 112). The sea has been conceived as a deterritorialized space that “does not — in the form of landmarks, coastline, etc.— yield to any visible shape or trace” (Kinzel 2002: 29). The notion of the maritime as opposed to the terrestrial reveals how territoriality has been predominant in western thought. Accordingly, land with its obsession for fixity and appropriation represents the point of origin and a form-giving element for human existence whereas the maritime entity is an asocial space, and a wild space of nature that is antithetical to the social places on land. In line with this logic, the sea is in constant opposition to landmarks, inscriptions, and other localizing tools presuming stasis.

In literary and philosophical history, the maritime environment, despite occupying seventy percent of the globe's surface, has been perceived as a non-specific space, one outside time, beyond time, or even antagonistic to time. From the beginnings of nautical travel, sailors venturing into the sea faced an indefinite unknown, one that reduced the earth to a dark spot on the horizon. Yet, as will be shown throughout this thesis, in order to grasp the importance of the Mediterranean Sea as a maritime border, one should approach it as an agent, as embodied place, and as ontology itself. Whereas diaspora studies conceived the sea, especially the Atlantic Ocean, as a blank space, or *aqua nullius*, this dissertation examines the materiality of the sea itself, putting emphasis on its “territorialization”. Therefore, even though, the maritime liquid quality poses a challenge to the ability to render it into embodied and fixed place, critical studies should point out that this is contrary to a long history of maritime territorialism and empire (Steinberg 2001: 207).

²¹ For all the scholarly work that has been written on the Mediterranean, there remains much to explore; at least in regard to the 20th and 21st centuries. Since Braudel, the Mediterranean has been analyzed most by ancient, medieval and early modern historians. With the exception of Abulafia, with his book *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (2011), who stretches his account into the 20th century, the historians give the impression that the Mediterranean as a field of studies stops existing when we enter modern times (see for example the 2014 contribution by Horden and Kinoshita, *A Companion to Mediterranean History*).

²² I have to note, however, that the Mediterranean as a place of encounter seems to attract more academic scholars than politicians. The latter, in fact, treat this basin like a sea of problems, all the better to fortify in order to restrain border transgressions.

²³ The sea was once considered as an open space, free from national bordering practices, as Carl Schmitt states: “the sea knows no such apparent unity of space and law [...] On the sea, fields cannot be planted and firm lines cannot be engraved. Ships that sail across the sea leave no trace [...] The sea is free. According to recent international law, the sea is not considered to be state territory, and should be open equally to all for three very different spheres of human activity: fishing, peaceful navigation, and the conduct of war” (Schmitt 2003 [1950]: 42-3).

Following the contribution of the German jurist and philosopher Carl Schmitt²⁴, order and orientation presuppose the element of the earth which, for human beings, is the “standpoint and ground” (Schmitt 1954: 7), and therefore order is territorial, ownership originates from land and orientation is in conformity with the division of the land. Schmitt considers the essence of the sea to be its difference with land. Not only the principal physical difference, but the divergent way in which the sea is subjected to law, order and control. For him, the sea “has no character, in the original sense of the word, which comes from Greek *charassein*, meaning to engrave, to scratch, to imprint” (ibid: 43) because “on the waves, there is nothing but waves” (ibid). Therefore, in its very nature, the sea rejects fixity and rootedness and, even despite international regulations, the *nomos*²⁵ of the sea is inconceivable, because “on the sea, fields cannot be planted and firm lines cannot be engraved” (ibid: 42). Even though Schmitt's concept of the sea without substance is flawed, it stresses the fact that the sea has achieved a poetic and philosophical potency that neglects its physical and geopolitical reality. Despite the constant motion of its currents, waves and waters, the sea can be located despite fluidity, mobility and mutability being hallmarks of the maritime imaginary. The recognition and appreciation of the mobility of sea-spaces unsettle the comprehension of geopolitics, with its territorial fixity, but suggest that order, and therefore borders, are dynamic and constantly reconstituted entities.

On the coast, the land crashes against a watery boundary, the *finis terrae*. Being, the *end of the earth*, it stands for the end of the (known) world, the apocalypse, the destruction of order and therefore a delimitation that is prevented to be crossed. The Mediterranean is the *finis terrae* for the migrants crossing from Africa. It has become a space of death (Çiçekoglu 2000: 17), where thousands have died in capsized boats, and a closed sea, whose physical characteristic, water and its fluidity, has created the possibility to enforce a tragically effective mobile borderscape. In this borderscape, borders and territories are constantly shifting alluding to the Mediterranean border as an unstable delimitation, suggesting the “vacillating” feature of the border itself that throws into question the very possibility of defying an inside and an outside — like a Möbius ribbon — within which, areas of indetermination emerge and zones of conflagration appear. Within such a Möbius border, migrants are excluded “from both the inside and outside, [...] They are banned in places with no names and status [...] They are invisible and without clear status, imprisoned but without charges against them” (Bigo 2007: 16-7). Since this watery border functions not only as an enclosing and confining line but also as a complex social institution marked by tensions

²⁴ Carl Schmitt was a conservative constitutional lawyer and thinker. Dealing with his writings remains a challenge for he was a devoted Nazi and antisemite. In spite of his affiliation with the Nazi regime, his contributions on a number of pressing contemporary geopolitical concerns -like the state of exception, global order and extralegal detentions – have received growing appreciation among contemporary scholars (see Minca and Rowan 2016).

²⁵ The notion of *nomos* is a derivation of the Greek word *nemeis* meaning 'to take or to appropriate'. In German *nemein* translates as *nehmen*, which, in turn, is connected to the word *teilen* (separate or distribute) and *weiden* (to pasture). The idea of *nomos*, then includes the following three dimensions -the appropriation, division and cultivation of firm land-.

between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing (Mezzadra 2015: 130), it is removed and dislocated in the attempt to restrain, block and filter the passage of certain bodies before the actual geopolitical division. Its goal is not to arrest mobility but to tame it: not to produce a generalized immobilization, but a strategic application of immobility to specific persons. It consists therefore of a “systematic instrument of population management” (Walters 2006: 199), an apparatus of surveillance (Fassin, 2011), dividing populations through disciplinary mechanisms of border security -surveillance and technology, military patrols-. It has also been regarded as an “antivirus software” (Walters 2004: 255) which is structured in order to block “malicious incoming traffic, while the non-malicious can smoothly cross its threshold” (ibid). Considering the maritime geophysicality, order and power become something that is dynamic, constantly modified and reproduced as the moving forces that constitute its entity — currents, migrating flows and bordering practices. These forces construct unstable spaces which are continually challenged and changed through new practices of movement and control. Such understanding captures the fact that the border is not static, but a dynamic, strategic practice -a field of tactics and counter-tactics- which is always evolving.

Just like the sea itself, the changeable characteristic of the Mediterranean border demonstrates its volatility: it tends to be fluid, “duplicated, multiplied and projected below and beyond the line itself” (Cuttitta 2007: 61). The metaphor of the fluidity, which prevails in the debate on global capitalism, is therefore not discarded, but outlined and relativized: space is included into the materiality of the control of flows, defining itself as one of the crucial actors in the production of hierarchies. Fluidity and flows, though, can connote boundedness, exclusion and the systematic management of movement. In line with the idea of flows, the border regime resembles a *sponge* that takes the liquid first and then releases the content into two repositories, one to be taken inside and the other to be emptied out. This “intelligently porous” (Green 2012: 584) practice of bordering is designed to restrict undesirable migrant circulation, while the flow of assets and commodities continues.

The maritime Mediterranean border is a flexible border, deployed whenever and wherever it is needed, and it functions to constitute the EU border as a world-defining frontier (Rumford 2014: 48). It is one of the consequences of the political and economic trajectory that has taken the European Union since the signing of the Schengen Treaty in 1985. This agreement prepared the way for the removal of internal border checkpoints, balancing the “security deficit” produced by this move by consolidating the EU's outer borders. By 1994, the EU articulated a “Euro-Mediterranean Economic Area” of free trade and organized the 1995 Barcelona conference, attended by fifteen EU countries, eleven Mediterranean states (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta) and the Palestinian authority (Bouchard 2014: 69). This gathering designed the “Declaration of Barcelona” whose purposes were the support of security, stability and peace; economic agreements and cooperation between EU and

the Mediterranean states. Nevertheless, the conference's primary goal was to limit the migrating flow originated from the Maghreb and oriented toward Spain, France and Italy and, in so doing, the Mediterranean Sea achieved the meaning of a separating sea that divides the aspirations of people of the southern and northern shores (Barrada 2002: 27). In addition, while agencies and surveillance mechanisms functioning on a European-wide scale, such as Frontex²⁶, have been implemented, the inner borders of the European Union have not merely vanished but, in the framework of the post 9/11 fear of security threats, have been replaced by a network of controls. Working along particular routes that stretch within and outside EU territory, surveillance has been carried out with the purpose of arresting clandestine migrants and collecting information about their plans of mobility²⁷. The establishment of neighborhood agreements with non-EU member states, such as with Morocco, Libya, and Turkey, funneled EU funds to the international migration enforcement practices of the states. In this way, methods and practices of border management are replaced by spatial taming produced by international actors working through joint maritime operations.

In these practices of control and surveillance, the Mediterranean Sea has acquired an important role. The interpretation of it as an external border of the EU is better conceived as the notion of a virtual maritime border (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2016: 60) which is highly unstable, since it is not constrained by a fixed location but rather can appear in any place where an unauthorized movement is noticed. The ambiguity of its location, by selective fixing and unfixing of the elements of the border, is a deliberate governance strategy. Its fixity/unfixity represents a geopolitical resource in a world defined by perpetual change, and it is a structural reality of the European policy, creating an impermeable barrier to those aspiring to enter the EU clandestinely. Understood from such a perspective, the Mediterranean border resembles an octopus whose tentacles reach everywhere, and a tri-dimensional entity that oscillates between moments of fluidity, allowing the transit of people, commodities and ideas and moments of solidity, restraining the transit under given political and historical circumstances (Vyjayanthi 2011: 124). Thus, it represents not only an exceptional space of risk, legislation and death, but also an important fulcrum for geopolitics. Such a fulcrum for geopolitics is increasingly constituted as the European frontier which is not without European power, but nevertheless not within Europe. As will be

²⁶ The EU agency Frontex (from the French *Frontières extérieures*), manages national and international border guards and has been accused of treating its tasks of rescuing migrants as incidental, focusing more on controlling and policing borders and preventing migrants from entering sovereign territories and applying for asylum (See the “NGO Statement on International Protection” to the UNHCR from 2008). Although Frontex is not a merely maritime-related border agency, it has been specifically involved in managing clandestine migration via the sea, particularly in the Mediterranean Sea and the waters around the Canaries Islands.

²⁷ This task has been helped and has, in turn, facilitated, the production of databases and systems of information exchange (such as the EURODAC fingerprints database) that have collected the profiling of allegedly risky subjects and have allowed to attain their identification within the flow of travelers. Furthermore, a hierarchical regime of mobility within the EU has intensified for particular categories of subjects, such as asylum seekers subjected to the Dublin II regulation and citizens of recently integrated member states whose mobility is limited for a number of years after the joining of their countries.

analyzed throughout the thesis, the Mediterranean border zone “presupposes” a void between the political space of sovereignty and the legal space of jurisdiction leading to the creation of a place whose main feature is its peculiar regime of legal and extraterritorial status along with a special regime of legal ambiguity/exception/suspension which is not contrary to the norm and the routine, rather it becomes the norm. From this point of view, the sea *nomos* (Schmitt 2003 [1950]) offers an example of both spatial fragmentation and legal ambiguity.

The much traveled and exploited waters of the Mediterranean consist of territorial waters, contiguous zones, international waters, or high seas, exclusive economic zones, fishing preservation areas, maritime patrol areas, search and rescue regions and offshore oil bases, among others. These areas coexist and often overlap with each other creating a jurisdictional patchwork. If we observe this situation from the perspective of migration and its management, a disintegration of legal space appears clear. The disputes that have arisen among Mediterranean states over the responsibility for rescuing migrants in distress at sea, as well as over the duty to disembark rescued migrants, reveal that the sea itself — far from being a lawless, empty and free field — is crisscrossed by multiple lines that delineate contested areas of responsibility. The paradox here is that, within the malleable framework of international law, it is not the lack of regulations that allows for divergent interpretations, but their conflicting nature and their range across a plurality of actors and legal rationalities, which in turn, have been used as the very means to evade responsibility. This fragmented territoriality of the sea has become a deliberately productive spatial model that has opened up a field of possibilities and strategies constantly exploited by different actors.

Agamben's concept of the state of exception raises an important contribution in contemporary debates about the connection between territoriality and law. Agamben has reintroduced, via an engagement with Carl Schmitt, the issue of sovereign power into the analysis of biopolitics²⁸ (Foucault 2004). Accordingly, the activity of sovereign power is biopolitical in the sense that it depends on the inclusive exclusion of bare life, and “having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, [it] legally places himself outside the law” (Agamben 1998: 15) giving light to the state of exception which is

a kind of exclusion [...] but what is excluded in it is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule. On the contrary, what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension. [...] The state of exception is thus not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension. In this sense, the exception is truly, according to its etymological root, *taken outside (ex-capere)*,

²⁸ According to Foucault, in the eighteenth century, modern forms of data collections -statistics, demography and biology- brought biological life (zoē) into the modalities of state power (bios). Consequently, sovereign power becomes separates in two complementary types of power: disciplinary power and biopower. The former is a kind of power that depends on the surveillance of the individual human body. The latter is meant to manage the population through its optimization. Considering these two kinds of power together, Foucault suggests that the old sovereign right was supplanted by the power to “make live and let die” (Foucault 2004: 247).

and not simply excluded (ibid: 22 italics in original)

This zone of exception therefore unsettles the “traditional” geopolitical awareness that national jurisdiction ends at its external borders. Yet, the suspension of sovereign regulations in the zone of indistinction/exception does not eradicate sovereign influence. According to Agamben, the sovereign remains, paradoxically, “both outside and inside the juridical order” (ibid: 19). By being both inside and outside, the state of exception produces a threshold of undecidability which grants the sovereign power the capability to indiscriminately turn specific persons into *homines sacri* through the politicization of their biological existence. The state of exception, temporary by definition, has become an established and long-termed spatial organization, that reveals itself at the border and relegates and represses the so called “undesirables”. Inasmuch as the territorialization of the sea is seldom comprehended as a bordering practice, analyses of exceptional bordering procedures are mainly established at traditional entry/exit points at land borders or within the land of a given sovereign territorial state, but barely examined in the context of maritime bordering. Agamben's state of exception is not restricted to land, but can also be applied to the sea: not only in the context of nation-state territorial waters, which are considered approximately as land, but also maritime zones which are partially or fully based on *mare liberum* such as the high seas (which constitutes 45% of the Mediterranean waters and which is defined by exclusion, they are outside nation-state jurisdiction). Whoever enters/is to found on the high seas, moves in a threshold of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit “in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer [make] any sense” (Agamben 1998: 195). The state of exception is often a prelude to stripping persons of their rights. Once a person has been stripped of rights - reduced to bare life²⁹ - his/her life may be endangered without consequence for s/he has no recourse to laws that defend the life and rights of citizen.

As the scholar Walters states, the sea “may have been striated by the modern forces of commerce, geopolitics and international law [...] [but] there exist circumstances under which the ancient idea of the high sea as a lawless space beyond sovereignty and justice is capable of being reactivated” (Walters 2008: 5). As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Mediterranean Sea does not represent jurisdictionally a maritime legal vacuum, but it does raise images of a void when migrant vessels are concerned, in particular when they capsize and persons drown. Unaccountability, impunity, and exception at sea persevere and, with it, the capability of

²⁹ The term “bare life” defines human existence when it is “stripped of all the encumbrances of social location and juridical identity, and thus bereft of all the qualifications of properly political inclusion and belonging” (Agamben 1998: 21). Bare life, thus, occupies an indeterminate location that is outside recourse to the law, but not outside its imposition. For the Italian philosopher, bare life is what remains when human life is reduced to nothing but life — banned from political community, whose death is categorized neither as sacrifice nor homicide (ibid: 82). In other words, it is outside legal protection, but remains subject to its potential violence.

the sovereign states to re-activate the sea as a deadly void. In an almost too literal example of biopolitical governmentality, here power is exercised not only by actively protecting the life of certain populations, but also by causing the death of others simply by abstaining from any form of intervention. The leading intention of EU border regime is not the protection of life as such but the production and encouragement of particular kinds of human subjects and the outlawing of all others. The exclusion of clandestine migrants authorizes the strategy of disallowing life — restraining migrants' landing —, as well as that of fostering their lives in highly monitored centers which migrants cannot leave unless to be repatriated.

Therefore, the vacillating Mediterranean borderscape can be understood as a perpetually constructed space of exception, in which the targeted migrant body is potentially subjected to exceptional measures and exposed to the threat of violence and death. Here, Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, defining “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (Mbembe 2003: 40) allows an understanding of the connection between the architecture of the Mediterranean borderscape and the measures rendering particular racialized bodies as threats unworthy of protection. Through necropolitics, Mbembe builds upon Foucault's twist of the medieval couplet “making die/letting live”, which has developed into the contemporary “making live/letting die”. Partially derived from the contribution of Agamben (1998), Mbembe introduces necropolitics, not in connection to the camp *per se*, but in relation to the cruel forms of subjection found in colonial spaces. Within these spaces, Mbembe stresses how cruelty was executed on the colonized body, adding to the contributions of Agamben and Foucault the category of race, thus emphasizing the racialized production of lives left to die. Mbembe's contribution highlights the irruption of necropolitics into biopolitics, the dehumanization of certain bodies, and their management through violence. Biopolitics and necropolitics are not mutually exclusive, rather “they constitute a spatial dialectical unity” (McIntyre and Nast 2011: 1472) and such dialectical unity is visible in the Mediterranean Sea, where biopolitical action is seen to give way to necropolitical inactions. In this sense, inaction/inactivity can be exerted as a means of control and power while biopolitical action works together with necropolitical abandonment in the (mis)management of migrants at sea. As remarked by Mbembe, the exercise of power in contexts of violence and control relies on the far-reaching propensity to objectify the body of the migrants, turning it into a *body-thing* which “could be destroyed, as one may kill an animal, cut it up, cook it, and, if need be, eat it” (Mbembe 2001: 27). In the space of the zone of exception, violence is targeted at certain bodies while exceptional measures become part of the politico-legal order. And, the Mediterranean border is one of the cores of bio(neco)political governmentality.

The systemic violence perpetuated against migrants, especially when it happens across the overlapping and conflicting boundaries of maritime jurisdictions, is often dispersed among multiple actors and partial regimes of liability, which makes locating and isolating individual responsibility in a traditional sense increasingly difficult. In her ethnographic study of the

Mediterranean border, Silja Klepp claims that humanitarian law of the sea has often been ignored. In particular, she explores the connection between space and rights; for her, the maritime border is a geopolitical entity in which a “geography of EU refugee rights” and a “geography of rescue at sea” take place. Comparing these two *geographies*, Klepp identifies a multiple peripheralization (and neglect) concerning the protection of refugees in the EU. Accordingly, this peripheralization functions in such a way that the more geographically remote migrants are from the territory of the EU, the less their rights are recognized (Klepp 2011: 387). Nevertheless, when approaching EU territory, their rights progressively increase. The same impression holds true for the application of humanitarian laws of rescue at sea: they seem to rely on the location of the migrants' boat, the closer to EU territory it is, the higher the odds to be rescued. Thus, the bordering system, whose aim is to prevent and hinder the passage, aspires to intercept migrants' boats as early (and as far away) as possible on their way to Europe (ibid: 388). Jurisdictionally, it is unclear where and how to intercept migrants' boats and which nation-state should assume responsibility for the examination of an asylum request, in particular when engaged in a joint operation or in operations taking place within the territorial waters of another State or in the high seas. Especially at sea, where nobody witnesses the measures taken, security forces are in a privileged position and can monopolize actions through illegality. It is through informal procedures (using a vessel rather than a ship carrying national flag to avoid the Treaty of Dublin II) and ad-hoc resolutions on the Mediterranean border of the EU that the principles of refugee protection and the non-refoulement are ignored. Such (mis)practices, which are taking place without a legal background and rely on unclear geographies of responsibility and operational invisibility, give the possibility to operate at sea without respecting the 1951 Refugee Convention. Following Klepp's approach, the maritime border can be conceived as a zone of exception and sole state power that leads to a monopoly of control and knowledge. The state of exception, understood as a “temporary suspension of the juridico-political order” (Agamben 1998: 197) is being progressively turned into a permanent spatial arrangement. Hence, in the Mediterranean Sea, the exception becomes the rule, regulations are suspended and everything becomes possible. The state of exception is, therefore, the main principle of government through which the migrants are no longer seen as individuals of rights, but as *homines sacri*, reduced to bare life, becoming banned from the law.

The same questions with which Agamben frames *Homo Sacer* could also be expressed in regard to the current situation in the Mediterranean Sea: what are the juridical practices and deployments of power by which migrants are dispossessed of their rights? And what are the prerogatives by which no action committed against them can appear as a crime? A sort of answer is given by Maurizio Albahari who, in his article “Death and the Modern States” (2006) claims that, lethal border practices become morally and politically acceptable while they are legally enforceable on the other. In his words,

the EU and the state, in the daily struggle with would-be migrants and asylum

seekers [...] find in the de facto power to 'let die' a key prerogative of their sovereignty. At the same time, they also propose themselves as agents of humanitarianism in rescue operations, finding in this moral intervention a paradoxical legitimization of border enforcement (Albahari 2006: ii).

This conjunction between action of refoulement and rescue at sea constitutes a paradox of liberal democratic power and rule of law. In my opinion, the same could be said in regard to the relationship between the Mediterranean borderscape and the law. It seems that the borderscape is no longer the locus of spatial coincidence between sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction; on the contrary this frontier zone is produced by means of a systematic disjunction of the political space of sovereignty from the legal space of jurisdiction. This disjunction is produced by means of a double movement of introversion and extroversion of borders in conjunction with the passage from “an order without localization — the state of exception, in which law is suspended — [to] a localization without order — the camp as permanent space of exception” (Agamben 1998: 197). On the one hand, the introversion of borders is produced by moving back the legal border of rights in order to put specific categories of people and places under a peculiar regime of extraterritorial legal status. On the other, the extroversion of borders is produced by expanding the reach of the sovereign border beyond the territorial dimension giving light to buffer countries where the migrants face the sovereign power of the border regime well before they may reach the legal border of rights. Therefore, such geopolitical strategies of migration regulation rely on practices simultaneously expanding geographies of control, while contracting spaces of rights. This places migrants within a vacuum, a geography characterized by a legal irregularity in which they are subject to the authority of the sovereign, yet have no capacity to enter the system of protection.

The death of migrants at sea and its spectacular visibility, however, do not lead policy makers to radically challenge the exclusionary border regime. Rather, in the context of what William Walters has defined the “humanitarian border”, perpetual calls to rescue migrants at sea have become the ground to legitimize increased surveillance and border control, which are the very same practices that have led to death in the first place (Walters 2011). The scholar Fassin (2005), in investigating French asylum policies, claims that the rights of migrants, also including the right to life, are shifting from the political to the compassion sphere; there is a rising move towards granting rights to migrants out of commiseration while restricting less humanitarian avenues to the same rights. In the same vein, it could be claimed that the human dimension of migrants is acknowledged only when it is most threatened. The exclusive concern over the modalities of rescue has obscured the politics of life that support military-humanitarian practices: migrants seeking safety become lives to rescue and their right of mobility is denied from the outset. The techniques of capture and containment of clandestine flows function in parallel through border restrictions that cause border deaths and through the humanitarian channeling system. In light of that, the risks to life that migrants take and rescue politics are not contradictory

mechanisms of migration management; rather they are intertwined geopolitical technologies of migrants' governmentality. This leads to the assumption that humanitarian practices hold a precise political technology over migrant lives by rescuing, sorting and channeling them, one in which people leaving their home can seek safety only by first becoming shipwrecked persons to rescue. Those migrants who are rescued at sea are not “saved” in the sense of being free to go wherever they wish: on the contrary, once rescued they enter the legislative channels of asylum and just few of them will be granted humanitarian protection.

It is not only the suffering or the life-threatening conditions to which clandestine migrants are subject, but also the denigration by some (EU residents) that turns migrants into subjects deserving compassion. At first glance, humanitarian concerns can be interpreted as the “good-hearted” side of brutal border control policies that have converted human beings into clandestine persons and have boosted the smuggling industry by establishing visa obligations. Yet, human concerns also encourage integration policies that perceive migrants as persons in need of being “saved” from a condition of backwardness and oppression, and thus inferior subjects. The very same borders, reinforced in the name of humanitarian concerns in order to protect the rights of migrants from violation by the smugglers, can result in depriving them from the most fundamental of all human rights: the right to life. Tragically, considering the sensation and spectacle produced by shipwrecks, dying at sea is a way for migrants to be seen as valuable human beings. As Tazzioli suggests (2015), the border spectacle enacted at sea and played out in the array of images which take the Mediterranean basin as their prime focus reduces the search for life to maritime emergency and response. Migrants are therefore to be saved once their boat capsizes, but nothing more. The Mediterranean border turns into a zone of interception, rescue and capture.

Thus, maritime rescue is yet another kind of control over migrants' lives and humanitarian governmentality has (re)organized the maritime basin into a spectacle of rescue and routinized emergency (Van Reekum 2016: 339). As shown, the discourses around the humanitarian border are enmeshed with a biopolitical regime of governance of the bodies of clandestine migrants which are targeted and monitored by the EU border authorities with debatable ethical and political consequences. Indeed, the humanitarian focus and the emphasis on the lives of clandestine migrants are closely linked to what Foucault referred to as biopolitics (Foucault 2004). And yet, what is at most needed is a change of frame or Heading; instead of putting into force a humanitarian rescue system, reducing migrants to shipwrecked persons, one should go beyond the scene of rescue at sea, exploring what happens to migrants before and after being rescued by military-humanitarian actors. Going beyond the border spectacle of maritime rescue means stressing the freedom of movement and the right to choose a place to live, excluded in humanitarian logic by the asymmetry between the recipient of shelter and those who are responsible for rescuing them.

1.3 Concluding remarks

As shown, the Mediterranean itself is trapped in a tension between mutually exclusive interpretations. On the one hand, it has been seen as a marginal space, isolated from practices of modernity and modernization. On the other hand, it is employed as a “paradigm” for exploring alternative modernities, as a space where contrasting genealogies of modernity can be detected and reinterpreted (Giaccaria 2012: 295). The Mediterranean Sea, rather than being an amorphous, blank entity and beyond sovereign control, is a place that demands striation and regulation; it is crisscrossed by hermetic borders which are fluid as the water that constitutes it; and it has become a solid space in which divisions of race and class are re-inscribed within new binaries — regular/ clandestine, tourist/migrant, inside the EU/ outside of it. Although the idea of a united Mediterranean may have been true during some periods of history, the divergences between shores have certainly deepened and widened over recent decades. If the comforting trope of the Mediterranean homogeneity is left aside and one considers the social, economic, political and cultural features of the Mediterranean in current times of migration, such a peaceful vision crumbles.

The fluidity and the liminality of the Mediterranean go hand in hand with the waves and cycles of the bordering processes and border articulation. It is in this sense that it is more helpful to comprehend the politics of European Union bordering as a series of ongoing practices which are never fixed and to conceive the Mediterranean Sea as a jellylike, three-dimensional border that oscillates between states of fluidity, enabling the passage of people, forms and ideas, and states of solidity, blocking passage. As shown, the Mediterranean borderscape is not merely flexible, but rather dependent on coexisting contractions and expansions, whereby the space of rights diminishes while the border regime is expanded. Moreover, this body of water embodies the paradox of border's invisibility, ephemerality, elusiveness, and power: here, limits and delimitations are at their most fluid degree, yet more surveillance forces patrol this basin than any other body of water. The border, *cum-finis* in Latin, has a significance and a materiality similar to confinement, in as much as both terms, border and confinement, refer to fortification, defense and barrier. To confine and exclude is the main purpose of the border regime patrolling Mediterranean waters.

In the light of these reflections, the Mediterranean Sea is a vital and important fulcrum for European geopolitics. It is a basin whose quality is that of a spillway of interests of great powers in order to construct, destroy and reconstruct an international order (Vasquez Montalban 2000: 18). It represents a policy arena for EU legislation, a violent place and the site that absorbs diverse political, ideological, and cultural frustrations and, in such process, becomes an elaborate and heavily bound place defined by power relations that manifest themselves through b/ordering processes. The mobility conflict of which the Mediterranean basin is the principal fault propagates

even more as EU nation-states are re-imposing order and control onto migrants' movements. This conflict is bound to persevere as long as the imbalances which gave rise to it perpetuate, and the requests for mobility and autonomy of migrants reverberate through their enactment of their right to move.

The Mediterranean is a world of competing meanings: as a border, it changes rapidly and in many different ways — in terms of its nature, location and function — and, there is no doubt, that in terms of clandestine migration toward Europe it is, to quote the Italian writer Alessandro Leogrande, “a subterranean fault line that cuts from east to west. From the Middle East to Gibraltar. For every crossing, there is a rift that opens up. That is the Mediterranean border. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the main border between two worlds is located within the waves of what has been defined, since antiquity, the Middle Sea³⁰” (Leogrande 2015: 40).

³⁰ The quoted passage is my own translation. The original version is the following: “È una faglia sotterranea che taglia il Mediterraneo da est a ovest. Dal Vicino Oriente fino a Gibilterra [...] Ogni attraversamento una crepa che si apre. È la frontiera. [...] Dopo la caduta del Muro di Berlino, il confine principale tra il mondo di qua e di là cade proprio tra le onde di quello che, fin dall'antichità, è stato chiamato Mare di mezzo” (Leogrande 2015: 40).

2. Border Aesthetics

This subchapter is devoted to theorizing border aesthetics, a mode for analyzing literary productions that derives from and focuses on the experience of border-crossing. The questions that endorse the following pages are related to the contribution of aesthetic expressions in the broader field of border studies, namely can aesthetic expressions be more than a side-issue in border studies? How does border aesthetics contribute to the area of border studies, a vast and flourishing field that investigates the different, sometimes mutually exclusive, definitions of the border? To what extent can it be employed to enlarge the conceptual framework from which, and with which, the notion of Mediterranean border is understood?

A border does not exist *per se*, it is not a self-bounding geopolitical principle, but rather it consists of discourses, narratives, and spatial manifestations. It does not in itself convey a message, but it relies on discourses and narratives in its (re)production, representation and interpretation. Thus, in order to be functional, a border needs to be supported by narrations and discourses, able to convert limits into instruments of definition and separation. It is both the *process* of bordering, othering and negotiating difference, and a constructed institution that (re)creates categories of difference and separation. The very word *process* indicates the possibility of narratives, since narratives depict processes, and processes cannot be portrayed without the support of narratives. On the other hand, the term *institution* derives from the verb, *to institute*, and an institution is thus an entity which has been instituted. It has been subjected to a process which implies that an institution is not a fixed entity rather always “under construction”. To imply that the border is an institution is also to suggest that is not just a consequence, but also a cause; it is not the outcome of a perpetual process of institution, it is also itself a continual act of institution, instituting other entities.

To comprehend the relationship between aesthetics and the border, it is necessary to refer to the definition of aesthetics which, like the concept of the border, has changed over time. During the eighteenth century, in Western European societies, the term aesthetics was coined to indicate a concern with beauty and fine arts as a sphere of experience different from the practical concerns of science, economy and politics. It came to be associated with ideas of sensibility and matters of judgment (Eagleton 1988), and it consists nowadays of a set of theories employed both to interpret artistic productions, and also to define what counts as “work of art”. The term *aesthetic* exhibits a wide range of meanings: it refers to art and beauty in particular; to *aisthesis*³¹ in

³¹ *Aisthesis* derives from the Greek word for sense/perception, the process by which something is made available to our senses. However, according to Rancière, in the last two centuries, the term *aisthesis* defines the mode of experience according to which different things have been perceived, whether in their techniques of production or their destination as all associated with art. It relates to the sensible fabric of experience within which they are created, including material conditions -circulation and reproduction-, modes of perception and thought patterns that label and interpret them (Rancière 2013: x).

general; to fictionality — the invention of fictive worlds which are presented in textual forms, and “to anything and nothing” (Welsch 1997: 13). As an epistemology of the sensible — or what can be perceived and is subject to cognition—, it refers to something perceptible, it has a fundamental social, political and bordering function, since it renders certain entities visible/invisible, detectable/undetectable, and it participates in the acknowledgment of a border through sensory perception.

The question rests on how aesthetics and politics are intermingled. Aside from its material aspect, a border is a social (re)produced, and highly aestheticized phenomenon that is subjected to a perpetual process of definition and redefinition. In order to function as a border, it must be constituted and expressed on the plane of the sense; it must therefore have an aesthetic feature. It is a sign, that is to say, a form of writing, and thus a text to be read and interpreted. It becomes meaningful through sensory perception and hence, narratives and figural representations are pivotal components in border formation, negotiation and performance. As Rancière claims in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, politics revolves around “what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Rancière 2004: 13). For the scholar, politics and aesthetics “like forms of knowledge, construct 'fiction', that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done” (ibid: 39 *italics in original*). Accordingly, aesthetics refers to a particular type of politics which may mirror, follow or intertwine with politics proper, without being reducible to it, and, thus, any aesthetic expression contains a mixture of political awareness and aesthetic form. For Rancière, aesthetics and politics are not discernible in isolation from each other, but they consist of two forms that are shaped within their independent “regimes of identification” (Rancière 2004: 20). So, while aesthetics and politics are divergent means, distinctive discourses, unique ways of addressing the task of the distribution of the sensible, they do not exist in independent realities: they are intertwined with one another in different distributions of the sensible.

From such a perspective, aesthetics is a modality that is attuned to the practice of sensory awareness, it consists of a system of interpreting the world offering alternate ways of seeing and speaking, and its engagement with the political provides methods to reconfigure our sensory experience of the world. This is to say that aesthetic engagements can become political and therefore politically unsettling in the most important way: by questioning the limits of what is visible and invisible, thinkable and unthinkable, acceptable and tolerable and, therefore, it brings new modes of thinking and knowing. While the principle of the distribution of the sensible is at the basis of both aesthetics and politics, Rancière claims that the aesthetic regime antedates the political (Rancière 2004: 34). Based on the premise that the constructive nature of discourse in general and of narrative in particular implies a “fictionalizing” dynamic, the “real” must be fictionalized in order to be grasped and thought, and therefore the border needs to possess a

sensible and aesthetic element in order to transfer meaning and be meaningful. Borders, as such, are intimately intermingled with the senses and thus with aesthetic objects and practices. Such approach suggests that borders and aesthetics are deeply at one; political statements and aesthetic expressions create effects in reality: they delineate what is visible, mark trajectories between the visible and the sayable, and they draft modes of doing and making. In this line of thought, a border is a political aesthetic project that intervenes in the material sphere in order to (re)arrange the objects of perceptions, and the abilities and opportunities of perceiving what is out there. That is one way in which power functions, by making particular things more visible or audible and making others invisible and inaudible.

Since the realm of politics must first begin in a fictive dimension³², the construction, maintenance, and re-production of the border *takes place* through representations, through performative acts, through practices of narration, visualization and imagination, involving their reading and interpretation. Which comes first? The border or its representation? One can say that the border as idea precedes the border as aestheticized object but it supersedes it too, in the sense that for its maintenance notions and performances of difference are required. As Sidaway notes, it is unfeasible to decide exactly what comes first and “[t]he border derives a significant part of its identity precisely from such *undecidability*” (Sidaway 2007: 170 italics in original). On the grounds of these assumptions, I will conceive the aesthetic/literary productions under investigation in the present thesis as “something able to open one's eyes to other ways of viewing the world” (Welsch 2011: 15), as expressions that reconsider important matters that drive global politics, continuing the search for thinking space, and exploring ever new ways of writing, seeing and perceiving the Mediterranean Sea. Also, they constitute a fundamental component of the Mediterranean borderscape that either maintain and support, or subvert and transform, existing regimes of bordering and in/exclusion.

Since the Mediterranean border exists inasmuch as it can be sensed, made the object of aesthesis, it is conceived as the result of a complex articulation of material features — regarding their factual production —, structures of imaginations, symbolic constructs and conceptual formations that make it meaningful. It is an aestheticised object and, since it requires interpretation to exist, it is not absolute, but perceived very differently by different people. It is a space of interaction where meanings are continuously performed through the persons who cross it, interpret it, legislate it, and secure it. It is an open predicate that functions differently before different groups of people³³, giving rise to diverse claims and counterclaims, it is “a zone of

³² Here, fictive dimension must be understood in the sense of “dimension of fiction” where fiction is conceived as “a cultural artifact produced by the imagination and it is not subject to the conditions of truthfulness based on reference to the empirical world” (Lavocat 2016: 33 my translation). The original is the following: “la fiction est un artefact culturel produit par l' imagination et non soumis aux conditions de vériconditionnalité fondées sur la référence au monde empirique”

³³ Being unevenly transparent for divergent groups of people, depending on their origin, material conditions and belongings, borders are inevitably linked to discrimination and social injustice (See Kolossov, Vladimir and Scott 2013).

multiple actors and multiple bodies each calling on different histories, solidarities, and discourses of protection, care or security” (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007: ixxx), and it is an idealized/symbolic entity behind which its effective functioning lies. So, the “nature-based” Mediterranean border, is a “complex and multi-dimensional cultural phenomena, variously articulated and interpreted across space and time. [...] [F]ar from being a self evident, analytical given, [it] must be interrogated for its subtle and sometimes not so subtle shifts in meaning and form according to setting” (Donnan 1998: 12). Also, rather than being a text and a representational field of indisputable meaning, it is a disputed area that exists *in tension* between multiple actors that question its connotations, values and purposes. The Mediterranean border is both a 'meaning-making' and 'meaning-carrying entity', it means distinct things to different people and functions differently upon different groups, which mirrors the disproportional filtering function captured by Hedetoft's metaphor of the border as an “asymmetric membrane”, mentioned in the introduction. Consequently, fictional narratives, perceptions, reconfiguration and imaginations are constitutive of the border meaning and outcomes, and the practice through which the “imagined” border is validated and experienced as “real” can be defined as *borderscaping* or the practice of shaping the border in people's mind.

The concept of *borderscape* takes into account that the border is a shaped and constructed reality and can, in turn, be reshaped and redesigned. Even though there is no a common definition of the notion borderscape, it combines features of “landscape” and “border”. On one hand, landscape has to be envisaged as “a process by which social and subjective identities are formed” (Mitchell 1994: 1), which integrates both the natural aspects of an area and its cultural features, and it does not only consists of a visual composition, but also of a presentational-perceptual interpretation. On the other hand, the suffix “-scape³⁴” has been employed and altered by the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai who, in his book *Modernity at Large* — concerning global capitalism, its flows and disjunctions —, suggests to employ the prefix in order to refer to “perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors” (Appadurai 1996: 33). His typology of different “scapes” (ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes), that denotes the culturally conceived framing of the position and perspective of the imaginary of unstable, fluid and ephemeral flows, has affinities with the conception of borderscape. The application of the term borderscape answers the need to express the spatial and conceptual complexity of (in)visible borders conceived as dynamic, fluid, and polymorphous entities, delineated and simultaneously challenged by

³⁴ Etymologically, the term derives from an old German word meaning “to create/shape” that entered English vocabulary at the end of the sixteenth century through the old Dutch term “schap” in compounds like “landschap” referring to region and denoting a painting genre -landscape genre (Brambilla and Potzsch 2017: 68-9). The term *landscape*, which defines both a physical topography and a painting of such, underlines the intrinsic meaning of the word itself: a landscape can both be the natural entity itself and a representation of it. The latter is a depiction that portrays the topography as viewed from a particular perspective. Through this figuring of the gaze, it is related to power, the power to choose, to compose, to frame, and to draw limits.

discourses, narratives, practices, and actors. The term *borderscape* defines an area, shaped and reshaped by transnational movements, that goes beyond the idea of a clear-cut territorial division focusing instead on the precessual, re/de-territorialized and dispersed feature of the border, and its ensuing regimes and ensemble of processes. Not only it refers to practices of bordering that do not start or end at the geopolitical division but, it also suggests that the border space is molded by different actors involved in its aestheticization by recognizing, accepting and challenging pre-existing narratives, symbols or myths and, in turn producing others. Thus, it is a signifying system in which interpretations are offered and re-offered by the perceiver-observer, it is considered differently depending on how particular actors experience the border, it indicates the complexity and vitality of, and at, the border. It is not contained in a specific location, it is not recognizable in a physical space, rather it is tangentially distinguishable in struggles to clarify inclusion from exclusion. Not only is the *borderscape* concept important to deepening the investigation on the border as a space of complex interactions, but it also highlights another important argument within the reflection on borders, namely the notion of becoming and of being in flux.

As Perera claims:

There are multiple actors in this geo-politico-cultural space, shaped by embedded colonial and neocolonial histories continuing conflicts over sovereignty, ownership, and identity. The bodies of refugees, living and dead, and the practices that attempt to organize, control, and terminate their movements bring new dynamics, new dangers and possibilities, into this zone. Allegiances and loyalties are remade, identities consolidated and challenged, as border spaces are reconfigured by discourses and technologies of securitization and the assertion of heterogeneous sovereignties (2007: 206)

Hence, the term *borderscape* reflects on the fluidity and contingency of “geographies of actions, histories of place and the itineraries of moving bodies” (ibid: 207), it reveals the claims and counterclaims that emerge from this geo-politico-cultural space, and connects the border to the phenomenology of the landscape and its contested (re)production and representation.

Several scholars have discussed the notion of the *borderscape* and its applicability. While for Strüver, the *borderscape*, shaped through representations of all kinds, implies *borderscaping* as “practice through which the imagined border is established and experienced as real” (Strüver 2005: 170), for Schimanski it is “anything involved in a bordering process [...] this means that the *borderscape* is not just a question of what happens on the border or in the immediate borderlands, but also of what happens at any spatial distance from it, at any scale, on any level, in any dimension —including the aesthetic” (Schimanski 2015: 36). Accordingly, it adds to the bordering process the spatial and sensible components of power, it draws attention to “the discursive, narrative practices [that define] meanings, norms, values, real and imaginary lines in space over time” (van Houtum and Berg 2003: 1), and it connects border experience with border representation offering a way to appreciate the junction between political discourses, socio-cultural representation, and aesthetic productions. The *borderscape* concept forms an analytical

angle that draws attention to the multidimensionality of borders and it registers the necessity to analyze border not as taken-for-granted entities solely linked to the territorial demarcations of states but as mobile, relational, and contested sites, thereby exploring alternative border imaginaries “beyond the line” (Brambilla 2015: 17).

In terms of literature scaping the Mediterranean border, border fiction does not describe the border, it re-describes and configures it. In this sense, the maritime border and the narrative are mutually constituted. Narrative creates the border space, and the border in turn fosters and produces narrative. So, the border is not only produced by narrative and interpreted through narrative, the border also holds or anchors the narrative. The border creates the conditions for the border narrative to exist. The narrative structure, in turn, allows for a consciousness of the border. In this light, fiction as a discursive practice is a mediating force in society, since narrative stylistic conventions and plot resolutions function to either sanction and perpetuate ideologies, or to produce new ones that permit the author and the readership to engage in a re-writing of social contexts (Lionett 1997: 205). Hence, recognizing that borders are both narrative and particular material practices, the usage of the term *borderscape* reinforces the evolving meaning of borders and it implies that aesthetic works participate in the same assemblage in which bordering takes place. It therefore allows to interpret literary productions not only as representations of the border, but at the same time as part of the bordering practice.

The corpus of literary productions under scrutiny *scape* the border's material and imaginary spheres even when their purpose is to counter the dominating border regime. Hence, the aesthetic analysis of the Mediterranean border allows to comprehend both de- and re-bordering practices and to connect border experiences with border representations by reconceptualizing the border through the relationship between politics and aesthetics. Also, it offers a lens to comprehend the manner in which different actors have (re)imagined the border, and such perspective requires the recognition that the border definition is itself being continuously contested, (re)invented, and negotiated in many fields giving light to several divergent conceptualizations of the Mediterranean Sea itself.

2.1 Border Fiction

Migration and borders have shaped human cultures from time immemorial but, as areas of inquiry in literary studies they have developed in the late 1980s, emerging notably from postcolonial studies (Friedman 2007: 260) and the interdisciplinary field of border studies. Whereas it is true that other critical discourses have turned to borders³⁵ — in geopolitical *and*

³⁵ With the spread of border theory in U.S., other border regions of the world have become subjects of literary investigation: partition literature in South Asia, Israeli/Palestinian border literature and other

metaphorical sense — it is similarly true that U.S. border studies, more than any other, have redirected critical attention on the notion of the border, turning the U.S.-Mexico border into a fundamental and necessary concept for the larger discourses of American literary studies, U.S. history, and cultural studies in general. In particular, Chicano studies have come to claim the geopolitical and symbolic border between United States and Mexico as a site “of creative cultural production that require[s] investigation” (Rosaldo 1993: 207-8), “the new foundational metaphor of Chicano/a studies” (Sadowski-Smith 2006: 721) and, more broadly, the “birthplace of border studies” (Michaelson and Johnson 1997: 1),

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) has been considered a touchstone text for border studies and border theory. Her contribution focuses on the ethno-cultural discourse about the U.S.-Mexico border prioritizing the geopolitical space as contact zone and space of ambiguity, that allows the formation of new alternatives for subaltern subjects and modes of liberation, such as hybridity. For Anzaldúa, the border entity is a notion which embraces all sort of cultural encounters, of cultural experimentation, of domination and deterritorialisation, and by being a porous border, it configures a dynamic space of interaction and transculturation giving light to what Bhabha has defined “third space” and her “nueva mestiza”, a space in which duality can be transcended (Anzaldúa 1987: 60). For its suggestive overtones of liminality, the border as metaphor has been prevalent both in border theory around the U.S.-Mexico border and in postcolonial studies in which the in-between border experience becomes a tool in order first to investigate the liminal position of cultures and individuals, and secondly to define subjectivities caught up in the dynamics of Self and Other. Such in-between and interstitial space captures, according to Bhabha, the particular conditions of postmodernity: “narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aborigine communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees” (Bhabha 1994: 5), in which the border logic denotes the perpetual “displacement and conjunction” that characterizes the physical and psychological existence of subjects caught up in the space of in-betweenes. In such light, by approaching borders as sites of connection and separation between differences, and as limits denoting binary oppositions (male/female, self/other, white/black, and so forth), border studies, and border theory in particular, goes well beyond the terrain of the geopolitical demarcation.

The contribution and application of such approach is relevant, and at once problematic, in that the geopolitical border, which offers the site of departure, is canceled in a universalizing degree moving beyond its particular territorial space. Indeed, rather than examining the specific reality, border scholars and artists have praised the capacity of borders to become sites of resistance (Fluck 2006: 70), third spaces from which hybrid cultures emerge (Bhabha 1994: 5), postmodern laboratories that question concepts of the national (García Canclini 2001: 14), sites

intensely divided border regions such as Greece, Cyprus and Beirut (Layoun 2002).

that promote transnational practices (Park 2009: 7), all the while, the border loses its tangibility³⁶, and its notion has been referred to so frequently that it has been reduced to “a catchword expropriated and popularized among progressive thinkers” (Minh-ha 1996: 2). Such theoretical literature supporting border studies neglects the role of borders in reinforcing differences and preventing crossings and reflects the generalizations deriving from a Western perspective that tends to essentialize relations between nations overlooking the many otherness related to border and omitting any reference to “the other side” of it.

While U.S. border fiction is mainly linked to symbolic issues of ethnic identity and is associated with Mexican-American or Chicano/a cultural productions, Mexican border literature encompasses both *literatura de la frontera*, which consists of literature written by authors located in the northern regions of Mexico, and *literatura fronteriza*, a more general category of literary expression about the border that includes fiction from other Mexican regions (Castillo and Córdoba: 2002, Rodríguez Ortiz: 2008 and Félix Berumen: 2004). Moving beyond the metaphorical use of the symbolic and ethnic border, both *literatura de la frontera* and *literatura fronteriza* set their narratives at and along the U.S.-Mexico border, mirror the ongoing military enforcement along the border, migrants' attempted crossings, the consequences of globalization on local places in border areas, and the exploitation of maquiladoras' workers. In Mexican border writing, the U.S.-Mexico border is a site in which oppressive border regime defines, disciplines and regulates the life of the population living along it and attempting to cross it, and it is a space in which transnational economic markets and heavy bordering procedures exist side by side. These divergent signifying systems or practices of representation/interpretation underline the discrepancies bound up with the investigation of any border. Also, they mirror the scale of attitudes about any geopolitical demarcation as either a place of violence, a free zone for the displacement of products and capital, a paradigm for cross-cultural relations, and as a gateway for those people who are still in search for the land of opportunity. Except the discrepancies, they seem to suggest the necessity of looking at the border from many standpoints and, in this line, scholars of border studies should look and analyze any border from more than one side or, at least, acknowledge that any investigation is a partial perspective lacking its counterpart(s).

2.2 Mediterranean Border Fiction

As scholar Frank Søren suggests, the transformation of the atlas of Europe from a system with fixed geopolitical delimitations into a more dynamic system with oscillating lines of division has made the borders of Europe one of the main themes and source of creativity in recent literary

³⁶ An exception is found in Arteaga's *Chicano Poetic*, in which the critic properly claims that the border is “always a site of real world politics. It is not simply a metaphor” (Arteaga 1997: 8).

productions (Frank 2017: 83). Migratory phenomena across the Mediterranean Sea have inspired a number of authors and have led to a proliferation of literary productions scrutinizing different aspects of the migratory event. However, as already mentioned in the introduction, even though many written narratives touch on the topic of migration and the living conditions of the migrants who have successfully made it to Europe, few depict the treacherous maritime crossing itself.

The five novels under scrutiny in the present thesis stand out in the way they describe so sharply the emotion-filled experience of crossing clandestinely the Mediterranean Sea. In opposition to migration literature, which privileges movement, narratives of assimilation, cultural clashes, hyphenated identities, and competing national and ethnic loyalties, Mediterranean border literature often describes a lack of free movement, and it narrativizes the geopolitical border both as a topographical and a thematized element in the fictional world. Potentially, the novel's central space, the space that forms the narrative both topographically, narratologically, and thematically, is the maritime border. It is in this context that Mediterranean border fiction comprises of literary works published in different languages and countries, notably from around the Mediterranean Sea, that addresses the theme of clandestine migration, transmigration, relocations and the social and cultural challenges they bring forth. These literary productions open up new perceptions on border-crossing, they chronicle the experiences of migrants attempting to reach the other shore, the violence they must endure, and they describe the Janus³⁷-faced entity of the border, that simultaneously splits and merges. Mediterranean border fiction makes visible the several layers of “hidden histories and geographies of the [Mediterranean] border” (Schimanski 2015: 49), and it depicts and reflects upon colonial heritage and its present-day sociopolitical influences. Through the medium of fiction, the authors bring to life the voice, the unspoken words, the feelings of those who depart claimed by a better place on the other shore. They expose the social injustice and the hardship that migrants suffer before, during and after the migratory venture in addition to restore migrants' humanity, in contrast to mass media coverage which limits itself to reiterating a meager overview of the migratory patterns and their actors³⁸. Ultimately, it consists of a body of literature exhibiting an extraordinarily and heterogeneous archive of narratives on (in)voluntary displacement, daring journeying, attempted border-crossing, and the ambivalence of return, describing a complex border reality, all of which renders fiction “a far more plausible representation of human feelings and understandings than many of the artifacts used by academic researchers” (White 1995: 15).

As theories of the border have proliferated within the political, sociological, geographical,

³⁷ Janus was the Roman god of the end and the beginning, the custodian between the upperworld and the underworld, and between the centripetal and centrifugal oriented face (Van Houtum 2010).

³⁸ As Iain Chambers suggests, the “Mediterranean crossing provides a newsworthy, dramatic metonym for modern migration” (Chambers 2010: 679) and recurrent images of clandestine maritime crossing can take the place of all migratory flows in the Mediterranean basin, since mainstream representations of them tend to include tropes and patterns that conceal what actually is occurring as migrants attempt to reach Europe.

and anthropological realms, the investigation of the poetics associated with the crossing of borders has come in disparate and disjointed forms, owing to a variety of subfields within the larger scope of border studies. The sheer diversity of linguistic aesthetic productions that constitute the literary corpus born of Mediterranean border-crossing has elicited different critical responses. This is in part due to literary categorizations that still employ the nation-state as their determining criterion. Hence, border studies in literature has been limited to the context of various national literatures or postcolonial literature in general. Drawing from this premise, the following chapters propose border-crossing fiction, as a mode of writing that is independent of the national origins of any given author. The border text does not compete with national literatures, rather it circumvents them. It is an intentional circumvention of the paradigm of nationality – whether to question, challenge, or critique its reach. Yet, it neither denies the existence of the nation-state, nor ignores its encompassing influence in demarcating belonging. The aesthetic reading of the novels will delineate a space where rigid binaries deployed around national literatures are contested, and where a multifocal approach is at the core. The constellation of the five novels points to a plurilingual and multi-sited corpus of Mediterranean border literature creating a wider range of focal lengths on the maritime border.

The inclusion of aesthetics in the analysis of the Mediterranean border highlights the political role of cultural expressions in relation to contemporary border regimes. In particular, Mediterranean border fiction, by narrating and representing the Mediterranean border and its regime, arouses a fissure that is also an opening, where dissimilar interpretations are juxtaposed but never reassembled making the Mediterranean border a contested arena of meanings and interpretations. The contest over meaning is “fought” on a ground made of representations, narration and discourse, where “all real geographies are imagined and all imagined geographies are real” (Soja and Hooper 1993: 196) and in which literature, as a disclosure of the many imaginaries that are projected onto the Mediterranean, opens up this complex space of controversial meanings, and it reveals the illusory aspects contained in the dominant border representation. In other words, border fiction cannot be diminished to simple depiction of the discourse(s) on clandestine migration across the Mediterranean Sea, but have to be acknowledged as enhancing those discourses as much as they question or even destabilize predominant paradigms, as it is able to undermine and unsettle the definiteness of the border as a category. Accordingly, border fiction destabilizes the certainty of the border's essentialist aspects “mak[ing] it suddenly appear, uncertain, fraught and difficult” (Amoore and Hall 2009: 312) by filling the Mediterranean Sea with perceptions and representations incompatible with the border's restrictedness, promoting cracks within the system. However, the border is ever present and inescapable. It cannot be wished away. The point is not to dismiss the border's entity, rather it is to acknowledge its presence and its ordering purposes, and therefore accept its existence but take it as uncertain; not a rigid entity but one that is open to negotiation.

The features that the border novels have in common are, in the first place, their physical location, the Mediterranean borderland; secondly the sea as a border space; and finally the characters' intended crossing of the maritime border. The five border novels thrive thematically and structurally on the tensions that emerge around the maritime geopolitical border where the characters either attempt to transgress it or their crossing is restrained. No matter how diverse the literary productions might be, the shared feature running through these novels is that the Mediterranean border is imprinted upon them. Since the Mediterranean Sea plays a primary role in this body of literature, the maritime border not only pervades these literary productions but binds them together across languages, locales and genres. Hence, the five border novel under scrutiny emerge from and engage with the maritime border and bear its threads, all the while being connected together by this very same space. As mentioned in the introduction, the sea is not merely a container for the story, rather it is the generator of the narrative. Such an assertion, that alludes to the sea as an entity filled with agency, presupposes that agency cannot be only associated to intentionality, and thus to human (or divine) intelligence. Rather, the dynamic and generative power of the sea-matter, has a creative power of its own (Whatmore 2006). The delineation of the novels takes an anthropocentric approach that implies the centrality of the story about human characters. Yet, a closer look at them reveals that, although humans occupy the main role in the narratives, they are not the sole protagonists. In recognizing that human and nonhuman nature “share certain qualities and interests”, the five novels under scrutiny show that “survival interests are not in opposition to those of nonhuman nature, but are interconnected and interdependent with it” (Willoquent-Maricondi 2010: 47).

The fact that the authors write and come from dissimilar geographical contexts, and they write about the Mediterranean Sea and migration, is significant of a shared sensibility about contemporaneity. The ways of narrating are different, of course, but in their writings they “become chroniclers of the histories of the displaced whose stories will otherwise go unrecorded. [They] record what history and public memory often forget” (Seyhan 2001: 12) and their works become the staging of critical investigations about the maritime border. Accordingly, border fiction cannot be easily equated with a particular national tradition or origin, that is why it should be addressed from a comparative approach, offering a multiplicity of perspectives in accordance to the Janus-faced aspect of the border. Since anybody is always situated in relation to the border, and there is therefore, never one single perspective from which it is possible to approach the border from all sides, the writers approach the maritime basin from different perspectives, and while it might be possible to strive towards a common ground of discussion and comparison, there will never be a general theory for approaching border fiction.

The question lies then on the ways in which writers (re)configure the Mediterranean border within fiction since each of the literary productions contains a way of looking at the border and, contemporaneously, an attempt to interpret and reinterpret it. By working on imagination,

writers challenge dominant representations, making the border a space of struggle over meanings. As Edward Said suggests “none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because [...] [it] is about ideas, about forms, about images, and imaginings” (Said 1993: 7), and therefore border fiction's contribution/critique³⁹ to the analysis of the Mediterranean Sea resides in exposing or unveiling that difficulty and intractability, while also putting into question the “naturalness” of the border itself. So, contesting imaginations and different ways of seeing produce a space in which the Mediterranean border appears more fraught and complex than ever.

In sum, border fiction consists of

strategies [that] aim to change the frames, speeds and scales according to which we perceive [border issues] [...] Such strategies are intended to make the invisible visible or to question the self-evidence of the visible; to rupture given relations between things and meaning and, inversely, to invent novel relationships between things and meanings that were previously unrelated. (Rancière 2010: 141)

Therefore, in the analysis of Mediterranean border fiction, it is important to focus on the implications of aesthetics that engages geopolitics. How do Mediterranean border fiction link specific aesthetic categories (border figures) to divergent kinds of border? Are such ascriptions contingent aesthetic views, or do they infer something about links between aesthetics and geopolitical borders? What purpose do border figures serve in border fiction? The goal is to think critically about the myriad ways in which literary texts represent, contest and rewrite border-crossing experiences across the Mediterranean from 2005 onwards, and about the many “faces” that the Mediterranean border shows. Since writers approach the border from different angles, a common perception about the border experience is difficult to be found that's what makes the understanding of the border and border crossing intricate. Yet, there is a need to address the relevance of border aesthetics within the theoretical field of border studies by first investigating on the multiple modes of representation about clandestine Mediterranean crossings, and, secondly, by demonstrating and analyzing what literature proposes in terms of different discourses, voices, and imaginaries.

My approach rests on the assumption that writing and other forms of aesthetic expressions intervene in the evolving meanings — and also in the (re)production of them — that the Mediterranean Sea has achieved. In this context, I recall Braudel's posthumously published *Memory and the Mediterranean*, which starts with a chapter entitled “Seeing the Sea”. Although composed as a history, the opening lines impress as a statement of aesthetics: “the best witness to the Mediterranean's age-old past is the sea itself. This has to be said and said again. And the sea

³⁹ Critique is here understood as a practice that discomforts and unsettles one's sense of certainty. As Foucault suggests “critique doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes: this, then, is what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those for who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. [...] It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn't a stage in programming. It is a challenge directed to what is” (Foucault 1991: 81).

has to be *seen* and *seen* again” (Braudel 2002: 3 my italics). Braudel's imperative to look at the sea over and over seems to propose the emergence of a critical Mediterranean: a temporal, cultural, aesthetic and literary field of inquiry, and a site of knowledge production departing and focusing on the sea itself.

As the following chapters devoted to the geo-literary analyses outline, the aesthetic productions are able to carry the complex representations of the Mediterranean border, and at the same time they offer pause for reflections on the workings of the maritime border in migrants' life. In this light, the importance of aesthetics in the study of borders reveals how aesthetics “can help us rethink some of the most serious problems in [border] politics [...] and provides us with insights that we otherwise would not be able to gain” (Bleiker 2017: 259, 260). Hence, the aesthetic analysis of the Mediterranean border provides new ways of comprehending both de- and re-bordering practices and to connect border experiences with border representations by reconceptualizing the border through the relationship between politics and aesthetics.

The following three chapters are to be read as echoing one another and as constitutive of the perpetual discussion of border and aesthetics in flux throughout the project. Therefore, the close-readings intersect with each other through the use of two shared analytical reading strategies.

The first strategy focuses on the planes onto which the Mediterranean border is projected in the literary texts: geopolitical, symbolic, temporal, and epistemological. The geopolitical plane approaches the border as a topographic and territorial demarcation that exists on different scales and is configured in several ways in both concrete and conceptual spaces. The symbolic plane, a fundamental component of both social and aesthetic realms, operates on the plane of the mental or social landscape (conceptual oppositions between values or notions that trigger either desire or fear). The temporal plane relates to the time-related context of the border-crossing (the experience of waiting at the border and human life cycles or transition rituals that divide the past, present and future of a crosser's life). The epistemological plane functions on the level of knowledge and refers to the dichotomies known/unknown, comprehensible/incomprehensible, recognizable/unrecognizable. The mentioned border planes function together and intertwine with each other in the way that a specific border plane is not just one or the other, but it combines features of other planes. These border planes contribute first to a theoretical definition of each border representations found within the five novels under scrutiny, and secondly to the understanding that the Mediterranean border is not just one geographical entity but it exists within multiple border planes. Each novel operates on different border planes and, in some cases, two or more border planes intertwine demonstrating that one border plane does not exclude the other. The point is not to dissect every border plane, but to understand how each of them constitute the border entity, both in the realm of fiction and in the physical world. Therefore, the literary analyses that follow are comparatist, and emphasize the significance of locating the

Mediterranean border within literary and socio-cultural frameworks.

The second strategy is to pay attention to the border figures, or the aestheticizations of the Mediterranean border in fiction. How is the significance of the border negotiated through literary tropes, metaphors and rhetorical gestures? In the five novels, the aesthetic formations of the Mediterranean border play a constitutive role in defining how this border works and how it is negotiated. Border figures, in which one or more images are employed to convey the perception of the border in an indirect way, include metaphors, tropes, and other narrative configurations that enhance borders and determine how people think about them, and partake in social imaginaries. As Franco Moretti explains “[n]ear the border, figurality goes up [...] Geography does indeed act upon style” (Moretti 1997: 45) and border figurality is a means for dealing with “the emotional impact with an unknown reality” (ibid). In this line of thought, defining the border as both the locus and the consequence of aesthetic productions, helps to grasp its meaning not only in geographical terms, but also in terms of both effect and affect: how the border affects lives, both materially and metaphysically. The analysis of the aesthetic representations of the Mediterranean border as they transpire in the five literary productions will suggest some ways that the multifaceted feature of the maritime border is refracted within the particular aesthetic frameworks. Consequently, it will also be analyzed how literary productions contribute to social and political interpretations of the nature of the border and the ways in which either they confirm or challenge the meanings inscribed to it.

It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to explore in detail the border figures employed to describe the maritime border. However, I will outline in the following passage some of the most recurring ones. First, the maritime border figures as a transparent wall; an imaginary that leads directly to politics of exclusion and reflects a geographical imagination rooted in conceptions of Europe as fortress (Chapter III.2). Second, it is represented as an invisible frontier; an aestheticization of the border that stresses its goal to contain the familiar and excludes the Other (Chapter II.1 and III.1). Third, it is rendered as a void where boats capsized and people are either left to drift or drown, which alludes to jurisdictional elusiveness of rescue operations (Chapter II.2 and III.2). Other border figures include: liquid hell, a magnet that lures the migrants to reach it, an ubiquitous monster, an immobilizing force, and, in few cases, a bridge. The border figures, that will be analyzed in deep in each chapter, offer contemplations and interpretations of the Mediterranean border. However, it has to be noted that the maritime border is not only described, questioned and, to some extent, even transformed by these aestheticizations, but it is also produced by them. In this sense, when narratives are set on the border, they actively perform and define it, unveiling alternatives and possibilities hidden behind its limits since literature does not only reflect or represent the circumstances that lead to its creation, it also becomes a cultural force with the power to influence it.

The border figures mentioned above are inevitably connected to the liquid materiality of

the sea. While acknowledging the diversity of images associated with the sea, it is feasible to highlight some recurring themes in the imaginative geography of the Mediterranean waterscape. The sea is often imagined as a vast, limitless, and unfathomably deep space where human beings are put to test against challenging hazards (Chapter III.1 and III.2). The liquid space is a prime activator of the trope of the sublime⁴⁰: limitless, deep, indefinite that invokes both awe, hope and longing. When observed from a distance, it is docile, alluring, even attractive, but at close proximity or while crossing it, it turns into a menacing and perilous place. Before the actual maritime border-crossing, it is often described as submissive and friendly, but at the moment of navigating it, it turns into an unreliable and deceitful entity (Chapter II.1 and III.2). The vastness of the sea evokes the fear of the unknown, while its horizon cannot be seen, but only imagined. Its liquid feature is associated to unpredictability and instability, and its watery element strengthens its changeable and volatile aspect. Its waves and currents are the elements through which the characters move; they are, on one hand, described as rhythmic entities that facilitate the passage and, on the other, as initiators of chaos and destruction. It is the laminar quality of water that make various mobilities possible but, at the same time, it also creates frictions, complicating the boundaries between moving and staying. In this sense, the maritime border brings with it a distinctive anxiety of the uncertain and the precarious. It is counterintuitive to reduce the maritime border to a fixed location since the Mediterranean waters are by nature fluid and intrinsically vague. *Vague*, from its main root in Latin *vagus*, means “wandering or straying” and from the French *vague*, wave, it refers to the same elemental waterscape as does the word *fluid*. Indeed, the two etymological origins connect, since it is of the very nature of water to wander. Rather than being a mark of weakness, the maritime vagueness is a source of power, both of exclusion and facilitation. Hence, the sea embodies a dual and paradoxical nature, both limiting and enabling human mobility. As will be further discussed particularly in the third chapter, the sea is the liquid terrain of conflict: migrants are detained not only at sea but through a strategic use of the sea. There is nothing *natural* about their detainment/rescue or deaths. The geopolitics of the sea, understood as the “forces that precede, enable, facilitate, provoke and restrict life” (Grosz quoted in Depledge 2013: 91), is manoeuvred by geopolitical practices that shape the way the maritime geopolitics functions, and therefore affect the ways some people are empowered and others limited by it.

Deeply concerned with the ecologies and the discourses of the Mediterranean Sea — and to some extension of the Sahara Desert —, the novels attempt to engage with the geo/ecopolitical world of the maritime border. In all novels, while the space of the horizon and arrival remains ever elusive and out of reach, the Mediterranean border is not conceived as an atemporal backdrop

⁴⁰ The term “sublime” derives from Latin *sublimis* which means high, raised, or lifted up, hence, that which is elevated. Hegel claims that the sublime is “the attempt to express the infinite, without finding in the sphere of phenomena an object which proves adequate for his representation” (Hegel quoted in Moland 2019: 67).

to the migrants' attempted crossing, rather it is described as a politically contested space which is not merely a continuation of what happens on dry land, rather it has power of its own. In all novels, the seemingly timeless flow of the sea becomes enmeshed with the geopolitical and the liquid element, turning it into a space of stasis, confinement and death. Hence, in the following literary analysis, by locating the aesthetic productions as spaces of interface between representation and extra-literary reality, it is feasible first to enlarge the understanding of the Mediterranean borderscape and the mobilities occurring within and beyond it, and secondly to open up a space for analyzing the ways in which the Mediterranean basin has been turned into a border space.

II. Bordering the Strait

The sea
is not a place to pass by
It is not a road

Rosi, *Fuocoammare*

Gibraltar's peaks, two promontories on either side of the Strait, in the south of the Iberian Peninsula and on the northern coast of Morocco, have traditionally been seen as a gateway to the Atlantic Ocean; the place where the Mediterranean waters spill out onto the wide Atlantic. However, in antiquity, the peaks were known to mark the entry into the abyss — the Atlantic Ocean which was named the *mare tenebrum* and *al bahr al zulumat* (the Sea of Darkness), by the Romans and the Arabs respectively. As myths would have it, the Pillars of Hercules took shape when Hercules narrowed the already existing passage from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic in order to protect the Mediterranean basin from the monsters arriving from the Ocean. Another myth recounts of him disintegrating a mountain range which had previously connected the continents of Europe and Africa. Legend has it that the Pillars of Hercules bore the warning “Nec Plus Ultra”, meaning *nothing further beyond*, as advice to sailors not to venture into the perilous unknown (Polycandrioti 2000: 54). The waters beyond the twin peaks were extremely feared and to travel across them signified to violate divine authority and to be contaminated. However, after Columbus reached the American continent, the emperor Charles V determined that “Plus Ultra” - *further beyond*-, would be a more suitable dictum for the Spanish kingdom because it would encourage others to take risks as Columbus had. Thus, initially perceived as the barrier enclosing the quiet and familiar waters from the turbulent and unknown ones, the Hercules' Pillars turned into the gateway to the rest of the world. From being the symbol of danger and distress, it became the symbol of opportunity.

Nowadays, the Strait of Gibraltar is one of the symbols for clandestine migration (Weisberg 2016: 131) and, whether textually transposed as a warning or magnet, it dominates much of the cultural production of the Maghreb (Sellman 2018: 752). The Strait, which figures in several works of literature and film, represents the nodal point for human crossing; the attempted passage for many leaving the Moroccan coast, the place where bodies are subjected to heightened surveillance, and a point of passage and of confinement, where the stories of those who cross it are all-too frequent stories of failure (Esposito 2014: 118). Many authors have turned their attention to the clandestine migration across the Strait, thereby narrating the individual and collective experience of border crossing, the causes and pitfalls of contemporary African migration to Europe, disclosing and questioning the narratives surrounding it. They interrogate the discourses that have considered the Strait, and to larger extent the Mediterranean Sea, a two faced-

entity — a natural haven, and a backdrop to human tragedies — providing a perspective grounded in the Mediterranean as it is today. Common features can be found in many of these narratives: the characters' feeling of despair, of an empty future, the final resolution to attempt the clandestine crossing with the help of a (often) despicable *passeur* (trafficker), and the final shipwreck.

To chronicle the manner in which the Strait has been transformed into the emblem of exclusion, contemporary writers employ a variety of metaphors: hell on earth, an impenetrable moat, “the abyss of the world” (Binebine 1999) “a cemetery where the current catches hold of corpses, taking them to the bottom⁴¹” (Ben Jelloun 2006: 13), a graveyard whose waves “are inky black [...] like tombstones in a dark cemetery” (Lalami 2005: 2), or conversely “passage interdit, passage franchi” (Daoud 2002: 257) and “the tides of the forbidden dream⁴²” (Binebine 2005: 130) that configures the Strait as an obstacle which is intended and designed to be inaccessible to clandestine migrants, but which can be potentially breached. Literary representations of the Strait can offer a set of paradoxes that questions the function of the very border (is it a bridge or a cut? Is it stable or shifting?). Indeed, as any border, the maritime stretch entails Janus-faced potentialities: it is a border *between* and a border *to* wherein the *between* presents a possible obstacle, the *to* a possible opening — a border is a barrier or a bridge.

The liquidity of the sea may instigate feelings of freedom of hope, and sometimes of adventure, but at the same time, its crossing represents a passage into the unknown, horror, anxiety, intimidation, and dread. Due to the precariousness of the crossing and the chance of being caught, the journey across the sea tends to be related to the suffering, the risk, and the death of the migrant. The Strait embodies not only the symbol of borders and dead ends, but also of medium and mirage of Spain and the myth of prosperity it alludes to. This change of perspective from sea-tomb to sea-source of life explains the figure of the migrant as an individual who perceives the crossing of the maritime basin as the only possibility for his/her own enhancement. This ambivalence attached to the sea reveals the aesthetic double that transpires through the narratives: dual participation of desire and fear, good and evil, death and rebirth, restoration and devastation.

Hence, perceptions about the maritime border are fluid and variable as the sea itself. In the following literary analysis of Lalami's *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* and Pajares' *Waters of revenge*, it is thus necessary to consider the polysemous character of the Mediterranean borderscape, its ambivalent purposes and the resources, and the tension between dismissal/repulsion and attraction/temptation that structures the border-crossing. As Massimo Cacciari suggests, the border “escapes each attempt to uniquely determine it, to 'confine' it in one meaning” (Cacciari 2000: 73); therefore, it can be perceived in different ways and it can perform multiple functions. This is particularly insightful in analyzing the analogues between the aquatic

⁴¹ The translation is mine. The original is the following “un cimetière où le courant s'empare des cadavres pour les mener au fond” (Ben Jelloun 2006:13).

⁴² The translation is mine. The original is the following: “les flots du rêve interdit” (Binebine 2005: 130).

element and the maritime border, because, as Illich claims in this regard “water has a nearly unlimited ability to carry metaphors” (1986: 24).

The stress on water's features of fluidity and transmutability leads to reflect on the various ways in which the aquatic element changes physical state as it moves through, and simultaneously organizes space and time. Even though the sea might first appear as a still, horizontal and empty space (Schmitt 2003 [1950]), it exists as a depth and as a surface, and as an ungraspable space that is constantly being reassembled by dynamic particles. Its properties – depth, mobility- can also be ascribed to land but, in the case of water, these qualities are different in the speed and rhythm of mobility and the continuous ease of transformation. Its natural characteristics, liquidity and fluidity, and the lack of visible limits seem to suggest that the sea is a principle of eradication, the smooth place par excellence in which one finds oneself disoriented because it “ is a field without conduits or channels” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 371), the absolute challenge to geospatial investigation, a “non-signifying field [that] bears no message” (Barthes 1972: 112), and finally a deterritorialized space. Even though its water might give the impression of limitlessness and infinity, of an “oppressive monotony and flatness” that fails to hold qualities to inspire the imagination (Lévi-Strauss 1973 [1955]: 338-9), the sea is a place as much as anywhere else. It is not to be considered a blank environment or a backdrop to other events but a specific space with its own characteristics, subdivided into different contact zones, arenas of cultural encounters and conflicts, and in some cases of physical death. In current times of migration, the assumption of the sea without substance is flawed and it neglects its physical and geopolitical border reality. Moreover, as the metaphor of Bauman (2000) indicates, the contemporary liquid modernity requires a liquid security dispositive⁴³ to filter mobility flows, and the aquatic element represents the perfect model for the fulfillment of such task.

Considering the sea as a dynamic borderscape enables us to understand that the form of water opens new spaces of control, contestation and resistance. Water is characterized by transmutability; its ability to metamorphose into substances with mutual exclusive qualities — liquid, solid, steamy — means that it moves between oppositional extremes. It can be invisible and transparent, penetrable and impenetrable, a life-giving and a life-threatening force or it may burn, freeze or drown (Strang 2004: 49). Water's physical features both promote mobility and produce frictions, thus complicating the boundaries between dwelling and staying. Besides, the liquidity of the sea complicates the practice of mapping since its dynamic qualities are resistant to an ontology of bounded zones and stable points of power and knowledge. Yet, such a mobile space, that can be utilized, occupied and exploited in *any* direction, produces dynamic projections of power and therefore borders. Whilst bordering practices on land involve markers of territory —

⁴³ A dispositive is in Foucault's words, “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions” which has a ruling strategic purpose (Foucault 1980: 194).

walls, fences, check-points — ; at sea, the materiality of the aquatic space determines distinct bordering strategies⁴⁴. The reflection on borders within a dynamic assemblage and from a fluctuating angle points to the fact that human mobility and intervention are shaped by the liquidity of the sea.

The maritime border achieves a performative dimension and intrinsically relies on the very act of transgression. Since transgression depends on the pre-existence of some sort of spatial ordering and the transgressive act functions with and depends on previous limits, border crossings and borders are defined in terms of each other. As Foucault notes “a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows” (Foucault 1977: 34). Thus, throughout the chapters, I propose to think about the Mediterranean border not as static and mapped configuration, but as a space where multiple mobilities engage each other. Hence, the focus lays on the border crossing practice: passages from one side to the other, hindered passages and unsuccessful border negotiations.

A focus on the performativity of the border leads also to the question of what comes first: the border or its performative engendering. And yet, as the sociologist Georg Simmel suggests “[t]he boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially” (Simmel 1997: 142). In this light, the Strait-border is the consequence of symbolic differences, even if it is a spatial construction. It is a form of classification or a means to mark distinctions and therefore, it is employed to impose one's own vision of the world and to claim one's allegedly socio-spatial community. Accordingly, the constructed border, whether or not represented by material fences or gates, is based on the continentalist principle and on its primacy as structuring an assumption of geopolitical spaces. Because of such naturalized understanding of anthropic spaces, this principle assumes that cultural contiguity overlaps with territorial continuity, while cultural discontinuities are defined by sea openings.

The maritime stretch of the Strait of Gibraltar is also considered as a fracture (Naïr 2006: 60) between shores marked by economic disparity. The Spanish journalist Ignacio Cembrero describes the Strait of Gibraltar as “the most unequal border of the European Union” (Cembrero, quoted in Dotson-Renta 2012: 4) in terms of uneven distribution of income and opportunities, and of purchasing power:

The border between Spain and Morocco is number one in the world for differences in human development [...] seventh in the world for the inequality of income per inhabitant, and 12th for disparity of buying power of citizens [...] The worst part is not the abysmal inequality between both shores of the Strait. The worst part is that each year the difference increases (ibid.)

⁴⁴ Whereas the 12 nautical mile territorial sea zone can be marked on a map; no wall can be built and no fence erected. Whilst a border on land may become solidified and thus visible, borders on sea are less evident which does not mean less dangerous.

When it does not stand for death and/or the mirage of Spain and the myth of prosperity it alludes to, the Strait comes to symbolize inequality between the two shores⁴⁵. It emerges, as Russell King claims, as “a liquid frontier separating the rich north [...] from the poor south [...] and temptingly open to migrant crossing (King 2001: 8). And yet, just when the economic gap between the sides of the Mediterranean is widening considerably, compelling more and more people to attempt the maritime crossing⁴⁶, Europe is reinforcing border protection in the effort to permit access only to those migrants it needs (Thomas 2011: 150).

Considering the waterscape both as producer and a product of the border regime through which bordering practices are enacted, a key point in the following literary analysis is the consideration that the liquid element of the sea is a vital component in scaping the borderscape. The engagement with aesthetic representations and reproductions of maritime borders provides a resource that is integral to the formation of border meanings and it is instrumental in the development of an understanding of current (im)mobility flows across the Mediterranean sea. In light of that, the Strait -and to a larger extent the Mediterranean- is not just a by-product, but it possesses a productive power of its own, thus performing a fundamental role in the fabrication of the world. Therefore, the Mediterranean Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar are ideal observatories for all major issues about current discourses on migration-related bordering practices. They have emerged as fundamental sites for investigating global dynamics of (im)mobility⁴⁷, “containing both proximity and distance, constituting a link but also an obstacle and a barrier” (Thomas 2011: 147).

⁴⁵ In this regard, see also Vazquez Montalban (2000: 20, 25) who defines the maritime stretch as a barrier between the poor and the rich of the planet.

⁴⁶ Amid the official estimates and the lack of precise data, it has long been evident to migration scholars that clandestine boat entry into the European Union is tiny relative to other means of clandestine entry or residence. In Spain, for example, the country's latest immigrant census states that, fewer than one percent of those people entering the country since the beginning of the nineties have done so by means of clandestine boat migration. Rather, the majority of Europe's clandestine migrants are visa over-stayers (Armillei 2017: 147). So, whereas migration by boat represents only a fraction of clandestine movement to Europe, it raises humanitarian as well as ethical issues for European and North African countries. As a matter of fact, it is one of the most perilous forms of movement between countries for several reasons: most of the vessels are ill-equipped in order to attempt the sea-crossing, the number of passengers they carry are way bigger than the one they are allowed to, and the weather conditions and sea currents are unpredictable putting at risk the lives of the migrants. The boats often have unreliable motors, they do not have enough fuel or appropriate navigational equipment, and living conditions on board are minimal. In addition, the unpredictability of the weather and currents makes the crossing a risky trip: without previous warnings, the boat can be devoured by a storm which turns the currents into dangerous waves that crush against the boat and might push some of the passengers out into the sea.

⁴⁷ Different dimensions of (im)mobility across the Strait are articulated, and also in conflict with each others. As Ursula Biemann suggests in her work about the dynamics of local micro-geographies of everyday mobility entangled with global and transnational systems, the Strait of Gibraltar is crossed “by container ships en route from West Africa to the Mediterranean, by boats transporting migrants on their perilous nocturnal journeys, by helicopter patrols keeping watch, by radio waves and radar lines, by itinerant plantation workers who pick vegetable for the EU market, by commuting housemaids going to work for the señoras of Andalusia, by border controls on the mountain passes, by buses transporting Moroccan women to Tangier where they peel Dutch shrimps to be shipped back to Holland [...] by pirates who produce goods from China and by women smugglers who hide these goods under their skirts and carry them into the Medina” (Biemann 2010: 48).

With this introduction in mind, the present chapter sets out to explore the aesthetic representations of the Strait of Gibraltar as they transpire in two novels: Lalamí's *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* (2005) and Pajares' *Aguas de venganza* [Waters of revenge] (2016). Such venture suggests the ways in which the multifaceted nature of the border is refracted within the two mentioned aesthetic works. It bears stressing the fact that by “representation of borders” I do not have in mind only the description of concrete, artificial borders per se, so much as the figurations that shape their manifestations into, say, fences, walls, or detention centers. What this entails is that the pre-conditions and pre-figurations, be they either ideological concepts or imaginaries, are the ones that ensure the production of material borders in the first place, since without these intangible pre-conceptions a wall is simply that, a wall.

1 A Sea of hope: Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*

Tanger était une impasse sombre,
un corridor bouché par la mer;
le détroit de Gibraltar une fente,
un abîme qui barrait nos songes;
le Nord était un mirage⁴⁸.

Mathias Énard, *Rue des voleurs*

Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits (2005), Laila Lalami's debut novel, thematizes seaborne clandestine migration across the Strait zone, describes the dangerous nocturnal passage that the migrants undertake in order to reach the other shore, and evokes the migrants' experience of a repulsive and unpredictable sea that stands in stark contrast to the touristic image of the romantic and benevolent Mediterranean – bathed in sunshine, and consumed by mass tourism.

Laila Lalami is herself Moroccan, currently an associate professor of creative writing at the University of California, Riverside, and composed *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* in English whilst living in the United States. Her choice of language has been motivated by her place of residence and by her desire to reach out to the U.S. audience. According to the scholar Sarnou, the shift towards the U.S. mainstream is not exclusive to Laila Lalami, but it is a part of a movement by other Arab-American writers eager to participate in the U.S. market, and it constitutes a promising field of literary, cultural and discursive investigation since it represents a connecting point between the “West” and the Arab world in a period during which tension is increasing between the two sides (Sarnou 2014: 77). Among Moroccan authors who have begun composing their literary productions in English, one can distinguish two more writers: Abdellatif Akbib (professor of English at Essaadi University in Tetouan, Morocco) and Majid Anouar (scholar and founding director of the Center for Global Humanities at the University of New England). To date, however, Laila Lalami is the only one to have achieved critical success, and her novel *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* is, so far, a rare example of border fiction written by a Maghrebi female author (Alami 2012: 154).

Hope and other dangerous pursuits is set in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it narrates the various stages of the migrant's journey, focusing on the life of the migrant before and after s/he has (un)successfully crossed the border, and its plot takes place against the backdrop of recent European visa restrictions –one of the causes behind the exponential increase in clandestine migration across the Strait. The novel is divided into three parts starting with an autonomous section titled “The Trip” while the following two parts, entitled “Before” and

⁴⁸ “Tanger was a dark dead-end, a corridor blocked by the sea; the Strait of Gibraltar a crack, an abyss that effaced our dreams; the North was a mirage” (my own translation).

“After”, contain four sub-chapters, each of them titled and self-contained. The prologue describes the difficult nocturnal journey from Tangier to Tarifa in a small inflatable boat referred to by the brand name Zodiac, the second chapter “Before” is a flashback section which recounts the lives of the characters, and describes their reasons for attempting the crossing, while the concluding chapter “After” relates their stories after the attempted crossing. These sub-chapters alternate points of view offering diverse perspectives on border-crossing and they center on four characters: Murad, a highly educated unemployed college student who is not able to make a living in Morocco despite his education. The second man is Aziz who is supposed to be supporting his family at home, but has no job. The third character Faten is a religiously devout veiled nineteen-year-old girl unwilling to remain silent and to accept a subordinate position within society, while the fourth one is Halima, an abused mother of three children, whose unemployed husband beats her.

Hope and other dangerous pursuits can be considered a composite novel, “a literary work composed of shorter texts that -though individually complete and autonomous- are interrelated in a coherent whole” (Dunn and Morris 1995: 3). Its integrity is rendered through the interaction with and among its parts, and their thematic development: the common setting, the recurring characters, their desire for migrating, their shared attempted crossing, and the containing elements of preoccupation, despair, hope, and aspirations. The episodic structure of the novel conveys uncertainty and incapacity to a unified narrative of migration, offering a complex mosaic of accounts that cannot be confined to a single story. Lalami's use of the genre of composite novel is appropriate to reflect the fragmentary nature of migratory journeys, the different yet shared conditions of displacement, and the multiple perspectives on the border-crossing experience. Although the entire literary production is framed by the prologue and the concluding sub-chapter entitled “The Storyteller”, both narrated through the perspective of Murad, this framing device does not completely contain the other sections within. In this light, this is a novel which could be seen as a continual expansion, collection and insertion of stories which provide additional angles and layers, and therefore offers polyphonic perspectives to the theme of migration in the world of the twenty-first century.

With “FOURTEEN KILOMETERS” (Lalami 2005: 1 further quotes are from this edition), two words indicating the geographical distance between the Moroccan shore and the Spanish one, Laila Lalami opens her novel, and sets the beginning of the narrative in the Strait of Gibraltar. While the novel's opening words allude to distance and division, and sets the scene for a narrative unfolding across shores, this stretch of water stands between the characters and their destination and, even though it consists of *only* fourteen kilometers, it represents a forbidden passage. Such a short stretch of water is a determining factor in the characters' plans for migrating: the brief span between the shores functions as a magnet that lures the migrants with the illusion of an easy passage due to the apparent feasibility of the crossing. However, the distance is

far more insuperable than initially appears. As it will further analyzed, the travel of hope becomes one of despair as this short distance turns out to be a great barrier for the characters, and as reference, for many other travelers that try to reach Spain clandestinely.

Hence, the narrative opens in *medias res*, and in a moment of transition where the characters are in the middle of the Strait, no longer Morocco and not yet Spain. By reversing the linear narrating of migration, and by opening where the international discourse about North African migration usually ends, since the sea crossing is supposed to be the final part of the migratory route, Laila Lamali subverts the assumption that the most significant aspect, or indeed, the culmination of the migrants' story is the crossing itself. In this way, the author stresses the fact that the border crossing is not the most important aspect of migration after all rather, behind the goal of any migration -the border negotiation-, there are manifold reasons, stories, doubts, hope, feelings and consequences that trigger that crossing.

The crossing is narrated through the eyes of Murad for whom the distance between the two shores “[is] nothing, a brief inconvenience [and] the crossing would take as little as thirty minutes” (1) and conversely such distance “separates not just two countries but two universes” (ibid). His observation regarding the separation between the two shores calls attention to the entity of this stretch of water as “a sea change of culture and economics in a remarkably short physical distance” (Salaita 2011: 115) and as a dividing border. Despite the geographical vicinity between Spain and Morocco, the Strait does not call for connection, rather it entails a border between South and North, Africa and Europe. Such dichotomy is highlighted by Murad's observation about “two universes” divided by the sea which, rather than being a space of connection, exchange and mutual recognition, it is rendered into a liquid wall and a “mounting barrier” (Chambers 2005: 324) constructed “between the pleasures of wealth and the desires of the poor” (Badiou 2008: 38).

The geographical referent -fourteen kilometers- mentioned at the beginning of the novel is ambiguous as much as the Strait is a “nebulous space between the two coasts” (Dotson-Renta 2008: 429), and it consists of a frustrating geographical impediment that prevents easy access to the opposite coast. Even though on certain days it is feasible to see across, and television and radios in Morocco can pick up Spanish channels and vice versa, this space, while narrow, is filled with turbulent waters. The recognition of that turbulence, the real physical risk, also functions as a metaphor of the Strait as a dangerous bridge, one charged with potential but also requiring cautious negotiation. In this light, the close proximity between the Moroccan coast and the Spanish one goes hand in hand with the impossibility, and the intrinsic difficulties of reaching their destination. Paradoxically, Tarifa is geographically close but unreachable.

During the crossing, the characters are on board of a six-meters *Zodiac*, an inflatable rubber boat in which there are no benches, just an open space where the passengers are forced to squeeze in tightly, designed to accommodate eight people, but it is instead packed with thirty “men, women, and children, all with the anxious look of those whose destinies are in the hands of

others -the captain, the coast guards” (2). The positive outcome of the crossing relies mainly on others: the ability of the the human trafficker to maneuver the boat at sea, to interpret any signs of weather change and sea currents, and to repair any engine's failures. What the characters do not realize before the crossing is that, even the seemingly reachable distance to the other shore becomes a dark threatening place in which the sea “can pull hard” (9), and it can turn itself into a space of risk, danger, hostility, terror and misery involving a dangerous journey that can end in death. During the crossing, the sea turns itself into a repository of lost lives, the scenario of desperate efforts to survive, and into a graveyard where its waves “are inky black, except for hints of foam here and there [...] like tombstone in a dark cemetery” (2). In the quoted passage, the sea has thus come to symbolize a cemetery which makes the migrants' boat adopt a coffin-like figure. Wherein the sea is associated with a ghostly metaphor, the characters, being in a transition site between Morocco and Spain, are located somewhere between life and death. However, the Mediterranean spatial reality as an internal sea suggests that it is easy to navigate, and it is bounded by lands whose shores are never too far: while in the middle of the crossing, Murad looks out at the approaching Spanish coastline and “[he] can make out the town where they're headed. Tarifa. The mainland point of the Moorish invasion in 711” (2). To be able to see the other shore does not mean, however, that the destination will be reachable. While on-board, Murad is under the impression that the crossing of the Strait will not pose any challenge to him. His failure to recognize the significance of the Mediterranean Sea as a barrier conveys Murad's naivety about the trip.

The geographic vicinity between Morocco and Spain has promoted a shared history constituted by patterns of transit, occupation, and mobility. From the rise and fall of Al-Andalus to the contemporary contentions surrounding the Spanish possessions of Ceuta and Melilla, the relation between the two countries has been one of perpetual dialogue and mistrust. Nowadays, those fourteen kilometers remind Moroccans of their geographical vicinity with Spain, and therefore of the possibility to easily reach the opposite shore. On the other hand, for Spaniards and other Europeans afraid of being “invaded”, or even “reconquered” by the Moors, such reachable distance symbolizes the “uncomfortable” proximity of Europe with its Other. In this line of thought, the current migratory crossing from Morocco into Spanish soil may evoke the idea of a second *reconquista*, and such aspect is treated ironically in the following passage in which Murad recalls the story he had been telling tourists about how Tariq Ibn Ziyad had conducted the Moorish army across the Strait⁴⁹, and had instructed his troops to burn the boats upon landing in Gibraltar.

⁴⁹ In this respect, it has to be noted that the name “Gibraltar” is the Spanish version of the Arab definition *djebel tariq*, meaning “the mountain of Tariq”. Indeed, the mountain situated on the cape of Gibraltar is named after Tariq Ibn Zyyad, the Berber commander who led the Moorish incursion of Iberia in 711, paving the way for the creation of Al-Andalus.

Murad used to regale tourists with anecdotes about how Tariq Ibn Ziyad had led a powerful Moor army across the Straits and, upon landing in Gibraltar, ordered all the boats burned. He'd told his soldiers that they could march forth and defeat the enemy or turn back and die a coward's death. The men had followed their general, toppled the Visigoths, and established an empire that ruled over Spain for more than seven hundred years. Little did they know that we'd be back, Murad thinks. Only instead of a fleet, here we are in an inflatable boat (2-3)

Murad does not simply recall the history of the occupation in 711; he recollects telling the story. Hispano-Moroccan history exists in the context of its telling and re-telling, of storytellers and listeners. Murad and his fellow Moroccans probably first encountered this anecdote as evidence of a glorious past, while Western tourists listen to a narrative populated by exotic, brutal generals and dark-skinned Moorish fighters that supports their already existing biases and partial comprehension of the region. Murad brings to mind the frightful image of Ibn Ziyad crossing the Straits and, in so doing, invokes both Moroccan pride and Spanish terror. Yet Murad's version of the anecdote, being told now in the context of an overloaded migrant boat, subverts both the Moroccan and Spanish versions of this common past. Such ironic subversion re-imagines both countries' national symbols, stressing asymmetrical power relations, and altering the attention from generals and conquering troops to a "motley mix of people from the ex-colonies, without guns or armor, without a charismatic leader" (3). His anecdote suggests on one hand the interconnectivity between Morocco and Spain: from the Moorish occupation of Spain during the Middle Ages to the creation of an Andalusian culture which is still honored and celebrated nowadays, and on the other, the importance of the historical past in shaping and contributing to the current migration from Africa towards Europe. By equating clandestine migration with a "new" Moorish invasion, Murad connects, in this way, historical events separated by more than a millennium, and he consequently alludes to past and present criss-crossings between shores.

On board of the boat, the characters sit tight next to each others: to Murad's left sits a girl named Faten who stares down at her shoes, across him sits Aziz, "a tall and lanky [man] who sits hunched over to fit in the narrow space allotted to him" (4) whereas on Aziz's left, sits a mother, named Halima, together with her two boys and one girl. On Aziz's right sits instead "a slender African woman [from] Guinea" (6). Murad wonders what the plans of his companions are, whether they are "meeting a husband or a brother there" (6) and, also, which other ways exist to reach Spain clandestinely: "instead of going on a boat, try to sneak in on vegetable trucks headed from Morocco to Spain" (6). His thought of an alternative crossing is however immediately followed by the recollection of a newspaper article about "the bodies of three illegals, dead from asphyxiation, lying on the crates of a tomato truck in Algeciras" (6-7), and he consoles himself by

thinking that on a boat there is no chance of that happening⁵⁰. In that exact moment “the outboard motor idles [...] Rahal [the trafficker] pulls the starter cable a few times, but nothing happens” (7). The engine seems to be broken and the boat starts drifting away. Murad and his companions are terrified; while some of them start crying and their hysteria is contagious, others are very tense and ready for conflict. Even though, “[t]he water is still calm” (9), the allegedly quietness of the sea manifests itself in an increasing readiness for violence in the boat's passengers and, while disputes explode on-board, Aziz tries to fix the motor. After some attempts, the boat starts moving again and “TARIFA IS ABOUT 250 meters away now. It'll only take another few minutes” (9).

At the sight of the coast, the Guinean woman throws her ID overboard in order “to pretend she's from Sierra Leone so she can get political asylum” (9). The practice of “burning⁵¹” identification is quite common in contemporary clandestine migration since, in the case of arrest, it (should) impede repatriation, and it constitutes both a practice of passing for somebody else, and a strategy of mobility. As Broeders observes “manipulation of personal identity is one of the major strategies adopted by illegal [sic⁵²] aliens who want to prevent detection by the state” (Broeders 2009: 55). In addition, such strategy is a form of resistance that sabotages the identification processes of mobility management, and it consists of a procedure of “de-identification” since it does not mainly refer to the shift of identity connotations, but also “it breaks the relation between one's name and one's body” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2007: 166).

At this point of the narrative, the characters' hopes of reaching the Spanish coast are very high. Yet, as though to emphasize the unattainability of their hopes, their fantasies are interrupted by the voice of the human trafficker who shouts “everyone out of the boat now!” (9). Despite having paid exorbitant sums, the passengers are not brought onto dry land; rather they are forced to jump from the boat and swim the remaining two-hundred and fifty meters. The decision taken by the trafficker of letting his passengers off board way too far from the shore is in response to the risk of being caught by coast guards and of “all get[ting] arrested” (10).

In order to avoid the SIVE (Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior -Integrated System of External Surveillance⁵³), its radars, helicopters and fast motor launches, traffickers either

⁵⁰ There is an important point that Lalami makes by including an account of a newspaper articles in her narrative; namely, that despite their longing to leave, clandestine migrants are in no way ignorant of the hazards that the crossing may entail.

⁵¹ In popular usage, the term “burning”, or *harga* in Arabic, refers to the clandestine migrant's burning desire to escape, burning of kilometers to the final journey's destination, and burning identification documents in order to avoid repatriation (Abderrezak 2016: 7).

⁵² It has to be noted that the term “illegal” is pejorative, stigmatizing, and even incorrect. The term, in fact, implies that migrants are criminal when, in reality, they commit an administrative infraction.

⁵³ SIVE was first applied in 1999 around the Strait of Gibraltar and has been consequently extended to the east and to the west to monitor respectively the whole of Cadiz province in 2004, the entire Andalusian coast in 2005, and, lastly, the Canary Islands. The SIVE has been implemented through the progressive inclusion of border control and management technologies comprising long-distance radar systems, sensors which can catch heartbeats from a distance, night vision cameras, infrared optics, helicopters and patrol boats. Spain's electronic wall, funded partly by the EU, has however not obtained significant results in preventing undocumented migrants from risking their lives (Saddiki 2014: 186).

undertake perilous routes across the Strait or leave their passengers way too far from the shore. The border enforcement across the Strait has turned this ribbon of water into a bolt to be secured and into the Spanish “front”⁵⁴. The crossing of the Strait is one leg in the migration corridor, but the coast-to-coast journey across its waters does play a significant role in the spatial enactment of “migration crisis”. Migration turns itself into “crisis” precisely where and when the geopolitical border becomes porous and “unmanageable”. The imaginary of an “out-of-control” border is not produced so much through the patrolling of the maritime basin, or through the strategies of border-crossing enacted by the migrants, but through the circulation of public images generated from those practices. It is in the great amount of newspaper articles, journalistic accounts, and photo portrayals that crossing the Mediterranean is dramatized. The spectacle of the “out-of-control” border and Europe’s “migrant crisis” functions as a device for the authorization of exceptional and “emergency” governmental measures meant for the expansion of border enforcement. As the scholar de Genova affirms such spectacle functions as “a virtually unquestionable pretext for dramatically reinvigorated border enforcement” (De Genova 2016: 35), and works as a kind of “ritualistic performance” which conceals the turbulent ungovernable migratory flows beneath the appearance of efficacy and exclusion. So, against the need for control and order, the sea’s liquidity and lack of clear confines and firm limits, suggest instability and uncontrollability and consequently it leads to the perception of the Mediterranean border as always-already negotiated, and therefore permanently dysfunctional. Such perception provides with the constant demand for more securitization and it lays the basis for the understanding of the maritime border as always incomplete, perpetually constructed and reconstructed, reordered and debordered. In this light, the Mediterranean border, intended as already inherent to the European Self, is to be defended against its constant “crisis”⁵⁵. Moreover, from a semiotic perspective, the symbolic feature of the border reveals the Mediterranean Sea as a *stage* in which borders and boundaries are continuously performed. As a stage, it achieves meanings according to the discourse that establishes it as a border and that shapes it.

As the trafficker orders the migrants to get off the boat in order to evade Spanish authorities, the passengers try to persuade him to keep navigating but, due to the precarious stability on board, “the Zodiac loses balance and then [...] [everyone] is in the water” (10). Tired, scared, and disenchanted, the characters must find their strength to swim the ice-cold water to the beach. The wreckage of the Zodiac is the most dangerous moment since the beginning of the

⁵⁴ In preparation for E.U. entry in 1986, Spain introduced the country’s first Alien Law, and soon started fortifying its southern geopolitical borders. Controls and clandestinity have since then gone hand in hand. It is no coincidence that the first reported arrivals of clandestine migrants by boat across the Strait happened in 1991, the year in which Spain joined the Schengen Agreement for free mobility within the European Union, and established Visa requirements for Moroccans (See Carling 2007a).

⁵⁵ The crisis is created by the pressure exerted by migrants who claim their own right of mobility which, in turn, destabilizes the geopolitical structure imposed by Europe and turns the Mediterranean border into a porous and unstable limit.

crossing, and it's the very moment when hope gives way to uncertainty, as the characters find themselves forced to swim and most of them “are not natives of Tangier and accustomed to its [the Strait's] water” (10)⁵⁶. The characters scream, start panicking, some drift away, and others -like Aziz- start swimming toward the coast. The moment of uncertainty in which the characters are found, does not implicate passivity or resignation. Rather, in their case, it is productive, it is employed to negotiate insecurity, and it constitutes a social resource creating relationships: even though Murad's fingers and toes go numb, he forces himself to keep swimming otherwise “he'll freeze to death” (11), and he helps other companion to stay alive “he holds his hand out to Faten [...] he keeps calling out, telling her to calm down and start swimming” (ibid).

After successfully swimming to the beach, Murad's feet feel the sand and his hopes are high once again: “he can't believe his luck. He made it” (13). He starts fantasizing about his future in Spain: “he imagines the office where he'll be working; he can see his fingers moving quickly and precisely over his keyboard; he can hear his phone ringing. He pictures himself going home to a modern, well-furnished apartment, his wife greeting him, the TV in the background” (13). His fabricated fantasy of enrichment not only reveals materialistic desires; it also discloses a stereotypical projection of Spain, and to a certain extent of the rest of Europe as well, as a terrestrial paradise – which contains the implicit message that, for Murad, Morocco lacks all these belongings. This is simply a dream of the young, a dream that could be seen as trivial, but that is nevertheless not to be condemned. Nevertheless, a “light shines on him. Murad sits up. The light is away from his eyes only a moment, but it is long enough to see the dog, a German shepherd, and the infinitely more menacing form holding the leash” (13). An officer “from the Guardia Civil [whose] name tag reads Martinez” (ibid) captures him and throws him into a van together with the other travel companions who have been caught, and brings all of them to the holding center:

He is taken to the holding station [...] On his way there, he sees a body bag on the ground. A sour taste invades his mouth. He swallows but can't contain it. He doubles over and the officer lets go of him. Murad stumbles to the side of the building and vomits. It could have been him in that body bag; it could have been Faten. Maybe it was Aziz or Halima. (15-6)

In the above mentioned quote, whereas Murad reflects on the fact that the corpse inside that body bag could have been himself, or anyone of his fellow companions in search of “hope and other dangerous pursuits”, the body bag materializes the countless deaths at sea. In this passage, Lalami

⁵⁶ This is a reference to Morocco as a transit country during the migratory route. Although Morocco remains mainly a country of emigration, since 2000 it has also become a destination for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. Migration patterns show that Morocco is progressively assuming an intermediate position connecting African and Mediterranean migration practices. Besides emigration, Morocco now deals with transit migration and settlement of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa: a significant number of migrants use Morocco as a staging post before attempting to enter the European Union. These migrants usually enter Morocco from Algeria, at the border east of Oujda, after crossing the Sahara desert. Once in Morocco, they attempt either to cross the Strait of Gibraltar in the attempt to reach Spain, or they try to enter one the two Spanish enclaves -Ceuta and Melilla- situated on Morocco's northern coast. Those who fail the attempt, settle in Morocco rather than returning to their home countries (See Berriane, de Haas, and Natter 2015).

not only reminds her readers that the Mediterranean border threatens the lives of the many attempting the crossing, but also that the many drowned at sea or the corpses washing ashore are persons with stories.

After being brought into the holding center, Murad encounters the familiar faces of his boat-mates “all wrapped in blankets like him, huddled close together to stay warm” (14). The only continuity between spaces -the boat and the holding center- is found in the characters' condition of immobility. As previously on the boat, where they were forced to stay immobile in order not to lose balance and risk that the boat would capsize, in the holding center their movement is once again limited as they are handcuffed. Both spatial arrangements -the boat and the holding center- have also a temporal dimension, in the sense that the characters are *waiting* either to reach the other shore or to be deported to Morocco. The state of waiting at the border or on the other side of it is both a symbolic and psychological practice of subjectification and internalization, as well as a practice of exclusion. Especially inside the holding center, the partitioning of time exerts effects of surveillance, sorting, and selectivity. Holding facilities do not only function as a means of excluding migrants, but also as a regulatory temporal device that manoeuvre the migrant's movements. Such perspective moves away from the conception of the detention camp as a space of sovereign exception (Agamben 1998) focusing on the entanglement between spatial (im)mobility and temporality. This view thus confirms de Certeau's statement that “space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables ” (1984: 118) and thus, holding centers function not only to prevent the passage but also to manage time and speed of migratory flows. The border regime deploys technologies and places — such as holding centers — for temporal management, either to speed border-crossings, or to slow and hinder the passage through practices of detentions, interception and deterrence. Therefore, while practices of temporal delays and filtering are significant in the spatial functioning of the Mediterranean border, the temporality of border-crossing is characterized by the emergence of different zones and experiences of waiting, holding, suspension which assume institutional shapes, like holdings center and deportation facilities. Such spatiotemporal feature of the bordering practice breaks the supposedly linearity of the migrants' journey from their places of origin to their destination, and stresses instead on discontinuities during their trip: interruptions such as waiting and stopovers, unexpected settlements in transit countries, and returns.

The atmosphere inside the center daunts communication: there are doctors “wear[ing] surgical masks on their faces, to examine them” (15), guards dragging the migrants to holding cells, and an officer who forces them to sign a paper stating that “they are here [Spain] illegally” (ibid). The characters are to be found in a situation in which they are considered first as contagious persons whose treatment requires protection, and secondly as illegal aliens/criminals. Intrinsic to the discourse of contamination at the hands of outsiders is the belief of the “pure” body of Europe under the menace of the “invasion” and degeneration by clandestine migrants.

Such rhetoric of potential contamination often indicates a political, cultural, and ideological belief in the “purity” of the European body and in the degenerative and polluting characteristics of those coming from outside of its borders. The discourse of containment against contamination defines clandestine migrants as abjects and, in such a way, employs a bodily rhetoric to exacerbate the anxiety over the “intrusion” of outsiders and to frame anti-immigration attitudes. The concept of abjection (Kristeva 1982) refers both to the anxiety and the fascination experienced when the bodily is expelled or rejected, as well as to the boundary between the inside and outside of the body, and the tensions caused by transgressions of that boundary. According to Kristeva, “it is not lack of health or cleanliness that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (ibid: 4). Therefore, the abject is not the absence of health, but the implications of the abject -disturbance of order, the imperceptibility of the difference between inside and outside, and uncertainty of the border itself. So, while being kept in the holding center, the characters are the abjects that disturb order by having transgressed the border. They are the alien element in the familiar, the figure of the unknown within the known and, therefore, treated as non-belonging persons. Furthermore, they are treated as criminals — since they have “illegally” reached Spain — and thus brought “to a moldy cell already occupied by other prisoners” (16).

The migration regime filters and divides migrants into desired and undesired categories and, since the characters are *de facto* excluded from legal and safe migration to Europe, their unauthorized entry defines them as *clandestine* adding to their migration project great uncertainty and risk of failure. The filtering aspect of the maritime border is made apparent in the novel's passages in which intensified border enforcement, both at sea and on the coast, relegates undocumented and “illegalised” migrants into areas of potential fatal crossing. Besides, the enactment of exclusion through law enforcement creates undocumented migration as a category and renders it visible. In this sense, the border spectacle functions as a performance in which the production of clandestinity works together with other practices of control to regulate migration and to enact security. The “illegal” migrants become then deportable persons, and through a legal production of illegality a range of subject positions is created. Once a border is created, people will try to transgress it. This produces a vicious cycle that feeds itself. The more mobility is limited, the more crossing becomes illegalized. And, as border control becomes more sophisticated, so does the smuggling industry. As the hazards increase, so do the potential profits, which in turn make smuggling activities increasingly lucrative (Laine 2018: 292).

Even though the characters' clandestine situation intensifies conditions of uncertainty in relation to their possible futures, their hopes are not brought to a halt. In spite of the risks and dangers in attempting the border-crossing, migration keeps on indicating potentiality and hope at the symbolic and material level while the hazardous crossing is a far better option to the socio-economic stagnation that the characters experience in Morocco. In this sense, the characters' hope

reminds of the title, alluding to hope as a way of dreaming up possible futures and as a powerful motivating force that permeates lives and activates them. In other words, hope is not a distraction from the geo-political violence of the bordering regime, but it can be part of its critique. Despite the failed attempt, Murad dreams of another chance and assures himself that “next time, he'll make it” (16).

The sealing of the prologue is followed by the second part, named “Before”, in which Lalami takes her readers on a journey that explores how the story's main characters came to be on the boat heading to Spain.

The first story is the one of Faten; she is presented through the point of view of a father, Larbi Amrani, an employee of the Moroccan Ministry of Education, whose daughter befriends Faten. Larbi considers Faten a menace to the future of his vulnerable daughter and he conspires to make Faten expelled from school. Her following expulsion from school leads to a spiral of events in her life that forces her to attempt the crossing. In this first sub-chapter, Lalami does not present Faten's own narrative, rather she is been introduced by the perception that Larbi has on her, illustrating Faten's lack of agency and narrative voice. After Lalami offers the reader an insight into what brought Faten to board the Zodiac, her character appears again in the second part of the novel “After”, in the sub-chapter titled “The Odalisque”. Here, the reader gets to know that, along with Murad and Halima, Faten is caught by Spanish authorities at the beach of Tarifa and is later detained in a holding cell pending her deportation to Morocco. While she awaits there, she detects a slight signal from one of the guards: “she didn't need to speak Spanish to understand that he'd wanted to make her a deal. [...] The guard had taken her to one of the private exam rooms, away from everyone else. He lifted her skirt and thrust into her with savage abandon” (141). Her acceptance of the Spanish guard shows how a successful border-crossing entails the use of any asset at her disposal, including her body. In fact, while the act undermines her integrity, it does allow her to enter Spain.

Years after the encounter with the Spanish guard, Faten finds herself in Madrid, working in the streets waiting for her next customer. Although she is not restricted by a patriarchal authority anymore, she finds herself into another oppressive sphere of gender relations by becoming a prostitute. Her life in Madrid is far from being “full of promise and possibility” (128) and she often imagines “what a normal life would be like, never having to see the men, being able to sleep at night, being able to look around her without worrying about the police at every turn” (133). Hence, even though she successfully crossed the Strait, Faten needs to hide from the police because of her clandestinity, and, when one of her customers persuades her into fulfilling his Maghrebi delusions, she has to struggle against the cultural boundary that she encounters on a daily basis. Albeit reluctant at first, Faten accepts to re-fantasizing herself through some “odalisque dreams” (142):

“Where did you grow up?” Martin [her client] asked.

“In a Moorish house.”
“With your parents?”
“I didn't see much of my father. I spent all my days in the harem.”
“With your siblings?”
“With my six sisters. They initiated me into the art of pleasing men.” (142)

Whereas Faten's customer reproduces the cultural boundary in which she is located on the other side as the “exotic other”, Faten accepts to perform a role that conforms with his fantasies. Exploiting the obsession of her clientele, Faten fabricates and manipulates tales of a harem girlhood, and her calculated manipulation of Western male erotic dreams provides her with a living. However, realizing that in fulfilling the customer's sexual fantasies she would be extending the colonial regime of cultural appropriation (Alami 2012: 149), she denies to submit to her customer's wishes by stating “from now on, all the chitchat is extra [...] I think you should find someone else next time” (143). Her refusal constitutes a symbolic act of non-compliance with Eurocentric male world-view, it shows her ability to seize control over her own future and, in this way, she regains her integrity and agency. Although she still occupies a position of mere power, she now has a narrative voice.

The second character introduced by Lalami is the abused mother of three, Halima, who aspires to migrate with her children in order to escape from a violent husband who refuses to grant her divorce. After realizing that she has a better opportunity of successfully reaching Spain than she does of divorcing her husband, she first attempts to obtain legal access by applying for a visa. However, after consulting with a lawyer and hearing that “you have to have a full-time job, a bank account, a ticket, a place to stay – it's complicated [...] and people like you, with no skills and three children, don't get visas” (72), she decides to reach the other shore clandestinely.

Contextualizing Halima's story before she concludes to cross the Strait is important to grasp the unfeasibility of her migration in legal matters. The migration apparatus is such that in order to obtain a visa to enter the EU, persons from “developing countries” have to provide proof of steady income and contacts in the country of destination. Created to deter migration, to which refusal to issue a visa is one of the elements that creates “illegality”(De Genova 2016), the system itself denies chances to aspiring border-crossers through a selective practice which, in turn, provides the condition for clandestine migration and enforces immobility. In addition, the refusal to grant a visa represents the dispatch of border security to the consulates that grant legal entry to the Schengen area. This measure of control, delegated to external countries and exercised through the visas and the controls in the consulates of the passengers' country of origin, works at distance and it is much less visible than guards working on the front lines of the nation-state. The surveillance of the “unwelcome” is the main tendency of policing of the global age, and such tendency, or Ban-opticon⁵⁷ as scholar Bigo defines it, is performed at a level which supersedes the

⁵⁷ The Ban-opticon concept has been developed by Didier Bigo in the field of EU security policy. Accordingly, surveillance no longer depends on immobilizing “unwelcome” people or on the omniscient

nation-state.

Through Halima's story, Lalami hints at a bigger context where specific persons have more impediments to go through than other advantaged applicants. The way migration policies affect a person depends on his/her personal situation and administrative status. Such a status is controlled in the country of origin where the person submits a visa demand, and secondly at each stage of the attempted journey from Morocco to Spain. Henceforth, the sorting of migrants is both maintained by computer databases that determine their administrative status, and thus their possibility of accessing the European territory, and also by boats, helicopters, and airplanes that guarantee the monitoring of the EU external borders. Hence, borders and their intrinsic controls are not constrained by geography anymore since the monitoring of flows does not need to take place at the physical borders, but can also happen before the individuals arrive, and after they reach European territory.

Even though Halima's attempt to reach safely Spain fails, she does not lose self-confidence and, once deported to Morocco, "she borrows money again [...], takes a room with her three children in Sidi-Moumen, a slum outside the city, [and] joins the hordes of day workers at market [...] waiting for a nod from someone who needs laundry washed or spring cleaning done" (114-5). She takes her chance alone, refusing to go back to her husband, and, in this way, she challenges the patriarchal system that had previously stripped her of any independence. In this light, the attempted migratory journey enables her to have more control over her life. By presenting a character who, after having failed to reach the other side, displays new agency, Lalami reconfigures immobility not as a failure but rather as a generative condition for both change and resistance.

The third character is Aziz who, unlike Murad and Halima who are captured and deported back to Morocco, eludes the Spanish guards and successfully crosses into Spanish soil. The motives that move him to attempt the crossing is "to make a living" (74), to regain his patriarchal authority that has been destabilized and challenged by his wife who found a job at a soda factory, to avoid "asking [his parents] for money to ride the bus" (79) and finally to "have a car and a place to go, instead of sitting idle at the a coffee shop while his wife was at work" (90). Although he was supposed to return home after a couple of years, five years pass before he goes back to Morocco. The return home is awkward and not as he had expected⁵⁸, but it still represents an

gaze of a guard, rather the "ban" is a method of excluding and normalizing, of deploying databases to produce profiles and consequently determine who is allowed to move freely and who is not. The purpose of the Ban-opticon is to define beforehand who constitutes a possible threat (See Bigo 2008).

⁵⁸ In Aziz's fantasies "he would come home on a sunny day, dressed in a crisp white shirt and black slacks, his hair gelled back and his mustache trimmed [...] with gifts for everyone in the family [...] his wife and parents would greet him with smiles on their faces [and] he would move them from the decrepit apartment in a poor neighborhood of Casablanca to one of those modern buildings that sprang up daily in the city" (146). Yet, at his day of return, he is forced to change the details of his homecoming since "his father had died [...] his mother and his wife lived alone" (147) and "he couldn't recall the colors of her [wife] eyes" (ibid).

opportunity for him to show his success, and to become an almost mythical figure to other aspiring migrants:

within an hour of his arrival, a stream of visitors poured in to see Aziz [...]
“Tell us” someone said, “what's Spain like?”
“Who cooks for you?” asked another.
“Do you have a car?” asked a third.
[...] He spoke of his job at the restaurant and how his manager liked him enough to move him from dishwashing to busing tables. (154-5)

Yet, in recounting his experience in Spain he does not share with his visitors the feeling of being treated as either a lawbreaker or an invisible subject within Spanish society

he didn't talk about the time when he was in El Corte Ingles shopping for a jacket and the guard followed him around as if he were a criminal. He didn't describe how, at the grocery store, cashiers greeted customers with hellos and thank yous, but their eyes always gazed past him as though he were invisible, nor did he mention the constant identity checks that the police had performed these last two years. (155)

Telling his experience in Spain, Aziz withholds the damaging price that he has to pay: he is included in the space of labor markets but does not share a sense of belonging and legal status. He is situated within the nation-state, but his inclusion “[is] subjected to varying degrees of subordination, rule, discrimination, and segmentation” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 159). The story of Aziz underlines the persistent cultural disruption, and ideological positioning between the Spanish and migrants: even though he was able to cross the geopolitical border in concealment and secrecy, a dispersed cultural boundary appears in other forms (prejudice, racism, suspicion, discredit), expanding its order and rules in places far removed from the border's geo-political location and opening up other spaces for forms of control. Once again, the notion of the Mediterranean border only takes on meaning when understood as a product of 'bordering', i.e. the everyday construction of borders and boundaries through ideology, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and agency. This stresses the way in which the Mediterranean border enables other borders to be (re)drawn and (re)produced. As in Faten's story, the geopolitical border assumes the connotation of a cultural boundary within the receiving nation wherein the Other is located on the other side: unknown, mysterious and exotic in the character of Faten, or to be feared, controlled and suspected in the character of Aziz.

The fourth character, Murad, is presented in the sub-chapter “Better Luck Tomorrow”. This part opens with the main character who, unable to use his degree to find employment in Morocco, spends his days in trying to lure tourists with Bowles' stories about Tangier⁵⁹ in order to

⁵⁹ The U.S. writer Paul Bowles settled in Morocco for fifty-three years of his eighty-three years of life since the 1950s, during which he became a figure of bohemian lifestyle for other compatriots who were looking for a simpler way of life. By the time Bowles settled in Tangier, Morocco was already a destination for tourists, but he helped to spread the legend of the country as “a place of exotic languages and customs, a place where shocking and barbaric cruelty occurs” (Tharaud 2009: 95). His fiction has revealed travel writing's role in furthering the phantasmic dynamics of Europe and United States'

choose him as their tourist guide. With his father deceased, Murad needs to assume the patriarchal role in the family, but being unable to find any stable employment, he cannot meet the demands of his family. The resentment and humiliation that Murad feels because of his devalued position increases after hearing of his younger sister's engagement. Feeling relegated in familial status, he desires to arrange for his migration to Spain: "he knew, in his heart, that if only he could get a job, he would make it, he would be successful, like his sister was today, like his younger brothers would be someday. His mother wouldn't dream of discounting his opinion the ways she did. And Spain was so close, just across the Strait" (108). In his mind, crossing the Strait becomes the only way by which he can regain his status and authority within the family. Although at first Murad is reluctant about attempting the crossing, he relies on the apparent success others have had to convince him: "the only [stories] that were told over and over in the neighbourhood were the good ones, about the people who'd made it [without mentioning] the horror stories – about the drownings, the arrests, the deportations" (107). So, blinded by aspiration of how migration will improve his condition, Murad imprudently makes the journey.

After Murad fails in the attempt to reach Spain, Lalami returns to his story in the concluding part of the novel, in the sub-chapter entitled "The Storyteller". Upon his return to Morocco, he feels a great sense of shame: "he refused to go out. He avoided family gatherings, refused to run errands [...] Everyone knew he'd tried to go to Spain, and now they all knew he'd been caught and deported, so he took to staying home with his mother" (176) but later on, whilst working as a store clerk he realizes "he'd had it wrong. He'd been so consumed with his imagined future that he hadn't noticed how it had started to overtake something inside, bit by bit. He'd been living in the future, thinking of all his tomorrows in a better place, never realizing that his past was drifting" (177-8). In the latter quote, Murad shifts his focus from the future to the past, and realizes that his dream of leaving Morocco was a threat to his own past. Through such reflection, Murad reconsiders his past as a valuable, tangible rather than imagined, a resource for reshaping himself and giving new meaning to his present. In the final chapter, the reader finds Murad sitting in the shop reading a novel set in his hometown written by a U.S. writer, and finding himself reflecting on how to reconstruct the plot to better communicate his own lived experience of Tangier. The scene that follows demonstrates the friction between the aestheticized representation of the Mediterranean conceived in foreign literature and the perception of it experienced by the migrants or by the people living on its shores:

he'd had a hard time losing himself in the imagined world of the novel, even

perception of its 'others' and in sustaining the asymmetrical power relations of Europe's colonial project. The African becomes at once a source of fascination and derision, as well as providing confirmation of Europe's cultural superiority and intellectual supremacy. In his literature about Morocco, Bowles literally takes over, or colonizes, the oral stories as given to him by storytellers such as Ahmed Yacoubi and Larbi Layachi, who were themselves illiterate. The stories that resulted from his re-writing became read as authentic Moroccan storytellings (Alami 2012: 150-1).

though it was set in Tangier. Or maybe it was because it was set in Tangier that he hadn't been able to reconcile the fictional world he was reading about with the one he experienced every day. He'd caught himself editing the author's prose -correcting an inaccurate reference and rewording the characters' dialogue- but wasn't it. Something was missing. (168)

The friction between the two images, the Mediterranean as an object of touristic consumption and the same very sea as a border, is the consequence of the multiple meanings of the border/filter that grants privileged groups to circulate freely but keeps others in a state of immobility, and therefore some border crossings are charged with tension while others are untroubled. The opposition between the Mediterranean as a tourist fantasy and a migrant reality comes into focus alluding to the Mediterranean both as a tourist theater, an object of fantasy and consumption, and a border spectacle, a highly monitored space, and a back-door that needs to be closed to prevent unwelcome crossing. This dual ontology of the border organizes subjects along a North/South axis where tourists from the North and migrants from the South are exposed to dichotomous experiences of the same place and time: while the characters' crossing is filled with danger, anxiety and unpredictability, tourists board a ferry that in less than one hour connect the harbors of Tarifa and Tangier. As a complex borderscape, the Strait of Gibraltar, it exemplifies the heterochronotopes that regulate the lives and deaths of different subjects, precisely as it highlights the mutually exclusive relations between bodies and borders. The migrants and the tourists establish points of connection between conflicting yet simultaneous heterochronotopes: the Strait as holiday space *and* the Strait as cemetery. The Strait borderscape dramatizes the two-tier ontologies that govern subjects along the Global North/South axis: in their spatio-temporal manifestation, they create simultaneously an arrangement of bodies and subjects that remain proximate yet invisible to each other (Pugliese 2010: 120).

Intermingled with Murad's thoughts about how to improve the narration of his home town, the author presents the dialogue between two female tourists, fascinated by Bowles' literature based in Tangier. Their conversation about the U.S. writer reminds Murad of how he used to take advantage of the writer's figure to lure tourists to hire him as their guide. Now, on the other hand, Murad wonders "if it would ever be possible to get away from Bowles, from the dozen of tourists he seemed to inspire to come to Tangier, nostalgic for an era they never even knew" (172) and, feeling resentment over the tourists' nostalgia for an American past they never experienced, Murad does not regale the two girls with stories about Western perceptions of Morocco, rather he fascinates them with a folk tale from his childhood. It is in this moment that Murad reflects on the importance of the past, its celebration and recollection in addition to the value of stories:

When he was a little boy, Murad remembered, his father would sit down at night, cross-legged on the raffia mat, his back to the wall, and tell stories for

him and for his sister Lamya. [...] He remembered the stories only in fragments [...] pieces of a puzzle that he couldn't reconstruct. Realizing this, he felt at once angry and sad, as though he had just discovered that a part of him was missing. (174-5)

Not being able to put together the pieces of stories that his father used to delight him with, makes Murad feeling “mutilated”. His perceived deficiency reflects the cost of his daydreaming of a better life in Spain; the time he spent trapped in the migrant's dream, in a future elsewhere that has prevented him from experiencing his life in the present. Understanding that by dreaming about a future, he has been missing out on the past and the present, Murad envisions a different future -one in which he recounts the same stories he had listened to as a child. In this alternative vision of the future, he is not working in an office, driving a car or living somewhere in Spain, rather he is occupied in regaining his perceived loss of memory and in sharing his stories with others.

As the ending of the novel gets closer, the act of storytelling dominates the last pages, and Murad not only enacts his own role as storyteller, but he also changes his point of view about his own and his country's future. As he admits “[t]here was no use in reading [Bowles'] stories anymore; he needed to write his own” (186), the ending of the novel depicts the transformation of Murad, from a consumer of Moroccan stories written by Bowles, into a storyteller, a creator of tales in their original form. Such transformation correlates with the development of full agency through the ability to narrate one's own stories, free from exotic and inaccurate fantasies originating from the West. The closing passage describes not just Murad's gaining control over the narrative through storytelling, but also the importance of engaging with historical and traditional memory in order to develop individual and collective self-definition. Since stories are the repository of collective knowledge, their re-telling is a primary key for shaping and sharing both present and future. In this way, Murad's reclamation of an authorial voice emphasizes the power of memory as a source of emancipation for the now and the hereafter. Reevaluating past tales and localised narratives, Murad rejects both U.S. and Eurocentric accounts of his country and initiates his own storytelling that “offers a path towards cultural resistance that honors cultural memory and calls for the development of more ideologically-informed forms of engaging historical memory in order to promote individual and cultural agency” (Alami 2012: 154). Murad's practice of storytelling is self-empowering, his role as storyteller can be understood as a practice of resistance and emancipation in the face of “involuntary immobility” (Carling 2002: 5), and also as a new vision to overcome politics of exclusion through historical memory and voice.

To conclude, in reading the experiences of the four characters, while economic reasons loom large their resolution to leave Morocco for Spain, in no case is the thought to earn enough money to make ends meet the only motive for their attempted crossing. As shown, other reasons include the need for Halima to get away from her abusive husband, the shame Aziz feels in not being able to provide for his family, Faten's fear of being persecuted and her need to escape from

a conservative system, and Murad's longing to reclaim his perceived loss of masculinity. Lalami is critical of her characters and their different reasons for crossing the Strait, as much as she is of the migratory system that oppresses them. She describes and exposes their shortcomings and ingenuities, but also their hopes and dreams. Her characters are not to be pitied or admired, rather they are first and foremost individuals for whom the crossing represents a possibility of emancipation. For those who cannot complete the border crossing, their forced return to Morocco represents an occasion to break with the past structures of domination and to exert emancipation and resistance in the present. Thus, the sea crossing is not only associated with danger and death, but also with hope and change. Refraining from offering any judgment on the decisions and realities of the characters whose experience the novels evokes, Laila Lalami calls attention to the complex conditions in which migrants are embedded, both at home and in the host country, and, as the title evokes, she describes the mixture of hope and trouble, expectations and misconceptions that defines migration. By narrating the story of four Moroccan migrants in search for a better future in Spain, and revealing the hard realities faced by people who risk their lives in order to reach what they consider the land of opportunities, she narrates both the subjective dimensions of many aspiring migrants, and their social situation after the (un)successful border crossing. In this way, she does not embellish or celebrate the migratory experience as a transformative path towards fulfillment, rather she introduces the practice of (im)mobility – by staging the return of Murad and Halima to Morocco- into the narrative of migration thereby revealing that immobility is itself not a form of standstill, rather a different kind of displacement.

Hope and other dangerous pursuits does not provide a dogmatically clear solution to the issue of migration, rather it levels a critical gaze at European migration policy, it exposes the role that Moroccan institutions have in fueling migration, and it functions as a critique of the methods in which the border regime force migrants to endanger their existences, and, if they survive their undocumented crossing, compels them into a clandestine limbo on the margins of society. In addition to a critique of the effects of fortified European borders, Lalami's novel critically examines the sociopolitical conditions that drive people to leave. In describing the characters' migratory experience, Lalami portrays the ways in which the migrants cope with and circumvent impediments to their (im)mobility, how they strive during dangerous situations, and how they insist on the plausibility of devising a better life even though hope is, in some cases, almost lost. The characters' hope is neither a description of their present nor pure fantasy; it is rather associated with the realm of the thinkable or imaginable, and it is what aspires their attempted border-crossing. Yet, hope can be disappointing and it may remain just a remote horizon, but it still offers a particular take on the characters' uncertainty as it emphasizes their potential rather than their fear.

The Strait of Gibraltar plays an important role in the novel since it is the transit space that

the characters need to negotiate before reaching the other shore, and it carries a strong figurative power, embodying multiple images which imply spatial hierarchies and mental maps. It presents itself as the last obstacle of an often long and dangerous journey, it functions as a possible bridge, and it achieves different symbols and meanings according to the perspectives. For migrants, it is the last obstacle to overcome; but it is tricky, as it changes its currents and appearance without warning. It is unpredictable, unreliable, wholly provisional and it is a lucrative space for traffickers. Even though it is a constant reminder of the geographical proximity of Europe, and it has the potential to represent a realm of escape and renewal, it is not a place to pass by; it is a rift and a crack, it is Europe's new frontier and a filter that stresses different levels of inclusion/exclusion. Its transgression is described both as a perilous adventure and a potentially liberating promise of a brighter future. The tension between dismissal/repulsion and attraction/temptation structures the border-crossing as a dynamics of approach and rejection on both individual and geopolitical scales. Inasmuch as the other shore stands for hope, expectations, or desire, it too implies the threatening, wide reaching magnitude of border enforcement at sea. For the border enforcement regime, the Strait of Gibraltar represents a problematic ribbon of water that needs to be monitored, controlled, and bordered since it consists of a permeable entry that let unwelcome people trespass, and triggers fears and anxieties for those who conceive the migrants as invaders or terrorists. As has been argued, while in response to migrant border transgressions, the Strait is increasingly ordered, territorialized, and securitized, one of the consequences of such bordering practice has been the displacement of migratory routes toward perilous crossing points in a conscious border patrol strategy that can be defined as “the optimization of natural obstacles” (Alonso 2002). For tourists, instead, it represents an easy passage to the Moroccan coast, an idyllic and touristic leisure place from which to start fantasizing the Other. The tourists' unquestioned transition between the two shores is compared to the unsafe journey of the four characters, and raises questions of privilege and exclusion: the tourists move in broad daylight while the clandestine migrants are forced to cross the border by night and, once reached the other side, they are forced to withdraw to the margins of the society. Therefore, *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* juxtaposes the divergent itineraries of different actors in one and the same borderscape. While tourists can cross the maritime border without even realizing its existence, this border tends to ban those who attempt to transgress it as clandestine migrants. The bordering and banning practices are executed by the border regime that puts into force the filtering quality of the border: one path is allowed to transgress the border while the other is forced to be redirected elsewhere through detention, deportation, or expulsion. Such a semi-permeability of the border derives from a rearrangement of space which, while making border vanish for some people, is, at the same time, forced to impose limits on others. In this light, the semi-permeability of the border activates the process of bifurcation that constantly redirects flows of people across or away from itself: it enhances the speed of trusted travelers,

while reducing and eventually blocking and detaining patterns of life that deviate from the established norm.

Lalami's contribution to border fiction is the acknowledgment that there is no master narrative of border-crossing and migratory experience. By choosing the format of composite novel, in which characters, themes and the principle of storytelling hold together the single sub-chapters, Lalami succeeds in describing not only the different aspects and personal reasons behind the root causes and the lasting effects of migration, but also how (attempted) migration can split someone's life into a "before" and a "after". In this way, the author emphasizes that the migratory journey lies at the center of a long, and sometimes never completed, web of personal reflections, actions, counteractions and repercussions that begin in the individual's biography well before the crossing, and which have implications many years afterwards. In the novel, the maritime border is the site where narrative strands diverge, it is the place that splits life between a before and after, and disrupts the experiences of the characters. It is a point of fracture, in which divergent narrative strands appear: the successful crossing experiences and the unsuccessful ones. The juxtaposition of alternating narrators reminds the reader of the limits of each narrative, which only exists in connection with the other, different but intertwined narratives. In this way, Lalami uses multiple voices to question the possibility of a single, unifying experience of border crossing. Such a narrative strategy suggests that the unitary narrative of clandestine border crossing is one of several, thereby dismissing one-dimensional accounts of escape and flight.

2. A Sea of revenge: Pajares' *Aguas de venganza* (2016) [Waters of revenge]

*Li lasciamo annegare, per negare*⁶⁰.

Erri de De Luca, *Solo andata*

As shown in the previous literary analysis, the Strait of Gibraltar becomes the scene of migrants' attempt to reach Spanish soil, the locus of many hopes, fantasies, and fears. Considered the Achilles's heel at the farthest extremity of Europe (Álvarez 2016: 119), the Strait is a heavily patrolled moat that, in some cases, turns into the final resting place of so many who fail to reach the Spanish coast. The Iberian Peninsula is the intended destination for many migrating from the Western African countries trying to cross the Strait from the Moroccan shore. The geographic proximity between Morocco and Spain has fostered a shared history defined by patterns of occupation and migration: the rise and fall of Al-Andalus, the establishment of the Spanish protectorate over Western Sahara between 1884 and 1975, and the appropriation of Moroccan territories, namely the territories of Ceuta and Melilla, by Spain. These historical events contribute first to an intricate relationship between the two countries, and secondly to current irresolution in the context of unresolved colonial histories. The weight of history is impossible to deny, but it is necessary to reflect on which stories of the past shape the present. Even though the past proves intrusive, its manifestations in the present are erratic and not always easy to determine, which means that the past and the present are not connected in calculable, linear fashion. Nevertheless, many scholars identify the current clandestine migration to Europe as a “soft war” that is both the legacy of colonialism and a consequence of globalization (Weisberg 2016: 133 and Thomas 2012: 269). And yet, in Mediterranean border fiction, the repressed history of colonialism is not always explicit and, in particular, in Miguel Pajares' *Aguas de venganza* (2016) [Waters of revenge], the past remains untold, focusing instead on contemporary migration across the Strait and on issues of border deaths and criminality at sea.

Furthermore, in contrast to the previous novel and the following two the maritime crossing is not specifically described, rather it is rendered invisible, a hauntingly absent presence. Through this subversion, the maritime stretch takes on a renewed symbolic meaning, beyond its relevance as the site in which many migrants have lost their lives. Indeed, contrary to the previous novel in which the Strait of Gibraltar is represented either as both medium and barrier, or as the mirage of Spain and the myth of well-being it invokes, in Pajares' novel the Strait is the place where criminality and disregard for human life are at their highest points. This distinguishing factor impacts upon the depictions of the Mediterranean seascape and migration across it.

⁶⁰ “We let them drown, to disown them” (my own translation).

However, analyzed in the same chapter, *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* and *Waters of revenge*, delineate the ways in which literary productions can evoke the maritime border through tensions between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility.

Clandestine migration has been on the rise since the mid-nineties, when many EU nations implemented the Schengen Agreement to abolish border controls at the mutual borders of the member states and fortify external ones. Efforts to prevent the clandestine maritime crossing has deadly consequences and migrant deaths have become part and parcel of current clandestine migration. Since the early 2000s the Mediterranean basin has been named a “maritime cemetery”, the ultimate resting place of an average of two thousand migrants per year (Brian and Laczko 2016, and Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou 2008: 2). With the unwillingness of recovering or identifying the bodies, the maritime stretch becomes the place where migrants' crossing is interrupted, thereby turning the sea into a mass watery grave where lives are swallowed up. The ongoing death of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea has come to play a fundamental role in the politics of migration and borders. The upsetting presence of corpses after a shipwreck, as well as the haunting absence of those who have drowned and never been found, have stimulated political debates in contradictory ways. As Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani claim, migrants deaths are not only condemned by those demanding justice for the dead and the missing, but also, spectacularized by the authorities to support their securitized border practices (Heller and Pezzani 2018). Deaths at sea are a form of border violence not only because they happen on the maritime border, but because they are considered a marginal kind of violence; an “invisible” violence not because it is hidden, but because even when it is happening, its brutality is easily dismissed. Thus, the maritime stretch turns into the liquid terrain of mobility conflicts: migrants are either detained or let drown *at sea* and *through* a strategic use of the sea. The modalities of border violence are shaped by a strategic use of the maritime environment turned into a liquid deathspace by state intervention. In light of the concept of “geopower” proposed by Elizabeth Grosz (2012) and outlined by Duncan Depledge (2013), the maritime environment is endowed with “forces that precede, enable, facilitate, provoke and restrict life” (Depledge 91). It is manouvred by geopolitical practices that shape the way in which the maritime geopower functions, and therefore affects the ways some people are empowered while others limited by it. In other words, the liquid terrain of the sea has been turned into a device, “enabling a form of killing without touching” (Heller and Pezzani 2018: 2) whereas migrants' death at sea have to be understood as the consequence of necropolitical border practices that highlight the ways in which migrants' lives and deaths have been made to not matter.

It is in this context that, politically committed author Miguel Pajares employs the genre of crime fiction, with its inherent function as a commentary on contemporary political and social context, to register disruptions in the social order, and to seek resolution to questions of morality and injustice that may seem insuperable outside the domain of fiction. *Waters of revenge* presents

a specifically intriguing instance of border fiction. Through the literary conventions of the detective genre — tension, pursuit, and intrigue —, the novel addresses competing conceptions of justice and the meanings attributed to crime and violence at the border; it describes the entanglements between smuggling and corruption in the world of clandestine migration; and tackles issues of criminality and human rights in settings in which multiple readings of statehood and geopolitical powers are at stake. The novel not only focuses on questions of criminality and human rights at the Mediterranean borderscape, but it also explores the experiences of migrants who, caught between death and detention facilities, enter the spiral of the sovereign ban (Agamben 1998) and necropolitical zones of exception (Mbembe 2003), literally a regime of death, as the state applies its bio-power on people's lives by turning human beings into non-subjects and therefore exposing them to a legal suspension of rights and existence.

Set in the Catalan capital of Barcelona, the novel opens with the protagonist, Samuel Montcasa, chief police officer of Barcelona's *mossos de esquadra*, contemplating a crime scene with a drowned child in a swimming pool and his father dead at the pool's edge. Although his case at first seems to concern interpersonal matters, ultimately it is linked to the transnational business⁶¹ of clandestine migration (Andersson 2014). Hence, to resolve the case, the detective is called to sites that show the toll taken by the Mediterranean turbulent waters and is forced to immerse himself into the deep underworld of violence and impunity that fills current migration across the Strait of Gibraltar. Some hints bring him to investigate two Spanish Civil guards who might be involved in the killing of the father and son. In the effort to achieve some evidence, he travels to Tangier and interrogates a survivor of a shipwreck that occurred in the Strait and seems to implicate two Civil guards in puncturing the rafts of fourteen migrants trying to reach Spanish soil. In pursuing some evidence, Samuel is faced with reticence, given that, as an informant suggests, “what happens at the border, stays at the border⁶²” (Pajares 2016: 172 all further quotes are from this edition. The translations are mine. The original passages can be found in the footnotes). To avoid any leaking of evidence “both in Spain and in Morocco, the police and the army are completely protected by the very same judges⁶³” (127), whereas “the secret services of both countries cooperate. The same is done together with the [secret] services of other countries⁶⁴” (84).

At this point of the narrative, Samuel begins to realize that the reality of clandestine

⁶¹ In his ethnographic research on what he defines the “illegality industry”, Andersson claims that this illegality industry “produces what it is meant to eliminate, curtail, or transform – more migrant illegality” (2014: 8), violence, and death. Alongside, the enforcement of the maritime border led to the blossoming industry of migrants' trafficking.

⁶² “Lo que pasa en la frontera, se queda en la frontera” (172).

⁶³ “En España, igual que en Marruecos, a los policías y los militares se os protege todo lo posible de lo jueces” (127).

⁶⁴ “En esto cooperan los servicios secretos de ambos países. Como lo hacen con los servicios de otros países” (84).

migration across the Strait is far more complex than he imagined. The quoted passages point to the extra-official means by which Spanish and EU authorities participate in mobility management outside their jurisdiction and emphasize the concealed and doubtful legality of these practices. Also, they imply a remapping of complicity in migrants' deterrence and eventual disappearance since the practices of mobility prevention are both covert and outside national territory. Thus, these forms of migrants' interdiction allow nation-states to elude the obligation to uphold national and international human rights standards. As will be further analyzed in the present literary analysis, the extraterritorial border management is a vital aspect of the novel's plot and its consequences are addressed both throughout Samuel's investigation and through the detective genre's trope of exposing police corruption.

Along with the uncovering of doubtful border enforcement practices, Samuel unveils many dark aspects about clandestine migration: “there is no way way to apply for asylum in a country unless you enter it⁶⁵” (114). To enter it, migrants have two main options: either climb the barbed wire fence in Ceuta, which is surveilled from both sides, and is “high [...] with spikes and blades, dangerous and impassable⁶⁶” (115), or board “the *patera*⁶⁷, that brings you directly to the Peninsula, even if a lot of people die in the Strait. And it costs one thousand Euro per person⁶⁸” (118). The sea route, with its hazards, replaces the land route — over Ceuta and Melilla — that is infinitely less perilous but not longer available, since legal avenues to enter Spain are difficult to achieve⁶⁹. Another option is to swim from the Moroccan closest beach to the Spanish territorial waters that bound Ceuta. However, this option is one of the most dangerous since the coastal guards, who intercept swimming migrants, either bring them back to Moroccan soil or puncture their floats and let them drown (120)⁷⁰. The quoted passages highlight not only the hypocrisy of the asylum system (Lavenex 2018) that requires a person to be already inside the country in order to submit an application for asylum, thereby forcing migrants to undertake perilous journey, but

⁶⁵ “No hay forma de pedir asilo en un país si no es entrando en él” (114).

⁶⁶ “la valla es alta [...] con pinchos, cuchillas, peligrosa, infranqueable” (115).

⁶⁷ Initially, *patera*, referred to a small vessel with a flat bottom propelled either by oars or by an outboard motor. Such small boat was used for fishing at close distance from the coast or for hunting ducks (*pato* means *duck* in Spanish). For a discussion of the ways in which the meaning of the term has changed, see Ezquerro (2000).

⁶⁸ “la patera, que te lleva directamente a la península, aunque muere mucha gente en el estrecho. Y cuesta unos mil euros por persona” (118).

⁶⁹ Before Spain's accession to the Schengen treaty in 1991, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on Moroccan territory were hindrance-free. After the joining of the EU, barriers around the enclaves were built. In the same year, visa requirements were introduced for Moroccan migrants in order to enter Spain (De Haas 2007).

⁷⁰ In this point, the novel seems to make a reference to actual facts outside fiction: since 2005, border controls on clandestine migration coming through Melilla and Ceuta have been tightened with severe results. An example is the deaths at Tarajal in 2014, where local police fired rubber bullets at nearly 200 sub-Saharan migrants who had been floating for hours at sea while attempting to enter Spain, at least fourteen people died and twenty-three were sent back to Morocco by Spanish Civil Guards (Rodríguez Ortiz 2016: 85).

also the violent repression executed by the border patrol and the complete lack of human rights protection. They also address what Gilberto Rosas defines the “managed violence” (2006: 401) of current border policies that force migrants to the most perilous points for the maritime crossing. Such managed violence depends on the portrayal of the Mediterranean Sea as *mare nullius* — an empty space —, where supposedly unscrupulous human traffickers expose migrants to unpredictable dangers. The construction of *mare nullius* conceals the overlapping jurisdictional regimes that structure responsibilities, such as rescue and disembarkation, at sea. In this way, the construction of the Mediterranean basin as an empty and ungovernable space gives a justification for EU border authorities when migrants die at sea. This strategy of creating an imagined maritime geography empty of actors, power relations and, thus, responsibilities, obscures the complicity of EU policies in migrant deaths. Alongside the creation of the maritime basin as an empty imagined space in order to elude responsibilities for the deaths of migrants, the sea is also turned into a seemingly inherently exceptional and perilous space requiring EU intervention.

The Mediterranean border is the site of interlacing sovereign powers — those of the littoral nations, but also those superimposed on them in the form of the EU border regime and its agencies. Through externalization, the border regime displaces the space of risk and death for migrants. The intended consequence is to remove the chance of dying from the doorsteps of Europe to North African countries — such as Libya and Morocco — where abduction, violence, and abuse against migrants are the rule (Amnesty International 2015). The fences around Ceuta and Melilla express the materiality of the Mediterranean border. These *new Pillars of Hercules* control the mobility flow; they are an extension of Spain, and thus Europe, within Moroccan territory as well as an externalization of the EU management of clandestine migration. They are an example of the “interpenetration between Africa *in* Europe and Europe *in* Africa” (Thomas 2013: 163 italics in original). Even though Moroccan authorities are not recognized by the EU, they act as auxiliaries in the border management by patrolling the enclaves' fences and periodically burning down the migrant campsites in the forest on the Moroccan side. The outsourcing of migration control to Morocco in order to preempt clandestine border-crossing indicates that the Strait of Gibraltar and the enclaves present a geo-racial form of exclusion — invariably via the bio-politics of race — that has shaped and shapes language and practices of governance. As long as migration is restrained in the Maghreb it is considered pre-empted and, therefore, the externalization of border control is an effort to “stretch the border” suggesting that the definition of the border does not refer to the geopolitical limit but to the management practices directed at preventing clandestine flows.

As mentioned by Samuel's informant, security practices within and beyond the Mediterranean Sea are increasingly carried out secretly, occurring in situations and sites where the limits between legal and illegal, licit and illicit, blur, and the nested scales of national and global no longer hold (Mezzadra and Neilson 2020: xxiii). In such ambiguous “exceptional”

borderscapes, discrimination and injustice are expressed not only through border deaths but also through preemptive mobility practices. As the informant in Tangier suggests to the detective, “all European countries fail to observe the Geneva Convention [...] The walls that the refugees crash against, are not the fences but the agreements that European nations have with their neighboring countries, so that their police prevent [the migrants] to reach the border⁷¹” (129). It is not only the perilous maritime crossing that represents an obstacle for the migrants, but also the invisible barriers which are scattered throughout the world. One of these is the set of preemptive strategies employed to restrict migrants' flows. This modality of border enforcement aims at restraining the passage and to redirect the flow through violence. And, even though the use of violence is defined in political discourses as an imperative and inevitable reaction for the “safeguarding” of EU citizens and for the protection of migrants against drowning, it is the very border regime that creates border violence. The border is the site of the founding violence of the sovereign power.

And yet, some scholars refer to the practice of migrants' border crossing as a form of resistance, wherein the border is understood as a space of struggle and of refusal of the order of things; a space where “migrants openly challenge, defeat, escape or trouble the dominant politics of mobility” (Tazzioli et al., 2015: 80). According to this line of thought, migratory counter strategies, which include borders' transgressions, embody and consolidate the possibility for ruptures, “open[ing] a new continent of political possibilities, a space within which new kinds of political subjects [...] can trace their movements and multiply their powers” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013b: 13-14). These interpretations of migrants' struggles, resistance and agency are very important and cannot be denied. However, it must be acknowledged that the migratory movement across the Strait often claims the lives of the migrants. For those who attempt the crossing by boat, the perilous journey turns into a tragedy, and their bodies “are buried in this huge mass grave that is the Mediterranean⁷²” (124). Despite the proliferation of security practices and technologies deployed along coastlines and at sea, the sea has been turned into a watery grave for many people who undertake the maritime crossing. The sea, far from being the locus of “untamed natural forces with the romantic idea of freedom” (Mackenthun 2014: 55), dreams of adventure and sublime horror, is a material and physical place that is subdivided into different contact zones, arenas of cultural encounters and conflicts, and physical death. Throughout *Waters of revenge*, by inferring rather than describing the deaths at sea, the migrant bodies become an absent presence, a spectral force haunting not only the maritime seascape but also internal cities, like Barcelona, where the novel opens. The maritime stretch is where the bodies of many are concealed, suggesting both that the sea is in part responsible for the migrants' lack of visibility, and that it functions as a spectral reminder of the efforts endured by those migrants whose

⁷¹ “Los muros contra los que chocan los refugiados no son sólo las vallas, los más insalvables son los acuerdos que los estados europeos tienen con los países vecinos para que sus policías impidan que lleguen a la frontera” (128).

⁷² “están enterrados en esa enorme fosa común que es el Mediterráneo” (124).

crossing has been successful. In addition, the parallelism between the sea and the graveyard filled with unclaimed bodies echoes the thoughts of cultural theorist Laviosa, for whom the sea is not only a space where power imbalances are articulated but also a repository for the continent's unwanted (Laviosa 2010).

Indifference to migrants' rights violations fuels atrocities and impunity. Samuel is faced with the silence and the intentional withholding of pieces of evidence, such as the employment of rubber bullets by the Spanish force to deter migrants and the fact that a civil guard crushed the hands of migrants trying to climb on the rocks, while other guards punctured the raft of a man and let him drown few meters from the coast. The concealment of these violations makes the detective wonder the reason why “none of this appeared in the investigation⁷³” (173). The cover-up of the illegal behavior of border patrol colleagues or of some important evidence can be linked directly to the activities of crime syndicates (Jancsics 2019: 409), thereby declaring that border authorities are criminal actors. Empty handed and on his way back to Barcelona, Samuel ponders his own obligations as police officer: “[h]e always thought he was doing his police work well and that he was doing it for the society, but now he suspected that everything was about keeping a *status quo* in which huge injustice had free rein⁷⁴” (italics in original 129). Despite Samuel's efforts to do his job well, he is inevitably part of the corruption/injustice that exists in the system; it thus should come as no surprise that, throughout his investigation, his ability to find the perpetrator(s) is limited. The failure of the detective is not a simple matter of corruption or ineptitude on the part of individuals or of the police, but it is instead systemic: no one is exclusively to blame, the problem is structural, and the system is flawed. Samuel also wonders :

and if the thirty thousand shipwreck victims who died in the Mediterranean [...] were also murders? [...] And what was going on with those who died at the fences in Ceuta and Melilla? Wasn't there any responsibility to investigate? How was possible that death of Mamadou Segá [a relative of the informant] was left unpunished? Even though the civil guards were following orders, somebody must have been charged⁷⁵ (129).

In this quotation, Samuel shows that he is dazed about the fact that certain persons can be deprived of their rights, that no action committed against them can appear as a violation, and that nobody is found responsible for their deaths. Moreover, the passage stresses the fact that, so perversely, European power lies in its ability to let individuals die through ignoring and systemic

⁷³ “Eso no ha aparecido en la investigación” (173).

⁷⁴ “Él siempre pensó que hacía bien su labor policial y que la hacía para beneficio de la sociedad, pero ahora tenía la sospecha de que todo se reducía a mantener un *status quo* en el que campaban a sus anchas unas injusticias monumentales” (italics in original 129).

⁷⁵ ¿y si los treinta mil naufragos que habían muerto en el Mediterráneo [...] fueran también homicidios? [...] ¿Y qué pasaba con todos los que habían muerto en las vallas de Ceuta y Melilla? ¿No había ahí ninguna responsabilidad homicida que investigar? ¿Y cómo era posible que la muerte de Mamdou Segá quedara impune? Aunque los guardias civiles cumplieran órdenes, alguien debería haber sido imputado” (129).

overlooking of those who attempt to arrive at Europe's shores, as well as fostering indifference toward them. The aim pursued via control practices is not to prove some ideal impenetrability of the border, or to make the crossings unfeasible, knowing that they will happen anyway. It is rather to determine whether and by what margin the maritime route will be taken, with which mortality rate; whether and on what condition a person is rescued — or permitted to be rescued — so that the management of mobility flow, including the implied decision to let live or let drown, is considered admissible. The unwillingness to rescue migrants raises questions about who is granted rights to mobility, and who is rejected and consigned to a form of (im)mobility.

Border violence is perpetuated with impunity and the phenomenon of border deaths combines the fatal consequences of militarization of borders, externalization of them, the use of questionable strategies (push-backs operations), and the criminalization of assistance. It leads to the understanding of the state not just as a rule maker and enforcer but also as a breaker of its own rules, which suggests that the authorities who determine and shape the law are those whose activities ought to be criminalized. These considerations paradoxically lead to several questions. How can there be a suspect when the criminal activity is systematic in scale? To what extent is the state willing to investigate the crimes for which it might be indicted? What happens when it is no longer possible to localize violence within the bounded territory of a state? What happens when violence is not specifically locatable? If questions must be posed about the state's legitimacy, such inquiries should also extend, in the context of transnational crime and securitization, to the border regime's networks. Samuel's thoughts expose the relationship among border deaths, migration policies, and state impunity, stressing that border practices are directly responsible for the escalating numbers of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean. Those who died in the crossing are portrayed as *necro-figures* (Mbembe 2003) — persons who can be injured or killed without repercussion — since the suspension of laws results in stripping persons of their rights as citizen for protection. As a consequence, acts of violence and injustice towards them are no longer seen as crimes punishable by law. However, through the words of the detective, the drowned bodies at sea turn from being traces of border violence to subjects of law. Samuel ponders the meaning of these deaths, not so much from the event of the shipwreck, but rather from the ethical and political point of the right to migrate. Such change of approach — from bodies to persons of rights — makes visible the invisibility of their deaths and questions the restrictions applied to mobility flows: instead of describing the event and the horrors of the shipwreck in itself, it reveals something that is invisible, “something that precisely has no 'natural' image — inhumanity, the process of negating humanity” (Rancière 2014: 49).

While discussing recent findings with a colleague, Samuel exposes his moral issues about the investigation and about the broader topic of migration: “how is it possible that the same Europeans, who flaunt about their democratic societies, could show so much cruelty towards

persons who are looking for a place to have a decent life⁷⁶” (204). And, above all “[h]ow did the Europeans reach the point to believe to have the right to convert their territory into a fortress surrounded by wire fences? [...] Why [in the case of migrants] is the application of human rights ignored?⁷⁷” (205). Samuel's words conjure up the invisibility of migrants in front of the law and their non-political essence, as if they have fallen into a political loophole. His queries point not only to the geopolitics of the “Fortress Europe” but also to the biopolitics of bordering practices and the inherently biopolitical quality of the security regime. The colleague replies that if the same actions were executed against other persons, the authority would be considered a criminal, whereas against migrants, the evidence is just ignored. Samuel is perplexed by this statement. However, the colleague continues, explaining “our society is provided with the necessary metaphors for it. We talk about the deaths at the border like they were fatalities; the crimes appear to be accidental facts originated by the inevitable task of protecting the border. And the result is that in few cases they [the deaths] are investigated⁷⁸” (210). Injustice follows migrants even in death. Border containment practices are the cause not only of recorded deaths but also of the “disappearance” of migrants. To travel undetected, many migrants become untraceable even when they die during their journey. For European border authorities, they are unrecorded deaths. When corpses are found, the number of deaths often remains vague because it is impossible to confirm the number of migrants on a vessel. Paradoxically, the proliferating surveillance, and the counting and mapping methods that mirror the governmentalization of the Mediterranean Sea, are counterpointed by the disappearance of many migrants. This “paradox” tackles the assumption of the Mediterranean as a “transparent” sea, exposing the uneven visibility that is at play and the presence of shadow zones. Border deaths are the inevitable consequence, not the side effect, of the visa regime that reinforces and magnifies asymmetries in the working and effects of the maritime border. The unrecorded deaths at sea and the “disappearance” of bodies point to the fact that for those who die in the effort to reach the opposite shore, their life is uncounted. No longer alive but not dead either, they are strangers even to that vague space between existence and nonexistence.

Samuel's queries and his colleague's answers point first to the double paradox to the leading principles of EU: whilst the EU is founded on a concept of free and open movement internally, it has progressively been characterized externally by its commitment to exclude non-citizens from accessing its territory. Secondly, they bespeak the absence of EU normative power

⁷⁶ “cómo era posible que los mismos europeos, que tanto presumían de sus sociedades democráticas, pudieran ejercer tanta crueldad con personas que lo único que buscan es un lugar en el que tener una vida digna” (204).

⁷⁷ “¿Cómo habían llegado los europeos a creerse con el derecho de convertir su territorio en una fortaleza rodeada de alambradas? [...] Por qué con ellos se prescindía de la aplicación de esos derechos humanos?” (205).

⁷⁸ “nuestra sociedad se ha dotado de las metáforas necesarias para ello. Se habla de las muertes que se producen en la frontera como si fueran fruto de la fatalidad; los crímenes aparecen como hechos accidentales derivados de una labor de protección fronteriza que es inevitable” (210).

— founded on the premise that human rights are to be regarded independent of any political consideration (Manners 2008) — when it comes to migrants' deaths at the maritime border. In this framework, the Mediterranean border performs an important function in security discourse since it defines the limit between security and insecurity as well as a “biopolitical distinction between life that (literally) counts [...] and life that does not” (Boyce 2012: 71). The maritime border has become an entangled liquid net from which migrants hardly escape — one that subsequently defines who is to cross/survive and who is to stop/perish. This situation brings to mind Mbembe's “Necropolitics”, a politics practiced by imposing death on people. In his articulation of the notion of *necropolitics*, the political theorist examines the enactment of sovereignty in cases in which “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population” (Mbembe 2003: 14) are the final intentions of power, rather than autonomy. In this sense, necropolitics is concerned with how life is subjugated to the power of death. Therefore, rather than indicating how life and death are both structuring aspects of power, necropolitics interrogates the asymmetrical conditioning of who gets to live and who must die. Necropolitics thereby discloses how certain persons are cultivated for life and (re)production whereas others are marked for death, creating a shifting limit between those deemed “legitimate” and those branded as “illegitimate”.

Metaphors matter, especially when it comes to migration. Considering them figures of thought as much as figures of speech (Steuter and Wills 2008: 7), they are fundamental components in the structuring of conceptual systems, providing frames that make concepts understandable. The semantic machinery that creates the definition of migrants and border deaths, just as it similarly produces definition of the Mediterranean Sea, is never neutral. Metaphors that parallel border deaths to fatalities are at their most effective when they pass unremarked into the language, thus remaining uncontested. As Bourdieu (1986) wisely says, “the fate of groups is bound up with the words that designate them”, (480-81); the language that is employed to chronicle clandestine migration has consequences on how the issue is perceived. As Samuel's colleague observes:

the language that it is employed [in referring to migration] has a lot to do with the fact that for immigrants and refugees the application of human rights is not the same as for our citizens. We talk about immigration in terms of flood, invasion, massive assault ... We always refer to it employing metaphors that indicate danger or threat, so that we see it as if it were something from which we need to protect and defend us⁷⁹. (212)

The metaphors invoke a sense of destruction as this uncontrollable mass enters the

⁷⁹ “el lenguaje que se utiliza tiene mucho que ver con el hecho de que a los inmigrantes y los refugiados no les apliquemos los estándares de derechos humanos que sí aplicamos a nuestros ciudadanos. Hablamos de la inmigración con términos como avalancha, invasión, asalto masivo ... Siempre nos referimos a ella con metáforas que indican peligro o amenaza, y así la vemos como algo de lo que debemos protegernos y defendernos” (212).

country. In particular, the usage of threatening marine figures — for example, flood— in connection with migration reinforces the idea of a calamity from which it is hard to escape. Metaphors employing water imagery suggest something “out of control”: the underworld/underwater that rises and overwhelms, generating fears of invasion. Even though, these figures and other “invasion” narratives are often based on hypotheses rather than actual numbers (Carr 2012: 22), their employment “permits us to justify the cruelty with which we treat these persons, or at least it helps us to look at the other side⁸⁰” (212).

In sharp contrast to the increasing media coverage of rescue and interception operations, and of shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea, a remarkable reticence and silence surround the dead bodies of those who die in the effort to reach Europe. This phenomenon is part of the broader securitization discourse surrounding migration: living migrants are considered as a threat to security whereas dead migrants are ignored and their death is circumscribed by legal and bureaucratic ambiguity (Kovras and Robins 2016: 42). The corpses of those dispersed at sea are the “marqueurs de la frontière” [border markers] that reveal the power of sovereignty and, at the same time, prove the geopolitical violence of the space of exception at sea (Ritaine 2015: 118). These corpses are the disturbing trace of the “deadly prevented from entering” (Albahari 2006: 27) and they are either ignored or considered “non-events” (Ritaine 2015: 118).

In this light, the maritime border turns into a force of exclusive inclusion marked by violence. In the latter respect, violence is not an unintentional feature of the border, but its unavoidable product. As Jones (2016) claims in his book, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, “borders and lines on maps are not a representation of preexisting differences between peoples and places; they create those differences” (166) and the hardening of the border through security practices is the origin of violence, not a response to it (ibid: 5). Yet, *Waters of Revenge* does not present a locatable source for the violence it seeks to grapple with. Instead, violence turns into a force in itself; it permeates the sea and the land in its movements; and similarly, it becomes indistinguishable for those who perform it as well as those who are victims to it. The continuous and repetitive flow of violence does not carry a graphic mark that can be pinpointed, but it constructs a space in which death and a “culture of violence” are enmeshed. Violence is not static; rather, it is so malleable and fluctuating that it cannot be spatially bounded: it moves from the mass graves at the bottom of the Mediterranean to the transcontinental fences of migrant detention and into the identitarian trenches of national public sphere. It is omnipresent, yet not localizable, beyond grasp.

As a form of control, differentiation, filtering, the maritime border becomes an instrument of death while unrecognized bodies at the border sink into oblivion and invisibility. Migration policies play a role in determining who dies, where and how. However, in public opinion, these

⁸⁰ “nos permite justificar la crueldad con la que tratamos a esas personas, o al menos nos ayuda a mirar otro lado” (212).

border deaths are the immanent consequence of natural conditions (the roughness of the sea surface), or, what has been called, the migrants' aspirations and risk-taking behaviors (Cutitta and Last 2019: 11) and the ruthlessness of migrant traffickers. Presenting border deaths as accidental or as the consequence of the “irresponsible” behavior of migrants, signifies diverting the focus from the direct impact of border enforcement on migrant mortality, by reproducing the given policy framework, without offering a different approach on human mobility and therefore prevent border deaths. In other words, as Samuel's colleague adds “instead of seeing migrants and refugees as persons who flee from misery or conflicts, we see them as either recruited or deceived/tricked by the [traffickers'] mafia⁸¹” (212). So, migrants are depicted both as a threat and as victims of ruthless traffickers. Therefore, on one side, the international political response to clandestine migration attempts to curb migration; on the other, such response paradoxically promotes rescue operations at sea with a rhetoric of salvation. The previous elucidations highlight that, faced with migration and drownings at sea, one should also consider the critical and political responsibilities of the language in shaping historical processes and apparatuses of power. In unpacking the semantic machinery around the topic of migration, it is feasible to uncover the very mechanisms of knowledge and power that have legitimated the present state of things. In addition, it should be stated that crossing the maritime stretch through traffickers is an illegalized border-crossing on the way to find refuge in the absence of legal means of migrating, and it is this very absence that permits a business for the services of the traffickers to emerge⁸². Corruption and border enforcement are related disclosing the gap between the state's authority to restrict movement it defines as illegal and its direct involvement in producing this category of movement; the very border enforcement devoted to curb migration is nonetheless essential to the success of migrants' trafficking business. As will be shown also in the following chapter, the Mediterranean Sea constitutes both a key space where limits and border enforcement are proliferating, and a site where humanitarianized and militarized forms of border governance coexist. The framing of the Mediterranean as a space requiring both humanitarian and military interventions reproduces neo-colonial practices in a sense that the EU is designated as the problem-solver tasked with resolving the “migration issue”. The military-humanitarian interventions at sea conceptualizes Europe as a unified and singular actor with both humanitarian and militaristic dispositions. The two tendencies are not mutually exclusive since they both constitute the neo-colonial heading of Europe. As Fassin suggests, the exercise of humanitarian compassion is “always directed from above to below, from the more powerful to the weaker, the more fragile, the more vulnerable -those who

⁸¹ “en lugar de ver a los inmigrantes y los refugiados como personas que huyen de a miseria o los conflictos los vemos como personas reclutadas y engañadas por las mafias” (212).

⁸² Here, it is important to note that, in term of clandestine migration across the Strait, the business of transporting migrants has become more profitable, and less risky, than drug trade. This kind of trafficking include both Spanish and Moroccan networks that act from bases in Spain, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, networks within the Kingdom of Morocco, and generally through partner networks in a western African country such as Mali or Niger (Law 2014: 140).

can generally be constituted as victims of an overwhelming fate” (2012: 4). Thus, in its focus on the saving of lives, humanitarianism at sea creates a hierarchy of life, and “hides” behind its salvation rhetoric an important aspect in the discourse around clandestine migration: the necessity of legalized ways of mobility.

While seeking to unveil the identity of the murder, Samuel's investigation becomes more complicated when the corpses of Florencio and Arcadi, the two Spanish coast guards who were first accused of murder, are found. The murder method for Florencio resembles the murder method for the father and the son at the beginning of the novel: “what has been done to Florencio Roca looks like what has been done to Hammed Benali and his son, mostly for the water [part]⁸³” (157). Indeed, at the sight of the corpses, Samuel observes that Florencio drowned at the stream next to his house, wearing a punctured life preserver, whereas the hands of Arcadi “were smashed, like crushed with a hammer, or a stone, or a shotgun's butt⁸⁴” (241). At this very moment, he understands that the crimes under investigation not only emulate others committed years before but they are also “macabre representations of crimes committed against migrants” (243)⁸⁵. Drowning is the pattern that connects the first murder and Florencio's, and, as Samuel observes, “there is an obviously intentional symbolic load [...] as there was in the murder of Hammed and his son. And a particular cruelty is evident: victims are allowed to know how [their lives] will end intensify their suffering⁸⁶” (171). Water links the three homicides, echoing “deaths at sea⁸⁷” (252) and “what is happening at the Southern border [...] the numerous unpunished crimes⁸⁸” (268). Water, and therefore the sea, plays a role both in the crimes investigated by Samuel and in the broader issue of maritime border violence. It conceals the traces of criminal practices and compromises pieces of evidence, which are inescapably destined to come to the surface. The aquatic element is a life-threatening force; it is both a means through which the border patrol exercises violence and an instrument of revenge, thereby determining the agential power of water as the vehicle for both border crimes and the murders Samuel is investigating. Therefore, water does not only take on a particular violent quality but also a characteristic wrath; it turns malicious and vindictive.

In light of the new evidence, both the submerged crimes committed by the border police and those committed throughout the narrative emerge. Samuel uncovers the links that connect

⁸³ “lo que han hecho a Florencio Roca se parece un poco a lo que les hicieron a Hammed Benali y a su hijo, más que nada por lo del agua” (157).

⁸⁴ “[e]staban destrozadas, como machacadas con un martillo, o una piedra, o la culata de una escopeta” (241).

⁸⁵ “macabras representaciones de crímenes anteriores” (265).

⁸⁶ “[h]ay una carga simbólica claramente intencionada [...], como la hubo en la forma de asesinar a Hammed y a su hijo. Y vuelve a apreciarse especial crueldad: se hace saber a las víctimas cómo será su final para intensificar su sufrimiento” (171).

⁸⁷ “muertes en el mar” (252).

⁸⁸ “lo que pasa en la frontera sur [...] cuántos crímenes impunes” (268).

them and consequently resolves to question the only person that he never even considered to identify as the murderer, one of his first informants for the crime committed against the father and the son: Ibra, the Senegalese man who, to put Samuel on the false track and obtain from him the names of the two Spanish guards, had pretended to have been Hammed's psychologist. It is at this point of the narrative that Samuel understands that the crimes he is investigating are acts of revenge committed against border guards who in the novel are responsible for migrants' deaths. Nonetheless, the detective connects the dots only towards the end while, throughout the novel and during his investigation, he is brought from one "migrant crime scene" to another by the sophisticated arranging of Ibra.

Samuel goes to Ibra's office. As soon as the detective opens the door, Ibra confesses: "[t]he only thing that kept me alive was my desire for revenge. I started dying a day in September 2008 when Hammed Benali murdered my wife Khady and son Jimmy⁸⁹" (272). His confession reveals also that Arcadi crushed the hands of his sister's husband, and Florencio punctured the raft of his best friend, causing death. That is why "[w]ith the deaths of Florencio and Arcadi, [his] vengeance is complete⁹⁰" (ibid). Ibra explains to Samuel that he only felt a desire for revenge when all official ways to discover and punish the offenders, who perpetuated the crimes against his family and friends, did not present themselves for legal institutions to prosecute. Indeed, the authorities on both sides of the Strait are quick in making any evidence disappear, whereas any crime committed against migrants is dismissed and ignored since "no officials would testify by saying who punctured [the boat]⁹¹" (274). He then reveals that since "there was no possible justice for [his] loved ones, [his] mind filled up with hatred and resentment⁹²" (275). Ibra's revelation discloses that corruption is rampant and that many officers are involved in concealing information regarding deaths at sea. His actions are expressions of absolute justice, and his argument is the usual one that is employed to excuse such actions: that the system is so corrupt that there is little probability, if any at all, that the criminals will ever be made to pay for their crimes and the harm to others these have caused. His "search for justice" and his return of harm for harm through revenge is an intimate/personal action, implying a sort of revolt against authority, thereby undermining official justice. His search for justice also discloses his broader commitment of disseminating "the crimes that are committed at the border, [so that] the atrocities at the border would come to light [...] In this way, he will do justice, not only to [his] dear ones, but also to the

⁸⁹ "Lo único que me mantenía vivo era mi deseo de venganza. Yo empecé a morir un día de septiembre del 2008 en el que Hammed Benali asesinó a mi mujer Khady y a mi hijo Jimmy" (272).

⁹⁰ "[c]on las muertes de Florencio y de Arcadi mi venganza ha concluido" (272).

⁹¹ "ningún militar testificaría diciendo quién la pinchó" (274).

⁹² "no había justicia posible para [sus] seres queridos, [su] mente se llenaba de inquina y resentimiento" (275).

rest of the migrants and refugees who die at the borders of your fortress⁹³” (277).

Ibra's revenge exposes the organized hypocrisy (Cusumano 2019) about the normalization of border deaths: while border deaths should be the exception, they have become the way through which mobility is governed. One of the consequences of such mobility strategy is that restrictive border policies lead to an indifference towards violence at sea and border deaths (Basaran 2015). Ibra uses violence to confront the unequal distribution of power and balance the scales of justice, but this is pointless to Samuel, who declares that he has just added his crimes to those that others have committed. To such accusation, Ibra replies

You are wrong. You talk about judgment and right of defense, but you don't consider that this official and institutional justice does not reach everywhere. In these weeks you got to know about the huge amount of crimes that are committed at the border, crimes which are committed by the members of the law enforcement [...] How many of these crimes have been brought to trial? How many police officers [...] are accused for these crimes? There are areas where the institutional justice does not reach [...] So, the question that I lay out for you is quite easy: isn't it fair that the victims try to impart justice by their own where there are no institutions doing it?⁹⁴ (278-9)

What lies beneath Ibra's revelation is the question concerning the reasons why the law enforcement agencies' priorities are defending the authorities' integrity rather than valuing human life. The *lex talionis* or principle of retributive justice employed by Ibra does not predicate actions of random retaliation; his acts of violence are in response to some “evil” done to him and on behalf of the persons close to him who can no longer seek justice for themselves. Ibra's acts of vengeance, motivated by his inability to find satisfactory justice within the jurisdictional system, point to the belief that wrongs deserve to be punished and vindicated. For Ibra, the use of violence in response to a perceived harm is required to balance the scales of justice, insofar as it is infused with the belief that those who hurt others deserve to be hurt in return. The point is not to define revenge as either barbaric or as a core value⁹⁵ but to emphasize the (im)proper use of violence to confront the unequal distribution of power. The morally ambiguous behaviors of both Ibra and the border guards draw attention to the fact that moral values are in decline in both public and social

⁹³ “los crímenes que se cometen en la frontera. [así que] las atrocidades de la frontera saldrían a la luz [...] Así haría justicia, no sólo con [sus] seres queridos, sino también con todos los demás inmigrantes y refugiados que mueren en las fronteras de vuestra fortaleza” (277).

⁹⁴ “En eso te equivocas. Hablas de juicio y de derecho a la defensa, pero no tienes en cuenta que esa justicia oficial e institucional no llega a todas partes. En estas semanas has podido saber la enorme cantidad de crímenes que se cometen en la frontera, crímenes que cometen los miembros de los cuerpos de seguridad [...] ¿Cuántos de esos crímenes han sido juzgados? ¿Cuántos policías [...] están condenados por esos crímenes? Hay terrenos a los que la justicia institucional no llega. De modo que la cuestión que yo te planteo es bien sencilla: ¿allá donde no hay instituciones que impartan justicia, no es lícito que las víctimas traten de impartirla por su cuenta?” (278-9).

⁹⁵ For a deep analysis of revenge as either irrational or as a core value, see Rokeach (1973) and Stein (2019).

life. In a society that is deteriorating into a condition of moral crisis, institutional authority is no longer felt to be trustworthy, thereby leading to the perception that the system is failing. If the system is fallible and if culprits are to be brought to justice, legal justice needs to be supplemented by individual actions outside the domain of law. In his confession, Ibra claims that he took justice into his own hands because legal justice will never be executed, as no one would ever be found guilty of the migrants' deaths at sea. His response is, nevertheless, understood as moral, rather than legal justice, since his actions are executed outside the limits of the law.

The end of the novel takes on a dark tone and closure of some kind remains a seemingly unachievable ideal: Samuel is unable to both answer Ibra's question in relation to the culpability of the system and to see a killer in him. However, he carries out his duty: he states Ibra's rights, leaves the room, and allows the officers detain him. The novel concludes with Ibra's arrest Samuel's realization that he has stumbled over more crimes than the ones he was appointed to solve. Despite Ibra's arrest and expected punishment for his crimes, Samuel knows that “nobody would pay for all the others⁹⁶” (280). For Samuel the pursue of justice, in contexts where intra-governance management of migration is entwined with indifference, is an impossible venture. Even though the ending speaks for the need for the assignation of criminal culpability that accounts for the suffering referred to throughout the novel, Samuel's final words express profound pessimism both about the execution of justice — because there is not one murderer, but many — and about the possibilities of any change within the migration system. What the ending makes clear is the lack of viable options in responding to the issue of harm and crimes, when those who are victimized are vulnerable and those responsible so very powerful. Nevertheless, even though the ending addresses Samuel's ultimate failure in uncovering “all the other crimes”; his apparent failure can be generative in the respect that his investigation offers a glimpse into the (dis)functionings of the migratory regime, uncovering its effects. Indeed, even if the novel does not offer any possible solutions, its engagement with the topic of border deaths opens up a crack in the system.

Waters of Revenge cannot provide political solutions. As Jacques Rancière in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010) aptly reminds, aesthetic productions must account for their powerlessness; “aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity. That is why those who want to isolate it from politics are somewhat beside the point. It is also why those who want to fulfill its political promises are condemned to a certain melancholy” (Rancière 2010: 141). However, the failing of Samuel's ambitions as detective is not without a positive outcome: it opens up a crack in the border regime. Through this crack in the system, it is possible to see gaps, omissions, and anomalies and to raise a criticism against the system upholding the migration regime. Such a system also includes the readership as implicated in it, since the *veil of ignorance* — where everybody in the EU find themselves “safe”

⁹⁶ “nadie pagaría por todos los demás” (280).

— is also part of the mechanism. What the novel suggests is that moral responsibility for criminal acts lies not just with the perpetrator(s) but with the state institutions and with those others who might consider themselves, or be considered, as innocent.

The novel confronts the readership with the maritime border as a space of violence and death and it reflects on fiction's potential of its own complicity scaping the border and — by positioning the literary production within the dispositive. Through retrieval of stories and consequences of border crimes, the novel redefines the meaning of the Mediterranean border. In *Waters of revenge* the fictional space of the sea becomes an archive of narratives and a fluid repository of submerged lives where official explanations of border casualties interact with a distinct narrative of border crimes, public negligence, and injustice. In light of that, rather than simply employing crime fiction as a means of finding border criminality's consequences, *Waters of Revenge* manipulates the literary genre to provide a sort of analysis of the geopolitical conditions that exacerbate them and to question the moral legitimacy of both the law and policing. Not only does the novel posit its audience as moral witnesses to the ongoing crimes happening at the Mediterranean border but also raises many questions and leaves them unanswered. Whose rights are at issue, and which injustice is to be confronted? At what point can a person be held accountable for his/her crimes? Are the migrants' deaths occurring in the Mediterranean a crime? And if they are, who is responsible for them? Could a person who witnesses a crime be charged with complicity for not assisting the victim? What happens when the society displays the same behavior but nevertheless there is no charge because it is not even considered a criminal negligence? Are we all guilty? And if so, of what? The novel does not simply ask who is culpable, but dares to ask if anyone is not.

By starting with the first crime and pursuing connections between officers, individuals and institutions until “the bigger picture” comes to light, the author employs the conventions of crime fiction for the purpose of enabling the reader to comprehend the wider implications of the border regime. In doing so, Pajares, defines border crimes not as events that can be tackled and punished by the force of the state — since some of the officers are also perpetrators of the crimes — but as part of a diffuse and pervasive system where the detective is powerless to intervene. Even though the detective eventually finds the culprit of the three murders, he does not achieve closure on the dilemma that the novel sets up as the kernel of the investigation. The reader is left with the sense that those responsible have somehow escaped justice. What the novel achieves is, however, to denounce the fatal consequences of the Mediterranean border regime and its crimes and, by narrating them, it posits reading as “a form of detection” (Scaggs 2005: 74) thereby discerning the oppressive bordering taking place at sea. By doing so, the novel leads the readers to reflect on issues of migration, crime, and border enforcement, and despite the apparent failure of the detective, it represents an attempt to shed light to the violent aspect of the Mediterranean border regime. Also, in tracing the conditions that transform migrants from persons of rights to

homo sacer – a person who might be killed without impunity – the novel offers a richly layered and troubling scrutiny of migrants' precarity.

Novels of this kind are to be appreciated as an incentive to the debate about the state of the migration situation and the ideologies prevailing in it. In a time in which the constant transmission of mass-mediated images of shipwrecks and migrants at sea diminishes their impact on the spectator, literature can lead to a greater reflection on these issues and a questioning of hegemonic discourses. Pajares takes crime fiction to a new level in its confrontation with moral dilemmas of our time, where the frustration of the detective figure leads to a failure of faith in the country's institutional systems that can initiate, and even justify, a turn to revenge. Indeed, the novel condemns authority as self-serving and far more interested in perpetuating appearance than revealing reality. There is no doubt that the genre of crime fiction is a popular one, and reading this work provides entertainment, but there is also a powerful social critique that deserves recognition. This literary analysis has highlighted that the detective does not limit himself to the task of finding the authors of the initial crime around which the plot is structured, but he also gets caught up in the socio-political condition in which this crime is committed. As the investigation of the first murder follows one false trail after another, Samuel's search for the murderer leads him to uncover many other crimes related to border deaths. In so doing, he finds himself well placed to offer critical insights into the juridical issues of clandestine migration, thereby providing a critique to the existing state of affairs. The author believes in the power of the written words and he finds the detective novel, with its wide popular appeal and concern with issues of crime and morality, the genre that might point the way toward a more egalitarian social order and encourage the readers' investment in the problems it represents.

In *Waters of revenge*, the Strait of Gibraltar, and to a larger extent the Mediterranean Sea, are a hauntingly absent presence. They are never described. This is particularly striking since the novel is set in the Catalan capital of Barcelona, often figured and marketed as “the city by the Mediterranean Sea”. A crucial distinction between *Waters of revenge* and the other novels under scrutiny in the present thesis is that, while *Hope and other dangerous pursuits*, *Don't tell me you are afraid*, *African Titanics* and *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* are concerned with the phenomenon of border crossing, Pajares' novel is a literary production that features migrants and border authorities as focal aspects within the juridical and criminal system. Also, in the case of Pajares' novel, the maritime stretch emerges as a memory of the border-crossing and in the residual after-effects that can be traced back to it. In this sense, the seascape is ambivalent and spectral, both present and absent, visible and invisible.

The maritime border is a given and ubiquitous entity, and Pajares' characters, consciously or unconsciously, have to live with its restrictions. The violence at the maritime border is the reason behind Ibra's search for revenge but the sea itself has been written out of the plot of the novel. Even his practice of border-crossing is never represented or imagined. What is left behind

in this practice of reducing are the cruelties lurking in the background — deaths, violence and crimes at sea. In describing the socio-political ethos in which border crimes take place, the novel stresses the importance of the maritime geopower, understood as the politics connected to nature, and how this power comes to be organized, mapped and shaped in order to facilitate certain kinds of life at the expense of others (Depledge 2013: 92). Geopower, the relationship between the earth and its life forms, running underneath and through power relations, manages population dynamics employing nature as the object of strategies of power (Luisetti 2019: 351). In terms of maritime clandestine crossing, the liquid element of the sea has been turned into a device facilitating death without touching. Such indirect form of violence is difficult to discover as such, and juridical responsibilities for it difficult to allocate. Pressing against violent border practices is an order of another kind: the sea regarded as a “natural border” whose liquid materiality obliterates and regenerates violence. At stake here is an oxymoronic notion: a natural phenomenon considered as a feature of the geopolitical landscape. As stated in the introduction, borders are artificial phenomena whereas the sea, in contrast, is a natural phenomenon and it remains altogether natural unless and until human interventions. But something particular happens when the sea is designated as a border. The status of the maritime basin, whose basic being is natural, is transformed with the *stroke of a pen* into a dual entity, as artificial as it is natural: both at once, and altogether each. The maritime border is *designed*. The artificiality of the maritime border leads to the understanding that the border is produced, rather than being a naturally occurring phenomenon. Such an understanding stresses on the productive and performative feature of the maritime border and it acknowledges the constructed and productive aspect of it.

The maritime border is in motion in several ways. First, the sea moves itself. This is evident in the case of geomorphology: the movement of sands, currents and tides. It is so malleable that it ends up altering the topology of the sides bounding it. Second, the maritime border is also moved by others. This is manifest in the case of disputes over control of people, land, and resources. Border movement and circulation are not the ongoing practices of differentiating; its processes of division also have a direct consequence on what is divided. What is divided must be recirculated, maintained, and even expanded; but simultaneously, what is divided must also be excluded. But exclusion is not simple blockage, it is redirection and redistribution. Therefore, since the border is not a simple binary cut, its movements break down, multiply and relocate the division altogether. Instead of dividing into two parts, the border bifurcates by circulation and multiplication (Nail 2020: 199). The circulating exclusion performed by the maritime border is itself defined on the inscription of asymmetrical relations of power and it reflects structures and hierarchies of power. The seemingly neutral geography of the Mediterranean Sea betrays its strong power relations, since any geographical sense depends on the observer whose perspective has the ability to impose itself, subordinating other points of view to a marginal role. The interrogation then is how to change its coordinates and, with another *stroke of*

a pen, disturb its '-graphy'⁹⁷. Considering the maritime border as a geopolitical assemblage that incorporates the geophysical not as a material basis but as a series of interwoven and erratic mobile forces, one could argue that the current framing of the Mediterranean Sea is not everlasting, which suggests that a re-orientation, and even a re-writing, might be possible. Understanding the maritime borderscape as a dynamic space of flows and continual recomposition where, because there is no a fixed background, place can be perceived only in the context of mobility and where movement, instead of being subsequent to geography, is the foundation of geography (Steinberg and Peters 2015: 258), the sea's physical peculiarity can promote the re-envisaging and re-enlivening of a world ever on the move. In such a world on the move, place is in formation and borders are simultaneously projected on, through, in and about space. Thus, through its liquid composition, dynamic forces and non-linear temporality, the sea can promote the need for an alternative comprehension of mapping and representing: living and knowing, controlling and resisting. In this line of thought, the maritime basin, which is able to turn the collision in encounter, can provide a re-framing of geography, in which contemporary separate shores acquire unsuspected intimacy, creating a necessary disturbing alternative mapping. Introducing the traces of other "graphies" permits to unlock the authority of a single account that promotes and preserves an existing hegemony in the present. To cut into the existing geographical and cultural order in order to offer a disquieting and turbulent alternative and thereby permitting a radical recomposition of the present permits not only to change understandings of past-present, but also to interrogate their frame. In this way, the reassembling of the Mediterranean archive permits a recomposition of the present, compelling open gaps, cracking the institutional voice and allowing other tellings to be heard. Standing on moving water, in the flux and the flow, and looking back at the shore, it is possible to envision an alternative world, one that offers a different perspective of "terrestrial" assumptions. Such an envisagement will be the main focus of the fifth chapter dedicated to the literary analysis of the novel *Le Baiser de Lampedusa*.

⁹⁷ Taking as point of departure the etymological roots of geography (gē, meaning earth) and (graphia, meaning writing), here I refer to the need to query the current inscription in the landscape and the earth/sea writing in order to question both the political order of knowledge and its inscription in the understanding of the Mediterranean Sea.

III. Bordering the Mediterranean central route

Contemporary clandestine migration to Europe across the sea saturates news coverage, political and policy debates, instigating intense discussions about human rights and fear of the “invasion”, while also triggering comparisons to the Middle Passage of transatlantic slavery. Some scholars (Chambers 2008, Lombardi-Diop 2008, Di Maio 2013, Sarnelli 2015) have compared the contemporary clandestine Mediterranean crossing to the Middle Passage stressing on common traits: the trans-Saharan route to Africa's coasts, the harsh conditions in which people are forced to travel, the journey by boat, the perilous sea crossing, the shipwrecks and the deaths at sea. These scholars have drawn parallels between the horrors of the Black Atlantic's Middle Passage⁹⁸ and the Mediterranean crossing depicting both marine spaces as watery graves. In this light, the Mediterranean abyss (Bensaâd 2006: 12) inhabited by the migrants who never reached the European shores, calls to mind the abyss lying at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, a watery grave that holds the bodies of the enslaved Africans thrown overboard. Hence, contemporary Mediterranean crossings reconfigure past diasporic realities, by forging similarities between migrants crossing the Mediterranean and those who were forced across the Ocean centuries ago (Murray 2018: 41). The parallel between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea is a political gesture by which the scholars shed light on the pervasive new forms of racism of contemporary EU states (Lombardi-Diop 2008: 171) and recall the atrocities of the Middle Passage (Curti 2011: 50).

Bringing these two historically and geographically divergent crossings together raises some problems. The distance covered in the Middle Passage was far longer than any crossings covered by contemporary migration, the slave ships were bigger and bore no resemblance to the boats employed by clandestine migrants. The Atlantic Middle Passage was often evoked as a one-way journey whereas the Mediterranean crossing is usually referred to as a journey with a return home. Additionally, clandestine migrants choose to set on the journey, whereas those who were shipped to the Americas were given no such option. Clandestine migration does not exist in a historical vacuum and the traces of both slavery and colonialism hover close behind, but it is not effective only to approach contemporary Mediterranean border-crossing as either the consequence of colonialism or as analogy to the Black Atlantic. Therefore, I would cautiously configure the

⁹⁸ The term “Black Atlantic” was coined by Paul Gilroy and refers to “a distinctive counterculture of modernity” (Gilroy 1993: 36) that emerges from Black cultural expressions in the United States and England. To describe such transnational cultural space, Gilroy proposes to consider “the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in the discussion of the modern world” (ibid: 15). He stresses the importance of ships, not just as symbols of the Middle Passage, but as vehicles through which a Black collectivity was created: “ships were the living means by which the points within that Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected” (ibid: 16). In defining the Black Atlantic, Gilroy claims that the history of the slave trade cannot be separated from the locations where it took place and where its legacy endures.

crossing of clandestine migrants across the sea in terms of the Middle Passage on the grounds that such parallelism dispossesses current migrants of any agency, and also neglects the contemporary power dynamic of the Mediterranean border regime. Consequently, such a parallelism creates contemporary forms of dehumanization and depolitization that consider migrants lives less worthy, and with no agency and voice. As will be analyzed, forms of dehumanization and denigration do happen not only in contemporary border security practices, but also in the context of humanitarian responses to them. Such awareness is relevant in order to bring to light that humanitarianism⁹⁹ is not at odds with the dehumanizing practices that it declares to restrain because it is constitutive of the very dispute that it claims to address and defeat.

Migrants coming from the Horn of Africa, and hoping to enter the European Union, typically travel overland to the North African coasts and then attempt to cross the sea departing from coastal sites in Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, or Turkey. The central Mediterranean Sea is not the most common passage people take to migrate clandestinely to Europe — most of them overstay their tourist visas (Frontex Risk Analysis Unit 2015). However, the maritime passage from Libya or Tunisia to Italy has captivated international attention by media depictions of scenes of drowning, abandonment at sea, and disputes between states about the disembarkation of migrants. From the early 2000s the central Mediterranean route has been a source of lucrative business for traffickers (Mountz and Hiemstra 2012: 459). The rise of human trafficking is correlated with the growth of border enforcement across the sea (de Haas 2008: 7) and since the second decade of the 21st century, the blossoming industry of human trafficking has matched a decline in the seaworthiness of the migrants' vessels. Many of them are unfit for the crossing, especially if overcrowded with passengers. The worsening sea and travel conditions are only partly responsible for the rise of the death toll. The tactics employed to cross the sea has changed in the last decade: from elusive smuggling to the anticipation of search-and-rescue operations, which means less fuel on-board and worse boat conditions. The precariousness of the sea crossing, along with the increased traffic, has transformed the central Mediterranean route into a zone of arrest and transfer to Italian soil. The consequence has been that migrants' routes across the sea is divided into two legs, disrupted between the two shores, with each leg of the journey maneuvered by a different “captain”. Traffickers no longer carry passengers from departure to destination; they transport them to midpoints at sea where their lives are threatened enough to merit either rescue or arrest by the border enforcement which completes the passage to Italian soil (Ben-Yehoyada 2011: 23).

This chapter analyzes the treatment of the clandestine Mediterranean central route in the

⁹⁹ I apply Walters (2011), Fassin (2007) and Cuttitta's (2018) notion of humanitarianism, with which the scholars conceive more than just “ideas and ideologies” or “simply the activity of certain non-governmental actors”, but rather understand humanitarianism as a specific form of government; as a rationality of power, therefore situating the debate “in relation to the analytics of government” (Walters 2011: 143). This humanitarian government results in a specific operational logic, which finds its expression in an “increasingly organized and internationalized attempt to save the lives, enhance the welfare, and reduce the suffering of the world's most vulnerable populations” (Cuttitta 2018: 635) and which becomes part of the border regime.

literary productions of Catozzella's *Don't tell me you are afraid* (2014, English transl. 2016) and Khaal's *African Titanics* (2008, English transl. 2014). From a border aesthetics' lens, this chapter focuses on the ways in which aesthetic productions are able to convey the representation(s) of the Mediterranean borderscape, on the border figures that refer to the multifaceted nature of it, and at the same time, on the ways in which the novels give pause for reflection on the articulations of the maritime border. The aesthetic engagement with the Mediterranean borderscape and the investigation of such engagement make possible novel ways of conceiving the consequences of the maritime border and of projecting alternative futures beyond it. The relevance of the two novels within the genre of Mediterranean border fiction relies on their narrativization of a piece of the entangled discourses, politics, practices, counter-practices in the current situation of clandestine Mediterranean border crossings. They offer an example of the way in which literary productions become part of the “distribution of the sensible” where contestations regarding what is visible, sayable, and doable may be expressed (Rancière 2010: 149). They are located at the core of the interaction between what Rancière defines the aesthetics of politics which is found “in the re-configuration of the distribution of the common through political processes of subjectivation” and the politics of aesthetics lying “in the practices and modes of visibility of art that re-configure the fabric of sensory experience” (ibid: 140-1). Nevertheless, although Mediterranean border literary productions, such as the ones analyzed in this chapter, are urgently needed because they offer a space for negotiation and reconciliation of distressing stories, they risk to be turned into a product selling pity and benevolence. Border fiction can move towards a change on issues of clandestine migration, but it can also re-enact, rather than counteract, the conditions of living in a polarized world. That is the case of Catozzella's *Don't tell me you are afraid* that aims to evoke compassion from the injustices that migrants have to undertake while, at the same times, making clear the distance between the fictional characters and the readership. As will be shown, such “literary humanitarian” response to clandestine migration can be turned into a marketable form of literary production, exploiting experiences of suffering as a means of establishing a false solidarity with the “Other”.

The two novels portray similar clandestine itineraries — from the Horn of Africa, through the Sahara Desert, to the coasts of Libya, and common means of mobility — the truck and the boat. In both novels, the migrants depart from the Horn of Africa: in Catozzella's text, the point of departure is Somalia, whereas in Khaal's novel, the protagonist leaves from Eritrea. The characters' destination is Lampedusa, supposedly reached by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The characters' attempt to migrate clandestinely is a precarious form of mobility, where their route is subject to constant revision, and the climax of the migratory endeavor, the landing in Europe, remains out of the characters' reach. Unlike the novels analyzed in the previous chapter, *Don't tell me you are afraid* and *African Titanics* present journeys that fail at reaching the intended destination. They address an aspect of the clandestine migration that is less perceptible from the

European gaze: the crossing of the Sahara desert that, as will be analyzed, represents the *mirror border* of the Mediterranean Sea. With this in mind, and paying attention to the aesthetic representations of the Mediterranean borderscape as they transpire in the two mentioned novels, the chapter sets out to examine how the two aesthetic productions carry the complex representation of bordering, and at the same time how they give pause for reflections on the (dys)functioning of the Mediterranean borderscape.

1. Dreams interrupted: Catozzella's *Don't tell me you are afraid*

It was said in those days that
the passage was both like dying and like being born.

Mohsid, *Exit West*

Catozzella's *Non dirmi che hai paura* (2014) [*Don't tell me you are afraid* (2016)] is the fictionalized account of the life of Samia Yusuf Omar, a promising athlete from Somalia who aspires to take part in the London Olympics of 2012. She lives to run, and her desire for running forces her to sacrifice more than she can possibly expect, her own life.

Catozzella's novel belongs to an emerging sub-genre of Italian migration literature¹⁰⁰ that narrates the experience of clandestine migrants, emphasizing the need for a tolerant approach towards migration and contributing to a comprehension of clandestine mobility as a facet of today's globalized world. In particular, opting to write a bio-fictional novel — a literary format that employs fictional techniques to narrate a story based on an actual biographical figure —, Catozzella explores and models the migratory journey of Samia Yusuf Omar, providing references to real-life stories of migration.

Bio-fiction contains external, real-world references, but these can be mixed with non-factual components; the chosen facts can be imaginatively manipulated in fiction, as fiction is not restricted to factual accuracy (Novak 2017: 7). Therefore, even though the novel is based on “reality”, it operates as a form of distorted reflection of the “reality” represented, as the author draws on elements other than documented facts. Whereas the novel invites a close association between fiction and reality — by including photographs of Samia and precise dates regarding her migratory experience —, the literary result is a narrative modeled on the vision of the creative writer rather than on the reality of the external world. Such a distancing from biographical representation allows the author to take liberties with the biographical figure in order to project his own creative perspective. Thus, the goal of the novel is not to write a biography, rather it is to employ biography in order to write a narrative. In this light, with his “creative labor” (Attridge 2017: 150), Catozzella employs an actual historical figure as a springboard for something other than making the person “known” (Novak 2017: 10) and, in this way, he fictionalizes, rather than represents, the biographical subject. As Lackey and Donnarumma aptly indicate, it is therefore

¹⁰⁰ See Mazzantini's *Mare al Mattino* (2011), Scego's *Adua* (2015), Ballerini's *La vita ti sia lieve* (2014), de Luca's *Solo Andata* (2014), Camarrone's *Lampadusa* (2014), Leogrande's *La Frontiera* (2015), Napolillo's *Le tartarughe tornano sempre* (2015), Enia's *Appunti per un naufragio* (2017), Cavalli's *Carnaio* (2018) among others.

incongruous to search for the goal of bio-fiction in the “authentic” and “true” narrativization of the biographical figure (Lackey 2016: 7, Donnarumma 2011: 33) since the novel does call for truth in a more general sense, removing the focus from the individual by enlarging the range to other voices waiting to be heard. In light of that, by refusing to be read as a singular story, *Don't tell me you are afraid* “can illuminate the names and faces of those whom we cannot know, but with whom we are imbricated” (Swanson Goldberg and Shultheis Moore 2012: 10), and it highlights the potential for aesthetic works to be implicated in representations of migrant subjects, Mediterranean border-crossing, and EU's border regime.

Don't tell me you are afraid begins in 1999 with the eight-years-old Samia and her inseparable friend Ali running through the streets of Mogadishu, a city torn apart by civil war and ruled by the fundamentalist militias of Al Shabab. The novel as a whole is built upon the narrative trajectory of first-person retrospective fiction, where the story begins with a young Samia and gradually narrates the events that brings her to clandestinely cross the Mediterranean Sea in 2011. The opening pages are characterized by the descriptions of how the war in Somalia has undermined Samia's living conditions and her security, and how it has taken away one important thing for the young protagonist: the access to the sea. The sea, that in her eyes, resembles “a beautiful expanse, gigantic, like a sleeping elephant breathing deeply” (Catozzella 2016: 15 further quotes are from this edition) is out of her reach, but, it is still a constant presence in her life: it is seductive, it lures her to approach it, its currents symbolize movement and immense possibilities, whereas her passion for running “is [her] sea” (16), and her legs flow ahead “like waves driven by an energy that wasn't [hers] [...] like the gravitational pull of the moon and the sun on the sea's tides” (51). Through much of the novel, Samia's imperative is “run”; it is what drives her to leave her native Somalia, to compete at international races, and to set out on a long and ultimately deadly journey to Europe.

The escalating conflict and political unrest in Somalia not only devastates the economic infrastructure, but also changes the life of its inhabitants:

Overnight, listening to music was forbidden. [...] Overnight, all the movie theaters were shut down [...] Films created and fed people's dreams; that's why the theater were shut down. Overnight, men were obliged to wear long pants and could not longer be seen on the street in shorts. They also had to shave their heads completely or wear their hair long, Afro style, with long, full bears. Half measures were no longer acceptable. Then there were the women. Women were no longer allowed to do anything; even walking down the street was risky. Trying it without a burka was a gamble that could cost your life. Overnight, the traditions of [Somalia] changed. The land of sunshine and color was transformed into an open-air training camp for extremists [...] Dreams, hopes and freedom had all been wiped out in a blink of an eye (80-1).

The more Somalia is shaken by political and social changes, the more Samia and her friend Ali dream of escaping from their unbearable condition. They fantasize about their future and they

dream of reaching Europe where, as “a friend who made the Journey had told [them], in the countries of northern Europe, if you were a refugee fleeing from war they give you a house and a salary” (68).

The myth of Europe is activated by the stories told and shared by those who migrated there while the mythical destination is synonymous with economic opportunities and benefits that far surpass those available in Somalia. The practice of storytelling in disseminating fantastic images of Europe and in persuading other would-be migrants to set out on the journey functions as a powerful trigger for those, like Samia and her friend, who are struggling at home. Yet, by omitting the cruel parts of the journey and sharing with friends and relatives only the achievements, the storytellers only reveal one side of the migratory journey and recount a distorted version of the migration experience. Nonetheless, the element of success in the stories increases confidence in would-be migrants and, in the case of Samia, it will represent an influential component in her decision to set out on the journey. At the height of the civil war, Samia trains in secret in a deserted stadium and through the streets of Mogadishu with “the burka over [her] head [...] Running in that getup is impossible. [She] stumble[s] repeatedly in the long garment, and the heat buildup under that confining black garb brings [her] close to fainting” (90). Yet, despite the political tensions, restrictions imposed on Somali women, and the lack of resources, Samia is selected to run at the international pre-Olympic race in Djibouti. There, outclassed, not having any appropriate coaching and suffering from malnutrition, and even though “[she] pushes to the limit [and] spurs [her] muscles to the bursting point” (116), she finishes sixth out of eight.

At her return from Djibouti, her sister informs her that she will depart soon in efforts to reach Europe because she “dreams of having a family [...] [she] dreams that [her] children may grow up in peace. [...] Maybe [she] will get to England [...] Or maybe Sweden or Finland” (118). Her sister's motivations lie behind her unplanned, clandestine and precarious but deliberate migratory journey from Somalia, through the Sahara Desert to the Mediterranean and, eventually to Europe. Like the invented and romanticized imagery of Europe, the migratory journey too is subjected to the process of mythification”: “[the Journey] is like a mythological creature that can just as easily lead to salvation or death. No one knows how long it might take. If you're lucky, two months. If you are unlucky, as long as a year, or even two. Ever since we were children, the Journey has been a favorite topic of conversation” (122). The mythification of the travel which is made more explicit by the capitalization of the letter “j” of Journey (and “v” of Viaggio in the original version), underlines the meaning of the journey for the people to the extent that it becomes a sort of rite of passage for many: “everyone has told stories about relatives who reached their destination in Italy, Germany, Sweden or England” (ibid). Everybody knows at least somebody that reached Europe and everyone shares his/her own stories of the travel contributing to the spreading of narratives and fantasies, about it. Hope, confidence and positivity are the

predominant sentiments about the journey, whereas scarce are the references regarding the despair, hardship, and pain felt along the way. Few are the details concerning the desert and sea crossing, yet many are the illusions to the better conditions that reaching destination entails: “those who make it there always say the same thing when they call home: I can't tell you what the Journey was like. It was horrific” (ibid). Finding the words to tell of the unspeakable atrocities is a daunting task, “[t]hat's why it's always shrouded in absolute mystery. A mystery that for some is necessary in order to reach safety” (122). The mystery of the travel functions in two ways: it lures the migrants to partake in the experience and it contributes to the myth-making of the journey. However, the incapacity to describe what happened before reaching destination can be analyzed as a way to protect friends and relatives from the truth. Samia's own journey is desperate, but when she calls home she covers the truth and lies about the complications she is experiencing. In sparing her relatives the dreadful details of her migratory experience, Samia contributes to the construction of the myth of the journey. The strategy of lying preserves the myth, as the people who in turn will listen to Samia's account would be themselves motivated to set out on the journey. This cyclical practice of myth-narration allows for the myth to perpetuate and, as the sociologist Holland and Huggan suggest, “inhabiting the indeterminate area between fact and fable, history and myth [...] the half-truths, rumors, mysteries and illusions of a world whose geography is only partially covered, and whose multiple possible histories are only partly understood” (Holland and Huggan 2003: 24) perform a driving force for migrant subjects.

Whereas in December 2007 Samia's sister defeats the monster (124) by reaching the coasts of Malta on board a vessel departing from Tripoli, Samia receives the news that she would represent Somalia at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. On the day of her race, while walking next to the other athletes, she notes how different her body is compared to them:

My legs looked like two dry sticks [...] There were none of the bulges that I saw on the others' legs: I had no quadriceps, no calves [...] The others looked like bodybuilders compared with me [...] I not only didn't have the machines to develop those muscles, but I didn't even have a coach. And I didn't have enough food [...] I was the shortest, the thinnest, and the youngest (140).

At the race, she finishes last but, in the locker room, she swears to herself that she would make it to the London Olympics of 2012, “with muscles where they should be and a heart as big and powerful as that of a bull. In 2012 [she] would be the winner” (144), she “would manage to win the Olympics, and [she] would do it as a Somali and as a Muslim woman” (148), without veils.

Returning to Mogadishu, her life becomes even more difficult: the Al-Shabaab fundamentalists consider her a threat to the repressive system they enforced: she is forbidden to run and forced to cover her face in the country she represented at the Olympics where, on the other hand, without veils and in front of cameras she run on TVs throughout the globe. After several threats to her life, she understands that she cannot stay any longer in a country that

“subjects [her] daily to shame and sweat forcing [her] to endure the worst humiliation on the street” (155-6). Hence, stripped of the only passion that matters to her, the passion to run, Samia travels to Ethiopia in the effort to find a coach who is willing to train her. However, since her official documents “confirming the fact that [she] is an Olympic Committee athlete in political asylum in another country” (165) never arrive, her only chance to train is to do it without people seeing her; at night when the other athletes leave the field. Once again, she finds herself in an unpromising situation. Although she is not specifically targeted, in Ethiopia, she is “a foreigner without papers, without passport. [...] a *tahrib*¹⁰¹, a clandestine figure” (italics in original 166-7). Stuck in Addis Ababa without a valid residency permit, she experiences her clandestine status as a stasis in her mobility: she is not allowed to stay and she cannot run. From this point of the novel onward, she can only run *away*. Thus, with no alternatives other than migrate, and, moved by the desire to join her sister, to find a competent coach in a place in which “[she] could do everything like a normal person, like any other girl” (172), on July 15th, 2011 Samia sets out on the journey.

The passage through the Sahara Desert, and eventually across the sea, is orchestrated by well-organized human smuggling ring¹⁰², and Samia does not have difficulties in finding her first contact person, Asnake¹⁰³, who promised to bring her to Khartoum, in Sudan. Without documents, the clandestine channel of migration is her only possibility to reach Europe while the precarity of the journey increases her vulnerability exposing the protagonist to injury, violence, and death. Her first leg of the trip, from Addis Ababa to Khartoum, takes place on the open bed of a jeep together with other seventy-one persons. From the very beginning of the journey, she feels like a nonentity, “a mere thing being transported from one place to another” (178). Dispossessed of her humanity, she is turned into a commodity, an inanimate object that is marketed, bought, and transported. The quoted passage first mediates the paradigm of the containment and invisibility of clandestine migrant bodies in contrast to the unrestricted flow of commodities and capital and, secondly, it highlights that the reassuring stability of the limits between human and non-human is undermined when the migrants start their clandestine journey. Indeed, she and her fellow travelers are turned into non-persons and relegated to an airless, crowded and uninhabitable space where

¹⁰¹ The term *tahrib* originates from Arabic and means trafficking. In Somali, however, the word gained a different meaning, describing the geopolitical framework that defines the migratory practice as an unauthorized act, along with the existential experience of uncertainty regarding “the journey into the unknown” (Simonsen 2017).

¹⁰² As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the growth in border enforcement correlates with increased smuggling activities which can be considered a global business (Mountz and Hiemstra 2012: 459). Enforcement measures and human smuggling practices tend to intensify in concert: as one increases, so too does the other. As border control expands, the prices paid to human smugglers and the risks taken by the migrants escalate (Nadig 2002). On the other hand, once the migrants reach Europe, another “business” takes place; the so-called business of hospitality. For the Italian case, authorities have outsourced to charities, private companies and cooperatives, the task of taking care of migrants upon their arrival in the country. As this became a lucrative business, the system provoked scandals arising from corruption and the influence of organized crime (Castelli Gattinara 2017: 327-28).

¹⁰³ The name, or maybe nickname, brings to mind the the idiom “to be a snake” which defines a person who turns out to be an untrustworthy person, a backstabber. The name's choice works also a reference to his despicable behavior toward Samia.

they must endure the smell of excrement, and vomiting which adds a layer of abjection to their objectification. The complete dehumanization and distress of Samia and her travel companions are met with indifference by the people on the street. Such a dehumanization paves the way for their exclusion from the category of legitimate human rights-holders (Bauman 2016: 86) and suggests that they have no socially recognized existence outside of their traffickers. Additionally, their traveling conditions affect their human nature: “[e]veryone seemed much more hardened. Withdrawn inside their armor” (178), they are emptied of all the social and psychological components that make up the self, they become selfish, ruthless, and alienated from any attachment to the group. Even Samia loses interest in being among others; she thinks only about herself, everything is secondary to her survival, she becomes more unsociable, a loner. Her only objective is to reach the end of the journey. It is precisely in such a state, where the stakes are at their highest, a matter of survival and death, that ethical behavior between the travelers is tested to the limits.

During the Sahara crossing, the group's morale is low, water runs out, and people are worn out by the desert's constant unpredictability. The landscape that surrounds them is

an endless ocher-colored expanse of nothing [...] fine dust that swirls up and gets in your throat if you don't cover your mouth [...] All around, a lunar landscape in which earth and sky are one. Your points of reference vanish. It's like *diving into a mirror*. An endless expanse of sand. So uniform that you end turning into sand. And not just because it filters in everywhere, so that it quickly fills your eyes, throat, and lungs with grit, and you have to swallow so it won't clog up your mouth [...] Going on like that, you too end up becoming sand, because you see yourself as a minute grain of that white expanse, or as one of the seconds of time that, like a madwoman, you can't get out of your head¹⁰⁴ (184, 191 italics added).

At this point of the narrative, the desert is the locus of a complex exploration of the biopolitical and ecological implications of material and discursive violence exerted on migrant bodies, and it emerges as a particularly significant counterpart of the sea. In the above mentioned quote, the description of the desert's vast and indeterminate expanse, without clearly defined landmarks, resembles the gigantic expanse of the sea mentioned at the beginning of the novel. Both limitless expanses give a sense of the infinite and the unknown, but the opposition between Samia's initial and sentimental attachment to the sea and the devastating power of the featureless and barren desert marks the differing emotional feelings provoked by the two spaces. Both spaces are key geographical presences in the narrative but, while the familiar and docile sea – on the surface – represents a force that provides Samia with energy, the desert is a mortal presence that suffocates, alienates and drives people crazy.

¹⁰⁴ In the quoted passage, the first-person perspective of the novel is shifted into a brief second-person narration. This instance of “impersonal” and “generalized” *you* (Herman 2002: 331, 371) blurs the limits between narrative and its extra-literary counterpart, but it has to be interpreted as referring to the diegetic protagonist.

Whereas, in general, sand, as a metonymy for land and stability, is opposed to water, and the new horizons attained through the mobility it conveys, in the novel the two elements, and the intrinsic dangers of two different seas — the sands of the Sahara and the waters of the Mediterranean —, are pivotal metaphors for the different phases of the migratory journey. Sand stands for the crossing of the desert while water stands for the Mediterranean crossing, but the two elements cannot be easily separated from each other because, as expressed by the image of “diving into a mirror”, the sea of sand is in a way a mirror of the Mediterranean. Thus, the Sahara Desert is “another Mediterranean” (Abulafia 2011: 18) and “the second face of the Mediterranean” (Braudel 1949:171). Indeed, as I will further analyze, even though Samia eventually reaches the Libyan shoreline, sand continues to cling to her, as to suggest that the waves of the sea are an extension of the desert sand dunes, or that the sea is like the desert except it has water instead of sand. Such understandings imply that the sea route is a prolongation of the land-based deathscape, that is the desert. Consequently, the closeness of the sea cannot be automatically interpreted as a symbol of freedom, as Samia wishes, or that it is impossible to leave behind the memory of the lethal desert.

In the course of the Sahara's crossing, the enclosed space of the van has profound alienating effects on the migrants, making them question their capacity to survive in such dire conditions. The compression of both space and bodies inside it forces contact as it constricts — migrants are pressed up against each other, sharing physicality as well as an ambiguous future. During the passage across the desert, some start hallucinating, others die of dehydration and, as the narrative suggests, the Sahara's crossing is a story of decline and survival, and to a certain extent, of becoming inhuman while striving for life. As Samia ponders upon her transformation, “[w]hen you enter the desert, you stop being a human being. [...] [you're] an animal tethered to life by an ever-more-tenuous thread [...] You quickly become ruthless. Everyone thinks of himself.” (186, 191). The passages thus present the experience of the characters as gradually dehumanizing, and likening them to animals who struggle to survive. The animalization of the characters can be read as an affirmation of their survival resources; a strategy of self-defense that exerts a form of agency through the ability to endure extreme physical pain. As Braidotti suggests, “the beast within the human [...] may be cheered as the trace of primordial evolutionary trajectory or cherished as a repository of unconscious drives, but it also calls for containment and control for exactly the same reasons” (Braidotti 2011: 82). According to the scholar, the methods to discipline the wild drives are both genderized and racialized and they tend to harp on the disposable bodies of “others”. The morphological normativity rests on an assumed political anatomy, according to which the equivalent of the 'power of reason' is the notion of Man as 'rational animal'. The latter is supposed to reside in a functional physical body, shaped upon principles of white masculinity, normality, youth, and health. All other kinds of embodiment are pathologized and cast on the other side of normality. This practice is intrinsically anthropocentric, genderized, and racialized in that

it supports moral standards based on white, masculine European/Western civilization (Braidotti 2011: 82). Reasoning along similar lines of thought, animalization alludes also to the exploitation and denigration wielded against clandestine migrants. In the latter sense, animal categorizations and the use of animal metaphors are deployed to justify exploitation and objectification. As such, animalization is a powerful discourse -conceived as an assemblage of linguistic and material phenomena- that structures migrants' encounters with diverse aspects of the border regime. The animalization of clandestine migrants constitutes a particular spatial technology of power whose main move is to posit animality as Other. Such move to define and exclude the non-human Other reveals the violent basis on which concepts of "human" sovereign political community are founded.

Three months after the departure, on October 12th, 2011, Samia and her fellow travelers reach the border to Libya, the traffickers let them descend the jeep and leave them there until some Libyan traffickers pick them up, and bring them to the prison in Kufra. All the travelers know that Kufra is "the worst nightmare [...] A place where you were likely to stay forever, if you didn't have the money they demanded [...] Or else when you started stinking like a corpse, they took you back to the border with Sudan, just before you died. They left you in the middle of the Sahara to drop dead there" (197). They enter a carceral space that is alienated from a community of rights-endowed persons, and where they are "depleted, reduced to shadows of [themselves]. No one spoke; some ranted and raved due to the heat or the solitude, longing for home" (199). The prison where the characters are detained is a junction that either arrests their journey, producing a period of stasis during their flow, or redirects them -via forceful return. It is one of the many measures employed by the border enforcement to hinder the passage of migrants and to enforce the quality of the border as a filter that permits one path to continue on one hand, and on the other to be redirected elsewhere through detention, deportation, or expulsion. In this light, the detention facility is a component of the border regime whose process of bifurcation constantly redirects flows of people across or away from the border itself. Such filtering process enhances the speed of trusted travelers, while reducing and eventually blocking and detaining patterns of life that deviate from the established norm.

After many days in prison, Samia receives from her sister the requested sum of money to continue the journey towards Tripoli, and on December 15th, she reaches the Libyan capital. There, Samia is happy not to have to see the desert again, since there is nothing she hates more than the sand entering the body through "your bones, your blood, your saliva [...] even if you wash with running water it stays with you forever" (209). The presence of sand stays persistently both in her body and in her soul, as if the sand were destroying the Self: "the desert extinguishes your soul, it obliterates your thoughts" (ibid). The omnipresence of the sand and its persistence in Samia's body and soul can be interpreted as a symbol of the limitation of the protagonist's mobility beyond her determination. Also, even though she tries to shake the sand out of her hair

and clothes, she seems to be unable to keep it out of her body and soul; it is as if the sand were eating her alive or that she is a prisoner of the sand.

Tripoli is an obliged point of passage for migrants headed to Italy and, for Samia, the Libyan capital is only a transit point for her, “a faint breath of wind, the rustling of a leaf, the blink of an eye” (210), and the proximity of the sea makes her feel confident and hopeful. Despite being warned about the danger that the maritime crossing entails, that “the sea is a bigger obstacle than the Sahara” (212), and that “its power is capable of engulfing [the boat] at any moment” (ibid), she doesn't presume it true since her romantic view of the sea blinds her in front of the life-threatening journey she is about to undertake. For her, the Mediterranean is no an obstacle, but the logical next step in her seemingly unlikely project to compete at the Olympic games in London. Prior to her departure, she fantasizes about sailing across the sea, she romanticizes about the moment in which she and the sea would finally meet up, and about the first thing she would do: “plunge into it and enjoy the vast, welcoming vastness” (212). Her failure to acknowledge the meaning of the Mediterranean as a barrier conveys the perception that she has no clear idea of what the maritime crossing holds for her.

Samia's maritime crossing towards Lampedusa is scheduled for 11pm; the boat is crowded with three hundred other migrants, and it is described as a microcosm in terms of the represented categories of gender and age, “men, women, and children, from infants to the elderly [...] a crowd of excited, hopeful *ghosts*” (219 italics added). The passage presents an imagery of the migrant boat as a contained structural entity that promotes a shared future of both hope and death. Such understanding considers the boat a place not unlike other spaces of social organization and collectivity — not an heterotopia *par excellence*¹⁰⁵, rather a world that compels a terrifying psychic communion between its passengers, designating a group of people attuned to the precariousness of existence and the imminence of death. Moreover, the comparison between the boat's passengers and ghosts recalls a disquieting similarity between the specters of migrants crossing the sea today, many of whom are invisible and forgotten in the abyss of the sea, and the characters bound to the Italian island. The spectral scene and the figure of the ghost — the confluence of things out of place and out of time — are associated with a sign of disturbance and deviation in the present. The sense of a disturbing presence that, despite of all attempts can never be eradicated, and the feeling of turmoil in the moment of crossing function to counter the invisibility of contemporary migrants, the “unmissed” persons that sociologist Alessandro dal Lago have defined as “non-persone” [non-people] in his book of the same title. Dal Lago ponders on how the hyper-visibility of current migrants in EU contributes to a desire for their exclusion, an

¹⁰⁵ The oft-quoted Foucault's (1986) approach to ships as “heterotopic spaces” emphasizes the ways in which the ship has summoned a divergent space of social organization and hierarchies, set apart from the land. However, during the border crossing land-based social hierarchies are reproduced or intensified onboard. Therefore, the micropolitics of the vessel does not diverge from the land-based spatial diagram of power relations, rather they recreate and reinvigorate existing land-based divisions.

intended invisibility which suggests that deaths at sea are ignored and thus un-mourned. He describes the process of disavowal: “[t]hanks to strategies of repression, the drowned are deprived of the opportunity to be remembered. If, when alive, they were mere annoyances, bodily encumbrances, once dead they are simply corpses with no history, no identity and no biography”¹⁰⁶ (dal Lago 2009: 225). A different take on the figure of the ghost is expressed by Jacques Derrida, for whom a concern for justice is what lies underneath the urge to speak in terms of ghosts (Derrida 1994: xix). However, insofar as the figure of the specter is in general understood as a means of examining issues of social injustice (O’ Riley 2007: 17), for some scholars, it also suggests a complementary reading of the Mediterranean the links the Black Atlantic to the Mediterranean, as a means to engage with other histories of migration and to propose a historical and geographical doubling. In its depth, the sea reveals the discontinuities of time events and, like ghosts returning from the past, migrants are “a living presence of the past” (Lombardi-Diop 2008: 168). In line with this view, the Mediterranean basin memorializes those lost in the Middle Passage and reminds of the past colonial racism; its watery component “remembers the dead” (Sharpe 2016: 20) and it represents a liquid tomb in which lives have been lost, lives that return to hunt the living. Thus, the figure of the ghost and the haunting experience chronicle the harm imposed or the loss sustained by a violence inflicted in the past. As Chambers and Curti urge to reconsider the Mediterranean “in the disquieting light of its doubling and displacement by a past that never fades away” (Chambers and Curti 2008: 389), the ghost figure stresses the persistence of the specter and spectral histories which have lead to the formation of the contemporary Afro-European passage. These spectral presences emerge from the cracks of the past, and from the waters of the Mediterranean basin in which, as Chambers suggests, “the present is not merely haunted by the past, but [...] [it reveals] the disquieting stubbornness of a yesterday that refuses to disappear into the stillness of the ordered archive” (Chambers 2005: 317-18). Accordingly, Samia and her fellow travelers are a reminder of the disquieting doubling of the present in the light of the past, and of the neo-colonial and global forces at play in the Mediterranean which, as used to be the case with the Black Atlantic, has become a cemetery. Such spectral company haunts and troubles the present and it forces to consider the “darkness” out of which the contemporary Mediterranean appears¹⁰⁷. As claimed by Lombardi-Diop (2008), the movement across the Mediterranean of African migrants, as well as their enslavement and trafficking, activates a parallel circulation of images that “stand for a warning about contemporary forms of slavery and dehumanisation, and constitute a trace of the cultural memory of the oceanic

¹⁰⁶ The translation is mine. The original version is the following: “per effetto di queste strategie di rimozione, agli annegati è tolta la chance di essere ricordati. Se da vivi erano dei meri fastidi, degli ingombri corporei, da morti sono solo cadaveri privi di storia, di identità e di biografia” (2009: 225).

¹⁰⁷ The appearance of (post)colonial ghosts in Italian literature is not always evident, particularly because a nation-wide engagement with its colonial past is a relatively recent phenomenon. However, such an appearance has been dealt in fiction by Francesca Melandri in her novel *Sangue giusto* (2017) [Right blood], by Igiaba Scego's *La linea del colore* (2020) [The color's line] and by Caminito's *La Grande A* (2016) [The Big A].

crossing” (Lombardi-Diop 2008: 163). In line with the previous contribution, Iain Chambers suggests a parallelism between contemporary Mediterranean crossing and transatlantic slave trade pointing that the sea -yesterday the Atlantic; today, the Mediterranean- continues to give up its dead. Accordingly, the migrant chain, that stretches from Africa five hundred years ago to the southern coasts of Europe today, encloses the concealed history of modern migration (Chambers 2008: 126). Yet, as stated at the beginning of the chapter, I refuse to adopt this parallel on the ground that the connection to the Atlantic slave trade deprives today's migrants of any agency. Whatever “enslavement” they experience has to be appreciated to be of a different order and treated with its own terms. While this parallelism does possess emotive force and a political gesture, the outcomes of such metaphorical bridge are less conclusive. As Duncan notes, the displacement in time carried out by the demonizing charge of “slave-trading” connotes an anachronistic practice (2017: 215). Such a chronological drifting omits the contemporary dimension of the Mediterranean crossing in the interstices of the EU border regime. Conversely, the reference to the ghosts in the quoted passage of the novel prefigures the fate that awaits the protagonist, it highlights the spectrality of the situation and it recalls a nebulous space in which a sense of spatial disorientation prevails. Whereas Samia previously dwelt on the boundary between the human and inhuman during the desert crossing, she is now suspended between life and death, as is suggested by the imagery of the ghost.

At the beginning of her crossing, even though the vessel is ill equipped, the engine is unreliable and basic living conditions on-board are minimal, the boat is not regarded as a tomb that potentially condemns its passengers to death, but as a regenerative space where Samia feels hopeful because “the sea conveys an energy [she] has never felt before” (221). At first, the navigation is easy and constant as the sea is docile, even submissive, innocent and “friendly” (220). On the third day, due to an engine failure, the boat stops, and remains at a standstill for about fifteen hours and, “fifteen hours are endless if you know you are just a step away from the goal line” (221). In the mentioned quote, Samia compares her border-crossing with a race of which the finish line is understood to be the Mediterranean border. For her, crossing is doubly meaningful, signifying “running” and “running away”. Indeed, from the moment in which Samia decides to migrate, she no longer runs for pleasure or for sport; she only runs for her life. In this light, her migratory experience is reminiscent of Agamben's allusion of “bare life” who “can save himself only in perpetual flight” (1998: 183). However, whereas Agamben emphasizes the looming presence of the massive structure of dehumanization and his formulation of the victimized state of bare life makes impossible any form of agency, both during her migratory journey and her competitive races, Samia goes through a decision-making process. She employs a tactic, a route and a strategy, and, in both situations, she weighs her options and makes calculated moves to achieve the final goal. In both circumstances her desired result is to step on the other side of the finishing/bordering line which, she believes, would grant her either triumph or safety.

Yet, the border/finishing line is out of her reach, and Samia finds herself confined on the boat, in an imprisoning space, suspended in time, and in a gloomy atmosphere that anticipates her future.

Her mobility is defined by stagnation and she is trapped inside the boat, which was meant to be only a temporary and intermediate space between points of departure and arrival, but is now a claustrophobic place. The vastness of the sea contributes to the creation of a feeling of suspension and immobility in which the maritime crossing is conceived as an interminable transit without an arrival. During such endless transit, Samia compares again her situation to a race: “it's as if at the end of a race, just when there's one step left to go, one final stride to plow through the finish line, you were to run up against a transparent wall” (221-2). In terms of her migratory experience, the maritime crossing is the last leg of a long and strenuous journey and even though Samia is geographically close to reach her destination, the sea constitutes an impossible intermediary space that prevents her from seeing beyond the horizon of her present situation. The rhetorical analogy of the transparent wall negates/counteracts the understanding of the sea as a topographical expanse to cross; a point of passage on the way to points of landing, a border-bridge, a platform towards something or somewhere else. Rather, it consists of a translucent border with a peculiar epistemological dimension — the border is transparent and invisible — which represents a power relationship and a form of exclusion. In this light, the transparent wall allows migrants to imagine reaching destination, but bars them from actually moving onwards. The transparent border “establishes the [internal and the external], thus framing the visible and the invisible” (Brambilla and Pötzsch 2017: 151) and, even though the border cannot be seen and the geopolitical plane of it cannot be located, its epistemological plane (between known and unknown) is accentuated: it operates as an invisible space that divides, creates distance and ambiguity stressing its invisible but prevailing power. The maritime border is transparent, so the eye can cross it, even if the migrants themselves cannot.

In its invisibility and mutability the Mediterranean border consists of an entity in constant shifts between presence and absence, being-there and not-being there. Its invisible quality confers on the migrants a situation that is double-edged: it supposedly facilitates their movements because of its very invisibility and, at the same time, it disorients whoever decides to cross it. The border, thus, encourages and entangles the migrants; either stopping them, or enabling them to secret themselves in its folds that sometimes hide or kill them. The maritime border sets Samia in motion and trips her up. This doubleness can be interpreted as the logic of the simultaneous but mutually exclusive aspects of the Mediterranean border: mobility and blockage, visibility and invisibility, openness and entrapment. Also the boat, the vessel tasked with carrying the characters to the other shore, does not have transformational potential because, instead of transporting Samia and her fellow travelers through a passage, it is immobile, and static. The consequence is an oxymoronic condition, a temporary permanence, alluding on one hand to the transitional nature of migratory journeys as socio-cultural and personal practices, and on the other hand condemning

current migratory policies, which tend to refrain migrants from reaching European shores.

If border-crossing is most often associated with moving from one side to another, it also involves a temporal condition, one that is marked by the feeling of speed and waiting and movement and stagnation. In response to the migrants' attempted border-crossing, the sea is turned into a border that regulates mobility through temporal disruption, suspension and interruption of the crossing. Spatiolegal and spatiotemporal manoeuvres at sea trace and retrace lines in the sea, creating spaces of exception in the form of exclusionary areas, designed to restrain the movement of undesirable people. By means of these manoeuvres, the maritime space is configured as a space of stasis, suspension, confinement, capture and death (Perera 2013: 65). The characters' waiting suggests a standstill during their journey; it represents a fixation on space, and it consists not only of a symbolic and psychological practice of subjectification and dependency, but also of a procedure of exclusion. The practice of waiting at the border is a crucial aspect of the border itself: it is a regulatory temporal device that manoeuvres the migrants' movements (van Houtum 2010). Waiting is a technique imposed by institutions or people in power on those with less power, such as clandestine migrants turning their experience into what Hage has defined "stuckedness": "a situation where a person suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation one is in and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they present themselves" (Hage 2009: 4). Making migrants wait thus is a technique and, as Andersson (2014) also argues, transit places have turned into traps of time, places of temporal control that affect the experience of time among migrants. Hence, as any border, the Mediterranean Sea, is not only about trespassing and obstructing, but it also a source of standstill that first produces a condition of hesitation, and secondly it establishes who belongs, who can go through, and who will be left waiting either within or outside the legal order. The subtle, yet powerful mechanism of letting migrants wait works on many levels: it deprives migrants of their autonomous subjectivity, and it represents a practice of border control and selection that appears as a neutral tool of security risk management. Not only does it normalize inequalities in mobility that affect non-European citizens, but it also underlines the fact that, in case of migrants' deaths, lethal migration by boat can only be prevented by more-efficient border controls, and systems of search and rescue¹⁰⁸.

After fifteen hours at the mercy of the waves, an Italian coast guard approaches and intercepts the migrants' vessel. At the sight of it, people on board begin waving arms "jumping and singing, cheering, hopping up and down" (222) in the hope they would be rescued, but the traffickers shout them to remain silent, still and to go back to their previous seats. For the next hour, while the two vessels float at fifty meters away from each others, rumors start unfolding on-board: some say that the Italians will never rescue them, they will not tow them, rather they will

¹⁰⁸ Maritime rescue is yet another mode of discipline over migrants' lives, being a strategy participating in the transnational management of migration.

force them to return to Tripoli. These rumors, based on the knowledge of bilateral agreements between Italy and Libya according to which push back operations are accepted procedures aimed at containing migratory flows, spread fear among the passengers.

Geographical proximity and long-established historical ties¹⁰⁹ brought Italy and Libya to set common and shared policies on migration. Beginning with the 1998 Joint Communiqué, Italy and Libya bilateral agreement advanced through the years and gained force with the 2008 Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation¹¹⁰ whose aim is restraining and denying unauthorized access to Europe. The agreement included operational and technical arrangements such as construction and maintenance of detention camps on Libyan territory, satellite detection systems and surveillance technologies (Paoletti 2009). Within the framework of the agreement, push back operations are seen as legal procedures aimed at containing migratory flows from the Maghreb towards Europe¹¹¹. The forging of such bilateral agreements (Spain-Morocco, France-Algeria and Greece-Turkey also signed them¹¹²) permits patrolling and interception practices in foreign waters with flagged and unflagged vessels, and grants the EU “a natural legitimacy to act in order to ensure its own security, promote good neighborliness, and stave off potential threats to European and global order” (Jones 2011: 41). Such practices of mapping and governing the sea turns the border into an elastic and dispersed entity that “inflicts deaths by first creating dangerous conditions of crossing, and then abstaining from assisting those in peril” (Heller and Pezzani 2017: 68). Through this practice of *interception at sea*, border authorities restrain migrants from entering the EU territory, thereby preventing access to rights, services and legal procedures to which landed migrants are entitled. In this light, the Mediterranean border has to be understood as a strategic effort to fixation, of gaining distance in order to achieve control. Moreover, these

¹⁰⁹ Between 1890 and 1941, Italy looked to expand outward towards eastern African territories, in North Africa, the islands of the Dodecanese archipelago and Albania. In spite of many failures (e.g., Amba Alagi, 1895; Adowa, 1896), Italy carried on its colonial ambitions and, by 1912, proclaimed sovereignty over Cyrenaica and Tripolitania in present-day Libya. With the advent of Fascism, Italian colonialism began its most violent phase: in the effort to affirm the strength of the regime and to restore the image of Italians as the legitimate heirs of the Roman *mare nostrum*, in 1925, Mussolini started pursuing repressive military campaigns both in Libya and in Eastern Africa (Bouchard and Ferme 2013:195).

¹¹⁰ The Treaty was meant to put an end to the friction between the two nations, particularly Libya's claims regarding Italian colonialism. On this occasion, the prime minister Berlusconi declared his regret for the colonial period and committed to make five billion dollars available over the following twenty years in the effort to compensate Libya for the damages and harm inflicted by colonialism.

¹¹¹ The principle of non-refoulement is recognized by the European Convention of Human Rights. On February 23rd, 2012 Italy was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights for violating it. This case is known as *Hirsi Saama and Others vs. Italy*. Not only was Italy condemned because of its push back operations, but also for denying migrants their right to apply for asylum by forcing them to return to a country — Libya — that has not signed the 1951 Geneva Convention and considers refugees and asylum-seekers as foreigners residing in Libya, without any specific distinction (Paoletti 2010: 90). Not only did Italy violate the regulation but, even in the current Frontex regulation there is no statement that guarantees basic safeguard against push-back operations, which proves that Frontex fails to respect human rights through its operation on the high seas (Sunderland 2013).

¹¹² Bilateral patrolling with non-EU nations is a common practice, the most successful examples being between the Moroccan Royal Gendarmerie and the Spanish Guardia Civil, and the already mentioned agreement between the Italian Guardia di Finanza and the Libyan authorities under Gaddafi (See Wolff 2012).

bilateral agreements reflect the European Union's widening of external borders and political authority beyond the territorial perimeters of its limits. The externalization of border controls, euphemistically termed "European Neighborhood Policies", includes delegating the regulation and repression of clandestine migration to non-European states, such as Libya and Morocco, where Sub-Saharan migrants are confined in (in)formal camps and prevented from crossing the sea toward Europe (Boswell 2003).

As the two vessels float a few meters away, some migrants try to say something: "others even start shouting at the traffickers, but it's just to be doing something; it serves no purpose" (222). Nonetheless, from the Italian vessel, ten ropes are thrown off board, they "hit the water with heavy plops" (223), and then suddenly a migrant jumps into the sea in the effort to reach them. Tension among the migrants rises; some start crying and praying whereas somebody warns not to follow the man's gesture because "the sea is rough; the waves will swallow you" (223). The latter passage achieves an effective figurative reference to suppression and oppression, and the image of being swallowed by the sea stresses the likelihood that the attempted border crossing is often a one-way journey that does not end in arrival. Indifferent to the warnings, four migrants jump off board into the water: "two are swimming like mad, with broad, noisy strokes. The other two [...] are moving convulsively, their gestures spasmodic; it's clear to everyone that they don't know how to swim. The water is choppy: it's an angry sea" (224). The sea, a space that bears the mark of limitlessness, poses a particular challenge to human orientation and provokes anxiety and fear about getting lost. Swimming with no sense of direction, and without being able to float, but with hope of land, points to the disorientating feeling of border-crossing, in which the liquid border becomes an unsafe area with no guarantee of safety. Being surrounded by water amounts to losing one's emplacement, doing away with the assurance of terrestrial ontologies. The localized Self is washed away in the tides of seawater. To be at sea means to be lost and, from this moment on, for Samia the sea is no longer a symbol of salvation and/or re-birth, rather it stands for annihilation and destruction. Whereas before the crossing, salvation is promised and desired, during the Mediterranean transit disaster is presaged; thus, salvation and destruction becomes strictly dependent on one another.

While the four migrants strive to stay afloat, Samia starts thinking about jumping off board as well, when "a force greater than [her] makes [her] climb onto the rail [...] It's that force that seizes [her] and makes [her] straddle the rail. It is not [her], it's that force" (224). It is an alien force, an inassimilable Other that pulls her down into the ice-cold water, and "decides to take [her] in hand" (225). The psychological as well as physical power exerted by the sea, leads her to envisage her body as somehow alien from her: she does not have control over her movements and her body is not only beyond control, but also an instrument that turns against her. Under water, in a desperate attempt to disable the devastating power of the sea, she tries to give it a familiar feature and to describe its consistency: she opens her eyes "there's a world of bubbles above [her].

There are slow, larger ones close to [her] head and small, very tiny ones racing swiftly the light, up to the surface. The water cradles [her] and takes hold of [her]" (225). Her contact with the sea entails a journey back to the source, a memory of an initial liquid state, whereas the Mediterranean waters represent both a source of life that might give Samia the possibility of re-birth and a parental figure, a protective space that cradles and guides her. Here, water assumes a symbolic valence that relates both to the stream of life — and thus to the promising future that crossing the Mediterranean might signify — and to a parental figure, a subterranean source/womb. These symbolic connotations attached to water ascribe a positive value to it: a vital element, the source from which every thing stems. Even though water is an emblematic symbol of salvation, purity and regeneration in biblical terms, it also alludes to destruction. Where salvation is announced, disaster is also predicted; thus, one becomes particularly dependent on the other. Hence, the liquidity of the sea is related to fusion and division at the same time: it makes reference to the reproductive amniotic fluid on one hand, and to the draining of the waters on the other; it is a life-source and a life-taker. Water fuses and disintegrates forms, it purifies and contaminates. In this light, the liquid component links both the idea of creation and of engulfment which suggests that the sea-as-source-of-life can easily turn into a sea-tomb in which the protagonist finds herself trapped in a limbo existence, between life and death. Cast at the beginning as a source of life and dreams, the sea is now a life-threatening force¹¹³.

Under water, Samia's feeling of being adrift, lost, and unmoored is exacerbated even more by the disenchantment that she feels plunging into the sea. That sea, that she craved to meet, turns into a site of struggle for survival, a limbo of precarity and indeterminacy, an horrific cradle of death, and finally a paralyzing trap. The challenges that the maritime negotiation imposes on the protagonist are experienced as traumatic obstacles on the way to find a desirable safe anchorage. Samia's Mediterranean crossing resembles an oneiric passage, suspended in time and space, during which she eventually manages to reach the surface, all the while singing her sister's song in the head: "*Fly, Samia, like a winged horse [...] Dream, Samia, dream like the wind playing among the leaves. Run, Samia, run as if there were no particular reason. Live, Samia live as if everything were a miracle*" (226 italics in original). After an ellipsis, the narrative continues describing how somebody grabs her hand and lifts her on board the Italian vessel. The narrative is then broken once again by the first verse of the song "*Fly, Samia, like a winged horse*" (227) which anticipates her boarding of a plane bound for London. There, she meets her coach, she starts training for the Olympics and, in few weeks, she is stronger than before. The second verse of the song interrupts the narrative and precedes her qualification for the Olympics "*Run, Samia, run as if there were no particular reason*" (228). At the Olympic games her dream is fulfilled: she runs with her idols, Veronica Campbell-Brown and Florence Griffith-Joyner. The novel comes to

¹¹³ Drawing on Saffioti's (2007) geo-philosophical understandings of the sea, the Mediterranean can be appreciated as hermaphroditic in its quality: a sea that takes male attributes for its implications of violence, and female aspects for it alludes to birth, creation and regeneration (Saffioti 2007:12).

an end with the third verse of the song “*Live, Samia live as if everything were a miracle*” (ibid) and the closing words “Boom. There's the start. Now we run” (228).

The novel is open-ended: her dream fulfilled in an imaginative after-life breaks the narrative link between death and narrative ending, so that it is possible to envisage a future of hope and survival for other migrants. *Don't tell me you are afraid* raises an important question regarding current Mediterranean clandestine crossings: what will become of the many migrants, such as the protagonist, those who will never make it to the other shore, but will remain instead at the bottom of the sea, along with other unnamed bodies of the sea bed of Mediterranean history? In this seascape of waves, currents, frail boats, ongoing border enforcement, indifference towards the plight of migrants, sites of memory are created to counteract sites of dispersal. If unaccountability persists, history obliterates individuals from the discourse, if episodes of human rights violation continue to be ignored, the aesthetic production functions as a textual memorial through which the author suggests venues for memory, critique and, eventually, change of Heading (Derrida 1992)¹¹⁴. In relation to Derrida's change of Heading, one could even go farther and defend a process of the “becoming-minor” of Europe (Deleuze and Guattari 1986)¹¹⁵ leading to a restructuring of the European space. This would permit to enlarge the social participation to all persons in what would otherwise deserve the label “Fortress Europe”. Such a process would have the consequence to bring to an end the ideals of pure and steady identities, leaving space for an Europe as a transnational space of mediation and exchange (Balibar 2002). The Heading of Europe in current times of migration is an important matter; not only considering Europe's colonial legacies that continue to have outcomes today, but also taking into account the people migrating to Europe, and the growing exclusionary rhetoric among politicians and citizen. Besides, any Heading of Europe is entangled with and responding to the phenomenon of migration, and any direction that Europe might take, or does take, has to be in relation to those reaching its shores.

Read through these lenses, the novel offers a space for (re)telling border-crossing experiences, not necessarily only as a testimony, but as an engagement with contemporary predicaments such the significance of borders and rights, the heritage of Eurocentrism and (neo)colonialism. This is particularly important considering that disputes in the context of unresolved colonial histories continue to be raised in the face of contemporary nations such as

¹¹⁴ In *The Other Heading, Reflections on Today's Europe*, Derrida criticizes a Eurocentric thinking as an idea that Europe's ideals can work as a format for solutions on a global scale; he also observes that “it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other” (Derrida 1992: 29 italics in original).

¹¹⁵ Also Rosi Braidotti defends the need of changing the social imaginary of Europe which she reads in the direction of “a collective aspiration toward becoming-minoritarian” (Braidotti 2011: 263). According to the scholar, such a process is collective and affective; it is driven by the longing for change, it requires active participation and it is supported by a self-critical approach (ibid: 264).

Italy that defines itself as a “postcolonial” state, when, in reality, there has been no effective overcoming of colonial history or relations. Moreover, by providing ways of making visible the invisibility of the clandestine migrants, *Don't tell me you are afraid* exemplifies how contemporary literature can shape the borderscape by expanding the ways of seeing and experiencing borders “through its own internal process of extending the language of resistance and representation” (Papastergiadis 2010: 19). In other words, this work of fiction encodes contemporary political tensions, specifically the tension between the freedom of mobility and Europe's border regime and it describes the complexity and injustice that takes place across the Mediterranean basin, in ways that have the potential to reconsider the EU border regime.

In the novel, the Mediterranean Sea is a space in which two imaginaries attached to it establish points of connection between incompatible yet simultaneous heterochronotopes: the sea as a refuge/freedom and of the sea as a cemetery. These violently disjunctive perspectives of the same space that are inscribed onto the sea enables the conceptualization of the maritime stretch of water as a space where absolute differences coexist simultaneously. Within these space-time continuums that overlap but remain divergent to each other, contrasting experiences of living and dying across the Mediterranean are encountered. As analyzed, the romantic, liberatory and nourishing aspect of the sea is opposed to its paralyzing characteristic of contemporary border regime that aims first to partition the sea, and secondly to discipline movement across it. In this light and related to the Janus-faced border, also the Mediterranean-crossing comprises of two sharply contrasting elements: it encompasses both immense possibilities on one hand, and death and stasis on the other.

The contradiction, which the novel reveals in its representations of the Mediterranean Sea, offers a perspective on this maritime basin that discloses and questions the grand narratives surrounding it. As mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis, the Mediterranean Sea as a geopolitical entity and an ideological concept, has rested on historical and cultural views that represent it as the origin and cradle of “Western Civilization”, at the expense of excluding the diverse Arab, Jewish, Levantine, African, and Semitic cultures. Moreover, the Mediterranean as a cultural and geographical concept -praised for its exemplary unity- has characterized Mediterranean Studies which advocate for a discourse of unity and fluidity within the plethora of voices and multiple histories emerging from this basin (See Goffredo 2000, Cassano and Zolo 2007). Uncritically celebrated, such marine tropism is somehow problematic when viewed from both a historical perspective and from the current migratory situation. The appeal to unity conceals other political intentions and suggests equality where in fact there is asymmetry and dependence. In this light, the novel, offering both romantic views of the sea and those which are grounded in the Mediterranean as a locus of migration, shows undoubtedly the great contradictions at play in the Mediterranean Sea today. In particular, throughout the novel, the ambivalence that permeates the Mediterranean basin is highlighted: it is a force in its own right, at

once calm, obedient, controllable but overwhelmingly powerful. Like a frontier of the mind or the imagination, it invokes both potential encounters and fears of the unknown and, like a two-faced entity it is perceived either as nurturing figure or a horrific cradle of death. This contradiction draws attention to the fact that the maritime border is conceived as a space where dreams and horrors along with “poetics and politics are mobilized” (Perera 2013: 78). Besides, during the border-crossing, the Mediterranean Sea is characterized more by dividing lines and ruptures, than by connecting networks of shared heritage. The transit moment, the in-between space, is far from being a place where resistance and creative occur -as postcolonial studies following the contribution of Bhabha (1994) would otherwise state. The migrants' experience of the interstice does not fit within this frame. For the protagonist, submerging, sinking, and gasping for breath come to define the experience of crossing, while the Mediterranean border means danger and death and not the fluid circulation that Arjun Appadurai (1996) expounds on. Thus, the volatile and all-encompassing aspects of the Mediterranean border and the plight of those who try to cross it bring the concepts of hybridity and in-betweenness under duress.

In the novel, the maritime border appears as a force in motion, whose amplitude and potency reflect the power of border control itself. In this light, to conceive the sea as a border means to make references to the tensions related to its function of control and regulation of migratory flows, to envisage it as the sea “in the middle of lands” (as its etymology refers¹¹⁶), and thus to assume that it constitutes a geopolitical delimitation, a buffer zone, a water barrier, a fracture between supposedly divergent realities, and a “materialization of authority” that aspires to suspend the continents' entanglement creating “quarantined realms” (Chambers 2008: 3, 6). It is a place of exception where “the conditions and the distinctions of normality and everyday life are normally suspended” (Balibar 2010: 31), where the conventions of law cede, unmediated violence intrudes and inequities are most intensely made manifest. The maritime border is what Mbembe (2003) evocatively defines a “necropolitical” space. Not only are the Mediterranean waters treacherous, but, thanks to bilateral agreements between European and non-European countries, migrants can be returned to places where their rights are not recognized or enforced. This embodies a political nexus which confines migrants between death and conditional salvation/rescue, where they become — in Agamben's terms — at once rescuable and killable; both saved and abandoned (Agamben 1998). Therefore, layered and archival, spatial and temporal, the Mediterranean sea delineated in the novel grapples with relevance “with respect to the present” in Giorgio Agamben's formulation (2009: 40), and it probes the critical stance of the Mediterranean as an aesthetic and political category for the understanding and the interpretation of current clandestine maritime border-crossing. Bringing together through the trope of water mutually exclusive features, such as continuity and rupture, stasis and movement, hope and despair-, Catozzella demonstrates a way of exploring the contradictions of border crossing along

¹¹⁶ *Mar Medi-terraneum*, from the Latin *medius* (middle) and *terra* (land,earth).

which assumptions about the “journey of hope” and the generative potential of migration. By employing the genre of the bio-fictional novel, he demonstrates that the literary representation designates another coordinate in the configuration of the Mediterranean borderscape, a space from which the stories of those who attempted the maritime crossing can be (re)invoked, (re)formulated, and (re)examined.

However, it has to be noted that the literary descriptions of Samia's attempted Mediterranean crossing and her migratory journey contribute to the depiction of the young protagonist as naive, unprepared, and as a victim. While it is true that the novel stresses the importance of not leaving migrants' deaths unperceived, unseen, and uncouned, it is also true that Catozzella's “good” intentions are somehow paternalistic towards the powerless and wounded female migrant. Such paternalistic perspective depicts a reductive imagery of the migrant as ingenuous and, in some cases, helpless, which projects or resurrects stereotypical understandings of the migrants as victimized and vulnerable subjects. Moreover, in describing the migrant as naive in her pursuit of Europe, the novel contradicts the recognition that many migrants embark on the journey with a much better comprehension of what lays ahead of them. While novels like *Don't tell me you are afraid* are urgently needed because they offer a space for negotiation and reconciliation of unspeakable pain, they should however avoid manipulating the experiences of suffering as a means towards promoting a false solidarity or a benevolent attitude. While it is true that the novel highlights the plight of migrants who cannot speak for themselves, thus making a case for incorporating in the emerging corpus of Mediterranean border fiction not only accounts inspired by first-hand experiences, but also literary productions by writers who feel concerned by the current status of migration, in my opinion, the literary production participates in further victimization of its subjects. Contrary to its noble intent, the “good” intentions of the writer and the emphatic discourse highlight the disproportion of power and give emphasis to the social, political and physical distances between supposedly “Western” readers and migrants, with the latter presented as pitiful victims in need of protection. The representation of the migrant as victim devoid of choice, and thus without autonomy and political subjectivity, is historically implicated in Orientalist discourses that locate East as victim to be “saved” by West as saviour, thereby permitting Western interventions (and strengthening Europe) under the guise of benevolent humanitarianism. Also, the novel “exploits” the figure of the migrant-victim, making its success (the novel won the Strega Prize in 2014) and its distribution consequences of a deliberate decision making about how the experience of migration can be included into the craft of fiction writing. It is beyond the scope of this project to consider the function of the literary work as a commodity (Subha 2016 and Sabo 2018), but it has to be noted that with a marked political sensitivity, aimed to raise consciousness around the topic of clandestine migration, *Don't tell me you are afraid* represents a genre of literary production -especially viable and widely accessible today- that is indissociable from the political, cultural, and economic context of its production.

Furthermore, literary productions such as *Don't tell me you are afraid* are, in my opinion, partially responsible for “the birth of the humanitarian border” (Walters 2011) which projects a perspective of migrants as victims and individuals who need to be saved and rescued. The humanitarian border, performed mainly by NGO at sea, gives rise to what Walters defines the neo-pastoral power practiced by institutions and individuals who create transnational networks of care, and play an important role in managing and controlling the sea. These humanitarian projects, which are quite critical of the state of the border regime, become ambivalent functionaries in its extended network and lead to the expansion of it not only by means of “security-actors”, but also through the articulation of humanitarian positions. As Cuttitta (2018) and Cusumano (2018) also discuss, such constellation of border practices results in a particular operational logic, in which humanitarian goals often end up perpetuating existing power relations, “providing operational support and humanitarian non-state legitimation to the border regime they declare to contest” (Cuttitta 2018: 651). Accordingly, compassion and appearance of care are in reality a source of power, concealing itself as mere beneficence. Even if border fictions, such as *Don't tell me you are afraid*, have the potential to acquaint readers with socially important matters, play a role in constructing awareness of the mechanisms of border control in the effort to turn the reader into a conscious agent of world transformation (Rancière 2009: 45), and aim to engender understanding about the material injustices that migrants have to undertake in order to reach Europe clandestinely, they consist of a matter of social power, as, social power is about creating narratives that establish and maintain particular spatialization of the world and society (Said 1993, xiii). By playing with stereotypical European conceptions of the aspiring migrants, as victims deprived from their humanity, and delineating a clear distance between the protagonist and the reader, Catozzella's novel victimizes the protagonist and thus perpetuates power asymmetries turning the migrant subject into the object of discourse. Such humanitarianism shifts the discussion of clandestine migration away from human rights towards a compassionate discourse, and, unwittingly draws a line of continuity between conceptions of humanitarian response and entangled colonial histories and economic interdependencies that underpin contemporary migration flows. In this light, the humanitarian border is part of the process of Border Spectacle, thereby presenting migrants as victims, displaced persons to be rescued. The latent danger of the humanitarian border has been valued by Mezzadra, De Genova, and Pickles who affirm that

the effectiveness of the humanitarian border and its form of spectacularization in gaining the consent of the public contrasts with the tensions surrounding the state's management and securitization apparatus, and it is not surprising that the two forms have increasingly been linked together in recent years with military practices of humanitarian aid and state building, and humanitarian agency engagements with securitization logics and practices (De Genova, Mezzadra and Pickles 2015: 68)

The humanitarian border resembles the conception of hospitality that Derrida (2000) has analyzed according to whom, any attempt to offer hospitality is also always in part engaged with the need of keeping one's guests under control. In this sense, the most well-intentioned concepts of hospitality or humanitarianism render the others as strangers, positing a kind of limit upon which the other is not allowed to trespass. Yet, in case of trespassing, hospitality turns itself into inhospitality.

Drawing to a close, even though border fictions can easily be turned into another marketable form of cultural voyeurism, manipulating the experiences of suffering as a means towards offering a false solidarity, it is however necessary to underline that these aesthetic interventions expose what is not visible to the eye of mainstream media or what is intentionally kept invisible. In light of that, *Don't tell me you are afraid* offers an example of the way in which literary productions can raise questions concerning the fabrication of “illegal” migrants, the production of othering and its close relation to the tightening and enforcement of borders.

2. Fire at sea: Khaal's *African Titanics*

Let's burn up the road
The promised Land is somewhere in the world.

Sansal, *Harraga*

Published originally in Arabic in 2008 and translated into English in 2014, Khaal's *African Titanics* revolves around the story of a group of migrants headed towards the coast of Tunisia in order to clandestinely cross the Mediterranean Sea and reach the southern coast of Europe. Narrated in a semi-realistic style as a first-person narration interspersed with poems and legends, Abu Bakr Khaal's debut novel is set in the first decade of the twenty-first century, explores the complexities at the heart of migratory projects, challenges the dehumanization of migrants and narrates the violence of militarized borders.

The first pages, that function like a preamble, frame the events that in the following ten chapters will be recounted. Migration is there described as a wave “flooding through Africa [...] sweeping everything along its wake” (Khaal 2014: 3 further references are from this edition), it is no longer an individual and marginal occurrence, but rather a mass phenomenon¹¹⁷ which lead to the emptying of Africa that “will soon be no more than a hollow pipe where the wind plays melodies of loss” (ibid). Migration is compared to a flood, an environmental catastrophe beyond human control that echoes inundation, whose spell captivates Africa's youth: “not a single young soul was left untouched” (ibid). Not only migration is compared to a wave, that through its deluge causes disorder, but also to a “pandemic plague [...] calling one and all to its promised paradise” (ibid) provoked by a dark sorcerer and its “magnificent bell” (ibid). People's minds are *infected* by “the migration bug” (8), and are obsessed by pursuing the chiming and seductive bell that tempts them to start the “ceaseless roaming [...] luring them away from their quiet lives” (4,5). The omniscient narrator of the first pages describes the migratory urge in terms of superstition and myth-making to which the migrants fall prey, which he blames a demonic force “casting a hypnotic spell over the villagers and transforming [them] into *hideous beasts*, submitting mindlessly to his every command” (4 italics added). The use of metaphors -wave, flood, plague- to refer to migration evokes either uncontrollable natural phenomena or contagious disease beyond human control. In this light, migration is pathologized and migrants are either turned into the carriers of this communal fever or dehumanized, turned into hideous beasts.

The dangerous lure of migration is strengthened by the spreading of false hopes and misleading stories of success:

¹¹⁷ Other literary representations of African migration to Europe include “a mass exodus [...] collective suicide” (Sansal *Harraga* 2005: 132) or obsession and madness (Ben Jelloun *Leaving Tangier*: 2009: 10), among others.

a photo of a young friend leaning against a gleaming car in a European city, acting as though he owned it when, in reality, he had amounted to no more than a dog-walker; a lucky soul returning from abroad in record time -and in a flashy car- with a beautiful lady on his arm; an epic letter from a man long absent, promising to return and settle for good in his beloved homeland for, in his words, he has amassed enough wealth to start up a bank. The truth of the matter was that he would probably never return, and was shamefully lying about his outrageous wealth (4,5).

These stories spread among the will-be migrants “with the usual speed of all strange and wonderful stories” (5) while the unlucky ones are not welcomed “willfully forgotten in favor of happier events and gossip” (ibid). The chimeric image of a mythical better life on the other shore does not come close to telling a believable account of life on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. And yet, it is this kind of embellished image, that accounts for a distorted perception of Europe, that explains the burning desire to leave. As for Samia in *Don't tell me you are afraid*, the myth of a better future somewhere else, with its powerful cohesive force, assumes a life-force of its own motivating migrants to set on the journey towards Europe. The preamble closes with the recounting of a legend about an uncle curing his nephew of the migration bug by singing him a song, because “*he would not give up until [the nephew] was finally free to live his life as a farmer and as an inheritor of songs, for this was his destiny*” (8 italics in original). Throughout the rest of the novel, the rich world of the imagination, of art, storytelling, and intrinsically of narrating, will become very important for the narrator, stressing the transformative power of aesthetics to “overcome sorcery” (9).

The following chapter begins *in medias res*, once the main character, Abdar, who speaks on behalf of the collective as chronicler and observer, has already started his journey and is already in the city of Khartoum in Sudan where he learns of the following steps of the migratory travel. Since the beginning, he shows familiarity with all the possible means of transport: “[he] was familiar with all the rubber dinghies, as well as the small fiberglass boats [...]. [He] knew the nicknames and pseudonyms of all smugglers and [he] could also identify the Land Rover drivers hired to transport migrants across the desert” (15-6). His journey continues through the Sudanese desert during which he and his fellow travelers have to face the first adversities: the police who demand bribes from them in order to proceed the trip, “brutal highway robbers who made a habit of looting vehicles along the road” (23) and, worse of all, the unpredictability of the desert “[whose] anger whips [them] relentlessly with storms of sand” (36). The barren landscape of the desert, its hostile environment and the constant threat of death from exposure or dehydration pose particular challenges to the migrant group: the desert “changes every day, always surprising you with some unexpected shift [...] It's a wilderness. But not the romantic kind of wilderness you read about. When a sandstorm comes, it's like Judgment Day's upon you” (28), it defies human orientation; there are “no fixed landmarks. Sand dunes constantly on the move. A great sandy

mountain, stretching off to the west, becomes no more than a speck in the eye” (ibid). The desert, rather than being a privileged topology for the nomadic sentiment of modern thought (Chambers 2014: 87), is a place where one gets lost, where somebody's existence is swallowed up and canceled. The desert, is an ecosystem with a logic of orientation unique unto itself and it represents the first obstacle of a long series of challenges that the characters must overcome before reaching the sea. Both at sea and in the desert distances are distorted. Both places are difficult to navigate in any reliable way. They are resistant to markers, constantly shifting and difficult to measure. Desert sand undulates and slides — as do waves in the sea — whenever someone attempts to size or mark it. Sea and desert: one a gigantic expanse of water and the other a dry waste of sand, one a “liquid hell” (28) the other “a wide ocean of desert sand” (29), are, in the words of the narrator, impossible “to be placed one above the other [because] one's a devil, the other's a demon” (28).

During the Sahara crossing, the group's morale is low, water runs out, and people are worn by the desert's constant unpredictability and hostility: “without warning, the desert whipped itself into a violent storm, enveloping everything in swathes of darkness” (30), their “noses and mouths had transformed into sand-filled caves” (ibid), “the blazing sun glared impassively on [them]” (31) and their bodies “roast under the scorching sun” (35). The travelers' health rapidly deteriorate, collective hysteria grows among them, some start hallucinating, others die of dehydration but, after fifteen days of traveling, the Libyan city of Kufra is on sight. There, the few left alive rest a bit before heading to Tripoli. In the Libyan capital, the group separates and the protagonist continues his trip together with Terhas, an Eritrean woman whose boyfriend died during the desert crossing. In Tripoli, they get in contact with some smugglers who promise them accommodation and the organization of the sea crossing. They are brought to a garage with another twenty-five Eritrean and “men and women of numerous nationalities: Africans and Arabs from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt [...] as well as Iraqi Kurds and Bangladeshis” (55) where they are supposed to wait before being brought to a hideout closer to the coast.

During their stay at the garage, the characters wait for food and water, they wait for good weather conditions that would speed up their departure, they wait for the smugglers to come and bring them to the crossing point and, above all, they wait for the possibility of crossing the sea. As in the case of Samia, the protagonist of *Don't tell me you are afraid*, the characters' waiting suggests a standstill during their journey; it represents a fixation on a place, and it is a symbolic and psychological practice of subjection to the passing of time and dependency on other people's decisions. The practice of waiting is felt by the characters as a practice of containment in a spatially ordered space set out by others, and it is a crucial aspect of the border itself: it is a regulatory temporal device that manoeuvres the migrants' movements. Indeed, in the garage, the characters' movements are slowed down and their autonomous temporalities are disrupted.

The temporal border, as a technique for further restricting and hindering movement, is a

EU's border strategy put into place to discipline and respond to practices of clandestine mobility that cannot be completely managed through spatial containment. The temporal aspect of the border plays a fundamental role in gaining control over uncontrollable and clandestine migration movements. The lens of the temporality of the border regime enables seeing that time is not only object of practices of monitoring, but also a means and technique for conducting migrants. In this light, border control occurs through space and through time. The temporal feature of the border does not supersede the spatial one, nor it can be analyzed as autonomous, rather it is interlocked within the articulations of bordering mechanisms. It is therefore more appropriate to refer to the Mediterranean border as a spatio-temporal one. As Mezzadra and Neilson in their book *Border as Method*, aptly state regarding the temporality of control, “only from the perspective of border crossing and struggles can the temporal thickness and the heterogeneity of the border be discerned” (2013b: 166). The scholars argue that temporality is one of the many components around which borders are established claiming that the border itself is “an important mechanism of temporal management, which aimed through its spatial operations to synchronize” the diversified temporality of migration (ibid: 134). As will further be shown, the characters are alternatively subject to sudden acceleration and to indeterminate wait, and their mobility is managed through temporal borders which are related to strategies of spatial confinement. Their waiting strengthens the exclusionary mechanism of border control, restricting their possibility to move forward and imposing the *pace of control* in their temporality of migration.

During their waiting at the garage, they exchange information about the crossing, stories about friends who made it, expectations about the future, fears and doubts:

Could the smugglers be trusted -or would they disappear with our money? When would our journey finally end? Would the boat prove watertight, or be no more than a leaky sieve? Would the police discover us, storming the building and leading us away in handcuffs, our money lost? And what about the sea? Was it impatiently awaiting us, ready to offer us up in sacrifice to its god? (44)

The above mentioned quote shows that the characters are not in full control of their own travel as their movements depend on the smugglers' decisions, weather conditions, the boats' state and, above all, bordering techniques enacted by exerting control over and through time and space. Their movement is, thus, partly dependent on others, their dependency forces them either to wait for a better opportunity or to find alternative routes to avoid the obstacles. Such spatiotemporal features of the bordering practice break the linearity of the characters' journey from their places of origin to their destination, and focus instead on discontinuities during their trip: interruptions such as stopovers, unexpected settlements in transit spaces, and eventually forced returns.

At the garage, they keep themselves informed about maritime conditions: the speed and direction of the wind, the height of the waves and the degree of visibility in the Mediterranean Sea. Even though they are well aware that “every week, one of their Titanics would leave for the

far shore, completely devoid of safety precautions, and likely to sink a few miles out of sea” (41), the precaritization and insecurity that pervade their current situation leave them no other solution than continuing their journey towards the sea. However, their last step -the sea crossing- becomes more and more difficult to arrange. One of them comments: “How can the journey from shore to shore be so very difficult? It seems so simple on the maps” (47). Even though maps make locations seem graspable and tangible, for the migrants the close proximity between the African coast and Lampedusa (on a map) goes hand in hand with the impossibility of reaching their destination. Paradoxically, Lampedusa is geographically close but unreachable. Notwithstanding, the geographically short stretch of water is a determining factor in the characters' plans for migrating: the brief span between shores functions as a magnet that lures the characters with the illusion of an easy passage due to the apparent feasibility of the crossing. Yet, the distance is far more insuperable than it initially appears. As will further analyzed, their travel of hope becomes one of desperation and death as the maritime stretch turns out to be a great barrier for the characters. The latter quoted passage not only addresses the unreliability and deceptiveness of the map, but also the power relations that are inscribed in it. The apparent neutrality of the map is opposed to its geopolitical function as it not only facilitates the most powerful visual abstraction of physical space by labeling and categorizing it, but it is also an effective tool for the appropriation and definition of space. Cartography served as a fundamental tool of colonial hegemony during European colonization in Africa and, as Gil and Duarte suggest, “mapping is simultaneously a task of discerning and appropriating, of study and domination” (2011: 1). It constitutes therefore an instance of arbitrary violence, that defines, confines, and rejects other versions and claims. The practice of mapping is also a means of both knowing and shaping space that relies not only on what is mapped, but also on what is *not* mapped. Spatial gaps or blank spots include the checkpoints that any migrant would have to cross to reach either the Libyan/Tunisian shoreline or farther Lampedusa. These blank spots can, however, be filled by the narrativization of the characters' border crossing in order to reveal and criticize the unmapped borders of the surveillance regime. Narrativizing and paying attention to such spatial gaps both reveal and contest the borders that remain invisible on the map. By explicitly offering a view of the attempted border-crossing and of the many barriers that impede it by the would-be migrants' perspective, the novel reminds the reader of how current geopolitics of the Mediterranean Sea have produced a space of containment and dangerous routes for the many who attempt its passage. Additionally, the quoted passage makes a statement about the power of geography and also about the Mediterranean factuality which, seemingly defined within its shores as a fixed maritime space, proves to be a lopsided framing. On a conventional world map, the sea appears blue, flat and changeless: immutable in both space and time. The overall cartographic approach is the one borrowed from representations of land: the sea is presented as a series of latitude-longitude lines that can be distinguished by variables, with the most prominent being the divide between land that

is covered by water and land that is not covered by water (Steinberg 2013: 159). Following this cartographic representation, the understanding of the planet is one of divided into two contrasting spaces: the static terrestrial one that can be settled and grouped into states and, on the other hand, the maritime one that, due to the absence of qualities that enable settlement, may be conceived as beyond society. Such a cartographic representation fails to reveal the intricacy of the aqueous entity as a mobile space whose essence is defined by its fluidity.

Mapping is also the preliminary condition for the crossing to happen, it is the cognitive grid that allows migrants to have a sense of direction, to position themselves and to move within space. The map, like a narrative, requires from the migrants a practice of navigation/reading that relies on shared assumptions of at least two factors: destination and definition of coordinates. However, during the maritime crossing, the fact of being afloat rather than being grounded, shifts people's points of reference. Hence, the act of sea crossing becomes a destabilizing moment through the breaking down of pre-existing spatial references and points of orientation, depriving the characters of the coordinates that would help them navigate the maritime stretch. Indeed, some of Abdar's travel companions board a boat head to Lampedusa and many feel on the edge as they are caught between the vast sea and the assurance of the shore: "[i]t is hard to describe the fear that grips you at the hour of departure. You approach the boats in the darkness as they rock violently on the water. At that moment, you truly understand the meaning of terror" (61). The sea's movement and fluidity are perceived as uncontrollable forces which frustrate and disorientate whoever decides to set sail and, because of that, many jump overboard before the boat even leaves the shore or "are swept to sea without ever having resolved whether to stay or go" (ibid). The swell of water, the vagueness of the horizon, and the atmospheric changes all make precise orientation an ideal rather than a possibility. The attempted border-crossing reveals to be a terrifying and an immobilizing experience during which the longed-for moment of the crossing — the arrival — is questioned and foreclosed since departure never happens. Even the shore, understood as the edge of the sea-land divide, is an an elusive limit for the division/merging between these geological areas. Its endlessly oscillating characteristic makes the boundary between sea and land alters on a daily basis. It is an in-between space, neither properly terrestrial nor yet thoroughly maritime, that challenges the characters' determination of boarding the vessel. For the characters, the encounter with the sea from the shore captures only a fraction of the sea's manifold, three-dimensional materiality. The partial nature of the characters' encounter with the moving waves produces gaps, as the unrepresentable becomes the undecipherable and the undecipherable becomes the unthinkable.

Nonetheless, for those who manage to depart, the sea reveals itself as a paralyzing trap and, after days of being adrift at sea, "doubts begin to stir as it becomes apparent the boat has drifted from its course" (61). Amidst the hunger, thirst, fear and death, as people lose consciousness, conflicts on board erupt for no reason:

At one moment the air is filled with sobbing and the next with hysterical laughter [...] Through all this, death rears its head from time to time, snatching away whomever it wishes, whenever it wishes. [...] Their jaws seem to stretch, primed to swallow you whole as they despoil corpses of random, valueless objects [...] They fight to death, bent on destruction with every fibre of their beings. They have become animals, and you fear that you have become one too (62).

The drifting boat is a scene of fatal disorientation, in which losing one's way has the most dramatic of consequences: the passengers become animals and monsters transforming the boat's narrow deck into a place for attack and assault. The conversion of people into animals reminds the reader of the initial description of how the migration spell turned people into *hideous beasts*. In the latter quote, however, it is the fatal sea that transforms the migrants into animals. The comparison stresses the fact that during the migratory journey, the dehumanization of the travelers is the last resort in order to remain alive. It highlights that during the maritime crossing, the sea turns itself into the scenario of desperate efforts to survive, and it becomes the malevolent antagonist which reflects the larger forces the migrants must grapple with. Solidarity between the passengers is subverted by hostility and conflict. Such a conversion reflects the agony of the survival struggle, whereas their efforts to master the sea are futile as they are reminded of the limits of human power against the *spell* of a demonic, alien and hostile maritime environment. The very notion of direction is radically questioned in this vast and unmarked space and the characters' ultimate scenario, the shipwreck, is evocative of their extreme fear, horror, disorientation, suffering and abjection. Besides, the image of the drifting boat suggests first precariousness at the crux of statelessness at sea and secondly it brings to mind the current disputes in policy debates regarding resettlement and granting political asylum. Also, it alludes to the bio-power of both nation-states and the EU that require the "excluded in order to maintain the inside" (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004: 36), resulting in the Mediterranean Sea as a space of exception, wherein migrants are excluded as bare life at sea in the effort to maintain the apparent order of a closed EU.

Whereas some of his companions try to cross the sea, the narrator stays in Tripoli and finds accommodation with other migrants. There, like previously in the smugglers' garage, they keep themselves updated about the weather reports, rehashing the forecast for the upcoming days: they flick constantly "through the Maltese, Libyan, Tunisian and Italian satellite channels. If one reports calm waters [they] would immediately switch to another, anxiously discussing any differences in their verdicts [...] On hearing of a calm sea, [they] would break into rowdy celebrations" (59). After promising weather reports, they chant and hope that their departure will be scheduled soon. Yet, as a companion suggests, the media is not to be trusted, one should not "get fooled by what you hear on the telly. They said it'd calm, did they? Nonsense. A calm sea is

just an illusion, meant to trick anyone gullible enough to set off across it” (60). The sea is tricky, unpredictable, and “a big fat liar [...] a great pool of poison [...] a killer and all *her* crimes are premeditated” (60-1 italics added). The possessive adjective *her* feminizes the maritime basin which contrasts the long history of employing the female body to represent land (Lemke Sanford 1998: 63). The female figure, which is in general related to fertility and nurture, is in the latter quote paralleled to a murderer. Far from being the cradle of civilization, the Mediterranean Sea described above is a horrific cradle of death.

Hoping to depart soon, Abdar starts getting in contact with some traffickers who bring him to their hideout and let him wait for the “right” moment to cross. There, he befriends a Liberian migrant, Malouk, an artist who travels with his guitar, whose musical abilities make him legendary among his travel companions, and who “becomes [Abdar's] dear friend” (65). Malouk has a habit of going to the beach on a daily basis. There, while he is exposed to the vast, strong and endless sea, he engages himself in a one-way conversation with it:

he had much to say to the sea [...] he stood tall, challenging his old and mighty adversary. As on previous visits, he leaned his body back and spat violently onto its surface [...] Damn you he yelled at the water. You may look mighty but you've no real power. I am not afraid of you. You can't get much lower than me and I am about to piss down your throat. You are nothing but salt and brine. I'll coast from here to Lampedusa. You'll see. [...] Some call you clever, some call you cunning, but you're nothing. You may be old as the earth and I may be fated to die, but you've no feelings, no heart. How is it possible to have no soul? Whose justice are you serving? Are you just offering us up as sacrifices to your god? (75).

The continuous flow of Malouk's words parallel the continuous flow of water. It is the flow of water that strengthens perceptions, jumbled-up associations, thoughts, all of which take the form of flowing words. In a sense, the endless Mediterranean basin seems to be reflected in Malouk's endless stream of thought. Waves and tides become companion-agents of Malouk's conversation/narrative. Waves produce frictions on the surface of the sea, making this surface rough and creating the oscillatory back and forth movement of the water. The continuous back-and-forth movement of the water resonates with Malouk's stream of thought. The latter and the Mediterranean Sea are mutually implied: the former enables the latter and vice versa, and the movement of Malouk's words both produces and is produced by the movement of the Mediterranean itself. From the beach, Malouk observes the horizon and projects his journey towards the offing, and eventually to Lampedusa. From the shore, he imagines reaching the other shore, he envisages his journey as a game pitting him against the sea—a game that he ultimately wins. Nonetheless, even though he knows that the crossing might be possible, he also understands the limitations of that possibility. It is not coincidence that he wonders if “the sea would take its revenge? Would it swallow him up?” (75). This passage achieves an effective figurative reference to suppression and oppression, and the image of being swallowed stresses the likelihood that the

attempted border crossing is often a one-way journey that often does not end in arrival. Here, the sea takes its own revenge on the crossers employing the flux and reflux of its fury that reverberates.

The character of Malouk can be read as a mirror image of the narrator himself, for the latter -after the friend's death- partly collects Malouk's songs and stories in the effort to recount the tragic loss of many migrants' lives. This becomes evident in the narrative strategy that projects typographically the distinction between Abdar's semi- realistic account and Malouk's artistic passages by italicizing the latter poems and legends. The appropriation of the artist's works by the narrator has not only a memorializing function for the lives of those who embarked on the same fatal journey, but also a storytelling function that works as *antidote* to defeat the migration bug, which has caused the urge to migrate. This memorializing function is stressed also when Abdar and Terhas are locked inside the trafficker's garage and start reading the messages left by migrants who preceded them: "If this letter reaches you, I beg you will not feel sad or fearful for me. Please do not shed any of your precious tears on my account as I tell of my journey from Nigeria to the shores of North Africa" (45). Their gaze goes over the various messages written by migrants over the years as they await their departure. The notes, which cover the four walls of the garage, are written in a mixture of languages and describe fears and doubts as the migrants face the next steps of their journey: "Where will you take me, oh fleeting hours?" (47), "Forgive me, my dear Hamouddi" (ibid) and lastly "The date of his Majesty's sea voyage will be shortly announced" (ibid). The messages of the past journeys disclosed by written excerpts, testify to the lost lives or unknown destinies. The reading of those notes by the characters brings not only memory of those who might have not made it, but also it provides a sort of closure to the suffering that the notes describe. This memorializing function parallels the realistic framework provided by the narrator, enabling the entire novel to give testimony to many unknown people whose traces are either lost or forgotten.

After days of being locked inside the hideout, the three of them, Abdar, Malouk and Terhas, succeed in escaping from it before "hundreds of flashing red and blue lights came streaming towards [them] [...] Police cars surrounded the building and all the men and women were led away in handcuffs" (77). They walk back to Tripoli where they head straight to an apartment which was "a well-known smuggling hub" (81) and discuss the next step. Instead of attempting the crossing from Libya, they decide to try it from the Tunisian coast since "its coast lay much closer to Europe, less than eight hours away. Tripoli, on the other hand, was at least two days away" (81).

They head towards the Tunisian border and decide to cross it at night where the possibilities of getting caught by the Tunisian police are lower. While approaching the first checkpoint, "searchlights beamed down on [them], flooding the area with light. [Their] shadows grew treacherously long, stretching over the ground and down to the sea, betraying [their]

presence” (84). In the quoted passage, the Tunisian/Libyan border is depicted as a highly monitored zone. Migration control along the border follows the strategy of prevention through deterrence, which consists in the assumption that a high concentration of personnel, infrastructure, and surveillance technology will deter unauthorized migrants from trespassing the border. As previously mentioned, the practice of waiting at the border is an important feature of the bordering process. Such waiting practice is however not only carried out by the migrants, but also by the border guards who stand at the border waiting for the clandestine migrant to attempt the crossing. The border guard is actually trained in the act of waiting and, as the scholar Van Houtum suggests, s/he is a “border waiter” (2010: 287). As representatives of the Law, border guards control the national border, decide who is allowed in or not, they reward and punish. Not only do they perform the Law but they also represent a spatial-territorial strategy of managing certain flows of people and their role as, *border waiters*, is one of the many devices of power construction, functioning side by side with the making and remaking of walls, fences and borders.

After successfully hiding until their shadows fade, the characters reach the borderline but, at a closer look, they catch a glimpse of their next obstacle: “a long barbed wire fence with a dense tangle of plants growing up it, concealing everything that lay beyond” (85). Fences and barbed wires, with their high level of visibility, are the usual images that come to mind when reflecting on borders, and they elicit the notion of borders as a force of containment that serves to exclude the unwelcome. Border fences bring human movement to a dead stop. They are built to impede the flow, and they are meant to discourage any trespassing with their daunting sheer verticality. Yet, this force of containment and intimidation inspires desires of overcoming, motivates bodies to climb over, and threatens physical harm through the inherent dangers of falling or being caught by the police on its other side. At the sight of the fence, the characters hurl their possessions over it and try to climb it, but they soon get caught in a tangle of metal and plants, and are forced to retreat. They start panicking but eventually they manage to pull themselves free and for the next half an hour they wade through muddy ground on the Tunisian side until the border town Bin Qurdan comes into sight. From there, they reach Tunis avoiding any “police cars, stationed at cross roads and in front of municipal buildings” (95) and find accommodation in a hostel where the owner, who “was used to welcoming guests like [them]” (ibid), suggests them to “avoid public places; like streets, squares and gardens. And don't walk around in groups. So, in other words, find yourself a hole, curl up in it, and hope for the best” (97).

They are forced to become invisible in order to avoid control and surveillance which are not only at the border check-points but also in the public sphere. Public visibility shifts between an empowering position (visibility as recognition) and disempowering one (visibility as control). Such opposition underlines the fact that visibility is a paradoxical concept: practices of rendering in/visible are associated to regimes of in/visibility that encapsulate the shift between a bestowing

and revoking of power at the oscillating threshold between what is worthy of being seen and what is not. In the case of the characters, their public visibility has to be avoided since “being seen” means to be identified as clandestine migrants, and thus deportable persons. The ever-present threat of detection and deportation forces them to resort to the strategy of invisibility which can be read as a form of resistance against border and migration regimes across the Mediterranean border, and it implies both the acknowledgment and acceptance of condition of invisibility and an interiorized mode of being. However, it has to be noted that the characters' evasion of visibility leads to a damaging self-perception of themselves as “shadows” or “ghosts”, stressing their position between being hyper-visible as clandestine persons but invisible socially and legally. Since the border regime tries to impose immobility and further contributes to the migrants' marginalization, it makes them insecure and vulnerable, forcing them to become invisible in order to survive while in transit. The practice of becoming invisible, and thus to disappear, is also produced by the practice of illegalization of the migrants, where the illegality manifests itself as “an erasure of legal personhood — a space of forced invisibility, exclusion, subjugation and repression” (De Genova 2002: 427). The consequences involved with being invisible may include exploitation, disappearance and even death.

At the hostel, the three of them share a room, and Abdar finds a note in which Malouk wrote a poem entitled “Crossing” whose lyrics evocatively depict their arduous condition, and the one of other clandestine migrants:

*Without an amulet/ I slid through the guarded gates/ Crawling like a worm/
Through barbs and wire/ Swallowed by salty swamps/ Surrounded by desert
dogs [...] Between wicked trees/ Clawing at my clothes/ while rain lashed me/
I watched my legs/ Sink into graves of clay/ Dissolving into watery floods/ I
crossed/ But now I must find an amulet/ To cross/ Straits of fire/ Towards
continents of snow (101) (italics in original).*

The latter quote not only reveals the hard realities faced by migrants who risk their lives in order to reach what they consider the land of opportunities, but also how they cope with and circumvent impediments to their (im)mobility, and how they strive during dangerous situations. Their journey is not linear, rather it is fragmented as the characters are forced to retrace their steps, all the while renewing their points of transit and arrival. As examined, the characters are compelled to find alternative routes to avoid and/or overcome both physical hazards, such as the desert, and geopolitical obstacles such as border enforcement. Their lack of opportunity means that their journey is a desperate resort: no precise plan is laid down, their decisions are in part arbitrary, and chances of a better life exist only in an imagined and dreamy future.

The *wet border* — the sea — is strikingly depicted as “Straits of fire” which combines the two elements of water and fire. This juxtaposition not only recalls the heat and dryness of the desert that the characters just crossed, but it also suggests that the experience of crossing the Mediterranean Sea is like *being in hell* where you feel the fire burning. Also, the Straits of fire

evoke the neologism employed in the Maghreb to refer to clandestine migrants, *harragas* (burners¹¹⁸), those who literally burn their documentation to prevent deportation. The mentioned border figure, conveying two facets of the border -liquid and burning-, combines two seemingly incompatible elements, and it contradicts the common understanding of water extinguishing fire. However, it draws an analogy between the magnetic attraction of water -as represented in *Don't tell me you are afraid*- and the mesmeric quality of fire. Both water and fire are a source of fascination and they share similar qualities: elusiveness and transmutability, perpetual change and motion. Pursuing the border figure of the *straits of fire*, one can further infer that the fire results in incineration namely, the end of the previous existence. By “burning” the Mediterranean border, the migrant meets a symbolic death by fire. Moreover, the oxymoron of the *burning water* evokes the border figure of the *liquid hell* mentioned at the beginning of the novel, and they both refer to the Mediterranean border as first a site of symbolic and actual death and secondly of agony.

On the way towards the Mediterranean shore, the characters' journey takes place across an area which has no visible territorial delimitations — except for the border check-points at the Tunisian/Libyan border — but which has been transformed by the European border regime into an elastic border zone, that encompasses the whole territory extending and including Europe and northern Africa. This is one of the consequences of the European border regime that has outsourced selective surveillance and detention practices in transit countries in northern Africa. The externalization of borders reinforces the idea that bordering practices are no longer only localized at the borderlines, rather they create a grid over social space, and they can be encountered “whenever selective controls are to be found” (Balibar 2002: 84). By stating that borders are where control, apprehensions, detentions and exclusion can be found, one should not consider the Mediterranean border simply as a generalization of “borders are everywhere”, rather the maritime border corresponds in its power with other types of filters both within and beyond the limits of Europe. In this light, the Mediterranean border is not only multiple at the level of its form and functioning, but it is also mobile (Szary, Giraut 2015) creating *de facto* overlapping jurisdictions. This is because insofar as border enforcement and security are concerned, prevention through deterrence has required a joint effort between states. The externalization of migrant processing and detention beyond the EU calls into question the current limits of sovereign borders and powers and destabilizes any sense of fixed borders and territorial stability. Additionally, the Sahara desert as a *mirror border* of the sea is still relevant nowadays, given that the security frontier of the European Union has been extended to the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and even beyond. According to the geographer Ali Bensaâd, the Sahara becomes the Mediterranean's hinterland: the desert irrupts into the sea. The two work as mirrors

¹¹⁸ As already mentioned in the second chapter, the term burners define those who burn their identification before undertaking the maritime crossing in order to avoid repatriation. To *burn* refers to the figurative act of 'burning the way' (in this case, the sea), and of clandestinely 'burning up' the kilometers that separate place of origin and Europe.

of each other. And if, in seismic terminology, the Mediterranean basin is perceived as a fault line between its shores, the Sahara represents the aftershock of this fault (Bensaâd 2006: 14). Trans-Saharan itineraries channel the flows coming from the Horn of Africa to the Maghreb, and represent for migrants not only a springboard toward Europe but also an arresting zone, due to the extreme danger in its crossing which is carried out nonetheless.

The European Surveillance Border System (EUROSUR), promoted in 2008 and implemented in October 2013, initiated a plan of visibility of migrants' route. The plan consists in a technique of observing and tracking migrants' routes in order to map a cartography of migratory flows and consequently filter and obstruct them before they actually reach Europe. Besides being practices and initiatives of direct control of territorial borders, they consist of a complex logic aiming at the creation of a regime of high visibility. Moreover, the European Union's cooperation with the countries of North Africa on migration and asylum practices out-sources EU border controls. Partnerships with non-member states have been key to the EU politics of migration, and in these agreements the EU government finances and assists the administrative and institutional capacities of border management in transit countries. This “assistance” includes the training of border police, the supply of technical equipment, the sharing of information on migratory routes and the creation of EU-financed detention centers for clandestine migrants in many locations in the Maghreb¹¹⁹. The Mediterranean border moves away from being a jurisdictional line, instead it starts to resemble a *frontier*, thereby rendering EU more akin to an empire -vis-à-vis the control of its periphery. As such, as the border comes to resemble a frontier, EU's sovereignty bears resemblance to *imperium* — a Roman definition for authority which is not territorially circumscribed —, but it includes spaces over the frontier. As analyzed throughout this thesis, in the last two decades, the Mediterranean border has undergone great changes regarding its shape, locality and places where it manifests itself. This transformation suggests first of all the dispersal of the border far from the actual geopolitical line, and secondly the constitution of a border network whose tentacles manifest themselves in different types of filters both inside Europe and in the northern African countries. Thus, it is a mobile space that can be located outside the EU, but which lies inside its strategic area of interest, and whose stability is fundamental.

In Tunis, after being approached by a smuggler, who shows them the boat that would

¹¹⁹ The process of European pressure on the Maghreb to curb migratory flows can be traced back to the end of the 20th century. The Barcelona Process -also known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)-, beginning in the 1995, laid the basis for a collaboration between the EU and its North African neighbours. The Process represented a strategy that, in official terms, aspired to secure a “zone of peace, stability, and shared prosperity” (Tanner 2004: 137). This process, however, offered the chance for an exertion of European soft power, rather than any direct EU foreign policy. In 2003, the Operation Olyssess started, which included France, the UK, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, and increased the amount of vessels patrolling the Mediterranean coasts in the effort to report on clandestine migration. Hence the need to strengthened enforcement in security and financial cooperations with North African countries. The change in financial priorities from the Barcelona Process to Operation Ulysses reflects the shift from a supposedly economic and democracy promotion agenda to a control and security policy based on preventing clandestine migration into the EU. For a deep insight into bilateral agreements between EU countries and the Maghreb (See Law 2014).

bring them to Lampedusa, Malouk agrees to attempt the crossing, whereas Abdar and Terhas reject the idea since the conditions of the vessel are very poor: “it had originally been a fishing boat [...] [There were] screw holes and deep scratch marks on the deck. The floor was covered in a layer of oil and dirt [...] and the roar of the engine was deafening as it belched out of suffocating acrid smoke” (107). The boat is described as an unstable vessel, its woodwork and engine are fragile and ill equipped to navigate the treacherous waters, which are bedeviled by strong winds and currents that can quickly transform the placid sea conditions into raging tempests. The boat, which should be the characters' shelter and transfer during the maritime crossing, is however a place of potentially claustrophobic confinement since “to make more seating, freezers used for storing fish had been carelessly removed” (ibid) and “the suffocating acrid smoke of the engine” (ibid) prefigures the fate that awaits its future passengers. In addition, throughout the novel, the general name given to any vessel bound to Lampedusa, *Titanic*, recalls the most famous ship that wrecked in 1912 whose disaster remains one of the most recognized maritime tragedies, at least in U.S. and Europe. This famous wreck has drawn and still draws attention not only for its high drama, but also for the moral issues exposed by the tragedy: the incommensurate number of fatalities among third-class passengers compared with first-class ones (Miskolcze 2013: 171). Consequently, the naming of the migrant's vessel *Titanic* engages with historical and contemporary moral judgment about controversial matters surrounding class and ethnicity¹²⁰. Even for those characters who do not name the boats *Titanics*, they routinely refer to them as “The Doomed” (61) while only in one case somebody opts to call it “Something optimistic. Noah's Ark. Or any other ship that never sank” (61) receiving as a reply the bitter statement that “seventy per cent sink, only thirty out of a hundred survive! So I guess Titanic is an appropriate name for them after all” (ibid). Hence, the novel's title *African Titanics* frames the clandestine crossing as a shipwreck employing the topos of the latter as “a powerful symbol of mortality adrift in a hostile universe” (Mentz 2008: 166). The migrants' boat is also characterized by an ambiguous duality. The vehicle and its journey is a space-time of death and hope: it is at once a coffin-like space “a hollow shell, traveling empty and alone” (62), and a place of escape. This analogy also applies to the novel as a whole, producing a lyrical space in which the humanity of the migrants as subjects is described and rendered visible while also foreclosing the impossibility of any hopeful outcome for its characters.

During Malouk's attempted border-crossing, the boat proves to be a weak means of transport, as “waves the size of mountains smashed angrily against the groaning boat [...] and the

¹²⁰ It is difficult to offer precise data and numbers concerning clandestine migration by boat across the Mediterranean Sea, but it is estimated that a migrants' vessel has three levels: the upper front is the first class area where migrants pay up to 1500 dollars for their passage, the intermediate level is where they pay about 1000 dollars, and the bottom part of the vessel is where they pay 800 dollars. In the bottom area, there is no air and it is particularly hot, and migrants often die during their crossing from suffocation rather than perishing at sea, often suffering from fuel burns produced by the combustion of fuel mixed with salty water, which leads to severe if not fatal burns (see Del Grande 2006, 2010).

deck creaked and bits of wood began to splinter off” (108). The consoling metaphor of the boat as a means of escape disappears and it is instead turned into an inescapable prison, a place of no exit. The passengers on board are terrified; they are constrained to remain inside a boat, lost at sea with a failed engine, and at the mercy of the waves. While waiting to be rescued, they begin “to fear the onset of collective hysteria” (ibid). At this moment of the crossing, the dreadful threat lays not “in the ferocious waves but in the water that had begun to slop onto the deck, threatening to drench the engine” (ibid). After hours of scooping water out with whatever containers they can find, with water flooding in through leaks, despair sets in among the travelers. They drift eight days with no orientation and direction, and in these days hunger and thirst claim the first victims: “by dawn, twenty people had collapsed and at sunrise they died, one after another” (110).

After eight days of being adrift, they reach international waters and hope that other vessels will save them. As one of the passengers says “[w]e’re in international waters now, so other ships will rescue us if necessary. Just keep calm” (108). The few left on-board scan the horizon in search for any other kind of vessel navigating in their direction. At the sight of an oil tanker, the few left alive wave at it asking for rescue but “a small group of sailors grouped motionlessly on its deck, surveying them in silence [...] The sailors made no response and the steamer continued on its course” (110). The migrants’ boat begins to go under, people throw themselves into the icy water, and Malouk lays floating on a plank reciting verses he wrote, asking the sea for mercy: “*Oh Sea!/ In the name of the faces/ Etched on your memory/ In the name of those/ Who have imprinted their cries/ On the air/ Restrain this tyrannous wind/ And still these hungry waves*” (113 italics in original) but in response “*Their corpses are raised high/ Like plunder*” (114 italics in original).

The sea is held to be divine, stressed by the capital letter “s” of “Sea” whose force is great against the helplessness of the passengers. Water, as a fluid and transparent substance, seeps into cracks leading to the ultimate destruction of the vessel and it has the power not only to capsize, but also to rip the boat apart resulting in the drowning of those on board. Hence, the strength of waves to carry migrants across the sea is counterpointed by the destructive quality of the very same waves. As both means of passage and menacing obstacles, waves are either the bridge to the other shore or life-takers, thereby embodying conflicting qualities.

The migrants’ maritime crossing is haunted by graveless corpses, “*unnamed boats / Like unmarked graves*” (112 italics in original), and it takes on a nightmarish dimension. The sea is described as an unmarked grave site thereby stressing the impossibility of naming and memorializing those who drown. As such, the Mediterranean grave site is short of coordinates that would allow the localization of boats and bodies, and therefore it lacks the place-based narrative and rituals for memorization. Besides, in the verse recited by Malouk at the moment of the boat’s shipwreck, rhetorical devices and figures of speech are inadequate to represent the horror of death at sea. The verse probes the limits of language and it refers to the impossibility of

narrating the unspeakable. It is not a coincidence that during any crossing “a deathly silence settles over [the boat]. People lose all ability to articulate” (61). Language becomes empty, meaningless and fails to express the thoughts, fears, and vulnerability of the migrants. The incapacity to speak at the moment of the border-crossing makes reference to the silencing of language of established human interpretations of the world. Silence during the maritime passage stresses the impossibility of representing the “inscrutable” border, of defining a space that escapes definition of strict delineation. Consequently, the clearing of all of the anthropocentric interpretations and creations of meaning at the moment of border-crossing stresses the vain attempt to create human meaning out of a nonhuman environment. Moreover, if one follows Laura Bieger's insight of narrative as a fundamental, and essentially human “resource of orientation and emplacement” (Bieger 2018: 13), the characters' failure to narrativise the experienced border-crossing emerges as tied up with their failure to orientate themselves. The disorienting experience of being at sea suggests hesitation, doubt, indecision, the loss of bearings and of articulation.

As already stated in the first chapter, even though jurisdictionally the Mediterranean Sea does not represent a maritime legal void, it does evoke images of a void when migrant vessels are concerned, in particular when they capsize and persons drown. Indeed, unaccountability, impunity, and exception at sea persevere and, with it, the capability of the sovereign states to re-activate the powerful function of the sea as a deadly void. As an almost too literal example of biopolitical governmentality (Foucault 2004), power in this instance is exercised not only by actively protecting the life of certain populations, but also by causing the death of others simply by abstaining from any form of intervention. The biopower is further muddled by competing sovereignties at sea that reject rescuing those in peril and/or simultaneously claim natural resources and trade routes for economical gains. Thus, the biopolitical economy of migratory flows goes hand-in-hand with fatal political regimes of control and management of both survival and extinction (Braidotti 2013: 10).

Silenced, invisible and excluded from the political space of Europe, reduced to naked, or bare lives, the characters during their crossing enter a space in which forms of legal and political de-legitimization go hand in hand with the suspension of human rights: they are abandoned in a space of disputed jurisdiction, to the forces of exception and to a hostile environment. At the Mediterranean border, inclusion and exclusion collapse together to produce alternative forms of “differential inclusion” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013b: 159) that work to define, stratify and divide people through the imposition of multiple, or absent, legal statuses. In this light, the maritime border represents a space that creates legal and social uncertainty in which the characters' political agency is temporarily deferred and, thus, repressed while their human status obliterated.

In the days that follow Malouk's unsuccessful crossing, Abdar and Terhas remain in Tunis

but get arrested on their way back to the hostel. Following their arrest, they are brought to a detention center, which functions as an outpost of the border located outside Europe, and which is “heavily guarded. A large gatehouse stood in front of its wide entrance, which swung open and closed to let in guards, police, special agents and all the other shady figures at work here” (117). After being interrogated, beaten up and brutally kicked, they are “released at the border and closely monitored as [they] trudged back into no man's land and on into Libya” (118). After two weeks at the border town, Abdar and Terhas are deported back to Eritrea. Their deportation gives an insight into contemporary migration practices, focusing on the impacts and implications of Libya's role in transnational management of border control, therefore bringing into view EU border regime's close connections with northern African countries in its effort to prevent access to Europe.

Abdar's failure to complete his migratory journey highlights the forced immobility perpetuated upon migrants. Yet, his failed attempt forcefully brings him back to his role as the novel's narrator and recasts him with renewed agency: a chronicler whose function is to memorialize the tragic loss of many migrants' lives. Having collected Malouk's stories and songs, at the end of the novel, Abdar functions like a mirror image of the artist, and he rehearses a poem written by his deceased friend: “*To all the pounding hearts / In feverish boats / I will cut / Through these paths / With my own liberated heart / And tell my soul / To shout of your silenced deaths / And fill / Palms of dust with morning dew / And song*” (122 italics in original). The final poetic insertion within the prose text is a dedication to all those who lost their life at sea, and it commemorates the persons whose deaths may remain unaccounted, in order that their stories and lives will not be buried in the grave of oblivion. The closing poem provides some sort of closure to the suffering described throughout the novel, and it enables the narrative to reverse the perception that such lost lives will be overlooked because not considered grievable, hence valuable (Butler 2009: 25). In the quoted passage, there is once again the reference to the burning/feverish quality of the maritime crossing, whereas the Mediterranean border comes to represent the Styx¹²¹, the netherworld dividing the living and the wandering shadows of the dead.

As analyzed, *African Titanics* narrates the strenuous journey across the Sahara desert and the sea, describes the dangerous passage that some of the characters undertake in order to reach the other shore, the suffering of hunger and thirst, the pain from the blistering sun and the characters' struggles during the migratory journey. The narrative depicts the Mediterranean border as a space that encapsulates both human hope and human despair, and as an arena in which people

¹²¹ In Greek mythology, the Styx is the boundary that divides the world of the living from the world of the dead. According to the myth, the only way to cross the Styx is in a boat rowed by Charon, the ferryman who demands payment for carrying the souls to the other side. One could even compare the myth to the clandestine crossings of the Mediterranean Sea, in the view that the seascape represents the passage between the two sides -the Styx-, and the trafficker, who in general navigates the vessels, demands payment for his service, as Charon does. Interesting enough, an Austrian movie entitled *Styx* was released in 2018 featuring a German doctor, sailing across the Strait of Gibraltar, who encounters a sinking migrants' vessel (Fischer: 2018).

and stories are enmeshed with the geopolitical. The ship's wreckage and the *invisible* trails and traces that mark the characters' unsuccessful crossing invest the Mediterranean border with their claims for safe passage, whereas, the maritime border stands between fear and desire, and as a representation of both fear and desire. The maritime basin is both the site of the possibility for escape and a place of extreme precariousness whereas water becomes the very geopolitical material that produces the conditions in which migrants either become managed persons outside of the limits of nation-states or are marked as disposable.

The maritime border is a key component in the production of symbolic geographies and it carries a strong figurative power: it presents itself as the last obstacle of a long and dangerous journey, it is defined as an adversary that needs to be fought, it is a magnet that lures the characters and restrains them even in the absence of a visual clue of it, and it acquires new meanings during the crossing. What the characters do not realize before the crossing is that even the seemingly reachable distance to the other shore becomes a dark threatening place in which the sea is transformed into the personification of evil, connected to death, a space of risk, of danger, of hostility, of terror and misery involving a dangerous journey that potentially ends in death. It is a repository of lost lives, a cradle of death, the scenario of desperate efforts to survive, and it is defined as a cemetery where, "boats are like unmarked graves" (114). The sea's apparent fluidity is rendered solid as opposed to its supposed shifting, mobile and liquid characteristics, and it is far from being a perpetual transit evoking notions of transnationality, exchange and free movement. Rather, it embodies the stage in which the border control tentacles act; it is a rift, a crack and a void where migrants' boats capsize. Not only it is represented as a space of risk and death, but also as an important fulcrum of geopolitical strategies, governmentality and manoeuvrings whose physical characteristics -liquidity and fluidity-, have created the possibility to enforce tragically effective mobile border zones.

Throughout the analysis, it has been shown that the Mediterranean Sea is better conceived by the notion of a maritime border which is highly unstable, since it is not constrained by a fixed location and can appear in any place where unauthorized movement is noticed. The ambiguity of its location, by selectively fixing and unfixing the elements of the border, is a deliberate governance strategy and a geopolitical resource in a world defined by perpetual change. The ubiquitous border stops being the exception and turns itself into rule, responding to its function of governing populations both inside and outside a territory. Understood from this perspective, the Mediterranean border resembles an octopus whose tentacles reach everywhere, a tri-dimensional entity that oscillates between moments of fluidity, allowing the transit of people, commodities and ideas, as well as moments of solidity, restraining the transit. So, far from being a neat binary line, it resembles a Möbius strip that creates ambiguous and uncertain zone of differential inclusion and stratified social differentiation. Consequently, the Mediterranean border is an unstable delimitation that throws into question the very possibility of defining an inside and outside,

suggesting the “vacillating” feature of the border itself. Since this watery border functions not only as an enclosing and confining line, but also as a complex social institution marked by tensions between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing (Mezzadra 2015: 130), it is removed and dislocated in the attempt to restrain, block and filter the passage of certain bodies before the actual geopolitical division. The fact that the border is dislocated does not mean that it is de-powered, rather it is an invisible figure that guides, conducts, obstructs and restrains people. It is omnipresent, yet beyond grasp. The border is not physically there, it cannot be seen, but its invisibility is even more limiting than a wall or a fence in the way it excludes human senses. The difference between not being able to see and literally unsee is important to the comprehension of how the concept of invisibility produces a supreme border. Not being able to see is limited by something external -be it a wall or a building- but to unsee what stands in front of a person is completely different: the border's invisibility is in itself a component that restricts human senses (Brambilla and Pötzsch 2017).

The descriptions of the characters' migratory journey reveal geographies of power, destabilize concepts of transit and settlement, and define it as an experience with indeterminate destinations and shaped by geopolitics. The novel portrays the effects of being on the move, or in some cases of being moved, shifted around, and thrown back and forth either by traffickers or border police. As migration controls proliferate along and beyond the Mediterranean border, the migratory journey is fragmented, involving long period of waiting and settlement interspersed with short bursts of mobility. The temporality of the characters' waiting opens up the “space” of migratory journey to include places of ostensible non-movement, such as the smuggler's garage and hideout. Both waiting and (im)mobility characterize the experience of the characters, for whom waiting is “a distinct spatial and temporal dimension of stasis” (Conlon 2011: 355). Even though their experience of waiting can be seen as a productive one since, during their waiting, the characters develop new strategies of mobility, it is however “a temporal process in and through which political subordination is reproduced” (Auyero 2012: 2).

With a passport worthless in the eyes of many European embassies, the characters are unable to access formal migration channels and are left to the whims of traffickers to take them across the Sahara and the Mediterranean, with results and death rolls that are familiar to the reader. They must therefore traverse longer, more perilous routes facing increasing danger, violence and risks, which are but the only ones available to them in the current EU regulatory framework. It has been however shown that, despite bordering practices, the characters manoeuvre over them changing their transit locations, adjusting to unforeseeable events encountered along the route. Thus, rather than being described as pitiful victims from a compassionate / benevolent writer -like in the case of Catozzella's *Don't tell me you are afraid*-, Khaal's characters exhibit a degree of agency albeit the ambiguity and clandestinity of their journey. Also, the representation of the characters' mobility vitiates stereotypical European

interpretations of clandestine migrants as either existential threats to Europe's cohesion or as victims in need of having their "humanity" re-established.

While *the migration spell* touches entire countries, the characters' motives for migrating are not explicitly stated, as the narrator suggests at the very beginning of the novel; "[w]e have our reasons" (24). Khaal's characters go after an imagined future, animated by migratory dreams triggered by a sort of bewitchment, sorcery and infection -the migration bug- which stresses that clandestine migration cannot be easily qualified under categories that divide the migrants into economic, labor, political, ecological ones. These categories only partly explain migration. The deeper reason is the sense of deprivation of a country (space) and a future (time), a spatio-temporal disappointment that does not open the doors to a promising future. None of the characters idealize clandestine migration as a solution to the conditions at home. Instead, migration is presented as a collective reaction to particular circumstances which are felt either unendurable or adverse and, as Malouk comments, migration is an ever-existing event because "there will always be migration so long as there are human beings on earth" (70). The underlying implication of Malouk's comment is that migration has always been a defining aspect of the Mediterranean and of the planet in general. Whereas the direction and patterns of movement have shifted over the decades, the Mediterranean region has been and still is a sending, receiving as well as transit region of migration. Additionally, his comment resembles the statement made by the scholar Mbembe who acknowledges that population movements and cultural flows have always been part of the African continent's history¹²². In this line of thought, the fact that the reader does not know precisely the characters' provenance speaks to the irrelevance of national origin in a world of mass migration. Even the start of the route is unclear, albeit it can be identified in the home country of the narrator, Eritrea. The precise route linkage from the beginning to the end is sometimes ambiguous as clear names or locations are not always stated, giving light to a feeling of spatial uncertainty both for the characters who are often found in alienating and disorienting situations, and for the narrative itself that presents both vague locations, and therefore unclear routes, and "spatial jumps".

At the end of their migratory journey, the characters have to come to terms either with death or forced immobility and return. In the latter case, the novel underlines that (im)mobility is itself not an impasse, but rather a different form mobility. Indeed, Abdar's forced return reveals his new trajectory as chronicler that memorializes the tragic loss of those who perished during the journey. His transformation into the narrator of others' stories mirrors the act of story-telling that,

¹²² See "Afropolitanism". According to the scholar, Afropolitanism is a transnational sensibility which is not based on victimhood, but on a blend of "here and elsewhere", and as the "primary way to embrace, knowingly, the foreign, the foreigner, and the far away, this capacity to recognize one's face in that of a stranger and to valorize the traces of the far-away in the near, to domesticate the un-familiar, to weave one's way into what appears as opposites" (Mbembe 2010: 229). Afropolitanism is a political and cultural statement whose concern is to break away from the reputation of underdevelopment and poverty that remains mostly related to Africa.

during the narrative, Malouk performed and was aimed to create a temporary community while attempting to survive along the route. Abdar's "take-over" at the end of the novel not only aims to preserve the stories of his fellow travelers by recounting their experience, but also to fabricate a "story" whose trajectories go from the past to the future. Besides, it emerges as a practice that stresses the quality of being "simply a man [and] no longer a migrant" (82). In this way, via the recourse to myths and folk tales, the conclusion of the novel not only explores the plight and loss of migrants' lives, but it also provides existential and universal reflections. Similarly to Lalami's *Hope and other dangerous pursuit*, the practice of storytelling in *African Titanics* uncovers a type of blank spot within the narrative space, its forgotten history, and reconstitutes a link with the past in a manner that goes beyond nostalgia. The need to remember functions as a precondition for understanding the present. Without memory, comprehension is difficult if not impossible. In this sense, the authors suggest that remembering and storytelling can serve as a starting point for challenging the present condition. Also, in paying important to the act of storytelling, they call for new new stories to be divulged, stories that depict the complexity of individualized migratory experiences.

Drawing to a close, the comparison between the two novels analyzed in this chapter suggests a commonality in the representation of border dynamics: the presence of intermediaries in charge of bringing the characters first across the Sahara Desert and then across the Mediterranean Sea, the representation of the maritime basin as a mobile borderscape, and the boat as the common means of border-crossing. Having decided to leave, the migratory journey exposes the characters to a whole range of dangers precisely because of the clandestinity of their travel increases their vulnerability. Human traffickers negotiate the means of transportation, driving overcrowded trucks and navigating precarious boats. Yet, unlike *Hope and other dangerous pursuits*, in which some of the characters succeed in their attempt to reach the other shore, Khaal and Catozzella's novels foreground journeys that fail at reaching their destination. These two novels do not focus on the arrival in the European territory, rather they portray the clandestine route through the Sahara Desert to the Mediterranean shore. Khaal and Catozzella's characters may not even qualify as clandestine migrants since they fail to reach Europe. With regard to the nature of their mobility, it is important to note that whereas Khaal's characters' route comes to an end at the detention center, an intermediate stopping point that becomes the destination itself, the route of Catozzella's character culminates at sea. However, both novels trace a tight political geography of border enforcement comprising the army posts, the prison in Libya, the detention center and finally the Mediterranean border.

In both novels, the Mediterranean basin is not a passive entity, but rather the active determinant of the crossing. It is vast, dangerous and a realm of pure struggle. It is a moat, a protective space that keeps the undesirables at bay. Its component, water, is a force both seductive and violent. Whereas in Catozzella's novel, it has been described as a motherly amnion and an

alluring magnet, in Khaal's text it is haunted by demons and it is associated with a feminine force that brings death. In both novels, it is an horizon, an always beyond. The limitless horizon gives a glimpse of the other side, but it is elusive and it can only offer an ephemeral view of the beyond. No matter how hard the characters struggle to cross the border, it always recedes from them. Not only it recedes from them, but it also evades determination. It is an irreducibly malleable entity that shows itself as an unsurpassable limit. This invisible border, that meets the eye yet simultaneously withdraws from view, is not the counterpart of the visible border, but it is a complementary part of it. The border-horizon works like a magnet pulling the characters towards it. Yet, during the sea crossing, the border-horizon offers nothing but an enclosing, undifferentiated limit without end, surrounding and imprisoning the characters. Bordered and trapped by the endless sea, the atmosphere that surrounds the characters is one of fear and dread that transmits a state of exclusion and separation.

Both writers connote the idea of a sea-turned-cemetery, where the currents catch hold of bodies, taking them to the sea bottom, thereby alluding to the devouring nature of the maritime border. The romantic aspect of the sea implied at the beginning of *Don't tell me you are afraid* is opposed to its paralyzing characteristics of nowadays border regime that aims to discipline movement and to partition the sea. Given such a multifaceted way in which the border lends itself to interpretation, the Mediterranean border takes the contours of a character with two dissimilar sides: it is, on one hand, a fluid, and potentially liberatory expanse, and on the other hand, a confined space with complex hierarchies of race and citizenship. Similarly, the sea crossing is Janus-faced: it is the signifier for the beginning of a new life and of immense possibilities, but also of death and stasis. The latter quality is exacerbated by the title of Khaal's novel, *African Titanics*, that implies first that migrants and their dreams travel in coffins, and secondly that the Mediterranean Sea behaves treacherously and it ends up being the migrants' graveyard. The boat, the vessel tasked with carrying the characters across the sea, is supposedly the vehicle for finding refuge on the other shore. At first, it is the locus of "positive" feelings, mainly those of confidence and hope, and it holds out faith, and guarantee of a better future. Nevertheless, during the passage, the boat turns quickly from being a place of shelter and promise to a place of grief and death. Thus, it becomes the symbol of the journey through life's stages and of the passage through which migrants enter the world and leave their life.

IV. Speculations on the Mediterranean borderscape

In the current migratory scenario, one of the places most evocative of the ongoing geopolitical dynamics is represented by the island of Lampedusa. A rocky 12-square mile island in the Mediterranean Sea, 120 miles far from the coasts of Sicily and 70 miles from Tunisia, Lampedusa has, over the years, turned into a place associated with the theme of mobility control and that of preventive rejection. It has been linked to migrant deaths and clandestine landings and, in turn, with the competing yet complementary political discourses of humanitarianism and securitization. Its name has become synonymous with moral and political scandal on the threshold of the EU (Ritaine 2015: 118), and with the “gatekeeper” of Fortress Europe, becoming “the sad symbol of European border politics” (Barroso and Schulz 2017: 311). Since the early 2000s, the island of Lampedusa has become a transit place for migrants coming from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia trying to enter European territory; a place where they come to a halt in the island's temporary migrant reception center.

Up until the beginning of the 21st century, the small island of Lampedusa, was predominantly known as a Mediterranean destination for leisure, tourism, and pleasure. The two “violently disjunctive experiences of and accounts of the same space” (Pugliese 2009: 664), demonstrate that the island is witnessing a friction between two spatial dimensions: a desirable holiday destination; and the transit/holding place for clandestine migrants. The juxtaposition of mutually exclusive features within the same geographical space makes the island capable of positioning two contrasting perceptions side by side. Such a positioning brings into focus the fault line of the border that congregates divergent qualities in its matrix: proximity and separation, division and connection. In the effort to keep the two spatial dimensions -resort and holding center- divided yet coexistent, the island has converted itself into a combination of real and imagined space, a third space (Soja 1996), where the migrants are either invisible or highly visible, depending on who is looking. Calling on Soja's contribution, the third space has the potential to become a space of “extraordinary openness, and critical exchange” (ibid: 5) prepared for the negotiation of borders and power.

Lampedusa incarnates different liminal forms: it is at the furthest Southern shore of Italy and Europe. Its geopolitical position locates the island at the outer post of the EU and on a fault line between Europe and Africa and this location turns Lampedusa into a crucial asset in the patrolling of the Mediterranean waters, and in the regulation and securitization of the borderscape. One could even suggest that the island is first and foremost a border. The quality of the border island makes Lampedusa a remarkable space of disputes and exchanges and a central player in the EU border regime. Its quality as a border is the consequence of its geographical location and of

political choices. However, its high degree of borderiness (Cuttitta 2014: 198) together with its potential to “radically open to additional otherness” (Soja 1996:61) can be the starting point for alternative figurations or schemes of representation of the Mediterranean borderscape. With this in mind, and taking into account Enia's account of the origin of the word Lampedusa itself — from *lampas*, the torch that sparkles in the dark (Enia 2017: 201)— , the following chapter analyses Charfi's literary production *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* (2011). The novel offers an *enlightening* counter-narrative and counter-configuration of borders, seascape and geography thereby reconsidering concepts of borders that might unveil interesting overlaps to be further explored. In this way, the counterfactual scenario represented in the novel is a “visionary” dimension that contests the existing order so as to construct a liveable present. Searching for a new *nomos* of the Mediterranean borderscape is an immediate and necessary priority. Finding the most suitable form of coexistence that values the singular differences, without rejecting a universal structure, is indispensable. Viable unravellings for the time to come can no longer be based on the idea of the Mediterranean border as a hostile space towards its shores (Bono 2016: 132), rather they should call for considerable changes in perspective, which should lead to the appreciation of a shared and interrelated Mediterranean space.

1. *Le Baiser de Lampedusa*: intimacy at the Mediterranean borderscape

Está distante el mar, y sin embargo,
nos rodea más y más¹²³.

Peri Rossi, *Descripción de un naufragio*

The present chapter delves into Mounir Charfi's speculative novel *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* (2011) which, through a narrative mode that undermines realism and the close association of the ordinary and the fantastic, creates a counterfactual representation of the Mediterranean borderscape. Counterfactual¹²⁴ excursion into the literary realm relies on the fictional treatment of the “what if” scenario that deliberately deviates from accepted versions of “reality”. It consists of a speculative¹²⁵ literary experiment which either explores possible realms or meditates on the impossible, as well as the unrealizable. Understood as an experiment, it has the potential for imagining and creating alternatives to the present state of things, and it consists of an immersion into the ontologically unreal¹²⁶.

Counterfactual novels, such as the one under scrutiny in this chapter, do not actually deny real events and places. Instead, by employing specific narrative devices, they introduce new interpretations by inventing alternative facts and spaces. Like other novels, counterfactual novels include numerous references to places, names and social or political circumstances, but whereas “traditional” novels tend to situate their plot in actual settings, counterfactual novels interfere with at least one of the cornerstones of actual geography, or geo-space, by altering it. As is in the case of *Le Baiser de Lampedusa*, they create counterfactual versions of space: their plots suggest altered or even newly outlined geopolitical borders and they are set in changed geographical framework in order to put the established representation into perspective and to draw attention to chance and contingency (Widmann 2011: 188). In light of that, counterfactual fiction enables a

¹²³ “The sea is far away. Nevertheless it encloses us more and more” (my own translation).

¹²⁴ Scholars define counterfactual as theoretical alteration or mutation of a sequence of events made in order to construct a different version of reality that counters the events of the “real” or factual world. The term *counterfactual* means, literally, contrary to facts (Dannenberg 2008: 110).

¹²⁵ The verb *speculate* seems to suggest inconclusive thoughts, but the term carries with it a sense of expectations or concerns, and opens up opportunities beyond the so called “real” or “fact”. To speculate upon something does not take exclusive interest in predicting the future rather, as the word *speculation* suggests -its etymology derives from spectacle and spectator- it deals with observation, contemplation and consideration.

¹²⁶ Fiction does not reproduce the real, but interacts with the real according to the logic of interfaces/referentiality. Accordingly, one could say that all literary productions are ontologically counterfactual if one understands counterfactual in its sense as fictive production. Yet, any fictive literary productions represent imagined scenarios while counterfactual fictions describe alternative scenarios to outer reality. The idea that frames the present chapter is that fiction does not reproduce the real, rather as Westphal has noted “[fiction] actualizes new virtualities that had remained unformulated, and that then go on to interact with the real according to the hypertextual logic of interfaces” (Westphal 2011: 103).

figurative mapping of the (so-called) real world by employing the (so-called) unreal or impossible as its means. Consequently, this genre of fiction produces different scenarios, imaginary places or spatial assemblages — counterfactual geography — which are, nevertheless, not totally imaginary worlds, but, rather, altered ones. The alterity of speculative/counterfactual fiction makes possible different ways of seeing and, by the same token, perceiving and maybe changing the world system, shaping the horizon of present thinking. The speculative genre permits the reader to conceive the planet anew, to visualize the globe in different ways, and to imagine alternative approaches to representing and otherwise engaging with the world.

Hence, in the novel's literary cartography, notions of center and periphery lose their normative coordinates while the indeterminacy of the border location suggests that it can also be imagined and positioned at any point, both at the edge and at the very core of the Mediterranean borderscape. Through the speculative genre, the novel proposes to unlock the authority of a unique accounting of geography that supports and perpetuates existing hegemonies and, in so doing, it re-assembles the Mediterranean geographical space, cracking the institutional frame and allowing for other versions to be heard. This counterfactual cartography exceeds the limits of “the real” and the known: it involves a consideration of the possible and, at the same time, a meditation on the impossible. This meditation on the impossible is part of the speculative efforts of the genre, as the projection of imaginary spaces represents an essential component of the engagement with the “all-too-real” world system.

In the novel, the Mediterranean Sea is mobile and uncertain, and the experience of it reveals all the limits and contradictions inherent in any topographical approach. The maritime basin escapes definition, with each and every effort at defining a fixed map of its location(s) doomed to failure. The point is not to reject the Mediterranean as an interpretative category, rather to imply that what does not exist is a single measure of the Mediterranean. As Abulafia suggests, the Mediterranean basin “cannot be simply defined by its edges” (Abulafia 2011: 11) and the nature of this space remains one that “does not admit of a straightforward answer” (ibid). Like Abulafia, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, in their contribution *The Corrupting Sea*, suggest that no single response can be given to the challenge posed by a geographical definition of the Mediterranean (Horden and Purcell 2000: 10). To approach the Mediterranean is to invoke a contested notion, which can relate alternatively to the countries circumscribing the sea, the Mediterranean watershed, or an area defined by climate and, in particular, where the olive tree is cultivated (King et al. 2001: 1-4). Mediterranean “contradiction” also exists at a geological level, since the basin “occupies the convergence zone between two major tectonic plates, Africa and Europe, with a third, Arabia, pressing from the east” (Stewart and Morhange 2009: 385). Nonetheless, despite eluding determinations and tensions between definitions, the Mediterranean has endured a long practice of totalizing imaginings and projects, of which stable cartographies are but one result. It is in this context, that Charfi's counterfactual literary cartography opens up a

space from which to imagine a different Mediterranean geo-social formation that questions the appraisals of a single mapping disciplined by landlocked aspirations. In point of fact, throughout the novel, the notion of the Mediterranean Sea is challenged while its visual appearance becomes blurred and disappears. As a consequence of its disappearance, continents shift and geographic regions are subverted: what is supposed to be South is not South anymore, while sections of the North becomes South and vice versa. This inexplicable occurrence appears to coincide with the coming together of two alchemist volumes, while the disappearance of the Mediterranean Sea forms the premise for a chain of counterfactual events which, in turn, promotes the production of a counter-discourse of the Mediterranean borderscape.

Charfi's novel echoes the thoughts of the scholars Mezzadra and Neilson who suggest that the contemporary debate around the concept of border is infused with “a sense of cartographic anxiety” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a)¹²⁷ by stressing the troubled connection between borders, and the instability of their contours. The novel's counterfactual geography questions the possibility of a single, unbiased perception of space, interrogates conventional spatial understandings, and revisits the cartographic representation of the world in order to stress the power of maps in the construction of spatial perceptions in accordance with the “official” ideology of the present¹²⁸.

Le Baiser de Lampedusa takes place across different historical times: the colonial French rule in Tunisia; Tunisia before the Arab Spring; and a speculative scenario in which the Mediterranean Sea disappears, and the continents Europe and Africa are joined together. The novel revolves around the protagonist's experiment to manipulate the normal course of nature, his impulse to create an alternative scenario of the world, and the consequences that such re-mapping creates both for the characters and for space itself. From the beginning, the protagonist, a scientist working at the seismological center of Tozeur in Tunisia, reveals his passion for re-mapping existing geo-spaces: “I lost myself within the reconfiguration of the world, I imagined myself as a juggler of planets¹²⁹” (Charfi 9 all further quotes are from this edition, and I will use translated quotations in the chapter. The translations are mine; the original quotes can be found in the footnotes) and his obsession to find the missing first volume of an alchemist book: “I had a sole

¹²⁷ In their article “Fabrica Mundi: producing the world by drawing borders” (2013a), which presents excerpts from the book titled *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (2013b), Mezzadra and Neilson analyze the power of cartography in shaping the world according to its measures. Accordingly, “cartography congealed the ontological moment of the fabrication of the world, constructing its epistemology on the idea of a natural proportion and measure of the world, an abstracted fabrica mundi to be projected onto maps. The naturalization of geographical and cognitive borders was the necessary outcome of this epistemological move” (2013a: 11).

¹²⁸ The author seems to suggest what the Italian scholar Farinelli (1992) has claimed in *I segni del mondo*, that the map, with its intrinsic power of representation and capable of acting within the social dynamics, “is above all a project on the world [...] and the project of each map is the one to transform, beforehand, the earth's face in its own image” (77). The translation is mine. The original version is the following: “[o]gni carta è innanzi tutto un progetto sul mondo [...] e il progetto di ogni carta è quello di trasformare -giocando d'anticipo- la faccia della terra a propria immagine e somiglianza”.

¹²⁹ “Je me perdais dans la reconfiguration du monde, m'imaginant jongleur de planètes” (9).

and unique obsession: to find the first volume in order to read the second one¹³⁰ (17).

Once he finds the first volume, the reunion of both discloses irreversible dangers, the consequences of which cannot easily be forecast. As soon as the two volumes are next to each other, “an event [produced] by the bowels of the earth, much deeper than its geological layers, in its liquid and burning abyss¹³¹” (67) happens, and the protagonist becomes the witness of an anomalous deviation of natural laws: Africa starts sliding towards Europe at 1km per hour. Once divided, continents begin a centripetal migration, as, underneath the Mediterranean Sea, the Eurasian tectonic plate clashes against the African one. Nature “has finally found a way to converge faster the two sides of the wound [...] that is the Mediterranean. [...] It will be able to suture the coastal cities¹³²” (71). What once seemed to be fixed and lasting, or at least a reliable spatial marker, such as the sea, is being put at risk by the volatility of natural laws. Therefore, nature is able to connect the two continents that have been divided by the maritime borderscape which is defined as “an immense bruise that has been made on the body of the earth....a piece of earth occupied by thirty million human beings, who feel obliged not to get involved in the existence of their neighbors, [who] are, like roots, attached to the piece of earth underneath their feet¹³³” (107).

In this passage, the sea is described not only as a wound, but also as a space that reflects the collision of two “referential codes”, namely the juxtaposed matrices of Europe and Africa. The sea is as much a network of reflections, connections and collisions, as it is a geopolitical space. It is a process as well as a place, and it represents a “limit between an inside and an outside, between the cultivated place of the domesticated scene and the strangeness and disturbance of the external world” (Chambers 2008: 41). It is also a world-configuring device, since it defines and organizes space by fixing points of reference which consequently locate individuals and objects in relation to it. To be on *this* or *that* side of the “immense bruise” means to “either physically perform your belonging within a community or to trespass into another” (Rivera-Servera 2010: 1). Such world-configuring device is also a force of containment that inspires desires to trespass. It is a traumatic bleeding wound¹³⁴ which takes away thousands of lives every year. It is no

¹³⁰ “Je n'avais plus qu'une obsession: retrouver le premier tome afin de pouvoir lire le second” (17).

¹³¹ “Un événement qui naîtrait des entrailles de la terre, bien plus profond que ses couches géologiques, dans ses abysses liquides et brûlantes” (67).

¹³² “a enfin décelé un moyen d'assembler plus vite les deux bords de la plaie [...] qu'est la Méditerranée [...] et de suturer les villes côtières” (71).

¹³³ “un immense bleu fait sur le corps de la terre.... Un morceau de terre est-il occupé par trente millions d'êtres humains, ceux se croient obligés de ne pas se mêler de l'existence de leurs voisins, fixés comme des racines sur le morceau de terre qui suit” (107).

¹³⁴ The border figure of the wound has also been employed by the Chicano artist and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa in her *Borderlands/La Frontera* to describe the U.S.-Mexico border. Accordingly, the border wound is a traumatic historical space that keeps influencing contemporary experiences of people and populations living in the borderland. For her, the U.S.-Mexico border is a “mile-long open wound/dividing a 'pueblo', a culture/ running down the length of the body/ staking fence rods in my flesh/ splits me, splits me / me raja, me raja” (Anzaldúa 1987: 2). Also, In his posthumously published text, *Memory and the Mediterranean*, Fernand Braudel motions to a beginning of History before human beings, and he refers to the Mediterranean as an ancient scar on the terrestrial globe: “if the

coincidence that, after comparing the sea to a wound, the protagonist recounts how the situation was previous to the collision of the two continents:

thousands of Africans threw themselves into European barbed wires, their bodies were mutilated by nails, blows and bullets [...] Some of them were caught and thrown back like mangy dogs [...] Those who survived came always back to those barbed wires. Their only code word was: *pass or die* [...] They had to cross the sea by paying human smugglers using an entire life's savings or by advanced payment based on slavery contracts. Once they became clandestine, they drowned their sufferings inside the holds of the feluccas. During the crossing, the smell of fuel oil suffocated their dread of being caught by coastguards. And this short journey turned often into a drama: at the smallest mishap, they were thrown overboard by their heartless hosts and they finished their journey inside the jaws of sharks¹³⁵ (113, 4 emphasis in original).

Thus, the migrants' route from Africa to Europe (prior to the literary re-mapping) was not linear; their journey was fragmented and it was complicated in terms of duration, since they were forced to retrace their steps, all the while renewing their points of transit and arrival. Even the maritime journey towards the other shore became a threatening passage into hostility, misery, the unknown, and death. The sea route, with its rackets and drowning, has been replaced by a land route that is infinitely less dangerous.

Le Baiser presents a different possibility: with the disappearance of the Mediterranean, no border police control the flow of people, and men, women and children initiate their mass displacement and exodus towards the point in which the two continents meet. The sea leaves in its absence a planetary bed of sand — for, without water, the surrounding spaces do not survive very long. As a result of the almost complete disappearance of the sea, spaces that had previously been incompatible and non-contiguous are now juxtaposed in order to shape a counter-site in which “real” sites are represented, contested, and reversed. Hence, the outcome is a revisionist literary cartography which compresses longitudinal spaces, pressing otherwise disparate places, groups, and events into close proximity. This speculative scenario might be thought of as a different order of connection, an interrelatedness that runs along smooth surfaces and contains multitudes.

While the continental drift and the clash of geological plates result in frequent earthquakes, the collapse of bridges, and the eruption of Sicilian volcanoes whose boiling lava

Mediterranean seems so alive, so eternally young in our eyes [...] what point is there in recalling this sea's great age? What can it possibly matter, that the Mediterranean, an insignificant breach in the earth's crust, [...] is an ancient feature of the geology of the globe?” (Braudel 2002: 3).

¹³⁵ “Les Africains se jetaient par milliers sur les barbelés de l'Europe, leurs corps mutilés par les clous, les coups, les balles [...] Certains étaient pris, rejetés comme des chiens galeux [...] Les survivants revenaient toujours à leurs barbelés. Ils n'avaient qu'un seul mot d'ordre: *Passer ou mourir*. [...] Ils devaient aussi traverser la mer en payant des passeurs avec les économies d'une vie ou avec des avances sur des contrats d'esclavage. Devenus clandestins, ils noyaient leurs souffrances dans les cales des felouques. L'odeur du mazout étouffait leurs craintes d'être surpris par les gardes-côtes pendant leur traversée. Et ce court périple tournait souvent au drame: au moindre pépin, ils étaient jetés pas dessus bord par leurs impitoyables hôtes, et finissaient leurs voyages dans la gueule des requins” (113,4 emphasis in original).

reaches the ever closer African coast, the island of Lampedusa trembles like a kiss between two lips.

Lampedusa, *geologically* “part of Africa” but *politically* Italian, has been the site that has witnessed the unsolicited arrival of many dead bodies and migrants who, in their failed attempts to cross the Mediterranean basin in largely unseaworthy vessels and rubber dinghies, have either washed up on its shores or rescued and brought to land. Nowadays, Lampedusa is a node in the mobility across the Mediterranean: it is the space that represents the material functioning (or dysfunctioning) of border control and it is the fault line demarking the limits of the EU. It is the combination of several border lines that have older or more recent origins: the North/South fault (EU vs. Africa); the South-South one (Mediterranean EU vs. Mediterranean Africa); and the South-East one (Mediterranean EU vs the Middle East). It is the outpost of the EU, its border, a permanent point of delimitation and contact between Europe — but also, and this distinction is important, the European Union — and its outside, against which Europe defines and establishes itself. Together with the Mediterranean Sea, it is a neuralgic zone in the geopolitical imaginary of the West. Both Lampedusa and the Mediterranean Sea are spaces in which identities are reified and ‘exacerbated’ (clandestine/legitimate, vagabond/tourist) while mobility is disciplined, surveilled and contained because it has the supposed potential to be profoundly disruptive.

In general, the entity of the island engages the encapsulation between local and global, micro- and macro-cosmos. The island's simultaneous boundedness and its porosity to travelers -and thus its susceptibility to change- have made it a valuable analogue for the globe as a whole. The bounded space of the island is a valuable constellation because, as Fredric Jameson claims, “in order to understand the world, [...] a being of such enormous complexity that it can only be mapped and modelled indirectly”, it requires “a simpler object that stands as its allegorical interpretant” (Jameson 1992: 169). Considering the island the allegorical figure for the world and its Greek term *nésos*, deriving from the verb *nécho* meaning to swim, float and navigate (Resta 2010: 44), one could draw the assumption that the planet is fluctuating, shifting its positions, and migrating. It ceases to be a stable place and becomes part of the unfolding, rejecting the aura of stability that is expressed in the idealization of space that eclipses the shifts of time and movement. In the novel, the island of Lampedusa is on the move. It is in perpetual transit towards other shores, other landings and hospitable harbors. It becomes the meeting point of the two tectonic plates moving towards each other and their sudden collision turns the island into a place of love and reception.

The speculative remapping in the novel proposes to reconfigure the outpost of European migration control into a node within a Mediterranean network. Instead of being a space of clashes, the Mediterranean envisioned in the counterfactual mapping is a space of interaction which accommodates non-exclusive categories. The titular “kiss” suggests that Africa and Europe are two complementary entities, historically and geophysically connected. Yet, the kiss is ambiguous

because it is a kiss between two persons “who do not know each other, or who did not really see each other¹³⁶” (26) but when it happens

[it] could upset everything [...] Suddenly, a powerful halo wipes the past away while the future starts sparkling with raging mad mirages. Starting from this rift in the human crust, the desire for the Other inflates and merges, all the while redefining different limits and different provisional paths. The Other becomes mine, his/her thought is adopted. From now on, his/her adored gaze becomes reference, like a lighthouse. His/her perspective becomes ours. We proceed along his/her tracks as if we had never walked on any other path¹³⁷ (26-7).

The kiss between two persons is here an allegory for the encounter between the two continents, and stands for interaction, transculturation, métissage, and hybridity. Since the two sides will soon be contiguous and they will eventually merge into one another, the outcome will be ideally a hybrid third space¹³⁸ which will neutralize internal differences and will defeat dichotomies.

Intimacy, understood as the intimate relation of individual persons within the private sphere, is the way in which the subject contemplates, explores, and obtains knowledge of self and others (Lowe 2015: 21). Hence, the kiss, the intimate entanglement, is an intra-active relationality between the entities “Europe” and “Africa” which undermines conventional notions of “inside” and “outside” and highlights the necessity that any route that the continents might take, or do take, is in relation to their others. Such entanglement underlines the necessity to take note of and assert that both continents should open themselves onto the other shore. In this sense, current migration is a phenomenon that is part and parcel of both continents, shaped by and shaping Europe and Africa simultaneously, intimately entangling the two. Thus understood, the titular kiss articulates an awareness of the intricate entanglements of Africa and Europe, revealing, as Alian Mabanckou has put it, that “Africa is no longer solely *in* Africa” (Mabanckou 2011: 87) and vice versa. However, as the protagonist claims “[t]hat's not love anymore [...] It's madness!¹³⁹” (27). As will be further investigated, the border survives its metamorphoses. Since every transformation is not amnesiac but retains from the past some of its basic qualities, the continents' entanglement triggers a reinvention and relocation of the border. The “madness” described by the protagonist is the result of bypassing the role of the border in favour of a borderless world. The latter, instead of

¹³⁶ “qui ne se connaissaient pas, ou qui ne se voyaient pas vraiment” (26).

¹³⁷ “un baiser pouvaient perturber tout [...] Un moment fort à l'halo trop puissant, que le passé s'efface brusquement et que le futur se met à miroiter en de furieux mirages. A partir de cette faille de l'écorce humaine, le désir de l'autre enfle et fusionne, réaffinant d'autres limites et d'autres ébauches de chemins. L'autre devient mien, sa pensée est adoptée, son regard désormais adoré est pris comme amer, comme phare. On chemine alors sur ses traces comme si l'on n'avait jamais marché sur aucun autre sentier” (26-7).

¹³⁸ The terms *third space* and *hybrid* are used in the sense given by Homi Bhabha, for whom hybridity operates as a “reversion of the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that the other denied knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority” (Bhabha 1994: 114) while the *third space* is the cultural location of hybrid communities.

¹³⁹ “Ce n'est plus de l'amour, c'est de la folie!” (27)

welcoming differences, induces to erect limits against some supposedly elusive and malicious threats which impede the construction of a cohesive inside. In light of that, the cohabitation and “entanglement” of people are not obtained by doing away with differences, but rather by giving the same value to them.

In the literary re-mapping, the continental drift results in an overlapping movement of spatial coordinates and in the close proximity of the two sides: from the African coast, one can see the lighthouses of Sardinian harbors while Spanish television shows that Algiers is now in front of the island of Mallorca and it will soon be few kilometers away from Marseille. As a result of such terrestrial movement, the Mediterranean becomes an inner lake and the Strait of Gibraltar closes the ocean off. Contrary to the news that predicted a violent clash between the two continents, the contact between Africa and Europe is gentle, sensual like the caress of a romantic prelude: now Marseille joins Algiers, Bisert connects with Rome and Sicily is tied together with the gulf of Gabès.

Eventually, as the protagonist suggests, “the puzzle was recomposing itself”¹⁴⁰ (98).

While observing the “puzzle”, or the counterfactual geography, one of the characters states that “the universe is the nation of the man. Borders are just the leftover of a colonial conception that is doomed to disappear. Men are supposed to move freely like goods”¹⁴¹ (79). This sentiment recalls the work of Fatima Ben Slimane, who analyses the shifting and multiple notion of border in the Maghreb region in her work “Between empire and nation-state: the problem of borders in the Maghreb” (2010). She argues that nation-state logic was imported by waves of colonial expansion (38), and that it contrasted with the previous geopolitical logic in the Maghreb. Before colonialism, the notion of borders as limits, and consequently as tools for spatial enclosure and differentiation among populations, was lacking from both the civil and the political imagination (ibid: 53). David Harvey similarly argues that in the context of European colonization, spaces “were deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding signification [in order] to be reterritorialized” by colonial administrations (Harvey 1989:264). Consequently, cartography accompanied and supported colonialism as it surveyed territorial advances, while contemporary geopolitical borders in the Maghreb are not only legacies of the colonial past, but also markers of historical ties to the present. Accordingly, one could say that the border regime is an extension of the history of colonialism and domination that Europe and the West have exerted over the rest of the world.

And yet, the call for open borders for commodities and capital, in addition to simply reproducing material inequality between the global North and South, has also fueled a great unevenness within the South. With the Euro-Mediterranean Economic Area of 1994, the vision of the Mediterranean border as a portal became the favorite metaphor for the economies of both

¹⁴⁰ “Le puzzle se reconstituait” (98).

¹⁴¹ “Les frontières ne sont que le reliquat d'une conception coloniale appelée à disparaître. L'homme doit circuler aussi librement que les marchandises” (79).

shores. Upon being introduced into the global South, deregulation and cross-border negotiation with Europe have tended not only to benefit only a small clique of people, but also to increase the polarization of resources. *Le Baiser* unravels the spatial injustices of dislocation and deterritorialization in the Maghreb that result from policies equating economic progress with globalized commodities and capital.

While walking through the streets of Marseille — now Maralger —, Algerian women look at the shop windows and they sadly realize that the dresses, which have been produced by their hard work, are sold in France for the price of one year's salary:

she was a worker in a textile factory for export to France, a factory whose owners were benefiting from all tax and social advantages, a factory where the workers were doing three eight-hours shifts under conditions of modern slavery, where any mistake was punished by a pay reduction [...] She started calculating how many millions of dinars her boss gained from her twenty years of miserable existence, working in front of the sewing machine” (96-7)¹⁴².

Globalization increases or maintains unequal cross-border exchange: cheap labor on one side facilitates cheaper products for more affluent consumers on the other and, to a certain extent, contemporary trade agreements between historically unequal partners reinvigorate consolidated power structures. Accordingly, the Mediterranean border represents an economic resource, a site for developing business and a profitable alternative to EU enterprises. For them, the border is a barrier that needs to be crossed. In fact, in economic and financial terms, the Mediterranean spatial barrier achieves less and less meaning since it triggers the formations of places in ways attractive to capital. Nevertheless, the outcome has been the creation of fragmentation, insecurity and uneven development within a seemingly unified global space of capital flows, while the Mediterranean border has become the intractable zone of North-South inequalities, and “one of the most active friction-planes when considering North-South imbalances in the globalized world.” (Ribas-Mateos 2001: 22).

The fictional collision of the continents results in a continental contiguity that destabilizes previous ideas of stable territory and sovereignty: whereas African people walk freely on the other side, the European rhetoric around the disappearance of the border revolves around fear and threat to national security. The maritime border used to provide security to Europe, as it functioned as a powerful device to overcome firstly anxiety towards the unknown, and secondly any possible threats coming from the outside. With the new fictionalized scenario, however, there is no border that obstructs the flow of people from the South, and Europeans are forced to find alternative ways to “protect” themselves: helicopters fly over the small stretch of the Mediterranean Sea,

¹⁴² “Elle était ouvrière dans une usine de textile destinée à l'exportation vers la France, une usine dont les propriétaires bénéficiaient de tous les avantages fiscaux et sociaux, une usine où les ouvrières faisaient les 3x8 dans des conditions d'esclavage moderne, où toute erreur était sanctionnée par une retenue sur salaire [...] Elle s'était mise à calculer les millions de dinars qu'elle avait fait gagner à son maître pendant les vingt ans de sa misérable existence devant sa machine à coudre” (96-7).

projecting their lights over the crowd that hurry to the other side, the inhabitants of Europe are now “the new colonized who lock themselves within the walls of their luxurious ghettos¹⁴³” (99), and in response to “this immense moving human anthill¹⁴⁴” (96), the army builds a barricade at Gibraltar that looks like “a hymen erected to the virginity of Europe¹⁴⁵” (95), meant to prevent “the penetration of unauthorized African populations¹⁴⁶” (ibid).

The two latter quotes recall the foundational European myth -that of *Europa* and the bull- in which Europe was a Phoenician woman who was kidnapped by Zeus, disguised as a white bull. After seducing and raping her, Zeus swims to the island of Crete, located at what is now believed to be the fringes of Europe, where she became a queen. According to this myth, the female and vulnerable *Europa* is not located at the center of Europe -wherever it might be-, but at the outer margins, in the Mediterranean island of Crete. According to Manfred Pfister, this myth is a foundational model for territorial identity politics, which are still effective in our present: what is vital for territorial or cultural unity and identity “is less the projection of some core essence than the demarcation of boundaries, and it is through defining and policing margins and through constructing differences *between* inside and outside, self and Other, more than through unification *within* that cultural entities like Europe are created” (Pfister 2007: 24-5 emphasis in original).

The “unregulated violation” of the “out-of-place” border by people coming from Africa triggers anxiety and fear among European population since the disappearance of the Mediterranean border makes it impossible to differentiate the *inside* from the *outside*, and therefore to separate insiders from outsiders. Such confusion and turmoil contradict the idea of territorial exceptionality, and it legitimates the intensified integration of military equipment and personnel into bordering activities. In response to the fear of invasion, Europeans initiate bordering spatial strategies in order to “delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the [...] powers of the Other” (De Certeau 1984: 36). This place-claiming activity is a protective reaction that functions to reclaim previous territorial and cultural limits. In this regard, the underlying idea is that borders are not only lines on the ground or on a map; rather, they constitute a fundamental feature of the state's and the people's political imaginary, functioning as beliefs which create and shape a world, a social reality. Even after the border's material entity disappears and its political and administrative aspects vanish, the memories of the border can still manage and exercise cultural and social power. The maritime border shaped both communities and identities, and after its fictionalized disappearance, it continues to embrace -albeit as phantom- specific social spaces. And, inevitably, newly erected borders face the world in the places from which the waters had evaporated.

¹⁴³ “Les autochtones d'Europe, ceux qui désormais étaient les nouveaux colonisés, barricadés dans leurs ghettos de luxe” (99).

¹⁴⁴ “cette vaste fourmilière humaine en mouvement” (96).

¹⁴⁵ “un hymen érigé à la virginité de l'Europe” (95).

¹⁴⁶ “la pénétration des populations africaines non autorisées” (95).

To recapitulate, in the course of the narration, the continental drift and the clash of geological plates result in an overlapping movement of spatial coordinates which “disturb” the previous equilibrium: the Mediterranean has disappeared in order to leave space to a new world, it has lost its previous function of “natural border”, and it evaporates, leaving behind a terrifying — for European people — conglomerate of continental contiguity. By presenting a post-national map in which geopolitical borders are challenged and undermined, the counterfactual literary cartography articulates new ways of seeing, perceiving and subverting the border and, consequently, it refers to the appropriation of existing spatial representations and the intrinsic subversion of their previous function. Accordingly, through the Mediterranean border's geopolitical realignment, the literary cartography stresses the fact that not only borders, but also nation-states, are precarious constructs.

Charfi's choice to focus on the shifting of natural resources -the sea and lands- is crucial for the bigger context of globality, in which the narrative is set. Through the fictionalized disappearance of the Mediterranean as global border, the narrative challenges the concept of a rigid geopolitical limit. By suggesting that the geopolitical border, which not only divides two continents but also regulates the division of labour, is a purposeful fiction, the entire novel interrogates the meaning of pre-given denominations and categorizations, and also the existing power relations between Europe and Africa. Additionally, moving or performing the border off site reminds us that the border was already an artificial construction. Indeed, any cartographic representation evokes a world which elicits a fiction, a fiction that is itself based on the fictitious belief in the existence of a primordial order that needs to be preserved and/or re-established. Following the idea of the fictitious cartographic representation, the border is thus the consequence of a fictional, but very effective, arbitration, an act that suggests — in its performativity — not only a dialectical relationship between the sovereign ruling and the fictional representation of order, but also the choice of what to include/exclude in the representation.

Nevertheless, the obliteration of the land-sea distinction and the disappearance of the sea have tremendous consequences for the landscape: the sea escapes, leaving “people without profits and promises¹⁴⁷” (146). The sea level rises flooding coastlines; water putrefies; fish die; and fishermen lose their jobs. The scenario encapsulate the future of *sealess* port cities, whose once-flourishing harbors are now in crisis, and general decay is such that the past beneficial presence of the sea can no longer be felt. Being cut off from the Mediterranean, cities seem suffocating, whereas the sea turns from the vital resource to the very instrument of their destruction.

The ancient practice of Alchemy¹⁴⁸, and the protagonist's experiment, appear to have been

¹⁴⁷ “La mer avait fui [...] laissant aux hommes un legs sans profits ni promesses” (146).

¹⁴⁸ Alchemy is a medieval science that sought to change ordinary metals into gold. The alchemist saw himself as one who, although operating within the traditional worldview, was able to alter and manipulate the normal course of nature through knowledge and experience. The art of transforming and manipulating the course of things functions simultaneously on three levels: the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. No transformation would be lasting or complete unless it succeeded in all three levels (See

implicated in a difficult skein of intersecting links among nature, people, and nations. The re-mapping of the geo-space is not without risk and, toward the end of the novel, the protagonist realizes that his actions have resulted in the estrangement of human beings from, and within, nature. Such alienation intensifies the environmental crises around the disappeared Mediterranean Sea and functions to remind the protagonist that the conditions of living are subordinate to the course of nature.

Furthermore, the counterfactual world-design does not resolve previous cultural/political conflicts between the two shores. Even though the spatial notion of maritime border is contested, its presence is undoubtedly tangible, and it regulates the lives of entire communities and populations. Such consideration underlines the fact that, even though space is being re-inscribed within a different set of discourses, part of the previous power relations and epistemology persists. In the novel, while the Mediterranean border becomes a permeable and fluid entity, it is simultaneously erected at other sites (within European cities and at Gibraltar). In this sense, the process of reassertion and re-articulation of socially and culturally constructed boundaries implies that a previously challenged existing boundary is re-established in a new guise in response to a contested set of interests. Moved by the desire to strengthen the now porous and disappeared border, Europeans start planning local bordering activities, and the regulation of mobility in order to preserve a sense of security. Contact zones between the two continents are now the stage for the imposition of “new” delimitations and, as the protagonist comments, “our Mediterranean becomes a dead sea [...] and for a piece of Promised Land, people kill each other¹⁴⁹” (155). Draining the Mediterranean does not render its space less dangerous. It does not make for one of those smooth spaces such much valued by Deleuze and Guattari¹⁵⁰. Deterritorializing the sea and its waters entails a reterritorialization that, in turn, re-updates the maps.

Suspecting that his actions may have precipitated the geological aberration that has thrown the population in turmoil, and since power relations intrinsic in the previous world design persist, the protagonist decides to distance the two alchemist volumes and re-establish the previous geo-space. Not only does he realize that the removal of mental boundaries is proving to be more difficult than anticipated or that the call for open borders and free movement can be appropriated to enforce other structures of control, and that “the wide universal/global family of people is utopia¹⁵¹”(107), he also, and above all, realizes that “we do not need any alchemy volume to comprehend life. The Earth, the men and the sky will move in one way or another and

Linden 2003).

¹⁴⁹ “notre mer Méditerranée devienne une mer morte [...] et pour un lopin de Terre Promise les gens s'entretuent” (155).

¹⁵⁰ According to the two French scholars, sedentary space is striated by barriers, fences, and paths, while nomadic space is smooth, marked only by traits that fade and move with the trajectory (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

¹⁵¹ “La grande famille universelle des humains est une utopie” (107).

it will not be my hand to stop them¹⁵²”. He becomes aware that he is “neither a wizard nor a seer¹⁵³” (87), and that the manipulation of the course of nature demands a complete comprehension of the web of historical, cultural, ideological and political relations in which the Mediterranean borderscape is embedded. Thus, as a consequence of the two volumes' detachment, the two continents drift apart again, the water flows back into the Mediterranean basin, the earth stops trembling, and nature returns to its previous course.

This second re-mapping reveals, once again, that space is not a static, passive and unchanging entity; rather, it a flexible construct entangled with power relations, social hierarchies and human imagination. It is temporary, and it is constantly in the process of being constructed. Likewise, the re-mapping discloses the “vacillating” feature of the border itself; its entity tends to be fluid, “duplicated, multiplied and projected below and beyond the line itself” (Cuttitta 2006: 61). In this logic, any border is far more complex than a simple line of division between sovereign geopolitical powers. It must be understood as an entity that shifts from fixed line to a mobile one, from a material division to an immaterial, and finally from a linear demarcation to a zonal one. It involves unequal power relations, asymmetrical obligations, and overlapping regimes whose limits do not coincide.

Furthermore, as the novel suggests, a borderless world is not the solution: the absence of borders would be a false utopia because it would not propose a life that is qualitatively different from existing conditions. The borderless concept does not articulate concrete alternatives because it forecloses possibilities for which no terms of reference exist. Instead, it fixes the future based on contemporary material practices and discursive concepts, and therefore reproduce ideologies that already exist. Even though globalization might suggest a borderless world for some people, the geopolitical subdivision of the globe suggests that borders are now dispersed, ubiquitous entities, found not only at the geopolitical line. Moreover, as the protagonist claims towards the end, “miserable is the man who trusts the world! [...] The matter [the border] will remain [even though] the shape disappears¹⁵⁴” (139). Therefore, instead of bypassing borders in favour of an immediate transnationalism or cosmopolitanism that risks ending up nowhere, one should favour “incantations and prayers in order to turn back¹⁵⁵” (158) as the last sentence of the novel suggests.

¹⁵² “Nous n'avons besoin d'aucun manuel d'alchimie pour comprendre la vie. Le sol, les hommes ou le ciel bougeront dans un sens ou dans un autre, et ce n'est pas ma main que les arrêtera” (154)

¹⁵³ “Je ne suis ni mage ni devin” (87).

¹⁵⁴ “Que l'homme est malheureux qui au monde se fie! La matière demeure [même si] la forme se perd” (139).

¹⁵⁵ “Incantations et prières pour faire marche arrière” (158).

2. A different *sea-graphy*

Le Baiser de Lampedusa allows the reader to reflect upon the nature of a world in which national and supra-national borders are no longer assumed as natural; it urges the reader to connect the novel's speculative events with anti-immigration legislation, European neoliberalism in the form of economic agreements with African countries, and the current militarization of the Mediterranean border. Its fictional, literary cartography resonates with the circumstances of present times in which not only capital but also borders, and their intrinsic military defense, are premised on flexibility and its counterfactual scenario represents a challenge to the tenets of globalization: how far is the world willing to take the idea of free circulation?

In the novel, geography is not a simple backdrop within fiction, becoming almost a protagonist. The Mediterranean Sea is not only the locus of interaction of dynamic forces, but it turns into an actor, the agent of the counterfactuality, and it represents an entity capable of provoking actions and events while, at the same time, it has control over the characters' existence. The sea as an actor suggests that the idea of possessing the sea, managing and determining its movements, is a highly contestable invention.

Constantly in motion, the literary cartography proposed by Charfi represents the elasticity of borders, it stresses the constantly shifting and contested dynamics of social power, and highlights that categories such as borders, continents and nations are constantly invented and reinvented, in the process of becoming and/or disappearing. Also, by speculating with the geographic representation of the world, the author unveils that the mapping strategy is not only an imaginative and fictitious one, rather it is a powerful technique for the creation of categories and, intrinsically, for the practices of ordering and othering.

The critical perspective of *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* lies in its very genre: the counterfactual literary cartography defies existing maps and urges the reader to escape from their constraints in order to explore and speculate on possible sequences of events. It encourages to obtain the understanding of the world through a system of correspondence between natural phenomena and social mechanisms. Charfi's alchemical search for a universal equilibrium is carried out thorough a configuration of multiple contingent possibilities, all present, yet none inevitable. His "literary alchemy" defamiliarizes the object of analysis — the sea — and the established method — geography — in order to delve into possible alternative forms of knowing, thinking and being. He creates a space of reckoning that allows us to revisit current contingencies and possibilities, to consider alternatives that may be *unthought* in current times, in order to imagine different future for what lies ahead. Charfi's experiment is not a project of merely describing the present differently, but one of stressing its impasses, elisions, and entanglements. It is an attempt to reveal the existence of alternatives and possibilities that lay within, to read

connections and conjunctions across archives and geographies, and to devise other modes of interpretation beyond the assumptions based on geopolitics and economics.

Even though it takes the form of a flight from reality, the novel contains a powerful, implicit critique in its subversive technique, which intrudes upon the cartographic “real” by undermining its spatial points of reference and certainties. The speculative form suggests that a rupture has been made in the natural order of things, a change that makes the reader hesitant (to believe) and thus demands an alternative kind of reading practice than other genres. This rupture or the deviance from the “real” is employed to frustrate any faith in existing configurations, and it has the ability to re-frame the existing sense of reality. Its dual re-mapping — of turning towards a possible future as well as to the present in order to narrate the Mediterranean's position in contemporary geopolitics — reveals the ambivalence and complexities of the Mediterranean borderscape as an unfolding process. Charfi's fictional literary cartography *speculates* on the future in order to explore the problems of the present, as well as to draw on the power of the imagination to depict alternative visions of unexplored connection among various individuals and communities that inhabit the borderscape.

The sea transforms itself and surprises. It remains shift, cannot help changing, and so it is neither a fixed entity nor a completed project. It is a “vibrant matter” (Bennett 2009), characterized by the vitality of entangled human and non-human elements. In the novel, the Mediterranean basin is not only a “new” landscape through which people wander and connect, but also a “wondering” entity of twists and turns. To start mapping this maritime expanse is probably not in the hands of human beings. Also, the entanglement between nature and human beings is so complex that the two affect each other; they function in a circulating system obliterating the juxtaposition between object and subject, human and non-human. If human and non-human are entangled, the consequence of this entanglement is “a space in which the human actors are still there but now inextricably entangled with the nonhuman, no longer at the center of the action” (Pickering 1995: 26). The natural and the human can no longer be thought as dichotomous entities, and, in this context, the notion of the human agent acting upon the world, imposing meaning upon matter, is refuted. The sea and the landscape are no longer mere backdrops but rather characters of a kind; they are not empty objects, but full of unfolding configurations. Therefore, Charfi's description of non-human agencies redefines the knowledge about foreground and background, subject and object. It offers a framework for addressing diverse agencies, yet without combining the human and non-human, and also without straightforward synthesis of a dichotomy. Endowed with inherent agency, although not necessarily with intentionality, the seaspace/matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing entity that participates in the construction of the borderscape. The novel highlights not only the entanglement between non-human and human power, but also the combination of elements, forces, and processes that take place at multiple levels, seeing the human as constitutively involved in these combinations. Such a recognition, as

Dana Phillips and Heather Sullivan claim, “may help us to recognize that we live in multiple worlds, some of them of our own making but many of them not” (2012: 447). In such a dynamic field, people come together with innumerable nonhuman actors, whose agency — whether intentional or not — is responsible for shaping the fabric of events. It is the sea itself, through its fluid cartography, which makes the supposedly stable geopolitical assemblage float, together with its histories/stories and interpretations. The force of the sea, with its tides, currents, winds and even storms provides a frame for acknowledging the instability of historical knowledge, world-mappings and world orders. The sea becomes then the site for an experiment in a different form of earth-writing that leads to a questioning of geography -and therefore borders- as status quo.

In light of alchemy's struggle after the unattainable, and of the principle of unity of matter (Read 1933: 278), Charfi's “literary alchemy” transforms the Mediterranean borderscape into a unified space, only to indicate that the transformation could not be a promising -or golden- solution. The resulting order, however, does not usher in a utopian era of inclusion, but remains dependent on its own particular form of in/exclusion that makes it as partial, uncertain and transitory as the preceding one. The novel's concluding remark criticizes such a questionable alternative, proposing a necessary shift in our way of thinking that, instead of visualizing “utopian” futuristic scenarios, should involve a reflection on the past: a return into its details, to its “blank” spaces and hidden connections, in order to find a sense of what awaits us. The novel seeks to open a fold in time and space to be invaded by other spaces and narratives, thereby leading into an alternative narration of the world. The ending suggests the need of a change of Heading (Derrida 1992), the need to reopen the horizon for ways of cohabitation that do not prove themselves by narratives of inclusion/exclusion. The geographical space that the Mediterranean Sea occupies is intrinsically connected to the history of the region, without which it would be impossible to comprehend the strati-form dimension of this basin. The spatial dimension is therefore inseparable from the temporal and historical one, while any cultural and political achievements depend on the interplay between history, geography, people and cultures. In other words, the Mediterranean basin, and the world itself, is like an open book requiring the appropriate device to be interpreted. And, if the “extraordinary” events ask us to activate ecological and migration-related obligations, Charfi's novel suggests finding such chores in the everyday.

Nevertheless, since our interpretations are destined to be incomplete, we will never arrive at the bottom of things. In this sense, the investigation and speculation about the “possible” remain open, as the conclusion of the novel demonstrates. And yet, if, at the end, we are forced to acknowledge that there is no clear outcome or simple way out of this intricate web, then it becomes all the more fundamental to recognize its limitations; the only possible trajectory to resolve contemporary critical conditions is to look into the present, consider the traces of the past and from such analysis obtain a wiser sense of the “possible”. To recover the lost traces of the

past, the leftovers of histories (Napolitano 2015: 52) means to shed light to those traces that may not fit into the master-narrative of the present. In this line of thought, recalling Derrida's critical reflections on Europe, current phenomenon of clandestine crossings might sketch alternative headings along which to reconsider our current times; allowing for a return (to) Europe -as "the duty to respond to the call of European memory, to recall what has been promised under the name of Europe" (Derrida 1992 :76)- and stating that the point is not leaving Europe behind because of its complicated histories and present, but of re-turning to it in such ways that it is feasible to envisage it otherwise than a narrative of closure.

Le Baiser impresses upon the reader a world of elements, namely, the sea, wind, water, and air and the dynamisms attributed to each of these planetary forces. With these elemental characters at the fore, Charfi's narrative attends to the planet's shifting qualities, permitting the reader to approach it outside of clearly delineated lines of geopolitical demarcations. While the colonial context relied on precise cartographic delimitations and the drawing of borders, and the postcolonial nation-state that emerged aimed to guarantee its territorial limits, Charfi's narrative dissolves borders altogether. Indeed, the novel transforms the present geo-space into a counterfactual world of moving lands and sea basins. The tensions that result from the encounters/collisions of moving lands and water, stemming from the geopolitical, cultural and ecological realities of the Mediterranean basin, make the sea itself a text, a text which scholar Serenella Iovino defines as "a site of narrativity, a storied matter" (Iovino 2012: 451).

Moreover, *Le Baiser*'s venturing into speculative modes of describing border-crossing produces means of re-envisioning the Mediterranean borderscape that question the ways in which borders create community and liminal spaces. The value of the speculative effort is to be confirmed in the imaginative endeavor involved in mapping an alternative Mediterranean borderscape that charts, albeit provisionally and tentatively, both "real" space and our available courses of action. In the effort to propose a different mapping of the Mediterranean borderscape, Charfi explores the "uprooted geography" of the seascape which is articulated in the "diverse currents and complex nodes of both visible and invisible networks", rather than simply following the "horizontal axis of borders, barriers, and allegedly separated unities" (Chambers 2008: 68). Such emphasis on the uprooted geography of the Mediterranean Sea leads to the understanding of the seascape as a complex and diversified space whose map becomes "an altogether more fluid and fluctuating composition" (ibid: 2).

The novel questions the ways in which the texture, the currents and the substance of the Mediterranean Sea impact contemporary geopolitical, social and cultural use of that space. Throughout the analysis, it has been shown that the sea does not function as framework for the narrative, but it achieves a lively and energetic quality of its own. It is a self-standing agent, rather than a support structure for human action. In this sense, the sea moves beyond being a literary motif to become an active participant that dynamically exerts an impact on geo-social

structures. The sea is a space of circulation because it is constituted through its very geophysically mobility. It is not something that happen between places; rather its movement emerges as the very essence of the Mediterranean region. From this perspective, the sea becomes the subject of the narrative not because it represents a space that facilitates/obstructs movement but because it is a space that is *constituted* and *constitutive of* movement. Also, the abyss of the sea and its form, even as it disappears, it relates to other elements, the sand, salt and the atmosphere, giving emphasis to its presence and its cyclical rhythm of time. Therefore, I argue that the Mediterranean Sea described in *Le Baiser* offers a way to reflect on history outside the structures of national narratives. Instead, through the maritime cyclical temporal pattern, it gives light to the possibility of renewal, as well as to the potentiality to foresee what is yet to come.

The novel turns to the cosmic temporality of the sea that conveys in its liquidity paradoxical features, both as a destructive force obliterating the traces of everything that it absorbs, while also producing a space of protection, of love and of procreative quality¹⁵⁶. In the novel, the sea spills out of the binary composition between land and sea; its force is carried outward and enters the atmosphere, permeating the air and its fluid and malleable manifestations crossing different temporal axes, past, present, and future. No longer relegated to *aqua nullius*, the sea is represented in terms of its agency. The author's aesthetics articulate what has been defined as “sea ontologies”, a perspective on the sea as “continually being reconstituted by a variety of elements: the non-human and the human, the biological and the geophysical, the historical and the contemporary” (Steinberg 2013:157). Only when this understanding of the sea, as composed by different components, is fully appreciated, then is it possible to think with the sea in order to enhance the comprehension and the vision of the entire world.

The second fictional re-mapping suggests that there is not simply a single alternative, a counter-narrative capable of substituting the previous one, but, rather a reconfiguration that gives thought to what already exists but has been disregarded, neglected, and denied. To question what has been ignored means to exhume what has historically been marginalized and culturally excluded. This means to recover the hidden connections between the shores, and it leads to investigating, disturbing and even deviating a composition of power logics which have regulated the “world mapping”, deciding who gets to be represented and who does not.

The ending of the novel points to an alternative kind of geography premised on other kinds of socio-spatial relatedness, defined by intimate forms of proximity and distance. This alternative Mediterranean presents itself as a re-mapping, a challenge to official geographies, and thus requires a fluctuating set of analytical concepts. The appreciation of the Mediterranean as an ever-changing social and geo-political assemblage, it is important in order to change our analytical concepts and to pose a challenge to the “methodological nationalism, the assumption

¹⁵⁶ *La mer*, charged with the double significance of the French *mère*, presents a mythical maternal protective force. And yet, this twofold interpretation is not limited to a procreative creation, but also an envisaging of other worlds, giving it a world-making capacity.

that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer and Schiller 2002: 301). The fluid mapping of the novel circumvents territorial claims and acknowledges the cultural and historical intimacy of its different shores. If the maritime borderscape shows a pattern of restless entanglement and of uncontrollable flow, its conceptual understanding should pose a challenge to cultural and historical mappings we have inherited. In this “sea of propinquity” (Matvejević 1999: 14), the proximity of differences around the Mediterranean basin carries with it the potential of belonging to a common space in which plurality and difference are the rule. Such a wealth of differences played out within the maritime basin shape an entity in which antagonism and interdependency coexist side by side. If the sea can offer a common measure, it is that of cultural and historical diversity washed by a shared marine vehicle. If the Mediterranean borderscape is a fluctuating multi-dimensional assemblage, where “the margins are as plural and diverse as the centers” (Chakrabarty 2000: 16), where the waves render the far proximate, the different familiar, and in which the process of assembling is always in the making, never concluded, never settled once and for all, the Mediterranean disturbs the neat enclosures that a nationalized frame has sought to achieve.

But, as tempting as it might be, one should not idealize the Mediterranean Sea as a space of cosmopolitan interrelation since borders -even conceptual ones- are tangible, defining, and exclusionary, even if they can be productive of new relations and ways of being. Borders are indispensable, because in the absence of them, there would be only the indistinctness of a homogeneous space, devoid of differences. Borders are necessary, because every definition, differentiation, and eventual relationship between the different sides depends on them. Thus, as seen in the novel, every attempt to remove a border would lead to unexpected consequences and would have the result of a chaotic indistinctness. And yet, also the notion of an impassable border as well as its definitive fixity, has serious consequences. When any border becomes an insurmountable barrier, it loses its function of an inter-connecting bridge, which encourages the passage between divided and connected edges. In this light, the Mediterranean border needs to be porous, so as to allow the right to escape (Mezzadra 2001), or simply the right to migrate. The regressive impetus for territorial sovereignty, which carries with it the diffusion of impenetrable borders, cannot be valued as a sign of power, but of weakness. In their supposedly spectacle of strength, the impassable borders are the image of the sovereign power in the face of its downfall (Brown 2010: 25). Not only do they strengthen the false perception of an homogeneous and united community on each side, but they also carry with them the misleading idea of preserving the “inside” from any contamination from a threatening “outside”. In the context of the maritime borderscape, the existence of differences is intrinsic to the essence of this space. The Mediterranean Sea is a pluriverse of shores, sides, basins, which are qualitatively divergent from each other, but nonetheless essential for its construction. In this light, it is important to conceive this maritime basin as both an experienced space and a dynamic field that, through its mobility,

through the encounters with its mobility and through interpretations of it, creates differences. The point is to adopt an approach able to preserve these differences without having them conflict with each other.

V. Conclusion

Un jour,
je reviendrai plus longuement sur ce rôle de la mer,
ce que j'en ai dit jusqu'à présent étant si peu de chose.
Le plus important reste à dire¹⁵⁷

Dib, *Qui se Souvient De La Mer*

In exploring the aesthetic dimensions of the Mediterranean borderscape, I employed a combination of critical methodologies that weave together literary criticism, in particular geocriticism and Border Aesthetics, Border Studies and Mediterranean Studies. Addressing the fraught issue of Mediterranean clandestine migration from the combined perspective of literary criticism and Border Studies, this investigation is both timely and significant since it demonstrates the value of literary texts in debates about migration and border-crossing. The inference that can be drawn from this project is that literature should dialogue with other disciplines, especially those belonging to the social sciences, such as border and migration studies, and that literary criticism is a potential means for the exploration of aspects of the social and geopolitical, thus far assumed to belong solely to other disciplines. The contribution of aesthetics to the discussion of the Mediterranean borderscape relies on its potential intervention in challenging the current hegemonic understanding of bordering practices at sea, and to offer an influential incentive for change. In the dynamic field of Border Studies, literary productions can interrupt and shift the logic of the border, allowing for the creation of a space of critical imagination, where the essentialist representation of the border is explored and questioned. Through retrieval of narratives of clandestine crossings, the novels under consideration redefined the conception of the maritime basin. In them, the fictional space of the Mediterranean Sea becomes a repository of persons and stories, a fluid archive of submerged lives, and a space of hindered and unsuccessful passages. Against the chimerical scholarship sustaining the idea of the Mediterranean as a cultural link, Mediterranean border fiction outlines an oppositional and creative space, offering a narrative of bordering, crossings, and of a contested hierarchy of mobility. In this way, these aesthetic works supplant the idea of the sea as a singular entity that the revival of Braudel-inspired investigations of the Mediterranean as a unified space has stimulated. As indicated in the fourth chapter dedicated to the literary analysis of Charfi's *Le Baiser de Lampedusa*, aesthetic productions are not tied to the reproduction of the known, but to the potentiality of the new, overcoming the limits of the present to elaborate on the time yet to come. Mediterranean border fiction cannot be

¹⁵⁷ "One day, I'll talk more about the role of the sea, I've said little so far, the most important still remains to be said" (Dib 1997: 20)

diminished to the simple depiction of the discourses on clandestine migration across the sea, but has to be acknowledged as means to amplify those discourses as much as to question or even destabilize predominant paradigms. Thus, the contribution of these five novels to the debate on Mediterranean migration is not fundamentally their accuracy in narrating the experience of border crossing, but, rather, their impact lies in their capacity to interrogate literary histories and geopolitical constellations. In this way, they create new modes of sense perception, instigate novel forms of political subjectivity (Rancière 2004: 9) and they open up a disquieting and turbulent archive, one that refuses to settle down or conclude, or comply with the authority of the current ordering (Chambers 2018: 458).

The Mediterranean border is not an anomaly in the globalized world but one of the many test cases that presages a widespread trend towards the proliferation of borders in an age in which it is alleged they are fading away. It is a space in which practices of control and strategies of bordering are elaborated, improved, and prepared for deployment elsewhere. However, if the employment of the maritime geopower through bordering practices induce stricter limits and categories, the border aesthetics offers the possibility of a counterstrategy, through which it is feasible to engage with the pervasiveness of borders. Without doing away with the border, in exploring and narrating the experience of clandestine crossings, these works of fiction function as an example, and perhaps even as an admonition, that echoes far beyond the Mediterranean basin. In the current age of renewed territorialization, of distinctions, exclusion and limitations, in which borders play a major role, it is important to turn our attention to topics related to border formation and border-crossing. Within literary studies, it is fundamental to ponder the insights of border fiction in stressing the (re)increased relevance of borders in the twenty-first century, in a world that is at once globalized yet also intrinsically re-nationalized. These novels are, therefore, a contribution to the growing field of Mediterranean Studies in its intersection with Border Studies.

Written on the stage of the early twenty-first century, the five novels I considered emerge in a period characterized particularly by bordering practices and clandestine migration across the Mediterranean Sea. They consist of a body of literature exhibiting an extraordinarily and heterogeneous archive of narratives of (in)voluntary displacement, daring journeying, attempted border-crossing, and the ambivalence of return, describing a complex Mediterranean border reality. As part of this historical time, the novels analyzed in this dissertation are deeply informed by many of the faces of the current militarization of borders, migratory flows towards Europe, restrictive forms of border-crossings and the position of European legislation that fortifies Europe against migrant flows, intensifying the perils of migrants' journeys. As they describe and represent the borderization of the Mediterranean Sea, these works of fiction seek to shed light onto the current issue of migration across the sea and attempt to offer alternatives to the bordering tendencies of contemporary geopolitics. These aesthetic productions are a supply of potentiality and experimental possibility in exploring the layers that compose the sea, the border, and the

migratory process. They are also a source for bringing about appreciation of what is unexperienced, traces not only of the present but of the future, traces of both people and the sea, the latest encompassing the natural order.

Defined here as the mode of literary production that attends most closely to the consequences of geopolitical borders, border fiction is multiple in generic form. Being written by authors with their unique styles and different genres, the narrative voices of the five novels differ from each other. However, despite the dissimilarities, all of the novels show how the issue of Mediterranean border crossing pervades a broad range of twenty-first-century fiction. To align these five novels through their shared participation in scaping the Mediterranean borderscape is to suggest that the ways to organize literary scholarship according to shared language and/or nationality can debilitate any conversation on the current state of the Mediterranean Sea. Even though any conversation about this sea cannot be comprehensive, Mediterranean crossings, both geographical and literary, complicate strict conceptualizations of regions oriented around one language and one people, and therefore it definitely exceeds the borders of the national. That is why the comparative reading adopted in this thesis permits the multi-sited conversation to come into focus, disclosing unexpected relationships and intimacies. Writing and investigating the Mediterranean borderscape are not singular endeavors, rather they emerge from a spectrum of different representations as rich and varied as possible. That is why, throughout the project, a multifocalization of perspectives on the Mediterranean border was chosen, which, in turn, involved the comparison of different optics that nourish and mutually enrich each other. While the novels considered by no means reflect the only example of fiction about the Mediterranean borderscape, - the East Mediterranean is out of the picture-, they are nonetheless suggestive of a recent trend within Mediterranean border literature. By and large, this study provides a critique of a one-sided perception of the Mediterranean border since there is never a single story about a place. Because I think that it is necessary not only to cross the limits that divide the various disciplines and shores but also put in dialogue different sides, I have opted to analyze literary productions written from different shores of the sea. For this reason, the Mediterranean border has been approached with a multi-perspective gaze, demonstrating that no narrative mode excludes the others. The picture one gets is an ensemble made up of perspectives that cannot be subsumed under a dominant one, and it is a picture unhinged from strict nationalism.

Border aesthetics has been the theoretical starting point to investigate the ways in which literary productions reflect and produce friction and transformation when the Mediterranean border and aesthetics intersect and change each other accordingly. This contributed to the appreciation that the notion of the border is itself being constantly negotiated in many fields, including literature, and that figural representations are a central component in border formation. In examining the border figures related to the Mediterranean Sea, the chapters, indicated ways in which literary criticism can attend more closely to the (de/re)construction of borders and, in light

of Rancière, can investigate “rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done” (2004: 39). In this light, it has been assumed that literary productions are a pre-eminent site where border phenomena are depicted, reflected and evaluated. Therefore, they produce effects in reality by “defin[ing] models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity” (ibid). Practicing border studies through fiction provides a valuable “antidote” to the need for cognitive closure. This concluding chapter is intended to be a celebration of literature first as a site from where to start rethinking concepts of power, border, and flows, and secondly as configurations of experience, that produce new modes of perception, which are turned towards the future and its actualization. In particular, by dwelling on the representations of the Mediterranean border, the following pages celebrate aesthetic productions for their potential to explore and elucidate perspectives on the maritime border that go beyond the numerical dimension of migration and lead to a revision of the border concept and, ultimately, of the world we live in.

A conception of the Mediterranean Sea in terms of a border space, or rather as a set of volatile borders that cut across lands, waters, and continents, is based on the recognition that borders, in the sea like anywhere else, no longer exist only at the edge of territory, defining the point where it finishes, but have been moved into the middle of political space. In accordance with the works of Balibar (2002), Mezzadra and Neilson (2013b), Cuttitta (2014), I have argued the maritime border is shifting and inescapable. No crossing or subversion can overcome its entity. Nevertheless, to define the Mediterranean border as volatile and inexorable reveals only a partial viewpoint. Through the analysis of the border texts, it has been shown how these literary productions are constitutive of a border aesthetics in a way that they are not only the result of the constitution of the border, but they also bear and convey the indelible mark of the border. As explored in the first chapter, the Mediterranean borderscape must be maintained, recreated, refueled, defended, repaired, as well as challenged, questioned, accused, criticized, and represented. The two aspects of the border — its entity and its representation — are interdependent and interactive. This relation is dynamic, subject to perpetual change, but nevertheless fundamental for its interpretation, appreciation and eventually critique. However, the depictions of the Mediterranean border that have been explored, are not only representations of possible, established meanings attributed to it, but also deviations towards other conceptions. Thus, they consist of both confirmations and inquiries of the very entity of the border they represent.

By analyzing the novels through the lens of the border, I have employed this space as a code and a key to interpretation. Placing the maritime border at the center validates its functions not only as a reflection of geopolitical, spatial and social practices, but also as the category that defines them. The investigation and exploration of the maritime border uncover the threads that bind these works together resulting in a border aesthetics that not only pays attention to the sea as

a border space, but also engages with this very border shedding light to the disruptions and contradictions in its formation. The notion of the Mediterranean border as a code of comparison and juxtaposition for these works highlights that literary productions scattered across locales and languages are bound by the very category of the maritime border itself. In the absence of a universal and cohesive perspective on clandestine migration, in a period in which a shared appreciation of the pitfalls of maritime crossings is missing, and in a time in which nationalistic ideologies are rising again, the Mediterranean Sea is a tie that binds. Such a tie needs to be urgently explored. The urgency of the imperative to investigate the Mediterranean border from different angles serves as a reminder that this basin of water is surrounded by different but interlocked spaces whose histories have intersected and are coexisting.

Through the literary analysis of the novels, I have investigated the traces and the figures created by the encounter with the maritime border. The border figures appear in the form of rhetorical language and complex configurations of space and time in the narrative. The use of allegorical figures is a modality that is attuned to the process of sensory awareness and it is particularly exacerbated during the crossing experience where the characters are confronted with the power of the border. Figural language is not a secondary or an ornamental element, rather within the *partage du sensible* (Rancière 2004), the political entailments of figural language are pivotal to the understanding of the Mediterranean borderscape. Border maritime figures arise from and through (attempted) contacts, and those contacts, however fragmentary or biased through the human lens, are influential in shaping the epistemologies and discourses about the Mediterranean Sea. It is within discursive and metaphorical representations that it is possible to comprehend the layered composition of the maritime border and to shed light on the complexities of clandestine border crossing.

The distinctive force of the figurative representations is their capacity to weave together oxymoronic aspects of the border. On the one hand, it is depicted as a refuge, an energy, a life-source alluding to the liberatory and nourishing aspect of the border. On the other, it is an alien force, a space haunted by the emergence of monsters reflecting the sea's unruly and tempestuous quality, a site for unexpected violence and fear that associates the sea with the image of a threatening and repulsive entity, a transparent wall that alludes to its insurmountable feature, a devouring sea that takes human lives, and a liquid hell that defines the border as a space first of symbolic and actual death and secondly of agony. These aesthetic figurations predominate before and during the maritime crossing, and they involve patterns of repetitions and contrasts that bring together and juxtapose different perceptions on the border. In this way, they stress the quality of the maritime border as a polymorphic matrix where different aspects, faces, and perceptions are attached to it.

Because of its Janus-faced quality, the border is a force of both contact and retreat, and of violence and protection. Even the boat, the principal vehicle for clandestine crossing, is on the one

hand invested with the desire to escape and seek a better future elsewhere whereas, on the other, it transforms itself into a coffin. In its figurative rendition, the boat comes to symbolize frustrated desires and dreams, a space of hope that is never fulfilled, the journey's end never achieved, and expectations drowned whether it lands on shore or not. Given such a multifaceted way in which the border manifests itself, there is no single description to which the maritime border can be reduced and, thus, a coherent representation becomes impossible. This very lack of coherency in the border's representation warrants one final point: it is unfeasible to unravel and decipher these mutually exclusive interpretations. Yet, in investigating the range of possibilities opened up by such contradictions, it is possible to dig through the façade of the border and, in this way, to create the condition for speculating and eventually criticizing the current borderization of the Mediterranean Sea.

Throughout the project, I have shown that literary productions reveal the Mediterranean border to be unstable, crossable, resisted, and in flux, but still ever present. These representations of the border are inevitably connected to the liquid materiality of the sea. Indeed, the fluid element of water is a vital component in scaping the Mediterranean borderscape. The maritime basin is capacious and integrative; it has its ebbs and flows; it transforms and surprises. Its liquid feature is associated with unpredictability and instability and its watery element strengthens its changeable and volatile aspect. It is an entity with lively and energetic materiality of its own. It consists of forces that interact, crash, and coexist, generating zones of indeterminability/disorientation and also mutable orders/nomos of organization between persons and the natural environment. The sea has a kind of life of its own, understood as a system of *nomos* that is constantly transforming, never entirely stable, thus dynamic. In current clandestine crossing, not only are the sea *nomos* and its geopower managed and employed by border control, they also represent a series of enduring and changing forces that the migrants cannot control. Yet, as will be explored at the end of this chapter, these changing forces can induce both physical transformations in the geo-space and, eventually, in the social order.

In the novels, the sea is often described as a vast, limitless, and unfathomably deep space where human beings are put to the test against challenging hazards. In particular, in Catozzella's *Don't tell me you are afraid* and Lalami's *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* the liquid space invokes the feelings of awe, hope, and longing. It represents a magnetic and tempting space that attracts the migrants to something stronger than them. When observed from a distance, the sea is docile, alluring, even attractive, but at close proximity or while crossing it, it turns into a menacing and perilous place. In both novels, before the actual maritime border-crossing, the sea is often depicted as submissive and friendly, but at the moment of navigating it, it turns into an unreliable and deceitful entity. During the attempted border crossing described at the beginning of Lalami's novel, in the moment of transition between the two shores, the world seems full of possibility and the crossing is filled with infinite potential. Yet, this is also the very moment in

which the characters are forced into the waters of the Strait, where their hope gives way to precariousness. Even the title of the novel calls to mind the mixture of hope and desperation, expectations and illusions that characterize the border-crossing.

In Catozzella's *Don't tell me you are afraid*, the waterspace is associated with life-giving power of parenthood and rebirth, while the image of the immersion into the sea is both represented as a sign of ritual passage, new life and death. The sea is thus a source and a destiny figure: both a life-giving figure and a final frontier. If water generates life — through the analogue with the amniotic fluid — during the sea crossing, water takes the life cycle to the end, generating death. With the protagonist drowning while attempting to reach Europe, *Don't tell me you are afraid* casts the sea as a treacherous expanse awash in environmental and legislative hindrances. Even as the Mediterranean holds the promise of a better future beyond its shores, the stakes of crossing prove fatal for the protagonist. The sea is a womb that expels, fraught with as many dead as those living under the threat of death. Conversely, in Khaal's *African Titanics*, the sea is described as a wizard casting spells and its vastness evokes the fear of the unknown. It is a place of expulsion where the migrants' vessel resembles a coffin, the passengers on-board turn into beasts in order to survive or to escape the “devouring” sea, and their crossing is described as a living hell. In Pajares' *Aguas de venganza*, the sea is both a lawless space where crimes are not punished and a site for revenge, whereas in Charfi's *Le Baiser de Lampedusa* it is a force in its own right, able to move continents and people.

Even though the Mediterranean basin is a constant reminder of the geographical proximity of Europe, and has the potential to represent a realm of escape and renewal, it is not just a place to be crossed and then left behind; it is a rift and a crack, a space of violence and a lethal web of nets as the border regime strives to catch clandestine migrants, keeping their dreams captive and turning the sea into the world's deadliest body of water. In the novels, the Mediterranean Sea is anything but a free and safe passage towards the other shore. By contrast, it is the space in which the power of death is activated by either restrictive border measures or violent inaction of EU member states through practices of delaying or denying search and rescue operations. In light of that, the maritime border is described as a void where boats capsized and people are either left to drift or drown, which alludes to jurisdictional elusiveness of rescue operations. It is also represented as an invisible wall. Such a border figure, which stresses the transparent quality of the border, stands for a power relationship and for a form of exclusion. The transparent border is a peculiar limit. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that such a limit is neither drawn, nor can be seen, but it shows itself as an unsurpassable limit. It determines and delimits space while it itself remains without definition. This lack of determinacy is not a sign of weakness, on the contrary it is a sign of power. The figure of the transparent wall is also reinforced by the one that associates the sea to an invisible frontier. Both figures stress the goal of the maritime border to contain the familiar and exclude the Other through politics of exclusion.

In *African Titanics*, the maritime crossing is described as a venture haunted by punitive gods, and as a world of battles between human beings and unknown powers, be they intangible such as dread and distrust, or tangible such as waves, currents and winds. In describing the Mediterranean passage, there is an ambivalence in the relationship between the maritime passage and the migrants: the crossing is depicted as a perilous adventure but also as a potentially liberating promise of a brighter future. The tension between dismissal/repulsion and attraction/temptation structures the border-crossing as a dynamic of approach and rejection on both individual and geopolitical scales. Inasmuch as the space of the horizon stands for hope, expectations, or desire, it too implies the threatening, wide-reaching magnitude of border enforcement at sea. In the novels analyzed in the third chapter, while the space of the horizon and arrival remains ever elusive and out of reach, the waterscape is not conceived as an atemporal backdrop to the migrants' attempted crossing; rather it is described as a politically contested space which is not merely a continuation of what happens on dry land, but has power of its own: the seemingly timeless flow of the sea becomes enmeshed with the geopolitical, turning itself into a space of stasis, confinement and death.

At sea, both spatial and temporal distances are distorted. Disorientation is inherent to the border crossing experience. Such a wrinkling of time, or lack of temporal orientation, suggests an experience of border crossing characterized by dislocation. As shown in the analysis of *Don't tell me you are afraid* and *African Titanics*, feelings of disorientation and of limbo experiences pervade the maritime passage; the characters are suspended in space and are found in a state of existential suspension, where they are incapable of defining where they are, how long the crossing has been and when it eventually reaches its end. As explained in the first chapter, the border, as an institution, is an orientation device from which Mediterranean order unfolds: it orientates subjects in specific directions, affecting how they take up space, what they can do, and where they can go. Not only does it filter the flow of people, but it takes shape by being orientated around some people more than around others. In being an institution, the Mediterranean border governs the extent of inclusion and exclusion, the degree of permeability, along with the modalities of border-crossing flow. Therefore, given its orientational and stabilizing powers, the border takes on a special importance since it serves to situate, define and delimit certain places and people. In delimiting space and people, the Mediterranean border is a type of edge. As edge, it has to do with how things *end*. Yet, things also *begin* at edges. Thus, in some cases, being on the border means to be on the way to elsewhere, on the verge of going somewhere else. This is the case of some of the characters in Lalami's *Hope and other dangerous pursuit*: whereas some encounter the border as a marker of finitude — where their crossing experience ends — others successfully cross the edge and begin a “new” life on the other side. In Lalami's novel, the Strait of Gibraltar is not a simple medium of transport between shores, but rather a material, geopolitical and affective space in and of itself that represents a player in the tale of crossing. When crossed, the geopolitical border is

split. Its quality as a barrier is compromised; it reveals itself as a passage. The border is therefore attested and denied. The ambivalence between the border as a passage and a barrier makes it unfeasible to determine whether it functions fully as a containing or a hindering limit. Such a dichotomy of the border, expressed in variations of a split between the border's purpose as a separation and a join is a frequent theme in Border Studies. However, the seemingly successful geopolitical border-crossing of two of the characters turned out to be unsuccessful on the symbolic/cultural plane. Such an implication means that the maritime line of separation is reflected in the form of other internal boundaries far from the actual geopolitical division. This means that the symbolic and cultural planes are first inevitably folded into one another, and, secondly, that they are hierarchically related to the geopolitical plane and are, therefore, contingent upon, and unfolding from, it.

Edges at sea are mobile and uncertain, closer to the idea of a “horizon” than that of a strict cartographic projection. The trespassing of the border-horizon is impossible. As clearly depicted during the maritime passage of the protagonist in *Don't tell me you are afraid*, the appreciation of the border as a horizon leads to the understanding of it as a space that cannot be reached, and it cannot itself be determined. The horizon is the limit where the visible touches the invisible and, while the visible seems reachable, the invisible is inaccessible. The invisible — the other side — that meets the eyes yet recedes from view, does not consist of the counterpart of the visible, but its background. The two are entangled and exist because of each other. The horizon alludes to the presence of somewhere else — the other side — but in such an allusion/illusion it encompasses both its feasibility and its inherent impossibility. In its mutability, the border-horizon is an entity in constant shift between presence and absence, being there and not-being there. It resembles more the idea of a fringe than that of a straight line. Because of that, it takes us away from binary here/there schematics of normative order and it mocks the belief in the neat divide, the division between this side and that side. In its lack of precise form, there is both proximity and distance, presence and absence. Since it is impossible to determine how far away or how near the demarcating line is, the power of the border lies in disorienting whoever attempts to reach it. Yet, as the analysis of Catozzella's *Don't tell me you are afraid* has shown, the border-horizon is there, even when there is no clear position of it. The border is neither fixed nor a threshold. It is a border-horizon that is closing rather than opening on somewhere else.

Whereas the mutability of the border renders the maritime crossing a dangerous endeavor for the characters in *Hope and other dangerous pursuits*, *Don't tell me you are afraid* and *African Titanics*, the volatile quality of the sea opens up possibilities for critical interventions within the border's blank spot and gaps in Charfi's *Le Baiser de Lampedusa*. In the latter novel, the spatial disorientation of the maritime border, its lack of precise form, its volatile feature, and its intrinsic potential to resist measurements and markers, point to a way of perceiving this space as spanning beyond any cartographic projection. Through its speculative re-modelling of geo-space, the novel

offers a way to think of geography outside the structures of national narratives and outside of the binary structure between land and sea.

The sea's shifting and malleable appearances stretch over different temporal axes, past, present, and future. But it is not simply a repetitive force; it inheres a possibility for what is yet to come. The speculation on a different *nomos* does not discard what came before it. Rather, the maritime expanse creates alternative forms of possibilities, be it through remembrance of the past or fruitful prospects for the future. The speculative scenario promotes uncertainty, doubt and openness, but also presents a change of emphasis, a shift in relations. It is in both the displacement and the combination of previously unconnected elements that existing categories of perception are disturbed. Thanks to such a deviation of the geological order, a shift in position can be released and employed for the production of change. It is this deviation that creates a gap, “modifies the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images” (Rancière 2004: 39). From such a gap or fracture — a gap that produces a disorder in the established system of classification — it is possible to consider how the categories that sustain our framework might be radically challenged and reviewed. It is this change in perspective that permits alternative modes of addressing, contesting and reconfiguring the Mediterranean borderscape. However, *Le Baiser* does not give us a lecture of how to change the current state of things. Rather, by opening a gap and a space of reassembling, it offers an approach to the Mediterranean borderscape that can allow us to keep open the force of the critique. It is by revealing how we are trapped in the rigidity of categories that we can keep open the possibility of change, without displacing the focus on the present, and without wishing for an alchemic-golden solution. Indeed, by narrating alternative cartographic representations as forms of intervention, the novel defamiliarizes the maritime border and puts into question its “naturalness”. In the speculative re-mapping, the order of things crumbles, and it becomes evident that limits are artificially drawn. Disturbances and deviations in the order of things can be accommodated as a welcome stimulus. Seeing anew signifies seeing differently.

Whereas in *Le Baiser* the Mediterranean is described as a vibrant sea, in Pajares' *Waters of revenge*, the maritime stretch between Morocco and Spain is a haunting and violent presence. It is a liquid space of deadly journeys, where geopolitics combines with forms of violence. Even though the sea is not specifically described, it consists of a spectral presence, haunting the narrative with its violence. Seen as necessary and unavoidable in the act of hindering the passage of the migrants, violence becomes an instrument of death and of invisibility for the bodies sunk into the sea. As elaborated in Pajares's novel, border deaths are but the tip of the iceberg of violence permeating the current migration regime across the sea. Injustice does not only materialize in death but also in the invisibilization of bodies, disinterest in their drowning, the victimization of migrants, their illegalization and finally in the “ordinariness” of migrants' fatalities. What the novel stresses is that the Mediterranean border distinguishes between visible

and invisible bodies, in a way that can no longer be ignored, despite said invisibility.

The theme of invisibility and (im)mobility is also explored in Khaal's *African Titanics* and Lalami's *Hope and other dangerous pursuits*. In narrating the consequences of the characters' unsuccessful border-crossing, both novels dwell on the functions that (im)mobility has in shaping the characters' existence and visibility, and thereby stressing the ways in which unsuccessful border crossing stimulates fruitful transformations in the characters' lives. Both Lalami and Khaal compose counter-narratives which re-configure (im)mobility, by describing the return of their character to their home-country, and they offer a different view on unsuccessful border crossings. Their narrativizations challenge and complement the images of migrants arriving on the southern shores of the EU, presenting immobility as inherent to the narrative of border-crossing and migration. In the current situation of “forced immobility”, the stories of those who are compelled to remain are concealed behind successful border crossing stories and, consequently, by focusing on experiences of immobility intrinsic to the experiences of migration, both novels reflect on the complex networks and dynamics behind any migratory projects, and call attention to different kinds of movements. In this way, both writers reveal that immobility is not a condition that impedes progress, but rather another form of mobility.

Without condemning or idealizing, Khaal and Lalami's novels portray the complexities of the clandestine journey, which is as much about intentional choices as it is about coincidence. Indeed, the narratives refuse to portray aspiring migrants either as victims or agents of their own futures. Even though both novels question the fever of leaving as a dead-end, it is important to note that although the migrants' decision is presented as debatable, the reasons for leaving and the commentary on the migrants' clandestine journey are not. Discouraged by the lack of respect and prospects which the characters experience, they persist with their right to live their lives, even if it means pursuing this at great risk. Even if by leaving the characters accomplish their longings in ways that the novels describe as eventually failing or leading nowhere, what the characters nonetheless powerfully do is insist on more open futures and a social position away from oppression and exploitation.

The novels analyzed in this present project thrive thematically on the tensions that emerge around the maritime geo-political border. They depict the Mediterranean Sea as a space that encapsulates both human hope and human despair, and as an arena in which people and stories are enmeshed with the geopolitical. It is a liquid border and a watershed between the European Union and the countries of the Southern shores, where geopolitics combines with forms of violence. Accordingly, the novels explore how the geopower of the sea intervenes — and is employed — in the politics and strategies of bordering and how migrants transgress, struggle with, or cede their hopes to the indomitable sea. Literary productions about clandestine migration across the Mediterranean Sea present a challenge to the rhetoric of liberalism and free circulation, for they describe the falsity of these discourses by representing the lengths to which migrants go in order

to claim what such discourses offer. The myth of globalization gets challenged by the clandestine migrants: globalization is presumed to benefit the entire world, but what the five novels show is that it benefits a relatively small number of people while reinforcing differences and hindering the flow of the “undesirable” people. However, despite being the site of dire warnings and innumerable perils, the Mediterranean waters are a space in which other geographies, poetics and politics are mobilised, enacted and re-signified by the crossings of migrants. The trails and traces that mark their crossings, invest the Mediterranean basin with their claim for safe passage. Even at those sites of hindered crossing and violent border measures, moving migrants render the Mediterranean border into sites of counter-politics and, eventually into a touchpoint between different yet entangled shores.

As a dynamic force that is responsible for shaping violent structures, the Mediterranean border becomes the symbolic archive of loss; its infinite expanse carries the memories of unsuccessful border-crossings and it is a site of negotiation and encounter between contested histories and geographies. The sea is not inanimate and passive, rather it is crisscrossed by agents, events, forces. It is dynamic and changeable and, as it transforms itself, it generates and incites new forms of life by provoking geological and, eventually, geopolitical turbulence. Indeed, its dynamic and malleable feature creates different spatial and temporal constellations, through both the moving waves and its liquid archive of remembrance and fertile speculation for the future. If dynamism is a feature of the sea and of the maritime border, then the conception of geopolitics also acquires a kind of unstable and potentially changing ground. To see Mediterranean geopolitics and its social relations as stemming from the sea and its forces is the most compelling and powerful way to destabilize concepts of nations, origins and eventually fixed identity.

Since the matter of the border has to be imagined into being before it really matters, the way we perceive and act in relation to the maritime border determines what it becomes materially. Indeed, the maritime border is not produced by perceptions of its dimensions but by the imaginings of what it is and, especially, by mutually agreed discourses of what the sea is, or is supposed to be, or must be made to be. The contemporary framing of the Mediterranean Sea as an insurmountable border should not be everlasting, rather it should evolve into a threshold and a dwelling space. By turning the collision into encounter, the sea can assume a fundamental relevance in promoting pluralism and diversity. This move considers migration as a fruitful encounter, rather than an “emergency” and it aims at removing the inequalities that position individuals in different orders of importance and rights. The multiple and pluriverse Mediterranean Sea that contains, incorporates, and combines its shores, calls for an understanding of this space whose different sides entwine in an embrace of coexistence, rather than being confined to areas of exclusion.

To conclude, it is important to re-think the Mediterranean *nomos* — and to a further extent also the world order — in order to put the emphasis on the multiple and pluriverse

Mediterranean Sea, suggesting that differences, instead of counter-posing each other, should coexist in non-conflicting ways. The complexity of the multiple tensions which traverse the Mediterranean border asks for a multivocal approach in the analysis of this relational space. The shores are not autonomous entities, rather they find themselves relationally entangled. The perspectives of each shore do not necessarily exclude each other, but rather coexist and cooperate in the redefinition of the Mediterranean border. Positioning oneself at the border and looking out towards the shores means to absorb different angles, other points of view and unfold one's range of view. Such a positioning involves the recognition that the border is woven into the fabric of each shore and that each shore lives and exists in connection with the others. The point is not to dismiss the border – which is in itself impossible since the entity of any border is a cultural essential, the condition of every definition, of every determination of things in the world and of human beings, and a referential point without which space would be indecipherable and unattainable, where distance and location would have no significance in the absence of it – but rather to change the patterns in the Mediterranean border discourse.

Investigating, evoking and thinking of the Mediterranean border means starting to consider alternatives to the current state of geopolitical divisions. Only from such a rethinking can the foundations for the construction of an alternative be laid. Such a re-evaluation is an attempt to dehierarchize our conceptual classifications that create dualisms and binaries. It is an effort to dislocate the view from the hegemonic position, moving it along different axes and, in this way, promoting plurivocality, rather than univocality.

The future depends on the ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised, but fundamental in order to offer insights into the practice of bordering, particularly in relation to the border's function, meaning and interpretation. Speculating about the possibility of inventing spaces of otherwise is a performative force whose power cannot be denied. The point is to offer the tools for alternative forms of geopolitical arrangements that can be engendered starting from the analysis of the term border itself. Such a speculation is an agenda for radical cultural practices that take into consideration aesthetic productions that are — at their most provocative — a representation of the maritime border and an elaboration on it. The point is to acknowledge the potentiality of aesthetics to be turned towards the future and its actualization, and from here to discuss such an orientation, and its demands. Thinking about the future is a creative and, often, an open-ended form of prospection. However, it is not enough to conjure up the future: it is important to participate in such conjecture, refusing to favor a critique that is configured by the past. The embracing of the alternative is not just a moment of openness to enlarge the possibilities of the world and make it otherwise, it is also a fundamental move towards border alternatives/speculations that are not curtailed by the power dynamics of the present and past. Such an approach is auspicious in its rendering of alternatives that tackle and challenge the presumed given-ness of the border. The point is not to eradicate the border altogether. Rather, one

should overcome dichotomous concepts and categories and therefore change the terms of the perspective in such a way that differences do not necessarily clash with each other. This mode of thinking defeats binaries and geopolitical definitions based on these forms of thought. This is necessary, as we come to realize that older dichotomous frameworks of reasoning are no longer up to the task of grasping the complexity of the Mediterranean basin.

Moreover, it is fundamental that we do not reify the Mediterranean border, by presuming it is simply given. Rather, the border becomes given, as a consequence of the repetition of bordering decisions and practices made over time. In other words, no border functions without a matching border mentality. The current rigidity of systems and of models imposed on the Mediterranean Sea need to be reconfigured by taking into account the *pluriverse* Mediterranean. This change of paradigm offers a prospect that considers the differences that compose the basin and, at the same time, functions as an *antidote* to the pigeonhole principle. Speaking with Derrida (1992), such a change of Heading, whose logics are no longer based on binaries, but on a disseminated logic of multiplicities, should be the starting point for alternative geopolitical cartographic imaginaries. Therefore, if difference is ineradicable and otherness is unavoidable, the reflection should be based on the promotion of difference as a basis for exchange and not collision. The change of direction means leaving behind a discourse sustained by a unilateral perspective and a unique chronology, and substituting it with multifocal ones. The Mediterranean is a plural sea in the sense that it is heteroclitic - from the Greek *heteros*, other, and *klitos*, inflected – since different shores lean out over it. Then, when referring to the Mediterranean one should put much stock in encounters with difference, in recognition of alterity, and in reciprocity as a fundamental component for any interaction. By being able to disrupt nationalist protocols of kinship, a revision of our framework of analysis can transform our discursive formations and open up contrapuntal responses to the hegemonic discourse around migration to Europe. This is worth striving for, because narratives and discourses have the potential to change the way of looking at the world.

Bibliography

Primary sources

- Catozzella, Giuseppe (2016 [2014]). *Don't tell me you are afraid*, Appel Anne Milano transl., New York: Penguin Press.
- Khaal, Abu Bakr (2014 [2008]). *African Titanics*. Bredin Charis transl., London: Darf Publisher.
- Lalami, Laila (2005). *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. New York: Algonquin Books.
- Mounir, Charfi (2011). *Le baiser de Lampedusa*. Tunis: Arabesques.
- Pajares, Miguel (2016). *Aguas de venganza*. Barcelona: Alreves.

Secondary sources

- Abderrezak, Hakim (2016). *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Abulafia, David (2011). *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*. Oxford: University Press.
- Agamben, Giorgio (1998). *Homo sacer. Sovereign power and bare life*. Heller-Roazen, D. trans. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- (2009). *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Alami, Ahmed Idrissi (2012). “'Illegal' Crossing, Historical Memory and Postcolonial Agency in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*”, in *The Journal of Northern African Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 143-156.
- Albahari, Maurizio (2006). “Death and the Modern State: Making Borders and Sovereignty at the Southern Edges of Europe”. Working Paper 136, The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California at San Diego.
- Alonso Meneses, Guillermo (2002). “Violencias asociadas al cruce indocumentado de la frontera México EE.UU”, *Actas del IX Congreso de Antropología de la FAAEE*, Barcelona.
- Álvarez, David (2016). “Unstable Vessels: Small Boats as Emblems of Death Foretold and as Harbingers of Better Futures in Figurations of Irregular Migration across the Strait of Gibraltar” in *Migration by Boat: Discourses of Trauma, Exclusion and Survival*, Mannik Lynda ed., New York: Berghahn Books.
- Amnesty International (2015). “Libya is full of cruelty: Stories of Abduction, Sexual Violence, and Abuse from Migrants and Refugees”. London: Amnesty International.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde19/1578/2015/en/> (last accessed 8th February 2020).
- Amoore, Louise and Hall, Alexandra (2009). “Border Theatre. On the Arts of Security and Resistance”, *Cultural Geography*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 299-319.

- Anderson, Benedict (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Andersson, Ruben (2014). *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine migration and the business of bordering Europe*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria (1987). *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Appadurai, Arjun (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Armillei, Riccardo (2017). "Boat Arrivals and the 'Threat' to Italian National Security: Between a 'Moral Panic' Approach and the EU's Failure to Create a Cohesive Asylum-Seeking Policy", *Journal of Applied Security Research*, vol.12. no.1, pp. 141-159.
- Arteaga, Alfred (1997). *Chicano Poetics: Heterotext and hybridities*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Attridge, Derek (2017). *The Singularity of Literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Auyero, Javier (2012). *Patients of the State. The Politics of Waiting in Argentina*. Durham: Duke.
- Badiou, Alain (2008). "The Communist Hypothesis", *New Left Review* 49, pp. 29-42.
- Balibar, Etienne (2002). *Politics and the Other Scene*. New York: Verso.
- (2010). "At the Borders of Citizenship. A Democracy in Translation?", *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 315-322.
- Ballerini, Alessandra (2014). *La vita ti sia live. Storie di migranti e altri esclusi*. Milan: Melatempo.
- Barbero, Iker (2012). "Orientalizing Citizenship: The Legitimation of Immigration Regimes in the European Union", *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 16, no. 5-6, pp. 751-768.
- Barrada, Muhammad (2002). "Progetto per un sogno", in *Rappresentare il Mediterraneo. Lo sguardo marocchino*, Barrada, M. and Qadduri, A. eds., Messina: Mesogea, pp. 15-27.
- Barroso, José Manuel and Martin Schulz (2017). "Europa muss sich dem Mittelmeer öffnen. Offener Brief an Angela Merkel, Jean-Marc Ayrault", *Fluchtpunkt: Das Mittelmeer und die europäische Krise*, Hofmann F. and Messling M. eds., pp. 311-313.
- Barthes, Roland (1972). *Mythologies*, Annette Lavers transl, New York: Hill and Wang.
- Basaran, Tugba (2015). "The Saved and the Drowned: Governing Indifference in the Name of Security", *Security Dialogue*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 205-220.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- (2016). *Strangers at our door*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bechev, Dimitar and Nicolaidis, Kalypso (2010). *Mediterranean Frontiers. Borders, Conflict and Memory in a Transnational World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Benantar, Abdennour (2001). "Les Arabes et la Méditerranée", *Aire régionale Méditerranée*, Paris: UNESCO, pp. 77-100.

- Ben Jelloun, Tahar (2006). *Partir*. Paris: Gallimard.
- (2009). *Leaving Tangier*. Linda Coverdale transl., London: Arcadia Books.
- Ben Slimane, Fatima (2010). “Between empire and nation-state: the problem of borders in the Maghreb”, in Bechev, D. and Nicolaidis, K. eds., *Mediterranean Frontiers: Borders, Conflict and Memory in a Transnational World*, London: Tauris Academic Studies, pp. 35-55.
- Benito, Jesus, and Ana María Manzanás (2006). “Of Walls and Words: An Introduction” in *The Dynamics of the Threshold: Essays on Liminal Negotiations*, eds. J. Benito and A. M. Manzanás. Madrid: Gateway Press, pp. 1-11.
- Bennett, Jane (2009). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bensaâd, Ali (2006). “The Militarization of the Migration Frontiers of the Mediterranean”, in *Maghreb Connection*, Ursula Biemann ed., Barcelona: Actar.
- Ben-Yehoyada, Naor (2011). “The Clandestine Central Mediterranean Passage”, *Middle East Report*, no. 261, pp. 18-23.
- Berriane, Mohamed, de Haas, Hein and Natter, Katharina eds. (2015). “Introduction: revisiting Moroccan migrations”, *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 503-521.
- Bhabha, Homi (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bieger, Laura (2018). *Belonging and Narrative: A Theory of the American Novel*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Biemann, Ursula (2010). “Logging the Border: Europlex”, *Artistic Practices in the Field/Video Works 1998 2008*. Bildsmuseet/Arnolfini Gallery.
- Bigo, Didier (2007). “Detention of Foreigners, States of Exception, and the Social Practices of Control of the Banopticon”, in *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*, Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr eds., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 3-33.
- (2008). “Globalized (In)Security. The field and the Ban-Opticon”, in *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty. Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11*, Bigo, Didier. and Tsoukala A. eds. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 10-48.
- Binebine, Mahi (1999). “El estrecho de Gibraltar es un abismo”, *El País*, October 31st.
- (2005). *Cannibales: traversée dans l'enfer de Gibraltar*. Paris: l'Aube.
- Bleiker, Roland (2017). “In Search of Thinking Space: Reflections on the Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory”, *Journal of International Studies*, vol. 45, no.2, pp. 258-264.
- Boeri, Stefano (2002). “Solid Sea”, *Multiplicity*, XI Documenta: Kassel.
- Boswell, Christina (2003). “The external dimension of EU immigration and asylum policy”, *International Affairs*, vol. 79, no. 3, pp. 619-38.
- Bouchard, Norma (2014). “Dreaming the 'Great Sea': European Discourses on the Mediterranean and their Reception in the Arab and Islamic World”, *Mediterranean Review*, vol. 7, no. 2,

pp. 53-82.

- Bouchard, Norma and Ferme, Valerio (2013). *Italy and the Mediterranean. Words, Sounds, and Images of the Post Cold War Era*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1986). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- (1989). “Social Space and Symbolic Power”, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 14-25.
- Botta, Anna (2010). “Predrag Matvejevic's *Mediterranean Breviary*: Nostalgia for an Ex-World or breviary for a new community?”, *California Italian Studies Journal*, vol. 1, no.1.
- Boyce, Geoffrey (2012). “Beyond the sovereign gaze”, *Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 68-88.
- Brah, Avtar (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Braidotti, Rosi (2011). *Nomadic Theory: the portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- (2013). “Becoming world”, *After Cosmopolitanism*, Braidotti, R., Hanafin, P. and Blaagaard, B. eds, New York: Routledge, pp. 8-27.
- Brambilla, Chiara (2015). “Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept”, *Geopolitics*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 14-34.
- Brambilla, Chiara and Potzsch, Holger (2017). “In/visibility” in *Border aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, J. Schimanski and S.Wolfe eds., New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 68-90.
- Braudel, Fernand (1949). *Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- (1995). *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Sian Reynolds transl., Berkley: University of California Press.
- (2002). *Memory and the Mediterranean*. New York: Vintage.
- Brian, Tara and Franck Laczko, (2014). *Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost during Migration*. IOM: Geneva.
- (2016). *Fatal Journeys: Identification and Tracing of Dead and Missing Migrants*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration.
- Broeders, Dennis (2009). *Breaking Down Anonymity: Digital Surveillance of Irregular Migrants in Germany and the Netherlands*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Brown, Wendy (2010). *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.
- Cacciari, Massimo (2000). “Nomi di luogo: confine”, *aut aut*, 299-300, pp. 73-79.
- Cacciatore, Giuseppe (2003). *Mediterraneo e cultura europea*. Catanzaro: Rubbettino Press.
- Camarrone, Davide (2014). *Lampadusa*. Palermo: Sellerio.
- Caminito, Giulia (2017). *La Grande A*. Milan: Giunti.
- Carling, Jørgen (2002). “Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections

- and Cape Verdean Experiences”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 5-42.
- (2007a). “Unauthorized Migration from Africa to Spain” *International Migration*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 3-37.
- (2007b). “Migration Control and Migration Fatalities at the Spanish-African Borders”, *International Migration Review*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 316-343.
- Carr, Matthew (2012). *Fortress Europe: Dispatches from a Gated Continent*. New York: The New York Press.
- Cassano, Franco (1996). *Pensiero Meridiano*. Roma: Laterza.
- Cassano, Franco and Danilo, Zolo (2007). “Necessità del Mediterraneo”, in *L'alternativa mediterranea*. Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. 78-110.
- Castelli Gattinara, Pietro (2017). “The 'refugee crisis' in Italy as a crisis of legitimacy”, *Contemporary Italian Politics*, vol 9, no. 3, pp. 318-331.
- Castillo, Debra and Córdoba, Tabuenca (2002). *Border Women: Writing from La Frontera*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Catlos, Brian A (2017). “Why the Mediterranean?” in *Can We Talk Mediterranean?: Conversations on an Emerging Field in Medieval Early Modern Studies*, Brian A., Catlos and Sharon, Kinoshita eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-18.
- Cavalli, Giulio (2018). *Carnaio*, Rome: Fandango.
- Chambers, Iain (2005). “Off the Map: A Mediterranean Journey”, *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 312-327.
- (2008). *Mediterranean crossings: the Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- (2010). “Maritime Criticism and Theoretical Shipwrecks”, *PMLA* vol. 125, no.3, pp. 678-84.
- (2013). “Adrift and Exposed”, *Revista de Estudios Globales y Arte Contemporáneo*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 71-81.
- (2014). *Border Dialogues: Journeys in postmodernity*. New York: Routledge.
- (2018). “Broken geographies”, in *Migration and the contemporary Mediterranean. Shifting Cultures in Twenty-First Century Italy and Beyond*, Claudia Gualtieri ed., Bern: Peter Lang.
- Chambers, Ian and Lidia Curti (2008). “Migrating Modernities in the Mediterranean”, *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 387-399.
- Chanda, Nayan (2007). *Bound Together: How Traders, Preachers, Adventurers, and Warriors Shaped Globalization*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Çiçekoglu, Feride (2000). “Méditerranéenne?” in Çiçekoglu, Feride and Eldem, Edhem *La Méditerranée turque*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, pp. 7-23.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2000). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Clancy-Smith, Julia (2011). *Mediterraneans, North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c.1800-1900*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Conlon, Deirdre (2011). “Waiting: Feminist Perspectives on the Spacings / Timings of Migrant

- (Im)Mobility”, *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol. 18, no.3, pp. 353-360.
- Cooper, Anthony and Søren, Tinning (2019). *Debating and Defining Borders: Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Coutin, Susan Bibler (2005). “Being En Route”, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 107, no. 2, pp. 195- 206.
- Curti, Lidia (2011). “Voices of a Minor Empire: Migrant Women Writers in Contemporary Italy”, *The Cultures of Italian Migration: Diverse Trajectories and Discrete Perspectives*, Graziella Parati and Anthony Julian Tamburri eds., Plymouth: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, pp. 45-58.
- Cusumano, Eugenio (2018). “The sea as humanitarian space: Non governmental Search and Rescue dilemmas on the Central Mediterranean migratory route”, *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 387-394.
- (2019). “Migrant Rescue as Organized Hypocrisy. EU Maritime Missions Offshore Libya between Humanitarianism and Border Control”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 54, no. 1, pp. 3-24.
- Cuttitta, Paolo (2006). “Points and Lines: A Topography of Borders in the Global Space”, *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in organizations*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 27-39.
- (2007). “Le monde-frontière. Le contrôle de l’immigration dans l’espace globalisé”, *Cultures & Conflits*, vol. 4, no. 68, pp. 61-84.
- (2014). “Borderizing the Island Setting and Narratives of the Lampedusa 'Border Play', *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 196-219.
- (2018). “Repolicitization Through Search and Rescue? Humanitarian NGOs and Migration Management in the Central Mediterranean”, *Geopolitics*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 632-660.
- Cuttitta, Paolo and Tamara Last eds. (2019). *Border Deaths: Causes, Dynamics and Consequences of Migration-related Mortality*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Dainotto, Roberto (2003). “Asimmetrie mediterranea: etica e mare nostrum” *NAE*, vol.3, pp. 3-18.
- Dal Lago, Alessandro (2009). *Non-persone: L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*. Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Dannenberg, Hilary (2008). *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Daoud, Zakya (2002). *Gibraltar: Improbable frontière: de Colon aux clandestins*. Paris: Séguier.
- De Certeau, Michel (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. S. F. Rendall transl., Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press.
- De Genova, Nicholas, Sandro Mezzadra, and John Pickles (2015). “New Keywords: Migration and Borders”, *Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 55-87.
- De Genova, Nicholas (2002). “Migrant Illegality and Deportability in Everyday Life”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 419-447.
- (2016). “The 'Crisis' of the European Border Regime: Towards a Marxist Theory of Borders”, *International Socialism*, no. 150, pp. 31-54.
- De Haas, Hein (2007). “Morocco's Migration Experience: A Transitional Perspective”, *International Migration*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 39-70.

- (2008). “The Myth of Invasion: The Inconvenient Realities of Migration from Africa to the European Union”, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 7, pp. 1305-22.
- Del Grande, Gabriele (2006). “Fortress Europe”. *Fortress Europe*.
<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/>.
- (2010). *Il mare di mezzo. Al tempo dei respingimenti*. Modena: Infinito.
- De Luca, Erri (2014). *Solo andata. Righe che vanno troppo spesso a capo*. Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Del Sordi, Nicholas and Jacobson, David (2007). “Borders” in *Encyclopedia of Globalization Volume 1 A-E*, J.A. Scholte and R. Robertson eds. London: Routledge.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari (1986). *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Dana Polan transl., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Brian Massumi transl., Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Della Dora, Veronica (2010). “Mapping Metageographies: The Cartographic Invention of Italy and the Mediterranean”, in *California Italian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-25.
- Dell'Agnese, Elena and Amilhat Szary, Anne-Laure (2015). “Borderscapes: From Border Landscapes to Border Aesthetics”, *Geopolitics*, no. 20, pp. 4-13.
- Derrida, Jacques (1992). *The Other Heading, Reflections on Today's Europe*, transl. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- (1994). *Specters of Marx: the state of the dept, the work of mourning, and the new international*. New York: Routledge.
- Derrida, Jacques and Dufourmantelle, Anne. (2000). *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dib, Mohammed (1962). *Qui se Souvient De La Mer*. Paris: La Différence.
- (1997). *Who Remembers the Sea*, transl. Louis Tremaine. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Di Maio, Alessandra (2013). “The Mediterranean, or where Africa does (not) meet Italy: Andrea Segre's *A Sud di Lampedusa* (2006)”, in *The Cinemas of Italian Migration. European and Transatlantic Narratives*, Schrade S and Winkler D. eds. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, pp. 4-52.
- Donnan, Hastings (1998). “Nation, State, and Identity at International Borders” in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, T.M. Wilson and H. Donnan eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-30.
- Donnarumma, Raffaele (2011). “Ipermodernità: ipotesi per un congedo dal postmoderno”, *Allegoria*, no. 64, pp. 15-50.
- Dotson-Renta, Lara, N. (2012). *Immigration, Popular Culture, and the Re-routing of European Muslim Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- (2008). “Translated identities: writing between Morocco and Spain”, *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 429-439.
- Depledge, Duncan (2013). “Geopolitical material: Assemblages of geopower and the constitution of the geopolitical stage”, *Political Geography*, vol. 45, pp. 91-92.
- Duncan, Derek (2017). “Grave Unquiet: The Mediterranean and its Dead”, in *Mediterranean*

- Travels: Writing Self and Other from the Ancient World to Contemporary Society*, in P. Crowley, N. Humble, S. Ross eds. London: Routledge.
- Dunn, Maggie and Morris, Anne (1995). *The Composite Novel. The Short Story Cycle in Transition*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Eagleton, Terry (1988). "The Ideology of the Aesthetic", *Poetics Today*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 327-338.
- Énard, Mathias (2012). *Rue des voleurs*. Arles: Actes Sud.
- Enia, Davide (2017). *Appunti per un naufragio*. Palermo: Sellerio.
- Erl, Astrid and Ansgar Nünning (2005). "Where Literature and Memory Meet: Towards a Systematic Approach to the Concepts of Memory Used in Literary Studies" in *Literature, Literary History, and Cultural Memory*, Herbert Grabes ed., Special issue of *REAL-Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*, vol. 21. Tübingen: Narr, pp. 265-298.
- Esposito, Claudia (2014). *The Narrative Mediterranean: Beyond France and the Maghreb*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Ezquerro, Manuel Alvar (2000). *Tesoro léxico de las hablas andaluzas*. Madrid: Arco.
- Fabre, Thierry (2000). "La France et la Méditerranée. Généalogies et représentations", in Fabre, Thierry and Jean-Claude, Izzo, *La Méditerranée française*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, pp. 13- 152.
- (2009). "Preface" in *Mediterranean Frontiers: Borders, Conflict and Memory in a Transnational World*, Dimitar Bechev and Kalypso Nicolaidis eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. xi-xii.
- Farinelli, Franco (1992). *I segni del mondo: Immagine cartografica e discorso geografico in età moderna*. Florence: La Nuova Italia.
- Fassin, Didier (2005). "Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France", *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 20, no.3, pp. 362-387.
- (2007) "Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life", *Public Culture*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 499- 520.
- (2011). "Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 40, pp. 213-226.
- (2012). *Humanitarian Reason*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Felix Berumen, Humberto (2004). *La frontera en el centro*, Mexicali: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California.
- Fischer, Wolfgang (2018). *Styx*. Beta Cinema.
- Fluck, Winfried (2006). "Theories of American Culture (and the Transnational Turn in American Studies)", *REAL Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*, no. 23, pp. 59-77.
- Fogu, Claudio (2010). "From *Mare Nostrum* to *Mare Aliorum*: Mediterranean Theory and Mediterraneanism in Contemporary Italian Thought", in *Californian Italian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1. (<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7vp210p4>).
- Foot, Kenneth E. (2003). *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*.

Austin: Univ. of Texas Press.

- Foucault, Michel (1977). "A Preface to Transgression", *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon transl., New York: Cornell University.
- (1980). "The Confession of the Flesh" in *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, Gordon, C. ed., New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 194-228.
- (1986). "Of Other Space", *Diacritics*, no. 16, pp. 22-27.
- (1991). "Questions of Method", *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller eds. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- (2004). *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-6*. London: Penguin.
- Frank, Søren (2017). "The Novel and the Borders of Europe: Ben Jelloun's *Leaving Tangier* and Oksanen's *Purge*", *Symploke*, vol. 25, no. 1-2, pp. 79-95.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford (2007). "Migration, Diasporas, and Borders", *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*. David Nicholls ed. New York, pp. 260-293.
- Frontex Risk Analysis Unit (2015). *Annual risk analysis 2015*. Warsaw: Frontex, European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (available on-line: http://www.epgncms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/75e8fd4f-6169-423d-a6d4-c0372d93cbf8/Session_1_-_FRONTEX_Annual_Risk_Analysis_2015.pdf, accessed 14 April 2020).
- Gallien, Claire (2018). "Forcing displacement: The postcolonial interventions of refugee literature and arts", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 54, no. 6, pp. 735-750.
- García Canclini, Néstor. (2001) *Culturas híbridas: Estrategías para entrar y salir de la modernidad*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós.
- Gammeltoft-Hansen, Thomas (2016). "The Perfect Storm: Sovereignty Games and the Law and Politics of Boat Migration", in *"Boat Refugees" and Migrants at Sea: A Comprehensive Approach*, Moreno, V. and Papastavridis, E. eds, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, pp. 60-78.
- Gjergji, Iside (2015). "Lost in the Mediterranean: Theories, Discourses, Borders and Migration Policies in the 'Mare Nostrum'", *RCCS Annual Review* [Online], no. 7, pp. 151-162.
- Giaccaria, Paolo (2012). "Cosmopolitanism: The Mediterranean Archives", *Geographical Review*, vol. 102, no. 3, pp. 293-315.
- Giaccaria, Paolo and Claudio Minca (2011). "The Mediterranean Alternative", *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 345-365.
- Gil, Isabel Capelo and João Ferreira, Duarte (2011). "Introduction: modernity's fluid cartographies", *Journal of Romance Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 1-9.
- Gilroy, Paul (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Glissant, Édouard (1997). *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Goffredo, Giuseppe (2000). *Cadmos cerca Europa. Il Sud fra il Mediterraneo e l' Europa*. Turin:

- Bollati Boringhieri.
- Godin, Emmanuel and Vince Natalya eds. (2012). *France and the Mediterranean: international relations, culture and politics*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Gonzalez Calleja, Eduardo (2000). "Les différentes utilisations de la *Mare Nostrum*: représentations de la Méditerranée dans l' Espagne contemporaine" in Vazquez Montalban, Manuel and Gonzalez Calleja, Eduardo, *La Méditerranée espagnole*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, pp. 33-135.
- Green, Sarah (2012). "A Sense of Border" in *A Companion to Border Studies*, T.M. Wilson and H. Donnan eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 573-592.
- Grosz, Elizabeth (2012). "Geopower: a panel on Elizabeth Grosz's *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*", *Environmental and Planning D: Society and Space*. 30: 971-988.
- Guarracino, Scipione (2007). *Mediterraneo. Immagini, storie e teorie da Omero a Braudel*. Milan: Mondadori.
- Hadj-Adbou, Leila (2014). "Europe's Rio Grande: (Im)mobility in the Mediterranean", in *A New Paradigm: Perspectives on the Changing Mediterranean*, Toperich, S. and Mullins, A. eds. Washington D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, pp. 115-138.
- Hage, Ghassan (2009). *Waiting. Melbourne*. Melbourne: University Press.
- Harvey, David (1989). *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hawkes, Terence (1972). *Metaphor*. London: Methuen Company.
- Hedetoft, Ulf (2003). *The Global Turn: National Encounters with the World*. Aalborg: Aalborg University Press.
- Heller, Charles and Lorenzo, Pezzani (2017). "Liquid Traces. Investigating the Deaths of Migrants at the EU's Maritime Frontier" in *The Border of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, De Genova, N. ed., pp. 65-94.
- (2018). "The Mediterranean Mobility Conflict: Violence and anti-Violence at the Borders of Europe", *Humanity journal*, pp. 1-5. <http://humanityjournal.org/blog/heller-and-pezzani/> [visited on Oct. 16th, 2019].
- Herman, David (2002). *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Herzfeld, Michael (2005). "Practical Mediterraneanism: Excuses for Everything, from Epistemology to Eating" in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, Harris, W.V. ed., Oxford: University Press, pp. 45-64.
- Hicks, D. Emily (1991). *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Hofmann, Franck and Markus Messling (2017). "Für Europa: Politik und Ästhetik der Anerkennung", in *Flucht Punkt*, Hofmann F. and Messling M. eds. Berlin: Kadmos, pp. 7-24.
- Holland, Patrick and Huggan, Graham (2003). *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on*

Contemporary Travel Writing, 5th ed., University of Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

- Horden, Peregrine and Purcell, Nicholas (2000). *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- (2006). “The Mediterranean and the New Thalassology”, *American Historical Review*. Vol. 111, pp. 722-740.
- Horden, Peregrine and Kinoshita, Sharon (2014). *A Companion to Mediterranean History*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Illich, Ivan (1986). *H²O and the Waters of Forgetfulness: Reflections on the Historicity of “Stuff”*. Dallas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Cultures.
- Inda, Jonathan X. and Rosaldo, Renato (2008). “Tracking global flows” in *The Anthropology of Globalization, A Reader*, 2nd edition, Inda and Rosaldo eds. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 3-46.
- International Organization for Migration*: 2014-2019 Missing migrants project; <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/> [accessed 22 March 2019].
- Iovino, Serenella (2012). “Stories from the Thick of Things: Introducing Material Ecocriticism”, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 19, no.3, pp. 449-460.
- Iovino, Serenella and Serpil Oppermann (2014). “Introduction” in *Material Ecocriticism*, Iovino S. and Oppermann S., eds., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-20.
- Jameson, Fredric (1992). *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jancsics, David (2019). “Border Corruption”, *Public Integrity*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 406-419.
- Jones, Alun (2011). “Making Regions for EU Action: The EU and the Mediterranean”, in *Europe and the World*. Bialasiewicz, L. ed., Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 41-58.
- Jones, Reece (2016). *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*. London and New York: Verso.
- King, Russell (2001). “The Troubled Passage: Migration and New Cultural Encounters in Southern Europe”, *The Mediterranean Passage*, Russell King, ed., Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 1-21.
- King, Russel, Berardo Cori and Adalberto Vallega (2001). “Unity, Diversity and the Challenge of Sustainable Development: An Introduction to the Mediterranean”, *Geography, Environment and Development in the Mediterranean*. King R., De Mas P., and Mansvelt Beck J., eds., Brighton: Sussex, pp. 1-17.
- Kinzel, Ulrick (2002). “Orientation as a Paradigm of Maritime Modernity”, *Fictions of the Sea: Critical Perspectives on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture*. Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 28-48.
- Klepp, Silja (2011). “Die Europäisierung der Asyl- und Grenzpolitik” in *Europa zwischen Grenzkontrolle und Flüchtlingsschutz. Eine Ethnographie der Seegrenze auf dem Mittelmeer*, Bielefeld: Transcript, pp. 385-404.
- Kolossov, Vladimir and Scott, James (2013). “Selected Conceptual Issues in Border Studies”,

- König, Torsten (2016), "Die Mittelmeermigration in der italienischen Gegenwartsliteratur Biopolitik und Erzählung in gesellschaftlichen, medialen und poetologischen Kontexten", *PhiN, Philologie im Netz*, no.75, pp. 1-15.
- Kovras, Iosif and Robins, Simon (2016). "Death as the border: Managing missing migrants and unidentified bodies at the EU's Mediterranean frontier", *Political Geography*, vol. 55, pp. 40-49.
- Kristeva, Julia (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Leon S. Roudiez transl. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lackey, Michael (2016). "Locating and Defining the Bio in Biofiction", *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 3-10.
- Laine, Jussi P. (2018). "The Ethics of Bordering: A Critical Reading of the Refugee 'Crisis'", in *How to Deal with Refugees? Europe as a Continent of Dreams*, in Besier, G. and K. Stoklosa eds. Berlin: LIT Verlag, pp. 278-301.
- Layoun, Mary N. (2002). *Wedded to the Land? Gender, Boundaries, and Nationalism in Crisis*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Lavenex, Sandra (2018). "'Failing Forward' Towards Which Europe? Organized Hypocrisy in the Common European Asylum System", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol 56, no. 5, pp. 1195-1212.
- Laviosa, Flavia (2010). *Visions of Struggle in Women's Filmmaking in the Mediterranean*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Lavocat, Françoise (2016). *Fait et fiction: Pour une frontière*, Paris: Seuil.
- Law, Ian (2014). *Mediterranean Racism. Connections and Complexities in the Racialization of the Mediterranean Region*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1991). *The Production of Space*, D. Nicholson-Smith transl., Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lemke Sanford, Rhonda (1998). "A Room Not One's Own: Feminine Geography in Cymbeline", in *Playing the Globe: Genre and Geography in English Renaissance Drama*, Gillies J. and Mason Vaughan V. eds. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Leogrande, Alessandro (2015). *La Frontiera*. Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1973 [1955]). *Tristes Tropiques*, John Weightman and Doreen Weightman transl., London: Jonathan Cape.
- Linden, Stanton J. (2003). *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lionett, Françoise (1997). "Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the fiction of Gayl Jones, Bessie Head and Myriam Warner-Vieyra", *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature*. Obioma Nnaemeka ed., London and New York: Routledge, pp. 205-225.

- Lombardi-Diop, Cristina (2008). "Ghosts of Memories, Spirits of Ancestors: Slavery, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic" in *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections*, Oboe A. and Scacchi A. eds., New York: Routledge, pp. 162-180.
- Lowe, Lisa (2015). *The Intimacies of four continents*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Luisetti, Federico (2019). "Geopower: On the states of nature of late capitalism", *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 22, no.3, pp. 342-363.
- Mabanckou, Alain (2011). "Immigration, *Littérature-Monde*, and Universality: The Strange Fate of the African Writer", *Francophone Sub-Saharan African Literature in Global Contexts*, Mabanckou A. and Thomas D. eds. Yale: University Press. pp. 75-87.
- Mackenthun, Gesa (2014). "Oceanic Topographies: Routes, Ships, Voyagers" in *Navigating Cultural Spaces: Maritime Spaces*, Anna Margaretha Horatschek ed. New York: Rodopi, pp. 47-64.
- Manners, Ian (2008). "The normative ethics of the European Union", *International Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 1, pp. 45-60.
- Massey, Doreen (1994). *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Matvejević, Predrag (1999). *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*. Heim, M.H. Transl. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Mazzantini, Margaret (2011). *Mare al mattino*. Turin: Einaudi.
- Mbembe, Achille (2000). *On the Postcolony*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- (2003). "Necropolitics", *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no.1, pp. 11-40.
- (2010). *Sortir de la grande nuit. Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée*. Paris: La Découverte.
- McIntyre Michael and Nast Heide J. (2011) "Bio(necro)polis: Marx, surplus populations, and the spatial dialectics of reproduction and 'race'", *Antipode*, vol. 43, no. 5, pp. 1465-1488.
- Melandri, Francesca (2017). *Il sangue giusto*. Milan: Rizzoli.
- Mentz, Steve (2008). "Shipwreck and Ecology: Toward a Unifying Theory of Shakespeare and Romance", *International Shakespeare Yearbook*, vol. 8, pp. 165-182.
- Mezzadra, Sandro (2001). *Diritto di fuga. Migrazioni, cittadinanza, globalizzazione*. Verona: Ombre Corte.
- (2015). "The Proliferation of Borders and the Right to Escape", in *The Irregularization of Migration in Contemporary Europe. Detention, Deportation, Drowning*, Jansen Y., Celikates R., and Joost de Bloois eds. London: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 121-135.
- Mezzadra, Sandro. and Neilson, Brett (2013a). "Fabrica mundi: producing the world by drawing borders", in Blackwell, A. and Lee, C. eds., *Scapegoat: Architecture, Landscape, Political Economy: 04 Currency*. pp. 3-19.
- (2013b). *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- (2020). "Foreword" in *Debating and Defining Borders. Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives*, Anthony Cooper and Søren Tinning eds., pp. xvii-xxv.

- Michaelsen, Scott and Johnson, David E. (1997). *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Minca, Claudio and Rory Rowan (2016). *On Schmitt and Space*. New York: Routledge.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. (1996). "An Acoustic Journey." *Rethinking Borders*, ed. John C. Welchman. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, pp. 1-17.
- Miskolcze, Robin (2013). "Molly Brown and the *Titanic*. The Shipwrecked Woman in U.S. Culture" in Carl Thompson ed. *Shipwreck in Art and Literature. Images and Interpretations from Antiquity to the Present*. New York: Routledge, pp.171-186.
- Mitchell, William, J.T. (1994). *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mohsid, Hamid (2017). *Exit West*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Moisseron, Jean-Yves, and Manar Ezzat Bayoumi. (2012). "The Mediterranean: A Contested Concept." In *France and the Mediterranean*, Godin E. and Vince N. eds., New York: Peter Lang, pp. 19-36.
- Moland, Lydia L. (2019). *Hegel's Aesthetics: The Art of Idealism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Monegal, Antonio (2005). "A Landscape of Relations: Peninsular Multiculturalism and the Avatars of Comparative Literature", *Spain Beyond Spain: Modernity, Literary History, and National Identity*, Epps B. and Cifuentes L.F. eds. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, pp. 231-249.
- Moretti, Franco (1997). *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900*. London: Verso.
- Morris, Ian (2006). "Mediterraneanization", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 30-55.
- Moslund, Sten Pultz (2015). *Literature's sensuous geographies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mountz, Alison and Hiemstra, Nancy (2012). "Spatial Strategies for Rebordering Human Migration at Sea", in *A Companion to Border Studies*, Wilson, T.M. And Donnan, H. eds. Oxford: Wiley- Blackwell, pp. 455-472.
- Murray, Michelle (2018). "The African Dreams of Migration: Donato Ndongo's 'El sueño', Langston Hughes, and the Poetics of the Black Diaspora", *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literature*", vol. 72, no. 1, pp. 39-52.
- Nadig, Anania (2002). "Human smuggling, national security, and refugee protection", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 1- 25.
- Nail, Thomas (2020). "Moving borders" in *Debating and Defining Borders. Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives*, Cooper A. and Tinning S. eds., pp.195-205.
- Naïr, Sami (2006). *Y vendrán...las migraciones en tiempos hostiles*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- Napolillo, Enzo Gianmaria (2015). *Le tartarughe tornano sempre*. Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Napolitano, Valentina (2015) "Anthtopology and traces", *Antropological Theory*, vol. 15., no. 1, pp. 47-67.

- Newman, David and Paasi Anssi (1998). "Fences and Neighbours in the Post-modern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography", *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 186-207.
- Nichols, Stephen, Küpper, Joachim and Kablitz, Andreas (2017). *Spectral Sea: Mediterranean Palimpsest in European Culture*. Nichols, Küpper and Kablitz eds., New York: Peter Lang.
- Novak, Julia (2017). *Experiments in Life-Writing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- O' Riley, Michael (2007). *Postcolonial haunting and victimization: Assia Djebar's new novels*. New York: Lang.
- Panebianco, Stefania (2016). "The Mediterranean migration crisis: border control *versus* humanitarian approaches", *Global Affairs*, vol.2, no. 4, pp. 441-445.
- Paoletti, Emanuela (2009). "A Critical Analysis of Migration Politics in the Mediterranean: the case of Italy, Libya and the EU", *RAMSES Working Paper*, April, pp. 1-29.
- (2010). *The migration of Power and North-South Inequalities: The Case of Italy and Libya*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Papadopoulos, Dimitris and Tsianos Vassilis (2007). "How to Do Sovereignty without People? The Subjectless Condition of Postliberal Power", *Boundaries 2*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 135-172.
- Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, Aspasia (2008). *Transit Migration: The Missing Link between Emigration and Settlement*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Papastergiadis, Nikos (2010). *Spatial Aesthetics, Art, Place, and the Everyday*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Culture.
- Park, Jungwon (2009). *Imaginar sin fronteras: visiones errantes de nación y cosmopolitismo desde la periferia*. Proquest Umi Dissertation Publishing.
- Perera, Suvendrini (2007). "A Pacific Zone? (In)Security, Sovereignty and Stories of the Pacific Borderscape" in *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territories Edge*, Rajaram, P. K. and Grundy-Warr C. eds., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 201- 207.
- (2013). "Oceanic Corpo-graphies, Refugee Bodies and the Making and Unmaking of Water", *Feminist Review*, vol. 103, pp. 58-79.
- Peri Rossi, Cristina (1974). *Descripción de un naufragio*. Barcelona: Lumen.
- Pickering, Andrew (1995). *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pfister, Manfred (2007). "Europa/Europe: Myths and Muddles" in *Myths of Europe*, Littlejohns, R. and Soncini S. eds, New York: Rodopi Publisher, pp. 21-33.
- Phillips, Dana and Heather Sullivan (2012). "Material Ecocriticism: Dirt, Waste, Bodies, Food, and Other Matter", *ISLE*, vol. 19, no.3, pp. 445-447.
- Pingaud, Bernard (1959). "Milieu des terres", *L'Arc. Cahiers méditerranéens*, nr. 5, pp. 1-3.

- Polycandrioti, Rania (2000). *La Méditerranée grecque*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.
- Pratt, Mary Louise (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.
- Proglio, Gabriele, (2014). “Percorsi e visioni di donne nordafricane. Reale e visuale: quali confini?”, in *Donne per l' Europa*, Passerini L. and Turco F. eds. Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, pp. 208-225.
- (2016). “Introduction” in *Decolonising the Mediterranean: European Colonial Heritages in North Africa and the Middle East*, Gabriele Proglio ed., Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. vii-xiv.
- Pugliese, Joseph (2009) “Crisis Heterotopias and Border Zones of the Dead”, *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 663-79.
- (2010). “Transnational Carceral Archipelagos. Lampedusa and Christmas Island” in *Transmediterranean. Diasporas, Histories, Geopolitical Spaces*, Pugliese ed., Brussels: Peter Lang, pp. 105 – 124.
- Rajaram, Prem Kumar and Grundy-Warr, Carl (2004). “The Irregular Migrant as Homo Sacer: Migration and Detention in Australia, Malaysia, and Thailand”, *International Migration*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 33-64.
- (2007). *Borderscapes, Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rancière, Jacques (2004). *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Gabriel Rohkhill transl. London: Continuum.
- (2009). *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, Steven Corcoran transl., Cambridge: Polity.
- (2010). *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Corcoran S. transl., London: Continuum.
- (2013). *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*. Zakir Paul transl., London: Verso.
- (2014). Rancière, Jacques (2014). *Figures of History*. Julie Rose transl., Cambridge: Polity.
- Read, John (1933). “Alchemy and Alchemists”, *Folklore*, vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 251-278.
- Resta, Caterina (2010). “Un mare che unisce e divide”, in *Reggio città metropolitana: per l'amicizia mediterranea*, Giuseppe Tuccio ed., Rome: Gangemi Ed., pp. 37-44.
- Ribas-Mateos, Natalia (2001). “Revising Migratory Contexts: The Mediterranean Caravanserai”, in *The Mediterranean Passage. Migration and New Cultural Encounters in Southern Europe*, King, R. ed., Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp.22-40.
- Ritaine, Évelyne (2015). “Quand les morts de Lampedusa entrent en politique: damnatio memoriae”, *Cultures et Conflits*, 99-100, pp. 117-42.
- Rivera-Severa, Ramón H. (2010). “Border Moves” in *Performance in the Borderland*, Rivera-Severa R. and Young H. eds. Palgrave Macmillan, Press, pp. 1-16.
- Rodríguez Ortiz, Roxana (2008). “Disidencia literaria en la frontera México-Estados Unidos”, *Andamios. Revista de Investigación Social*, vol. 5, no.9, pp. 113-137.
- (2016). *Cartografías de las fronteras: Diario de campo*. Amazon ebook.
- Rokeach, Milton (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York: Free Press.
- Rosaldo, Renato (1993). *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon.
- Rosas, Gilberto (2006). “The Managed Violences of the Borderlands: Treacherous Geographies,

- Policeability, and the Politics of Race”, *Latino Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 401-418.
- Rosello, Mireille (2012). “Becoming UnDutch: Wil je dat? Kun je dat?” in *The Postcolonial Low Countries: Literature, Colonialism, and Multiculturalism*, Boehmer E. and De Mul S., eds. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 203-220.
- Rosello, Mireille and Stephen F. Wolfe (2017). “Introduction” in *Border aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, Schimanski J. and Wolfe S. eds., New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 1-24.
- Rosello, Mireille and Timothy Saunders (2017). “Ecology” in *Border Aesthetics*, Schimanski, J. and Wolfe, S., eds. New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 25-49.
- Rumford, Chris (2007). “Does Europe Have Cosmopolitan Borders?”, *Globalization*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 327-339.
- (2012). “Towards a multiperspectival study of borders”, *Geopolitics*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 887-902.
- (2014). *Cosmopolitan Borders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sabo, Oana (2018). *The Migrant Canon in Twenty-First-Century France*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Saddiki, Said (2014). “Border Fences as an Anti-Immigration Device: A Comparative View of American and Spanish Policies” in *Borders, Fences and Walls: State of Insecurity?*, Vallet, Elisabeth ed., Farnham: Ashgate. pp. 175-190.
- Sadowski-Smith, Claudia (2006). “Twenty-First Century Chicana/o Border Writing”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 105, no. 4, pp. 718-743.
- Said, Edward (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Saffioti, Francesca (2007). *Geofilosofia del mare. Tra Oceano e Mediterraneo*. Reggio Emilia: Diabasis.
- Salaita, Steven (2011). *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Sansal, Boualem (2005 [2014]). *Harraga*. Frank, Wynne transl. London: Bloomsbury.
- Swanson Goldberg, Elizabeth and Schultheis Moore, Alexandra (2012). *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Sarnelli, Laura (2015). “The Gothic Mediterranean: Haunting Migrations and Critical Melancholia”, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 147-165.
- Sarnou, Dalal (2014). “Narratives of Arab Anglophone women and the articulation of a major discourse in a minor literature” in *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 65- 81.
- Scaggs, John (2005). *Crime Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Seyhan, Azade (2001). *Writing outside the nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Scego, Igiaba (2020). *La linea del colore*. Milan: Bompiani
- (2015). *Adua*. Florence: Giunti.

- Sharpe, Christina (2016). *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Schäfer, Isabel (2014). "A Matrix for Mediterranean 'Area' Studies – Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach in the Post - 'Arab Spring' Context". *Mediterranean Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 57-89.
- Schmitt, Carl (1954), *Land und Meer: Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- (2003 [1950]). *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, transl. G. Ulmen. New York: Telos Press.
- Schimanski, Johan (2006). "Crossing and Reading: Notes towards a Theory and a Method", *Nordlit*, no. 19, pp. 41-63.
- (2015). "Border Aesthetics and Cultural Distancing in the Norwegian-Russian Borderscape" *Geopolitics* vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 35-55.
- Schimanski, Johan and Stephen F. Wolfe (2010). "Cultural Production and Negotiation of Borders: Introduction to the Dossier", *Journal of Borderland Studies*, vol. 25, no.1, pp. 38-49.
- Sellman, Johanna (2018). "A global postcolonial: Contemporary Arabic literature of migration to Europe", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 54, no. 6, pp. 751-765.
- Sidaway, James D. (2007). "The Poetry of Boundaries" in *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*, pp. 161-182.
- Silverstein, Paul (2002). "France's Mare Nostrum: Colonial and Post-colonial Constructions of the French Mediterranean", *The Journal of Northern African Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 1-22.
- Simmel, Georg (1997). "The Sociology of Space", transl. Mark Ritter and David Frisby, in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, Frisby D. and Featherstone M. eds., London: Sage, pp. 137-170.
- Simonsen, Anja (2017). *Tahriib: The Journey into the Unknown. An Ethnography of Mobility, Insecurities and Uncertainties Among Solamis en Route*. PhD dissertation, Copenhagen: the University of Copenhagen.
- Soja, Edward W. (1989). *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso.
- (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. London: Blackwell.
- Soja Edward and Hooper Barbara (1993). "The Spaces that Difference Makes. Some notes on Geographical Margins of the New Cultural Politics", in Keith M. and Pile S. eds., *Place and the Politics of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Stein, Rachel (2019). *Vengeful Citizens, Violent States: a theory of war and revenge*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Steinberg, Philip E. (2001). *The Social Construction of the Ocean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2013). "Of other seas: metaphors and materialities in maritime regions", *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 10, no.2, pp. 156-169.
- Steinberg, Philip E. and Kimberley Peters (2015). "Wet ontologies, fluid spaces: giving depth to volume through oceanic thinking", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol.

33, pp. 247-264.

- Steuter, Erin and Deborah Wills (2008). *At War with Metaphor: Media, Propaganda, and Racism in the War on Terror*. Plymouth: Lexington.
- Stewart, Iain and Christophe Morhange (2009). "Coastal Geomorphology and Sea-Level Change", *The Physical Geography of the Mediterranean*. Jamie Woodward, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press., pp. 385-413.
- Strang, Veronica (2004). *The Meaning of Water*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Strik, Tineke (2013). "Migration and asylum: mounting tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean" available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/51384f992.html> [accessed 8 February 2019].
- Strüver, Anke (2005). *Stories of the "Boring Border": The Dutch-German Borderscape in People's Mind*. Münster: Münster Publishing House.
- Subha, Xavier (2016). *The Migrant Text. Making and Marketing a Global French Literature*. Montreal: McQuill-Queen's University Press.
- Sunderland, Judith (2013). *Frontex Should Respect Human Rights Even on the High Seas*, Human Rights Watch, available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/06/frontex-should-respect-rights-even-high-seas> [accessed 8 February 2019].
- Szary, Amilhat A. and Frédéric Giraut (2015). *Borderities: The politics of contemporary mobile borders*. New York: Springer.
- Tally, Robert (2013). *Spatiality*. London: Routledge.
- Tanner, Fred (2004). *European Union Foreign and Security Policy; Towards a Neighbourhood Strategy*. London: Routledge.
- Taylor, Charles (2004). *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tazzioli, Martina (2015). "The Politics of counting and the scene of rescue. Border deaths in the Mediterranean", *Radical Philosophy*, no. 192, pp. 2-6.
- Tazzioli, Martina, De Genova, Nicholas, Mezzadra, Sandro, et al. (2015). "Migrant struggles", in Casa-Cortes, Maribel et al. "New Keywords: Migration and Borders", *Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 80-83.
- Tharaud, Barry (2009). "Culture and Existence in Bowles' Short Fiction" in *Writing Tangier*, Coury, R.M. and Lacey, R.K. eds., New York: Peter Lang, pp. 95-118.
- Theodoropoulos, Takis (2000). "Les bornes de la mer intérieure" in Theodoropoulos, Takis and Polycandrioti, Rania, *La Méditerranée grecque*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, pp. 7-28.
- Thomas, Dominic (2011). "The Global Mediterranean: Literature and Migration", in *Yale French Studies, Francophone Sub-Saharan African Literature in Global Contexts*, vol. 120, pp. 140-153.
- (2012). "Into the Jungle: Migration and Grammar in the New Europe", *European Studies*, no. 29, pp. 267-285.
- (2013). *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism*. Indiana University

Press.

UNHCR (2008). "The High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges", New York: UNHCR

https://web.archive.org/web/20080705191639/http://icmc.net/pdf/unhcr_stancom_08_ngo_stmt.pdf, [accessed 23 March, 2020].

— (2012). *Mediterranean Takes Record as Most Deadly Stretch of Water for Refugees and Migrants*. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2012/1/4f27e01f9/mediterranean-takes-record-deadly-stretch-water-refugees-migrants-2011.html> [accessed 15 March 2019].

Van Houtum, Henk (2010). "Waiting Before the Law: Kafka on the Border", *Social and Legal Studies*, 19, pp. 285-297.

— (2012). "Remapping Borders", *A Companion to Border Studies*, Wilson T. and Donnan H. eds., Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, pp. 405-418.

Van Houtum, Henk and Berg, Eiki (2003). "Prologue: A Border is not a Border. Writing and Reading Borders in Space" in H. van Houtum and E. Berg (eds), *Routing Borders Between Territories, Discourses and Practices*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Van Houtum, Henk and Mamadouh, Virginie (2008). "The geopolitical fabric of the border regime in the EU-African borderlands", *Nederlandse Geografische Studies* 376, pp. 93-99.

Van Houtum, Henk, Kramsch, Oliver and Zierhofer, Wolfgang (2005). *B/ordering Space*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Van Reekum, Rogier (2016). "The Mediterranean: Migration Corridor, Border Spectacle, Ethical Landscape", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 336-341.

Vazquez Montalban, Manuel (2000). "La Méditerranée invertébrée" in Vazquez Montalban, Manuel and Gonzalez Calleja, Eduardo, *La Méditerranée espagnole*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, pp. 7-30.

Vazquez Montalban, Manuel and Gonzalez Calleja, Eduardo (2000). *La Méditerranée espagnole*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.

Vyjayanthi, Rao (2011). "Speculative seas" in *The sea-image: Visual manifestations of port cities and global water*, Güven I. and Hakan T. eds., New York: Newgray, pp. 119-164.

Walters, William (2004). "Secure borders, safe haven, domopolitics", *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 237-260.

— (2006). "Border/Control", *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 187-203.

— (2008). "Bordering the Sea: Shipping Industries and the Policing of Stowaways", *Borderlands e-journal*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 1-25.

— (2011). "Foucault and Frontiers: Notes on the Birth of the Humanitarian Border" in U. Bröckling, S. Krassman and T. Lemke (eds) *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges*, London: Routledge, pp. 138-164.

Weisberg, Meg Furniss (2016). "Clandestine Emigration as Twenty-First Century Meme in the Roman Maghrébin", in *the Roman Maghrébin, Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 131-140.

Welsch, Wolfgang (1997). *Undoing Aesthetics*. London: Sage.

— (2011). "Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics: Towards a New Form of the Discipline", *Literature*

and Aesthetics, vol.7, pp. 7-24.

Westphal, Bernard (2011). *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Robert T. Tally transl. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Widmann, Andreas Martin (2011). "Towards a Typology of Counterfactual Historical Novels" in *Counterfactual thinking and Counterfactual Writing*, Birke D., Butter M. and Köppe T. eds, pp. 170- 189.

Willoquet-Maricondi, Paula (2010). *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller (2002). "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences", *Global Networks*, no.2, pp. 301-34.

Whatmore, Sarah (2006). "Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world", *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 13, no. 4, New York: SAGE Publications, pp. 600-609.

White, Paul (1995). "Geography, Literature and Migration", in *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, King R., Connell J., White P. eds. London: Routledge.

Wolff, Sarah (2012). *The Mediterranean Dimension of the EU's Internal Security*. London: Palgrave.

Zolo, Danilo (2007). "La questione mediterranea" in *L'alternativa mediterranea*, Cassano F. and Zolo D. eds., Milan: Feltrinelli, pp. 13-77.