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School of Art, Media and American Studies

Challenging the Collective Imaginary of Migration

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by

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‘Challenging the Collective Imaginary of Migration’

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Abstract

Close your eyes for a moment and focus on the image that emerges when you hear the word ‘refugee’. My thesis deals with the collective imaginary attached to contemporary migrations. It aims to explore its foundations in Western visual culture and its impact on migratory policies. The notion of visual culture is considered broadly, to include media photographs, art, and fashion productions, as well as data visualisations ranging from infographics to cartographies. At the core of these images, the semiotic element of the motif is understood as being key in the genealogy of images that explains the success of the narrow range of mainstream photographs encapsulating the refugees. Emanating from Google Images, these images are arranged into typologies. The narrow range of motifs that can be found in these mainstream images is analysed in the light of the resemblance relationship between images and migrants suggested by art historian W.J.T Mitchell. The resonance of these images with the Western economic system and historical background leads to a consideration of the distribution of roles in European societies as a reflection on the distribution of roles in European films. From there, the film industry will serve as a cognitive framework for thinking about border regimes. The focus of this doctoral research is the 2015 so-called ‘crisis’ in the Mediterranean, but its conclusion encompasses more recent events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, whose repercussions impact contemporary depictions of refugees.

The present dissertation is part of a Critical PhD by Practice in Film Studies but also relies on refugee studies, visual studies, and art history. *The People Behind the Scenes*, a 77-minute film, is an integral part of this research. Both components of this research can be read and watched separately, but they must be considered jointly to appreciate the study to its full extent. This research is conceived as a practice, involving the creative visual productions of myself, as author, and as a constant self-reflection of my personal conditioning, as a white Western woman bearing a family history of migration linked to the French colonial past.

Keywords

Migration – Images – Collective Imaginary – Mediterranean – Critical PhD by Practice – Media

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Note: Where English publications do not exist, all quotations from French texts are translated by myself.

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Although working and living at a distance from UEA, I was able to keep in touch with Hari Reed, a fellow PhD Candidate researching today's use of words surrounding migrations. To discover the language counterpart of my research about visual aspects of the so-called 'crisis', I can only advise the reader to delve into her work. I also would like to thank Inés Moreno Lopez, a friend and fellow PhD Candidate working on creative research in practice, for her support and help throughout this journey.

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As I am now myself away from my homeland, the Mediterranean region in which I grew up, my thoughts still turn towards this beautiful but disastrous area. May this work help to bring some light on the mechanisms of exclusion through images that are making this land of light a tragic point of no return for so many.

For yesterday's and today's victims
of European migratory policies.

Oh Mediterranean […]
Your overflowing torment and dream,
You reject it to invisible margins,
Bringing out new depths of new
Mirrors where your destiny is reflected.

Marin Sorescu, *I, the Mediterranean*, 1987

Introduction

In the heart of summer 2015, the Mediterranean Sea faced the greatest number of migratory arrivals in Europe since World War Two. The combination of the repression of the Arab Spring, civil wars in Syria and Iraq, authoritarian regimes and poverty in Africa led over a million of men, women and children to flee from their homelands towards Europe (Clayton *et al.* 2015). Since 1995, the Schengen Convention guarantees free movement of persons within the borders of the twenty-six signatory countries[1] and locks the outside borders of the area, building what has been called *Fortress Europe*. All member states of the European Union are entitled to respect the right of asylum, that is effectively implemented by countries located inside the external border of the area. Insofar as the Mediterranean Basin constitutes a natural boundary of the Union, Malta, Italy, and Greece, which have very small island territories in the region, are responsible for examining asylum applications and sorting out the 'good' refugees, who will be allowed to stay, from the 'bad' economic migrants, who will be sent back to their countries of origin. In practice, massive migratory arrivals since the early 2000s, mainly originating from wars in the Middle East conducted with the support of Western powers, are left to the charge of tiny territories unable to implement the Schengen system.

A collective imaginary in formation

However, what has been labelled in 2015 as a 'crisis' by observers and media was not a new phenomenon. Since 1993, the NGO UNITED for Intercultural Action has recorded the number of deaths caused by the European migratory regime which, when published by *The Guardian* on the 2018 International Refugee Day, had reached 34,361 persons (Needham 2018). As I am writing these lines, arrivals are less massive due to a monetised agreement between the European Union and the main country of departure on the Southern Mediterranean shore of Libya,[2] but crossings are still deadly (IOM

[1] Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

[2] 'Although arrivals were markedly down compared to the large numbers who reached Italy each year between 2014–2017 or Greece in 2015, the journeys were as dangerous as ever. An estimated 2,275 people perished in the Mediterranean in 2018 – an average of six deaths every day' (UNHCR 2018).

2021). The year 2015 is nevertheless a significant milestone affecting both the politics and the aesthetics of migration.

2015 marks one substantial relaxation of migratory policies in one of Europe's largest countries of destination. In the night between the 4 and 5 September 2015, Chancellor Merkel decided to open German borders to refugees stranded in Hungary, allowing a total of 1.1 million persons to enter the country. Almost two days before, on the morning of Wednesday 2 September 2015, Turkish news agency Dogan Haber Ajansi released Nilüfer Demir's photograph depicting a toddler laying on the beach, his head facing the sand. In the space of twelve hours, the image of the young Aylan Kurdi had been viewed by more than 20 million people across the world (Goriunova and Vis 2015: 10). The release of Demir's photographs constituted a decisive moment for the course of my research. Seeing this unbearable image taken in the Mediterranean, the region where I am from, determined the orientation of my studies.

Since the beginning of my Master's studies in Fine Art in that year, I had been developing a creative and theoretical approach to contemporary representations of migrations. The speed of the dissemination of Demir's images, the countless reframing and quotations they have been subjected to, and their links with iconic themes of art history, have all seemed to me to be indications of how a collective imagination is constituted.

Fig. 1 Artistic appropriations of Nilüfer Demir's photograph.

As Benedict Anderson (2006) and Charles Taylor (2002) have conceptualised, social communities are made of social imaginaries whose aesthetics are one main component. Made of a variety of mediums, from media to art productions and cartographies, these aesthetics draw a collective vision of the exiles. From a political point of view, persistence and repetition of 'the materiality of border enforcement practices in the symbolic and ideological production of a brightly lit "scene" of exclusion' composes what urban geographer Nicholas De Genova coined as 'border spectacle' (2015, 2017). These aesthetics would form a scene where border enforcement is 'rendered spectacularly visible' in a manner that would reify migrant "illegality" 'in an emphatic and grandiose gesture of exclusion' (2013: 1181, my emphasis). De Genova's conceptualisation of Western demonstrative management of the borders is inspired by Guy Debord's theorisation of *The Society of the Spectacle*: 'Spectacle is not a set of images, but a social relationship between people, mediated by images' (1995: 19). This relationship is at the core of visual anthropology, namely of the interplay between a visual production (artistic and media images) illustrating a human activity (border crossing), and the social organisation resulting from it (European

migratory policies) since the end of the *Mare Nostrum* operations on 31 October 2014. This operation, financed by the European Commission and implemented by the Italian Navy, consisted of the deployment of military vessels to rescue migrant people in danger. The end of its funding led to an increase in the number of deaths by drownings in the Mediterranean.

In order to understand the potential link between the type of lethal policies undertaken in the Mediterranean and the visual environment contemporary to these policies, I propose to consider the filmic tool, as a heuristic tool, to make us *feel* the collective imaginary of migrations in the Mediterranean. The verb 'to feel' rather than 'to give' or 'to see' is chosen because the notion of the collective imaginary is more related to mental images fixed in our memories from the repetition of the material images, than to material images or to reality as such. The historical background in which border spectacle takes place is marked by two elements. First it is constitutive of the wider 'tableaux of differentiation' resulting from structural racism (Gilroy 2005: 20; Maneri 2021). Second, it is the consequence of the biopolitics regime (Foucault 2004: 323) that dominates migration policies which, considering the scale of fatalities it generates, is now considered as necropolitics (Mbembé 2019). Closely intertwined, these political and aesthetical regimes are the expression of structural racism. Their joint examination in the present study takes place given the context described by Paul Gilroy, in which 'the suggestion that racism can exist significantly and perniciously in unconscious and supraindividual forms and that critical analysis of its potency can contribute something to the life of the humanities and the quality of broader civic interaction is […] widely rejected' (2005: 12). To unfold these unconscious and supra-individual forms would help in designating the semiotic elements in contemporary images of migration that perpetuate exclusionary politics against non-white exiles. Unveiling the genesis of images of migration and trying to show the way they influence political orientation of policies implies a need to consider together the political and the aesthetical dimensions. Three essays that jointly address, from their title to their critical arguments, notions of image and migration, encouraged me to explore the analogy between the visual and the migratory fields. They are *Migrating Images* directed by Petra Segmann and Peter C. Seel (2004), *The Migrant Image* by art historian T.J. Demos (2013), and *Lampedusa. Images Stories from the Edge of Europe* led by the Migrant Image Research Group (2017). In *Migrating Images*, art historian W.J.T. Mitchell states clearly the analogy:

‘What would it mean to talk about images as migrants, as immigrants, as emigrants, as travellers, who arrive and depart, who circulate, pass through, thus appear and disappear?’ (2004: 14)

The elusive nature of images, whose dissemination closely depends on the uncontrollable movements of collective affects, could be compared to the clandestine displacements of migrants. Conversely, migrants can be seen as projection surfaces of the vision of alterity expressed by one group. As surfaces of projection of the ‘otherness’, migrants’ portrayal can inform us about the psyche developed by one given national group. For Jung the psyche is composed by all psychic processes, whether concious or unconscious, imposed upon the individuals: ‘we can hardly rid ourselves of the prejudiced view that the psyche and its contents are nothing but our own arbitrary invention or the more or less illusory product of supposition and judgment. The fact is that certain ideas exist almost everywhere and at all times and can even spontaneously create themselves quite independently of migration and tradition. They are not made by the individual, they just happen to him—they even force themselves on his consciousness’ (2014: 7). As observed by philosopher of technology Bernard Stiegler, since the twentieth century, global capitalism is directed to consciousnesses (2004: 36). For describing the systematic exploitation of the consciousnesses, Le Brun explains: ‘I could just as easily talk about a war against silence, a war against attention as a war against sleep, or a war against boredom, a war against daydreaming. But also a war against passion. In other words, a war against everything from which no value can be extracted’(2018: 19–20).[3] This systematic instrumentalisation of ‘What is priceless’ (borrowing the title of Le Brun’s essay), ‘leads to the ruin of body and soul’ (Stiegler 2014: 16). For Stiegler, human beings cannot be separated from technics, and humans’ consciousness must be thought of as being in relationship with technics. As explained by scholar Matt Bluemink, ‘the externalization of our memory in tools is, for the human, a “third kind” of memory that is separate from the internal, individually acquired memory of our brain (epigenetic) and the biological evolutionary memory that is inherited from our ancestors (phylogenetic); this Stiegler calls epiphylogenetic memory or epiphylogenesis’ (Bluemink 2020). Following Stiegler, human beings’ consciousness would be resulting from a preexisting external

[3] From: ‘Je pourrais tout autant parler d’une guerre contre le silence, d’une guerre contre l’attention comme d’une guerre contre le sommeil, ou encore d’une guerre contre l’ennui, d’une guerre contre la rêverie. Mais aussi d’une guerre contre la passion. Autrement d’une guerre contre tout ce dont « l’on ne peut pas […] extraire de la valeur »’.

memory. ‘‘Consciousness’ is never constituted purely, simply and originally, in itself: it is always both a little bit monkey and a little bit parrot. It always inherits what it is not – this is its ‘facticity’ (Stiegler 2014: 28). On this, Stiegler, challenges Hurssel’s three-dimensional conception of the memory process that would be constituted by two opposed stages of retention: a primary retention (that is the constitutive part of the perception) and a secondary retention (which *derives* from the primary retention and relates to imagination). For the French philosopher, since the *age of the mechanical reproduction of art* (my quotation of Benjamin’s seminal 1935 essay), it is possible to hear twice in a row the same melody on one same temporal object, for example on a phonograph. This repetition is designated by Stiegler as ‘tertiary retention’ to point to the external memory it constitutes. When the same temporal object, here the melody, is produced two times, it creates two distinct phenomenon. For Stiegler, primary retentions vary from one phenomenon to another. In the case of melody: ‘the retentions from the first time of listening play, when they have become secondary, a *selective* role for the primary retentions of the second time of listening’ (2014: 34, my emphasis). As a result, repetition produces a difference. In the case of images produced by broadcasted programmes, press or films, that are materialised time overdetermining the relationships between primary and secondary retentions, the tertiary retentions can either intensify the difference between the two retentions, or cancel it by producing indifference. Following Stiegler, it would be possible to control the relationships between primary and secondary retentions.

Stiegler’s concept of epiphylogenesis can be likened to Cornelius Castoriadis’s notion of ‘collective imaginary’. For the Greek philosopher, ‘the imaginary […] is not an image of. It is the unceasing and essentially undetermined (social-historical and psychological) creation of figures/forms/images, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question of something’ (1999: 8). In this definition, ‘imaginary’ is used as something that is essentially known and not described as a given fact. Castoriadis’s conception of the collective imaginary, as a collective construction, suggests that influencing the imaginary by taking action on its modes of formation would be conceivable in the same way that Stiegler argued that controlling the processes of retention is potentially feasible. Consequently, intervening on the memorisation of images would be conceivable.

To consider images as fruitful to address migratory policies

What is the epiphylogenesis of migrations by the Mediterranean, or to put it like Castoriadis, what is its collective imaginary? From there, how could one intervene on the external memory of migrants it creates? To answer these questions, the general assumption of the present research is to consider images, whether media or artistic, as reading grids of migratory policies implemented in the Mediterranean.

A first approach would be to follow Mitchell's incentive: metaphorical and concrete relationships between the image's nature on one hand, and mental projections about migrants on the other hand, could constitute as so many unveilers of the Western collective imaginary of migration by the Mediterranean and of the resulting migratory policies. This stance would not essentialise the exiles into a 'figure'. Aware of the ethical pitfall that would be contained in an essentialisation of refugees, Mitchell (2004a) observes that a double movement is at work today: an ever-increasing dematerialisation of images, and at the same time, an obsession for materiality, and for things.[4] In the last section of the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx discusses the hoarder's fetishist propensity for money (1867: 91). In today's Europe, this magical dimension, this double beat between materialism and disembodiment, as well as the attraction and repulsion towards those who crystallise 'otherness', appear in a context that gives priority to the circulation of capital and goods over that of people (Mezzadra and Nielson 2013: 19). More precisely, within the movement of people, it prioritises those who hold the most capital and can benefit from the institutionalisation of passport and of visa sales. This context, therefore, reinforces the intuiton to think jointly about images and migrants.

Exploring the genesis and functioning of the collective imaginary of today's migrations through the Mediterranean by, for example, the elaboration of typologies of images and by their consecutive analysis, could be a starting point to delve into this potential relationship. As a visual artist undertaking a 'Critical PhD by Practice', I then go beyond the images analysis through the making of a film in a territory of arrival in the Mediterranean, such as Malta's archipelago. This film could be a visual way of delineating the collective imaginary of migration by the Mediterranean, and could constitute an opportunity for a reflection on the potential inputs of the filmmaking practice to this burning topic.

[4] 'There is a fact that material commodities still move around the world in container vessels in exactly the same way they did in 1900; that we haven't passed beyond the age of the steamship in the sense of the speed of movement material commodities, while images and information move incredibly rapidly' (Mitchell 2004a: 22–23).

Theoretical framework of the research in practice

Beyond Theodor Adorno's feeling of powerlessness when claiming 'There cannot be poetry after Auschwitz' (1966: 362), I follow philosopher Jacques Rancière who states: 'The opposite is true: after Auschwitz, to show Auschwitz, only art is possible, because it is always the present of an absence, because it is its very job to show an invisible, by the regulated power of words and images, joint or separate, because it is thus the only one capable of making the inhuman sensitive' (2012: 48).

Artistic practices belonging to an aesthetics of subversion (Mazzara 2019) could constitute an 'oppositional force' (Demos 2013: xv) to counteract dominant and stereotypical images of the so-called crisis. The subversion originates from the reflective movement induced by images. For Roland Barthes, photography is subversive, 'not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatises, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks' (1981: 38). An image which triggers critical thinking is a potential source of contest against established order. In the 1980s, philosopher Jean Baudrillard inverted the quest for misleading messages within images by affirming the absence of distinction between images and reality (1994: 2). Baudrillard's concept of simulacra will be a notional leverage for addressing the gap between journalistic discourse and images displayed. Simulacra will also be aligned with Rancière's conceptualisation of the power of 'dissensus'. Far from seeking reality hidden under appearances and a single regime for interpreting images, dissensus implies confidence in the viewer's ability to reconfigure his/her experience of the world from artworks. As a thought in action, the empowering ability of dissensus applies to both viewers and the image's designer: 'dissensus calls into play at the same time what is perceived, imaginable and feasible and the sharing of those who are able to perceive, think and modify the coordinates of the world' (2018: 55). As a result, artworks have the potential for producing an alternative perception of reality. Accordingly, considering artworks as symptoms of a world views' vision, visual studies, in which Mitchell is a leading theorist, are thus an epistemological tool for approaching not only the social construction of the visual, but also the visual construction of the social (Mitchell 2005: xiv; Center for Visual Studies no date). Provoking thought, and stimulating the usual boundaries of imagination with regard to migration, will be the purpose of the practical strand of the present research.

The making of my own images of migration will take place in Malta's archipelago, a place that has welcomed successive waves of migration from antiquity until today. To visually explore Mitchell's analogy between migrants and images, and to position exile as a universal experience, the film will not be confined to be a visual illustration of the critical part of the study. It will constitute an integral part of the research outcomes. For this, the feature film *The People Behind the Scenes*, shot alongside this research, is understood as an image-based laboratory, which, as such, creates thought. Following case studies allows an understanding of the analytical approach and the intentions that led me to its creation. However, it is important to state that this film also remains irreducible to written comments. Because of its very purpose, namely the delimitation of a mental phenomenon, it produces insights which can only be grasped and appreciated through its viewing. Here lies the specificity of this research that distinguishes it from other recent contributions in the field by constituting a reflection about images in images (Chwiejda 2020, Amores ongoing). Beyond the formal aspect of the research tackled by the shooting of a feature film, scanning through the present written work, which features 70 images, enables the reader to picture at a glance the reflection these images seek to design.

I would like to assume artistic research's ability to redesign perceptions on migration while being aware that it can be considered as an unreasonable assumption 'from the perspective of our oligarchic societies and the so-called critical logic that is double' (Rancière 2009: 48). Although not including migrants' self creative production in its scope, the present study falls within Walter Mignolo's notion of 'epistemic disobedience' which implies for the researcher to keep her distance from the conditioning of a historically dominant Western way of thinking (2009: 160). Mignolo's 'de-linking' are the backdrops from which the analysis will be undertaken, and from which the potential relationship between migrants and images will be assessed. More precisely, the goal of Mignolo's heuristic approach is 'de-linking from the magic of the Western idea of modernity, ideals of humanity and promises of economic growth and financial prosperity' (2009: 161). On this last point, Rancière's 'market law of equivalence' (2009: 102) will guide the image analysis as it states 'a disenchanted knowledge of the reign of the commodity and the spectacle, of the equivalence between everything and its own image' (2009: 32). By standardising differences and homogenising peculiarities into simplified versions of their reality, the law of equivalence aims to make things easier to memorise for consumer-viewers. The law of equivalence is

intrisinc to global capitalism. From Stiegler's perspective, as consciousnesses are used as 'meta-markets giving access to all over markets' (2014: 17) and 'driving forces' of these markets (2014: 16), a major part of industrial activity is intended to design 'industrial temporal object'. According to Stiegler, this kind of object is constituted by the fact […] that like *our consciousnesses*, it flows and disappears as it appears (2014 :18). From this stance, circulating images of migrants as well as migrants themselves will be considered as industrial temporal objects assigned to the law of equivalence. Consequently, migrants' intrinsic human specificities could be reduced to a few repeated stereotypes to be sold by press agencies when in the form of images, or subjected to human trafficking when being fellow men.

Main hypothesis

The main hypothesis driving this research, explored in particular through its practical strand, assumes that modifying visual productions dealing with migration would contribute to changing the public perceptions and the social organisations managing them. The first chapter will attempt to delimit the contours of the Western collective imaginary of migration by exploring the *moving* capacity of images from press photographs to fashion including cartographies, the verb 'to move' being understood both as an action verb and as an adjective reflecting a feeling. Emulating from this investigation, and extending it through a feature film, the second chapter will show how 'to feel' the collective imaginary of migration through a film, and will examine what this collective imaginary teaches us about contemporary migratory policies.

Main key terms, spatial and temporal limitations

Key concepts of the research will be understood as follows.

<u>Collective imaginary</u>

The notion of the collective imaginary will be used as a noun, and as a synonym for Stiegler's epiphylogenesis, as described in his words: 'time spaced and space temporalized, is the sedimentary store of events among which we live without knowing it. It is a memory that is transmitted down the generations (which haunt and *spiritualized* each other). Being spatialized it is exteriorized and retained in the *facticity of the non-living* – protected from the *fragility* of the living' (2014: 33). Born from the

dissemination of mass media photographs, of artworks and of maps, the collective imaginary of migration also encompasses detection imagery intended to cope with fragile vessels' arrivals.

Images and motifs

The images drawn upon in this study include media, artistic and cartographic representations of migrants. This broad selection is driven by the focus put on motifs within images no matter their medium. From Latin, *motivus*, 'what moves', motifs are characterised by their ability to circulate from image to image. This property explains their interest for the present study about the contours and content of collective imaginary of migration. The notion of the 'image' also engages with mental images, which consist in brain representations of memorised or imagined objects or situations. To the extent that images are constructed, they are examined as an anthropological phenomenon. The images' anthropomorphism consists in projecting social experience onto images. In this conception, the human body is understood as a living medium. In other words, the understanding of imagery implies a need to consider human beings as both authors and objects of the image. In the case of the present study, images will be seen as sources of knowledge about migration by the Mediterranean, as well as a visual framework to address the Western point of view on this geopolitical situation. In continuation with Stiegler's thought (2014: 17), images will be considered as industrial temporal objects, which, like our consciounesses, elapse as they appear. To summarise, images, and in particular visual motifs within images, will be understood as key components of one dimension of the psyche that is the collective imaginary.

Exiles and migrants

'Exile' will refer to both a feeling and to individuals. This sensation, which mixes nostalgia for the past as well as hope for the future, applies to both categories of 'migrants' and 'refugees'. The exile's positioning makes possible a vision on Western policies that is alternative to mainstream narratives. Exile allows the seeing of 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted' (Said 2012: 173). Throughout this research, and especially through its practical component, exile will be seen as a human condition shared by every person led to leave their homeland for an indefinite time. It will bring together those lost

in limbo by today's forced displacements, and those, already settled, who carry on experiencing the continous feeling of a 'fragmented identity' (Nouss 2015: 32). As explained in the film by a statistician from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the term 'migrants' is generally associated with exiles leaving their country for economic reasons, whereas 'refugees' leave their country for political reasons, that, in theory, entitle them to asylum. 'Migrants' are seen as not worthy of political protection, and by extension, regarding the actual conditions of their arrivals, a life; whereas 'refugees' are seen as deserving life and protection. To counteract this political partition by considering cross-border travel as a right inherent to all, this distinction will not be made in the dissertation. The terms exiles and 'migrants' will be used as synonyms.

Two reasons motivate the joining of these two notions. Firstly, for consistency and clarity with Mitchell's suggestion, I will use the term 'migrant' in chapter one that explores the relationship he suggested. Secondly, I will follow Maurice Merleau-Ponty who stated that 'To name a thing is to tear oneself away from its individual and unique characteristics to see it as representative of an essence or a category' (1945: 204). An object would be known when named. Yet, the generic term of 'migrants' refers to those excluded from what David Hollinger has coined as the *circle of we* (1993). Designating Westerners, this notion implies a use of universalism as a cultural imperialism, confusing 'the local with the universal' and introducing a cultural hierarchy in the light of a 'too parochial construction of our common humanity' (1993: 319). To challenge this exclusionary dynamic, I choose to use the mainstream term 'migrant' in order to 'contextualise' it differently. Using it as an equivalent of 'exile' will lead to restoring some of the intellectual and artistic dimension that used to be attributed to 'exiles'[5] (Agier 2011a: 88). From there, to start applying Mitchell's comparison with images, in the photographic sense, 'migrants' would be the negative images of Westerners.

[5] 'I am thinking in particular of the American intellectual of Palestinian origin Edward W. Said, whose *Reflections on Exile* were one of the starting points for this reflection or the philosopher Hannah Arendt, who first thought about the status of the "stateless" and refugees, partly from her own experience as a German refugee in the United States'. From: 'Je pense notamment à l'intellectuel américain d'origine palestinienne Edward Saïd, dont les *Réflexions sur l'exil* ont été un des points de départ de ma réflexion. Ou encore à la philosophe Hannah Arendt qui, la première, a pensé le statut des « sans État » et des réfu- giés, en partie à partir de sa propre expérience de réfugiée allemande aux États-Unis' (Agier 2011b: 21).

Regime

Lastly, rather than the word ‘genre’, which applies for example to distinguish the field of fiction from that of the documentary, the term ‘regime’ will be used to connect migratory policies, whether they are explicitly assumed or not, with the field of images. This will convey the political dimension of images, and will put the focus on their content (the circulations of motifs within them), rather than on the mediums.

Spatial delimitation

The Mediterranean Basin offers the setting of a rich history of exile since antiquity. Malta’s archipelago, a place of arrival of people, communities and occupants through centuries, whose capital Valetta has been the 2018 ‘European Capital of Culture’, is chosen for fieldwork. Having a proactive policy to attract foreign film productions, Malta’s film studios are specialised in the making of shipwreck scenes. More explanations on this choice will be provided in chapter 2.

Assuming my positionality and my potential bias as a Western researcher, the mainstream images analysed will originate and be analysed from the perspective of the main countries of destination of today’s exiles that roughly corresponds to today’s European Union plus Britain.

Time limitation

The scope of the study runs throughout twenty years starting in 2001. 2001 coincides with the collapse of the New York World Trade Center. It also corresponds with the revival and the publication of two essays. First, Francis Fukyuma’s 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man* which took on another meaning in September 2011 that entails the beginning of ‘universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of all human government’ (2012: 1). Second, it calls into question Susan Sontag’s essay *Regarding the Pain of the Others* (2003) about the influence of war images on the building of a potential collective ‘we’ since 9/11. 2001 would thus be considered as a shift in Western imperialist supremacy and as the climax of a Western community of viewers.

This dissertation is structured in two main chapters, each of them being organised in three sections.

Chapter 1. Nomadic images

Stating that images, especially if iconic, can be turned into motifs, becoming nomadic (Faulkner 2015: 54) which circulate, appear and disappear, this chapter will investigate images' nomadic nature. It will start by isolating images' central motifs defined not only as the image's main subject, but as the dominant or recurring idea the image conveys ('Motif' 2019). On this aspect, the iconological approach conducted by Aby Warburg (1926–1929), and subsequently theorised by Georges Didi-Huberman (2002) under the term image *survival,* will be embraced. This method of interpretation implies that images bear various temporalities that would connect them through time and space (2017: 48–50). Regarding the migration subject matter, in particular Demir's photograph of Aylan Kurdi, the imprint of archaic motifs such as those of religious iconology will be considered as drivers triggering images' dissemination. As the Oxford English Dictionary defines the term 'motif' as 'A *decorative* image or design, especially a repeated one forming a pattern'('Motif' 2018, my emphasis), the chapter will end with an exploration of visual motifs of migration's exploitation by the fashion industry.

Chapter 2. The People Behind the Scenes – Creative research in practice to unveil the collective imaginary of migration

The repetition of the same nomadic motifs can trigger compassion fatigue, a sensation humorously designated by David Lodge as 'the idea that we get so much human suffering thrust in our faces every day from the media that we've become sort of numbed, we've used up all our reserves of pity, anger, outrage, and can only think of the pain in our own knee' (1995: 18). Rancière responded to the so-called compassion fatigue syndrome by claiming that 'If horror is banalised, it is not because we see too many images of it. We do not see too many suffering bodies on the screen. But we do see too many nameless bodies, too many bodies incapable of returning the gaze that we direct at them, too many bodies that are an object of speech without themselves having a chance to speak' (2008: 106). To attempt to trigger reflection on the collective imaginary of migration dealing with these suffering bodies, this chapter aims to activate the image's subversive ability through filmmaking. This practice will lead to an epistemological proposal in the refugee studies field. The latter puts forward that the framework of

fiction suggested by De Genova with his notion of border spectacle can help in terms of assessing the gap between European legal statements (as for example, the European Convention on Human Rights) on one side, and the policies practically implemented to deal with migrants' drownings on the other side. This chapter will end with a reflexive consideration of the practical strand of the research and the way it may have iteratively fed its theoretical findings, and by questioning my researcher's positionality.

As the daughter and granddaughter of French *pieds-noirs* (black-feet) who migrated from Franco's Spain to French Algeria, and then to the mainland after the War of Independence, I will acknowledge the presence of my culturally constructed perception and of my personal affectations with the subject. This positioning results from the willingness to position myself as a researcher within a specific individual mapping, 'instead of asserting one reality and representing the self only in that particular reality' (Kunak 2017). I therefore decide to assume my own personal connivance with migration. Subjectivity will thus be understood as an essential dimension of the study through the dialogical relationship between the knowledge object, its context and its parts. As a consequence, I will not obliterate my personal relationship with the topic, but to the extent that it proceeds from the complexity of the investigation and of the investigator's posture (Le Houérou 2016: 170), I will acknowledge it in my filmmaking practice and in the analysis I will make of it.

Note about critical and creative components of the study

Far from being disconnected, the analytical part and the practical part of the present study will be embraced in a single look. Stemming from the exploration of Mitchell's analogy between migrants and images, the filmmaking practice will be considered as a research outcome as such. In this view, heuristic tools belonging to Film Studies, such as the distribution of roles, the location of the main subject in an image's composition, and the production modes will be articulated to the place allocated to exiles in Western democracies. The two components of the study, its analytical part and its practical part, have reversed goals to those to which they are generally assigned: the theoretical exploration is used as a practical tool from which to prepare the shooting, and the insights contained in the film will provide an understanding of contemporary migratory policies. The reading of the present written thesis must

therefore be completed by the viewing of the film which composes the study. To connect the main objective announced in the thesis title with the film, *Changing regime of images to change migratory regimes* does not come without offering a glance at *The People Behind the Scenes* that can be seen at this address https://vimeo.com/326506135 with the password TPBTS.

* *
*

From there, assuming that revealing today's collective imaginary of migration would be a fruitful means to understand migratory policies, exploring the nomadic nature of images (I), will help in drawing this imaginary through the making of a film that will in turn, help in terms of thinking about today's migratory policies (II).

Chapter 1 - Nomadic Images

The image of Aylan Kurdi was published on the 2 September 2015 at 8:42 am by the Turkish news agency DHA (Dogan Haber Ajansi). On the 14 September, the photograph had been shared 2,843,274 times among various social media, blogs, news, and forums and had been viewed by more than twenty million people across the world in the space of twelve hours.[6] Nilüfer Demir's photographs became viral because the young boy[7] materialised both the consequences of the Syrian civil war, and the incapacity of the Western powers to deal with the issue of hosting refugees. Her photographs went around the world because they had shown that, just like the Syrian war, European policies could strike indiscriminately.Why, while the Syrian civil war had been costing many victims and had been covered by all media for four years, had the photograph of one of them, that of the young Aylan, suddenly moved the whole world?

To answer this question, the main research hypothesis of the following chapter is to highlight the potential existing dialogue between current and past images of migration. For this, images will be thought of as signs, and as levers that can help in understanding power relations that nestle in gazes and in political decisions. Combined with structural racism, the global capitalism framework will be considered as the main forces fuelling the circulations of both migrants and images. In the Mediterranean area, the main manifestation of global capitalism for Westerners is tourism. For the migrants, global capitalism and structural racism find their expression in unregistered visa trade, smuggling and human trafficking practices. The relationships between migrants and Westerners will be understood within the scope of market relationships, which entails relationships of domination exercised by those deciding the game rules of international trade guiding flows of capital, goods, services, and humans.

In cultural history, motifs constitute a key tool that Aby Warburg (2012) and Erwin Panofsky (1972) have studied as *iconology*. Both art historians saw images not only as cultural facts, but also as symptoms of a collective memory. More recently, Didi-Huberman demonstrated that motifs can intrinsically bear several temporalities, and create as many time windows within Western visual culture (2004).

[6] See the spread hour per hour in d'Orazo (2015: 11).
[7] The boy's Kurdish name – his family has Turkish origins – was actually Alan Kurdî.

In the present study, motifs, that are key semiotic elements in images, will be considered as the main driver of circulations of images. Motifs' nomadism in media and artistic depictions will be understood as the very material *and* the fuel of the collective imaginary of migration. For this reason, motifs' circulation will be examined from a spatial point of view, as they can navigate through various mediums (such as media, art or cartographic images), as well as from a temporal perspective throughout history. However, in view of the iterative process at stake between media and art images, art productions will be seen as lagging behind media, to which they are content to be echo chambers.

As a consequence, a combination of structural racism and global capitalism will be what confines both production of images and migrants into closed circuits of consumption fostering visual clashes (I.1). Drawing on Simon Faulkner's analysis of Demir's photograph of Aylan Kurdi in the arms of the Turkish coastguard (2015: 54), it will be argued that the visual motif is what implements the displacement of images (I.2). Mainstream media motifs whose circulation is intense and repeated will be seen as the main drivers in the construction of stereotypes, as exemplified by their use in the fashion industry (I.3).

1. A visual clash

Although designated in the language of economics and finance by the acronym of 'PIGS', standing for Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain, the Southern European Mediterranean countries continue to be the favourite holiday and retiring destinations of Northern Europeans. Migrants and tourists both cross this area, but fall into two opposite regimes of human circulations. 'As a resident here for the last 50 years, I can say that lately we are seeing more coloured individuals on the streets in some areas of Malta', says a Tripadvisor commenter. He states: 'As a tourist it will make no difference to your holiday, as most illegal immigrants are held in isolated detention centres'. Yet, incidentally, migrants and tourists alike can share the same picture. Spanish photographers Juan Medina and José Palazón respectively (Figs. 2 and 3) captured this phenomenon at Gran Tarajal beach in the Canary Islands and in the North African enclave of Melilla. Playing on the contrast between the subjects placed in the foreground and in the background, their images surprise the viewers and provoke a feeling of unease. In Medina's image, three sunbathing tourists are chatting in the background, while a newcomer crawls in the sand in the foreground. In Palazón's photograph elegant golfers play in the foreground while a group of migrants are sitting on the top of a 12-metre-high fence. Palazón's photograph actually reveals those, evolving behind the scenes of tourist resorts, who are supposed to be 'held in isolated detention centres'. Medina's framing reverses the main roles and subordinate roles by putting a surviving unwanted traveller in the centre, and by simultaneously showing in the picture two antithetic experiences of the same Mediterranean sandy beach. Both these photographs create a visual clash. Both of them make visible a humanitarian catastrophe that is rendered invisible. 'History is the time when those who do not have the right to share the same place can occupy the same image' (Rancière 2014: 13). Although tourists and migrants are generally kept in distinct visual regimes of

images, in these photographs, they share, for a fragile and intense moment, the same frame.

Fig. 2 Juan Medina, In search of a better life, 2006, Reuters Source D.G.

Fig. 3 A golfer hits a tee shot as African migrants sit on top of a border fence between Morocco and Spain's north African enclave of Melilla, on 22 October 2014, José Palazón/Reuters.

Yet, in spite of the travellers' concerns, these images are fugitives, as migrants are forced to be. 'We don't see them. We see them on TV. We see them on the news', observes a local in *Sudeuropa*, a film shot in Lampedusa by Maria Iorio and Raphaël Cuomo. Earlier in the film, in the voice-over, Iorio quotes the Mayor of Lampedusa's words: 'Thanks to the support and the sensitivity of all national institutions both regional and local, and thanks to all the law enforcement officers who tackle this phenomenon we succeed in keeping separate – clearly separate – the reality of clandestine immigration from social life'. The message is clear: border regime fosters border spectacle, but not potential meetings in the public space. As a consequence, the Mediterranean happens to be the scene of journeys whose cost seems to be inversely proportional to the individuals' financial capacities. On the one hand, in a survey of June 2017, the IOM estimates the average cost paid by migrants to cross the Mediterranean was up to 5000 US dollars (IOM 2017). On the other hand, a consultation of travel comparator websites shows that the price for Mediterranean cruises starts at £359.00 for five nights during the low season. It could be observed that it is ten times more expensive to cross the Mediterranean for someone considered as illegal by European

legislation; but inequalities are so severe, that any kind of comparison remains impossible. In fact, sailors and professionals of the maritime sector certify that crossing the Mediterranean with the type of craft the migrants are paying for is doomed to fail and result in death (Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme 2017). Navigating in the Mediterranean for those with no documents represents sailing in the river Styx. As the average cost of a cruise in the Mediterranean shows, the Mediterranean is a valued destination for underprivileged European tourists. The main assumption of the following development is that the polarisation of the living conditions between the 'poor sedentary' and the 'poor nomads' (Balibar 2015: 141)[8] would serve to strengthen the stereotypes of migrants.

Tourism appears as the main concern related to the migration 'crisis' in France. A look at the most frequent questions associated with the keyword 'migration' in 2015 on Google highlights the dichotomy of preoccupations between French and Syrian populations. For the French, interest in the migration crisis is expressed for the way the 'crisis' may have affected tourist venues, whereas the Syrian people are preoccupied by their likelihood of death by drowning in the Aegean Sea, one of the tourist hotspots in the area (Google Trends 2015).

Fig. 4 Google Trends, Top questions on migration in France, 2015.

[8] From: 'pauvres sédentaires' and 'pauvres nomades'.

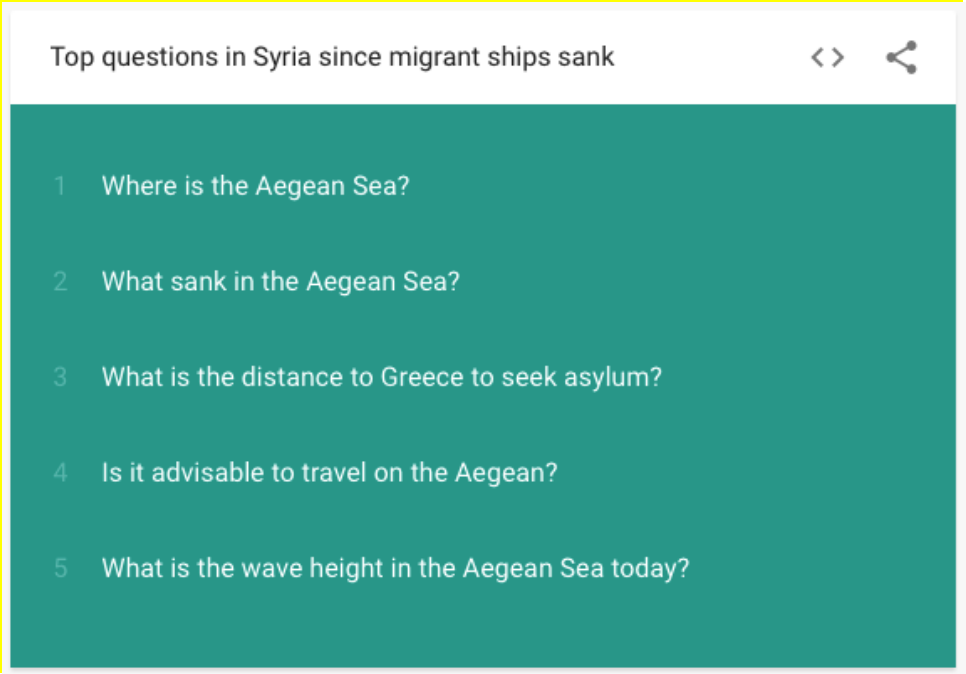
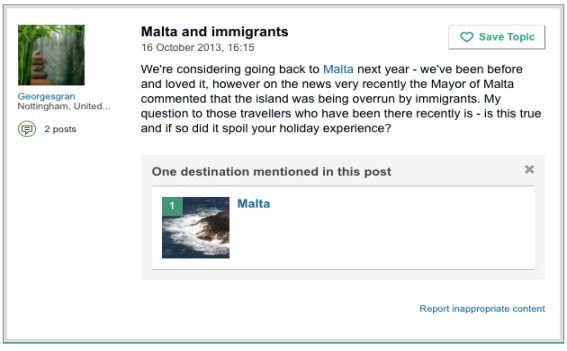


Fig. 5 Google Trends, *Top questions on migration in Syria*, 2015.

Westerners' peculiar interest in the humanitarian situation in the Mediterranean is confirmed by consultations of websites specialising in tourism in which people can comment, review, and ask questions about tourist venues, such as Tripadvisor. For example, this person from Nottingham raises his concern about the migrants' situation in Malta's archipelago in order to be sure that it will not tarnish his 'holiday experience' (Trip Advisor 2014, 2015).



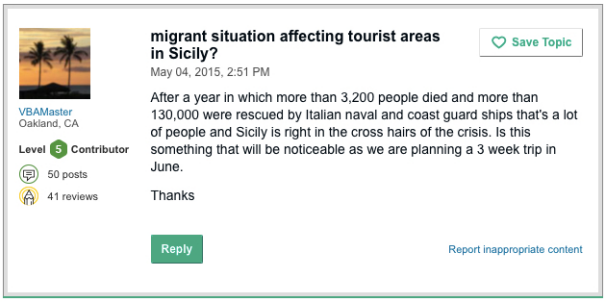


Fig. 6 Trip Advisor, Malta and immigrants and Migrant situation affecting tourist areas in Sicily?, 2015.

Among the messages related to the Mediterranean island of Sicily which were not removed by the Tripadvisor moderators' team due to abusive content, someone is asking if the migrant situation will be 'noticeable' (Tripadvisor 2016). The word reveals the way this concern relates with visibility. It is also telling about the importance of the stereotypes attached to the migrants as their sole presence could undermine the holidays and potentially 'spoil' the photographs to be posted on social media. This concern is also addressed by Berndt Körner, deputy executive director of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). Körner says: 'Whether the new route goes up to Croatia, it remains to be seen' (Cook 2016). This leader implies that despite the probable presence of individuals – the migrants – who should not be seen, this tourist location is still worth a visit. More precisely, Körner means, as one representative of Frontex, that exiles' presence is not fitting well with the Croatian holiday scenery since their presence could possibly threaten the security of, or at least spoil, a highly appreciated landscape for tourism. In addition to its smack of hate speech, this official statement hides European Union member states' failure in rescuing migrants who faced an imminent threat of death at sea and explains the European inactions denounced by NGOs.[9]

Improbable encounters of the 'poor sedentary' and the 'poor nomad' (Balibar 2015: 141) fostered by this border regime can be linked to Surrealism in the sphere of images. The Comte de Lautréamont created a sentence which inspired the Surrealist movement when describing the beauty of 'the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella[10]' (1938: 256). Surrealism is an international movement born of the chaos of the First World War. To overcome the barbarity of the war, images had to be as violently surprising and disrupting as the magnitude of the conflict. Surrealists' collages constituted poetic answers defying violence and hatred. As noticed by director Olivia Dehez in the voice-over of her documentary *Tunisia, bodies on beaches* (2019) shot in Zarzis, nearby the tourist island of Djerba, 'In Tunisia today, authorised travellers enjoy the luxury of unplugging from their worldly consciousness, while

[9] In the Mediterranean, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has stated that when a vessel is intercepted, even on the high seas, effective control over the boat and all persons on board implies for public officials the duty to respect and protect the rights of migrants on the vessel. The 'return of the boats at sea' is a violation of the ECHR.

[10] From: 'la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie'.

others have to overcome its contradictions, at the risk of getting lost, somewhere in the Mediterranean[11]'. There, a new cemetery was built as a matter of urgency 'because we wanted to prevent the bodies of drowned migrants from floating and going to places where there are tourists', explains Mongi Slim, head of the Red Crescent NGO in Zarzis. 'So that it doesn't shock the tourists and doesn't affect the economic activity of this region which lives essentially on tourism[12]', he says (Dehez 2019).

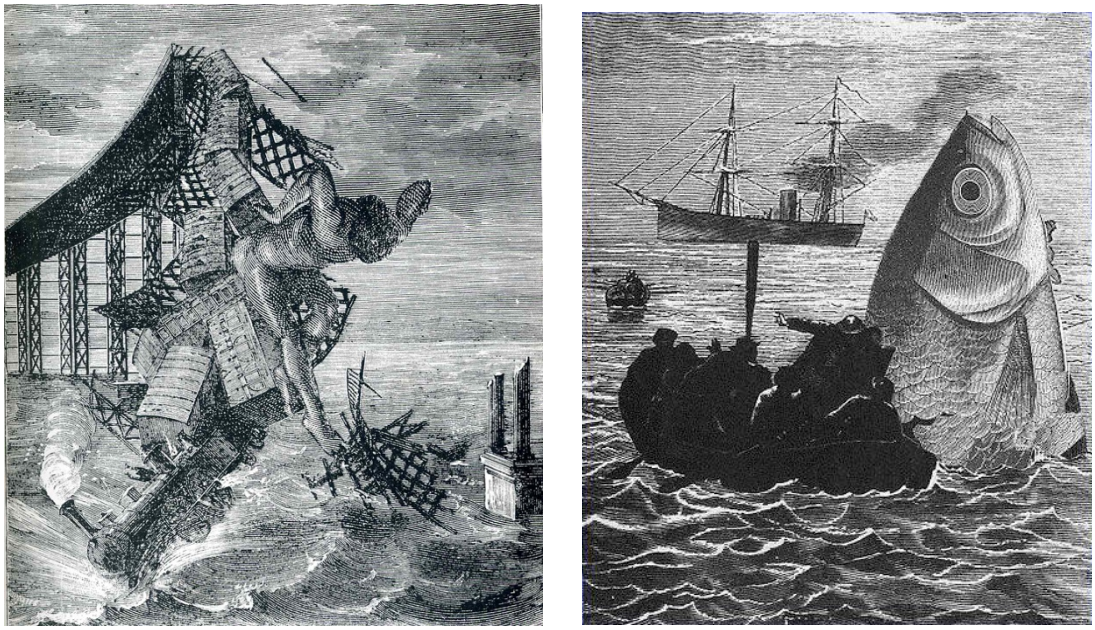


Fig. 7 Max Ernst, *A week of kindness*, 1934.

Assuming that the meeting of tourists and migrants on Mediterranean shores creates unexpected collisions, Max Ernst's collages could represent the dark dreams of those trying to cross the Mediterranean on fragile vessels because they are designated as 'illegals'. These designations arbitrarily imposed upon human beings operate as another kind of collage that creates borders in the space and in clichés and in the mind.

In French, a picture is also called a cliché. As postcards are visual clichés of a place, they are clichés of

[11] From: 'En Tunisie aujourd'hui, les voyageurs autorisés bénéficient du luxe de se débrancher de leur conscience au monde, quand d'autres doivent surmonter ses contradictions, au risque de s'y perdre, quelque part en Méditerranée'.
[12] From: 'Pour que ça choque pas les touristes et que ça touche pas l'activité économique de cette région qui vit essentiellement sur le tourisme'.

clichés. As suggested, Tripadvisor online commentators might be afraid of losing their clichés of the Mediterranean. Even without taking into account the potential presence of internet trolls, this sensation is supported by the amount of comments generally attached to online press articles about the 'crisis' – for example, 287 comments for the *The Express* article titled 'The popular holiday destinations set to be overwhelmed by migrant crisis' (Smith 2016) – and by their violence: 38 comments were deleted by the live team of moderators of the online newspaper. As shown by James Dennison and Teresa Talò (2017), human values are the most relevant components of individual's identity for influencing opinions about migrations. For people expressing a negative opinion towards migration, tradition, conformity and security are the most decisive values for their lives and for society. The influence of inner values seems constitutive of the perception of the world to the point of interfering with its matter itself. Because of their key role in the building of human values (Tappolet 2000: 254), images are key facts in the building of these values upstream of their formation. Downstream, images would be strengthening factors in the persistence of stereotypes. From this perspective, the Mediterranean would be the deadliest border in the world, because perceptions attached to people on the move in this area are producing the most contrasting images.

As a natural space, the Mediterranean is an ecosystem that gathers human beings around a closed area also designated since the Roman Empire as *mare nostrum* ('our sea'). Metaphorically, this body of water can be seen as the amniotic liquid[13] in which Western memories fertilise to generate an imaginary. Born from the interweaving of the successive populations who crossed this shared sea, this imaginary is materialised by practices, objects and images forming the background of Western culture. Warburg (2012) studied the circulations of these elements throughout his *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927–1929), a corpus of pictures that composes a history of art based on images. It constitutes an attempt to map the "afterlives of images" by showing 'how images of great symbolic, intellectual, and emotional power emerge in Western antiquity, and are reanimated in the art, maps, newspapers and magazines of later times and places' (Johnson, n.d.).

[13] 'La mer nous plaît donc pour l'une de ces deux causes : ou parce que c'est une chose toute nouvelle, toute fraîche dans notre sensibilité ; ou bien parce que c'est une chose très ancienne, un vieux souvenir atavique retrouvé tout au fond de nous-mêmes'. / The sea therefore pleases us for one of these two causes: because it is a very new thing, fresh in our sensibility; or because it is a very old thing, an old atavistic memory found deep inside of us', Remy de Gourmont (1906), *Promenades littéraires*, quoted in Fabre and Bouayed (2013).

Fig. 8 *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Aby Warburg, 1927–-1929.

The German art historian believed in the revealing power of images, which when picked and arranged in a certain way, could carry a world's memory, and unveil the main ingredients of the collective imaginary of a people. Adapting Warburg's method to today's mainstream images of migration could help to grasp the genesis of the Western collective imaginary of migration. The iterative process articulating the production of media and art images will allow us to extract semiotic trends common to both visual fields.

Iterative process articulating the production of media and art images

To go hunting for traces of a collective imaginary, designated as 'substratum' by Merleau-Ponty[14] (1945: 240) and as 'sedimentary deposit' by Steigler (2014: 35), I started by looking at images displayed on Google Images. A survey conducted from 2013 to 2016 by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism of the University of Oxford (Nielsen 2017), hows that in the UK people mostly get their news online and from television. In 2016, online sources of information exceeded television for the first time as the most followed source of media (for around 75% of the respondents). On the internet, the Google browser 'ranks first images that are more significant for the public (in that they are more clicked and dwelled upon) and that appear in nodes of networks between main websites (i.e. those with greater access and wide-ranging reputations). Being recognized as immediately meaningful by users who do not usually have personal knowledge of the subject, as well as enjoying high circulation, the images that rank first in Google Images search results can be understood as familiar iconographic representations of dominant stereotypical frames' (Maneri 2021: 10–11). Besides, most of the images recorded on Google Images are originating from online newspapers. As the decline of printed newspapers, as a chosen source of information, can be explained by a transfer of the readership towards online versions of newspapers, a quick check between the two versions of the same newspaper (the printed one and the online one), shows that both versions display the same images. For these reasons, I decided to focus on images ranked first on Google's Images tab.

Without indicating a medium or a specific area (media, art or other), I typed three key words related to my dissertation – 'migration', 'Mediterranean' and ´crisis´– in Google Images' browser. I excluded the term 'exile' because in common language it refers to historical banishments and deportations, such as the one of Napoleon to the island of Elba in 1813. From the images displayed from these two key words, I then typed in the search engine the words designating the images appearing in the first rank. The search on

[14] 'Objective thought is unaware of the subject of perception. This is because it takes the world as ready-made or as the milieu of every possible event and treats perception as one of these events. The empiricist philosopher, for example, considers subject X while perceiving and attempts to describe what happens: there are sensations, which are the subject's states or manners of being and, as such, they are genuinely mental things. The perceiving subject is the place of these things, and the philosopher describes sensations and their substratum – as one might describe the fauna of a distant land – without noticing that he himself also perceives, that he is a perceiving subject, and that perception such as he lives it denies everything that he says about perception in general' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 240).

Google Images include images published from the beginning of the 'migrant crisis' in 2015, to Spring 2017, the moment when I conducted this research. The keywords entered on the Google Images database are as follows:

First search: '*migration*' + '*Mediterranean*'+ '*crisis*'
Second search: '*migration*' + '*Mediterranean*' + '*Infographics*'
Third search: '*migration*' + '*Mediterranean*'+ '*boat*'
Fourth search: '*migration*' + '*Mediterranean*' + '*lifejackets*'
Fourth search: '*migration*' + '*Mediterranean*' + '*survival blankets*', etc.

With this visual material as a work basis, I applied Chris Marker's logic as a method of investigation. In 1997, for his CD-Rom project *Immemory*, the French director proposed to the viewer to navigate the CD-Rom adopting the erratic trajectory of the memory: 'My working hypothesis was that any memory a little long is more structured than it seems. That photos taken seemingly at random, postcards chosen according to the mood of the moment, from a certain amount begin to draw a route, to map the imaginary country that extends within us. By scanning it systematically, I was sure to discover that the apparent disorder of my imagery hid a plan, as in the stories of pirates'.[15] Images taken seemingly at random from the web for these key words could draw the contours of the collective unconscious of migration.

This psychoanalytic view on images has been applied, for example, about family photographs. Historian and theorist of photography André Rouillé noted that images aggregated in family albums compose a shared memory that could be designated under the term of 'photographic unconscious' (1990: 40). A dream, a slip of the tongue or a parapraxis are manifestations of our subconscious that can be read and experienced through images. In this perspective, delineating the Western collective imaginary of migration implies to go hunting for recurring patterns punctuating a shared memory. Unveiling that which is 'already there' (Stiegler 2014: 28) returns to the act of considering memory as an editing device composed of a collection of images. At night, images are mobilised to be assembled into dreams, and in the day, they emerge when

[15] Personal translation from: 'Mon hypothèse de travail était que toute mémoire un peu longue est plus structurée qu'il n'y semble. Que des photos prises apparemment au hasard, des cartes postales choisies selon l'humeur du moment, à partir d'une certaine quantité commencent à dessiner un itinéraire, à cartographier le pays imaginaire qui s'étend au-dedans de nous. En le parcourant systématiquement, j'étais sûr de découvrir que l'apparent désordre de mon imagerie cachait un plan, comme dans les histoires de pirates' quoted in Lambert (2013: 79).

reflection is called upon. Salient motifs in images are what empower images' impact on viewers, and strike their imagination. The following groups of images display the main motifs resulting from this Google Images' search. Inspired by Roland Barthes' research in semiotics (1965), the analysis below examines the relationship between visual motifs and the feeling they convey.

The first series of relationships aims to group media images of migration by breaking into pieces several pieces of semiotic information contained in each image. In terms of range of colours, a narrow chromatic array can be observed. Four main colours emerged: the gold of the survival blankets, the vivid orange of the lifejackets, the blue of the sky and the sea, and the black colours of the skins of the exiles as well as of the night.

Fig. 9 Images extracted from Google Images. Colours.

Colour symbolism provides a set of psychological associations between different colours and their associated social functions and moral values. This aesthetic theory of perception varies from one society to another, in time and space, and reveal 'essential things about the world and about ourselves' (Pastoureau and Simonnet 2007: 10).[16] It will be used as a tool to grasp the impact of images of migration from a Western perspective. On the occasion of the Marseille-Provence European Capital of Culture 2013, the exhibition *The Black and the Blue. A Mediterranean Dream...*[17] was held in the new Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (MuCEM). Curators Thierry Fabre and Anissa Bouayed investigated the relationship between these two colours whose implications in collective imaginaries are deeply embedded in the Mediterranean past and current history. The exhibition displayed these two colours side by side to portray the Mediterranean civilisation, revealing a symbolism operating in the imaginary as if they were two sides of the same coin. 'There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' states Walter Benjamin (1942). The fullness and the consensus of the blue, designated as Westerners' favourite colour (Pastoureau 2000: 149–150), are opposed to the darkness and to the indistinct threat carried by the black. Fabre mentions Joan Miró's use of the colour blue during his stay on the island of Mallorca. In the mid-1920s, the Spanish artist immersed himself between the vastness of the sky and of the sea. He stated that blue was 'the colour of [his] dreams' (quoted by Fabre and Bouayed 2013).

[16] From: 'nous dit des choses essentielles sur le monde et sur nous-mêmes'.
[17] Marseille, MuCEM, 7 June 2013 – 6 January 2014.

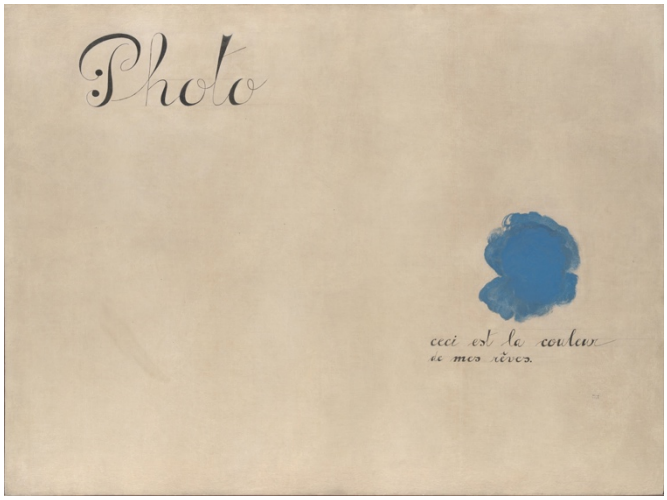


Fig. 10 Joan Miró, *The colour of my dreams*, Oil on canvas, 1925.

A few decades later, at the time when this Mediterranean island progressively opened to mass tourism, the Gorg Blau (Blue Gorge), also on the island of Mallorca, became one of the main sites of tourist interest.

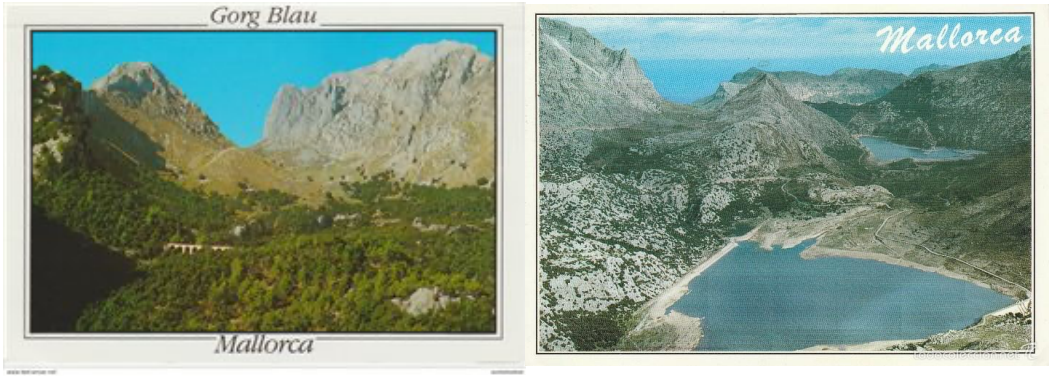


Fig. 11 Gorg Blau Mallorca, old postcards.

Generally attached to symbols, as when used in the background of the European flag (Pastoureau 2000: 159), the blue became, in the Mediterranean region, a marketing colour. According to the Gorg Blau Wikipedia page ('Gorg Blau' 2018), 'the place became famous by the conjunction of the elevation of the torrent's walls, the blue of the waters and the bridge, which inspired artists such as poets, photographers or

painters, a success that gave the place a tourist quality and postcard photo'. The artificial landscape of the Blau fits to a consumption blue. A blue made to sell holidays to tourists from all over Europe.

With the exception of formal wear imbued with an attractive elegance,[18] colour prejudices reflect social attitudes. The colour black conveys pernicious presages, embodied for example in the figure of the black cat which remains a symbol of darkness and death (Pastoureau 2015: 157). As demonstrated in a recent study analysing 1,500 iconographic representations extracted from the Google Images search engine, the discursive framework of the most frequent images of refugees shows them at a distance, grouped in human masses, especially when framing dark-skinned people (Maneri 2021: 15). Following Christina Sharpe, I stress that, as they are being racialised, and live 'in and with terror', Black-skinned people become *carriers* of terror, 'terror's embodiment […] and not the primary objects of terror's multiple enactments but the ground of terror's possibility' (2016: 79). For art historian Annie Le Brun, 'In man, the black would be the meaning of the inhuman to which he participates'[19] (2018: 329). Associated with lifejackets, the colour orange also conveys the feeling of subtle threat. It reflects the imminence of an emergency, a signal meant to warn of some insecurity. For Pastoureau, it has now became a mere symbol of vulgarity (2005: 114). The radiant colours of the lifejackets and survival blankets, strongly contrasting with the blue of the Mediterranean, can also be seen as decorative, like visual motifs can be. This dimension is further explored below.

Materials such as fabric, rubber, survival blankets and water are also substantial aspects of these images. Water, in particular, belongs to an imaginary that connects to a lexical field, including also the word 'flow', that is used to depict migrations (Solano 2014: 112). Without delving into a linguistic analysis of news articles, the expression 'flow of people' can be provided as an example, to characterise newcomer arrivals. Theorised by W.J.T. Mitchell, the *Pictorial Turn* concept puts forward that 'vision is as important as language in mediating social relations' (2004b: 82). In this perspective, the relationship between images, texts and speeches is constituted as so many components of a social construction in which vision is not purely an optical process.

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18 As exemplified with Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel's 'Petite Robe noire'. (Pastoureau, 2008: 189).

19 From : 'Le noir serait en l'homme le sens de l'inhumain dont il participe'.

Fig. 12 Images extracted from Google Images. Materials.

Lastly, this typology can be organised around three main visual motifs: boats (most of the time dinghies), lifejackets and survival blankets.

Fig. 13 Images extracted from Google Images. Dinghies.

Fig. 14 Images extracted from Google Images. Life jackets.

Fig. 15 Images extracted from Google Images. Survival blankets.

As they are repeated in almost all images of this typology, humanitarian items seem to play a central role in the Western representation of migrations by the Mediterranean. In French, a 'motif' also means a 'reason' or a 'criterion' for making a decision. The repeated presence of these elements suggests that 'the motif seems to be the motifs', namely the very reason leading to their dissemination. In spite of the variety of personal motivations leading to migration, the pervasiveness of lifejackets and survival blankets, together with the fact that both these items *cover* the bodies, endow migrants with passivity and *standardise* them.

To measure the extent to which these circulations of motifs contaminated other visual spheres, I decided to focus on contemporary art. My hypothesis was that this field, at the forefront of visual creativity, would provide me with alternative representations, that could, in turn, feed the collective imaginary. For this, I had to adapt my methodology: when typing the combination '*migration*' + '*Mediterranean*' + '*art*' in Google Image, most of the results were not related to contemporary art. At best, the images resulting from this search were wall paintings and cartoons. Consequently, I decided to glean art images of migration as I found them by visiting exhibitions (*Documenta 14* at Kassel, *Imagining the Mediterranean* at Valencia's IVAM, *Sink without Trace* at the P21 Gallery in London, a performance at Marseilles' MuCEM, the permanent exhibition of the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Paris), or by stumbling on them while searching for something else on the internet. My friend Inés Moreno Lopez, also completing a critical PhD by Practice in art, provided pictures from places she visited (Ai Weiwei's *Soleil Levant* at Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Copenhagen, *Les Mains sans sommeil* at Palais de Tokyo, Paris). Quickly, I noticed the recurrence of the same items in the media images. I grouped these art images together around the same

motifs. The compositions below gather art images dealing with migration by the Mediterranean representing boats and making use of lifejackets and survival blankets.

Fig. 17 Images extracted from the typology of images. Artworks related to lifejackets.

Fig. 16 Images extracted from the typology of images. Artworks related to boats.

Fig. 18 Images extracted from the typology of images. Artworks related to survival blankets.

For artists such as Banksy,[20] Gandolfo Gabriele David,[21] Arabella Dorman,[22] Alex Seton[23] or Bianca Argimon,[24] producing discourse about today's migrations seems to return to taking up mainstream media motifs of the boat, the lifejackets and survival blankets. In their artworks, these motifs become the very materials of the artists or can

[20] In his dystopian attraction park Dismaland, Banksy included a migrant boat pond piece.
[21] The artist and designer originating from Palermo exhibited 66 flags made from lifejackets' fabric as alert signs in Marseilles' ancient port in 2017. He also organised a workshop with exiles in which they were asked to paint, on this same fabric, what represented hospitality for them.
[22] In an artwork called *Falling* the British artist displayed life jackets and a rubber boat in St. James's Church, Piccadilly, London, in December 2015.
[23] In *The Island*, an exhibition from the Newcastle Gallery, the Australian artist made a series of marble sculptures representing lifejackets to question the Australian asylum policy.
[24] The young fashion designer created *Euroflot*, a lifejacket pinned with European flags that was exhibited from 24 November 2017 to 7 January 2018 in Palais de Tokyo in Paris and that has been put up for sale online.

be presented as ready-made objects. For example, such is the case with *Barca Nostra*, an art piece by Christoph Büchel, who exhibited the vessel in which 360 people from Eritrea, Somalia and Ghana perished off the coast of Lampedusa island at the last edition of the Venice international art Biennale (Gomis, 2020).
Acting as visual signals, whose bright colours – especially those of the lifejackets – are designed to be detected, these motifs are immediately recognisable by the audience. The reuse of these motifs into artworks contributes to shaping representations that neither belong to the genre of fiction, *i.e.* falling within pure imagination, and nor are they authentic testimonies. They open the way towards simulacra, in which images although having no relationship with reality replace it, and are valued in place of the reality they represent (Baudrillard 1994). Through the use of materials and artefacts similar to those found in Mediterranean migratory hotspots, artworks which repeat media motifs are supposed to open a window on a genuine disastrous humanitarian situation and to be genuine testimonies of it. Yet, I argue that far from conveying identification, and from attracting sympathy from opponents, they lock exiles into the narrow representation already assigned by various media. In view of the reciprocal influence of media and art images, these art productions lag behind media, to which they are content to be echo chambers. These artworks would enter into the realm of simulation. Through the artificial resurrection of the migrants' journeys they stand for, artworks consisting in the duplication of these motifs substitute reality with signs of reality (Baudrillard 1994: 2). As the realm of simulacra signals that motifs are valued for themselves, their intense repetition brings them in focus instead of the migrants' fate.

Through their circulation, motifs implement a conversation between media and art images. From Latin *iterare* ('to repeat'), an iterative process is a process involving a repetition. Observing dialogue created between the composition of images I created for this dissertation, one may wonder which visual source is feeding the other: the media or the art sphere? What strikes me is the way media images seem sometime to engage with art culture without any human intervention. The following mainstream media images highlight artistic processes such as the metaphor (here lifejackets as dead bodies), the accumulation, and the wrapping.

Fig. 20 Image extracted from Google Images. The metaphor.

Fig. 21 Image extracted from Google Images. The accumulation.

Fig. 19 Images extracted from the typology of images Google Images. The wrapping.

Repeated semiotic elements draw a genealogy of images in which contemporary press photographs can be connected to these artists' visions.

Fig. 22 Andreas Solaro, Migrants and refugees wrapped in survival foil rest aboard the Topaz Responder ship run by Maltese NGO MOAS and the Italian Red Cross after a rescue operation off the coast of Libya, AFP, 2016.

Fig. 23 Christo, 1958, *Wrapped bottle*.

Fig. 24 Dan Kitwood, Migrants from Pakistan land on shore after completing a journey in a small dinghy crossing a three mile stretch of the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Kos, Greece, Getty Images, 2015.

Fig. 25 Martin Parr, 1997, *Benidorm*.

Fig. 27 Kader Attia, 2007, *Ghosts*.

Fig. 29 Santi Palacios, Lesbos island, Associated Press, 2016.

Fig. 28 Sean Gallup, People pulling suitcases arrive at the Central Registration

Fig. 26 Jeff Wall, 2001, *Overpass*.

In the end, what seems to be at stake within the dialogical relationship between media and artworks, is less the need to determine which visual field first influenced each other, but rather to observe the closed-loop, or the infinite process of recycling, which rules the motifs' circulation between these two fields. This process also justifies why the notion of 'images' is understood in the broadest sense in the present study, why artworks sampling these motifs might have the same effect on public opinion than mainstream media photographs, and why these few motifs will be the starting point for the creative practice of this study developed in chapter 2.

Jacques Rancière observes that 'An image never stands alone. It belongs to a system of visibility that governs the status of the bodies represented and the kind of attention they merit' (2009: 99). An assumption has been made that structural racism and global capitalism constitute the background of the collective imaginary of migration. The purpose of the following case studies is to show how they fuel the circulation of motifs.

2. The circulation of motifs

In an analysis of Nilüfer Demir's photographs of the young Aylan Kurdi, art historian Simon Faulkner stresses movability as a key factor through which 'images can be transferred from one medium to another' (2015: 53). For media theorists Katja Valaskivi and Johanna Sumiala, the theoretical concept of circulation 'is not a closed circuit but rather an open-ended notion, flexible in its sense of direction and tempo of movement across different mediated—but also physical—times and spaces' (2014: 232). The examination below will go against this generic definition to show that in the context of images of migration, due to the influence of structural racism and global capitalism, the notion of circulation should be considered from its prefix, 'circular', which means 'within a closed shape'. For understanding their impact, these two driving forces will be investigated through four historical elements: the Judeo-Christian ethic, the Atlantic slave trade, the successive waves of colonisation of the African continent and the way invasions are traditionally mapped. All transiting through the Mediterranean, these historical manifestations of structural racism and global capitalism are activated in contemporary images of migration. They seem to have been, in one single movement, both the genesis and the condition of existence of the Western collective imaginary of migration.

a. The Judeo-Christian tradition – *Aylan Kurdi in the arms of the Turkish coastguard*, Nilüfer Demir 2015 photograph

In the night between 4 and 5 September 2015, two days after the spread of Demir's photograph, Chancellor Merkel decided to open German borders to migrants stranded in Hungary.

The two events are not purely coincidental: the release of the picture appears to have influenced public debate on migration by a spontaneous organisation of commitments of support around the world, ranging from public actions on a Moroccan beach to marches in Australia (Greenslade 2014; Pekel 2016). In Britain, a petition launched by the newspaper *The Independent* gathered up to 20,000 signatures in a few hours, leading Prime Minister David Cameron to announce in a press conference that thousands more

Syrian refugees would be welcomed for resettlement.[25] The dissemination of Demir's photograph also produced a generosity impulse worldwide, ranging from massive clothes donations in the Netherlands to the chartering of rescue boats in the Mediterranean (Pekel 2016). The charts below compare web searches related to the image and the amount of monthly donations to the Swedish Red Cross in 2015. How do images triggering so much emotion as the photographs taken by Nilüfer Demir manage to influence behaviours?

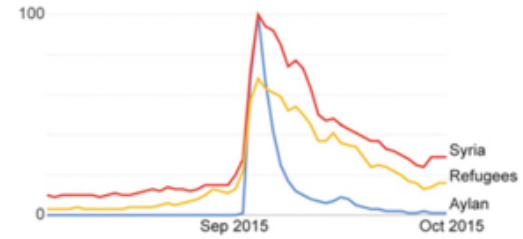

Fig. 2. Google Trend data on the relative popularity of search terms "Syria," "refugees," and "Aylan," August–September 2015. Note that Google Trends does not provide numbers of search requests; rather, the maximum number in the figure is scaled to 100, and the other values are proportional to that.

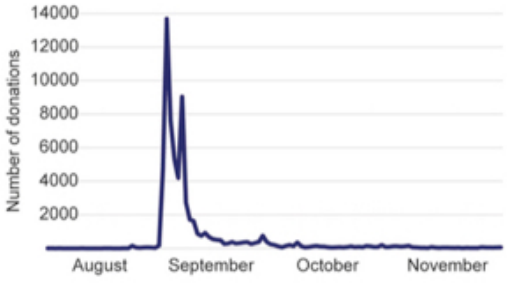

Fig. 3. Number of daily donations to a Swedish Red Cross campaign designated specifically for aiding Syrian refugees in Sweden.

Fig. 30 Charts extracted from Slovic et al. (2017), 'Iconic photographs and the ebb and flow of empathic response to humanitarian disasters'.

In line with Faulkner, Sara Ahmed believes that 'Affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity but is produced only as an effect of its circulation' (2004: 120). The evocative power of visual motifs originates from their motion, and while doing so, from their repeated impact on our retinas. This domestication of images consolidates through Western visual supremacy on images of migration. Analysing Demir's photographs, now iconic due to the global wave of emotion it triggered, helps to reach an understanding of what generates this motion.

[25] Repercussions of this decision taken on the 4 September 2015 are still relevant since resettlement has been expanded beyond 2020 into countries outside Middle East and North Africa. See Dearden (2019).

Looking at images from the scholarship of the art historian Aby Warburg, visual motifs appear to carry a potential charge, as they connect to Western cultural heritage. For example, Demir's photograph of the toddler carried in the arms of the Turkish coastguard officers, 'belongs to a complex typology of images' (Aulich 2015: 51). Drawing on visual anthropology, in which one understands the world with the help of images (Belting 2011), the impact of this image can be explained through one specific iconographic theme. It would implicitly refer to the Pietà, a Christian theme representing the Virgin Mary, as she cradles the child she holds in her arms. The succession and persistence of the Pietà motif throughout centuries would be what triggers a commitment to helping migrants. For Jim Aulich, 'the Pieta image travels through space [...] carrying [...] a residue of its previous existences' (2015: 51). The evocative power of this visual motif, specifically its religious connotation, such as the spirit of charity, would have caused Western viewers to act in a moral way towards migrants when seeing Demir's photograph (Aulich 2015: 51). As Didi-Huberman claims to see Jackson Pollock's dripping gestures in a Fra Angelico fresco, various temporalities in the image would generate collusions that may be anachronistic (2000: 16). The temporal movability of today's images of migration would be fostered by the circulation and recurrence of several motifs over time. Image temporality would be composed by both the historical and anachronistic elements running through them. Halfway between reminiscence and commemoration, what I would call 'spontaneous commemoration' makes it possible to remember an event or a person who has marked the Western collective unconscious (Gomis 2018). Seeing Demir's photograph would thus commemorate other past tragic disappearances across space, but also across time. One example from the history of art is the section of Pablo Picasso's canvas *Guernica* which also borrows the Pietà figure. First exhibited in the 1937 Paris International exhibition, the painting denunciates the first aerial bombing in history ordered by the Spanish Fascist regime with the help of the Nazi aircraft fleet which almost totally destroyed the Basque village of Guernica.

Fig. 31 Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, oil on canvas, 1937.

Fig. 32 Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* (section), oil on canvas, 1937.

In the collage of Ernest Pignon-Ernest, the Pietà motif is used as a tribute. It refers to Sam Nzima's photograph representing the Soweto riots of 1976 against a South African apartheid law which imposed Afrikaans as the official language of instruction.

Fig. 33 Sam Nzima, *Soweto Uprising*, black and white photograph, 1976.

Fig. 34 Ernest Pignon-Ernest, *Pietà sud-africaine*, collage at Durban-Warwick, 2002.

The motif's circulation generates new images that connect individuals worldwide in a universal feeling of sorrow.

In the case of Demir's photograph, emotions conveyed by the image happened to generate positive attitudes towards migration. The evocative power of the Pietà motif has been so strong that it seems to have erased the young boy's image in itself. Although hidden, his face has paradoxically opened the way towards identification. The public opinion did not register in Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian migrant boy, but in the bruised Chosen Child that has forever been navigating the Western collective imaginary. The Christian pillar of charity is embodied in the commandment to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31), which was manifested for example in the creation of the Christian Aid association to provide help to refugees after World War Two. As demonstrated by Max Weber in his seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001), the Christian values are key in the development of capitalism which manifest for example through 'philanthrocapitalism'. The term can be summarised by the slogan 'Businessmen and businesses are best placed to save the world' pronounced by Bill Gates at the 2008 Davos Annual Meeting (Elliott 2008). For example, in 2006, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation developed a partnership with the UNHCR to provide help to refugees worldwide (UNHCR no date). Also leading a major philanthrocapitalist organisation, Priscilla Chan and Mark Zuckerberg publicly advocate for the refugee cause (Reilly 2017) and Chan described her childhood experience as a 'boat people' refugee, stating 'You literally put your children on a boat, say goodbye, and hope to meet them on the other side' (Safian 2018).

b. The Atlantic slave trade – *Migrants rescued by Mare Nostrum operations* Massimo Sestini 2014 photograph

In 2015, the second prize of the World Press Photo contest was granted to Massimo Sestini for a photograph picturing rescue operations carried out during the Mare Nostrum Operation, around 25 kilometres from the Libyan coast (World Press Photo 2015).

Fig. 36 Massimo Sestini, *Migrants rescued by Mare Nostrum operations*, colour photograph, 2014.

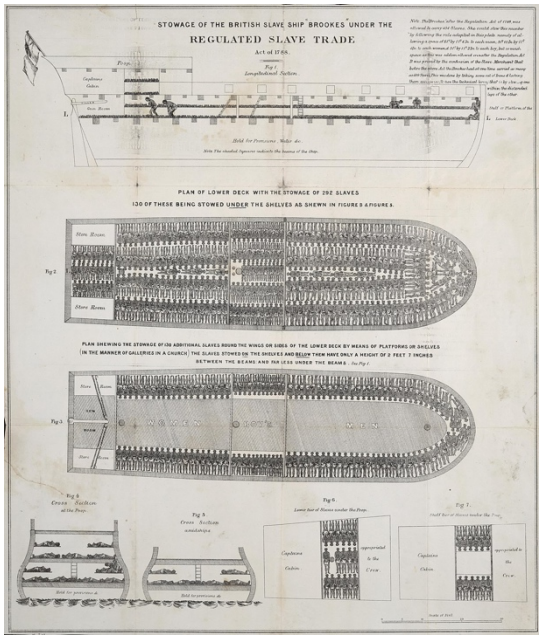

Fig. 35 Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, *Stowage of the British ship 'Brookes' under the regulated slave trade*, engraving, 1788.

As the dissemination of the photograph of the little Aylan held in the arms of the policeman may result from the presence of the Pietà motif, the success of Massimo Sestini's photograph seems to evoke pictures circulating more than 200 years ago. In 1788, the *Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* launched an abolitionist campaign whose most famous image is a cross-section plan of the *Brookes* ship. The slave trade, denounced through the images used in the campaign, was characterised by the use of ships in which slave's bodies were arranged as objects, totally occupying all the space available on board. This

kind of *anti-ark* (Baudrillard 1988: 18–19) contributed to the Western trade expansion institutionalised since the fifteenth century. Contemporary images of migrations by the Mediterranean appear to be linked with the idea of servitude practiced around that maritime area since antiquity, in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Roman Empire. For example, in March 2020 and June 2021, Greek authorities imprisoned, stripped naked, and beat dozens of Syrian and Afghan refugees before forcing them to go back to Turkey (for example, see Middle East Eye 2020; Altas 2021). Since the successive closures of migratory routes to Europe, and although the former President of the European Council appealed for the Central Mediterranean route to be closed (ANSAmed 2016), Libya remains the main country of departure to the European continent. Since its liberation from Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi's dictatorship on the 23 October 2011, a 'transitional' Libya Government (CIA 2021) has been left to militias from various regions and it was only on 23 October 2020 that a ceasefire was signed by warring factions (Wintour 2020). Human trafficking practices made the headlines worldwide in October 2017, when CNN (Elbagir *et al.* 2017) published an investigation including footage showing two men sold for the equivalent of $800. Knowing the chaotic political situation in Libya, the presence of a million black African migrants working in Libya before Colonel al-Gaddafi's deposition, and the pogroms perpetrated against these populations recorded since 2000 (Vick 2016), decisions to close the migratory routes to Europe were doomed to dramatically jeopardise these lives. In a field survey published on the 6 October 2016, the IOM estimates that 71% of the interviewed migrants have been subjected to human trafficking and other exploitative practices.[26]

[26] Survey conducted in September 2016 in Sicily: 'out of 2,957 migrants met, excluding those who preferred not to be interviewed (160) and those who already had participated in the survey (14), the final sample is composed of 2,783 valid responses of migrants coming from 38 different countries of origin', IOM (2017b).

Fig. 37 A refugee shows marks on his back which were reportedly sustained in beatings by Greek border officials, 2020 (TRT World/Screengrab).

Fig. 38 AA News Turkey, Mumin Altas, 30 June 2021.

These practices seem to take place within a broader historical framework.

c. The colonisation of the African continent – *Refugees arrive by boat on the Greek island of Lesbos* Sergey Ponomarev 2015 photograph

In the 'general news' category of the 2016 World Press Photo contest, the first prize was awarded to Sergey Ponomarev, a Russian photographer working for *The New York Times*. His photograph captures migrants arriving by boat on the Greek island of Lesbos. 'The same faces fill with distress, the same arms stretched full of hope, how not to make the connection between the photo of Ponomarev and the famous painting of Théodore Géricault painted in the 19th century?' observes Huffington Post journalist Anthony Berthelier (2016). Actually, visual motifs inherent to Géricault's masterpiece the *Raft of the Medusa* also circulate in other photographs of contemporary migrations in the Mediterranean. For example, in Santi Palacios's 2017 photograph titled *Right now: Central Mediterranean Sea* (Palacio 2017) migrants' dead naked bodies recall the body of the wrecked man at the foreground of Géricault's canvas. What strikes the viewer in Ponomorev's image, is the same imbalance in the gestures, the same naked chests, the same narrow range of colours, the same close frame, that provide so many visual signs transporting viewers to the Louvre's masterpiece. In both Ponomorev's photograph and in Géricault's painting, the characters are absorbed by what is happening to them with no gaze directed to the viewer. What art historian Michael Fried (1988) designates as the *absorption* of the characters reinforces the liveliness of the depiction, and the feeling of anxiety emanating from the scene. Scaled to human size (4.91 m x 7.16 m), the immensity of the canvas is key in Fried's demonstration of the absorption theory:

> I think of Géricault as the first painter who found himself compelled to assume the burden of that problem in its insuperable or tragic form and of the *Raft of the Medusa* as the principal monument to that compulsion. By this I mean that the strivings of the men on the raft to be beheld by the tiny ship on the horizon, by startling coincidence named the *Argus*, may be viewed as motivated not simply by a desire for rescue from the appalling circumstances depicted in the painting but also by the need to escape our gaze, to put an end to being beheld by us, to be rescued from the ineluctable fact of a presence that threatens to theatricalize even their sufferings (1988: 154).

This need to escape the beholder's gaze on the stage created by Western mainstream media resonates with Lilie Chouliaraki's analysis of the 'spectatorship of suffering' (2006). She states that the sufferers' dehumanisation is salient when preoccupation for the aesthetic dimension of the event preside over the making of the images. 'This point is thrown into relief once we consider instances of news where the contemplation of suffering does not involve human dynamics at all, either in the form of the sufferer's gaze or the presence of other figures of pity – that is, when the scene of suffering is altogether devoid of agency. Simply watching the scene of suffering objectifies the distant misfortune and, as a consequence, may lead to dehumanizing the sufferer' (2006: 92). Objectification of the sufferers in these images can be explained by one historical background. As in the previous image analysis, the Atlantic slave trade is the primary underlying narrative. While the ban on the slave trade had just been recorded when the Medusa incident took place,[27] it remained largely unimplemented in practice. Géricault thus portrays three black men, one of whom, from behind, is waving a cloth at the *Argus*. This gesture echoes that of the teenager in the foreground of Ponomarev's photograph who waves a piece of clothing. Secondly, the presence of the three men on the raft of the *Medusa* also recalls the colonial goal of the frigate which was a coloniser's vessel on its way to Senegal, a trading post that Louis XVIII was eager to take over as an outcome of the Empire wars against Britain. Beyond the aesthetic outcry that the realistic depiction of dead bodies triggered during the 1819 Paris Salon, the canvas stirred controversy for the policy denunciation it constituted. 'But here we are in the last act of the bloody tragedy' observed historian Jules Michelet. 'It is the end of the end for the Empire; one would say, even for France [....] It is France, the entire society of the century, that Géricault takes on board with him' (1896: 253).[28] The metaphorical dimension of the topic chosen by Géricault is part of a broader tradition in art history. Art historian Luis Vives-Ferrándiz Sánchez observes that 'The shipwreck theme appears to be a constant in Western visual culture which has served to qualify moral, allegorical and political issues of various kinds' (2013: 503). In this context, the shipwreck of the *Medusa* was also that of two major manifestations of structural racism: the Atlantic slave trade and the colonial

[27] Napoleon decreed the abolition of the slave trade to reconcile with Great Britain. His decision was confirmed by the Treaty of Paris on 20 November 1815 and by an order of Louis XVIII on 8 January 1817. The sinking represented by Théodore Géricault dates from 1816.
[28] From: 'Mais nous voici au dernier acte de la tragédie sanglante. C'est la fin de la fin pour l'Empire ; on le dirait, même pour la France.... C'est elle, c'est la société tout entière du siècle, que Géricault embarque avec lui'.

enterprise. As shown by the connections between past and contemporary depictions of these events, their imprint remains palpable in today's collective imaginary of migration.

Fig. 40 Théodore Géricault, *Le radeau de la Méduse*, oil on canvas, 1818–1819.

Fig. 39 Santi Palacios, colour photograph published on Twitter with the text: *Right now: Central Mediterranean Sea*, 2017.

Fig. 41 Serguey Ponomarev, *Refugees arrive by boat on the Greek island of Lesbos*, colour photograph, 2015.

d. The mapping of invasions – a 2017 Frontex map

The search on Google Images with keywords 'Migration' + 'Mediterranean' also revealed the popularity of maps in mainstream media. These maps are created by geographers and analysts from data collected and compiled by international organisations and NGOs. They are widely disseminated in mainstream media, research papers and educational resources. An overview of these data visualisations shows that in their greater part they are representing human displacements by broad arrows, often in warm colours, pointing in the direction of European countries. Political geographers Henk van Houtum and Rodrigo Bueno Lacy have coined the term 'the invasion arrows' (2020) to describe this way of depicting migratory displacements. What is the origin of this repeated way of visualising migratory movements?

Some 'survival images' of symbolic relevance to today's cartographies of migration seem to be historical maps of foreign invasions, such as depictions of the German invasion of French territory during World War Two. The importance of this type of mapping in the collective imagination has been facilitated by its diffusion in the cinema. As shown by Tom Conley in his seminal essay *Cartographic Cinema* (2007), cartographies are present, more or less explicitly, in a majority of films. The experience of contemplating a map would be 'co-extensive' of that of watching a film (2007: 1). For Conley, cartographies would be a way of viewing cinema. To the extent that images, such as cartographies, are human made, the anthropological perspective on them leads us to consider cartographies as ways of viewing policymaking.

Following Teresa Castro's observation (2011: 250), the proliferation of cartographic tools that enable us to geo-locate individuals in real time are extensions of paper-based cartographies and they constitute disciplinary devices. With regard to the scale of the surveillance technologies being deployed at the borders with the aim to deter individuals, for example in the Mediterranean

Sea, today's cartographies of migrants' arrivals in Europe appear as the afterlives of yesterday's military invasions. These cartographies of a war-like aspect convey the idea of a threatening invasion that also contaminates the collective imaginary of mainstream media images of the 2015 'crisis'.

Before borders were closed, migrations by land, especially by the Balkan route, have been photographed to portray endless lines of people. In these photographs, the choice of framing is crucial. Playing on this approach, the main pro-Brexit political party successfully used the journalist Jeffrey Mitchell's photograph of an endless queue of refugees walking along the Croatian–Slovenian border.

Fig. 42 *Refugees arriving in Slovenia*, Jeff Mitchell/Getty Images, October 2015.

Fig. 43 UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage poses during a media launch for an EU referendum poster in London on 16 June 2016, Stefan Wermuth/Reuters, 2016.

This photograph, displayed on a truck by the UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage, emblematised a specific use of images in the service of border shutdown agendas. As art historian Antigoni Memou observes (2019: 8), the line of refugees walking to the Croatian–Slovenian border are in stark contrast with the stillness of Farage when posing for his campaign in front of the image. Furthermore, in Mitchell's photograph, the beginning and the end of the queues are kept out of frame conveying the feeling of an endless line. Opponents to Farage's UKIP movement denounced the similarity of Mitchell's photograph to images of Nazi propaganda broadcast in 2005 in a BBC documentary (2016). If Godwin's law has been invoked in relation to this comparison, effectively ending the debate, the historical reference remains telling regarding the symbolic mark and afterlives of motifs associating migration with invasion. Analysing the arguments rejecting the idea of structural racism, Gilroy explains that they relate to the obsessive repetition of key themes: invasion, war, contamination, loss of identity (2005: 14), so many themes that transpire not only in images of migration, but also in political leaders' speeches.

In July 2015, when asked about the migrants trying to reach Britain by Calais, the British Prime minister at the time, David Cameron, referred to 'a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean, seeking a better life, wanting to come to Britain because Britain has got jobs, it's got a growing economy, it's an incredible place to live' (BBC News 2015). His words were

condemned by opponents and activists regretting the world leader's 'dehumanising language'. After the referendum, the think tank British Future held a survey showing that around two-thirds (64%) of interviewees felt that the referendum campaign became 'dangerously overheated' regarding the immigration debate (Katwala et al. 2016: 7). If the imprint in the words and in the minds of menacing mainstream images of migration contributed to this feeling, this impact must be all the stronger when it comes to official images.

Official cartographies of the European Union, as in for example the map below produced by Frontex, also seem to visually perpetuate a 'dehumanising language'. Moreover, being an official document provided in a public report by a democratic international organisation, the source reinforces its legitimacy.

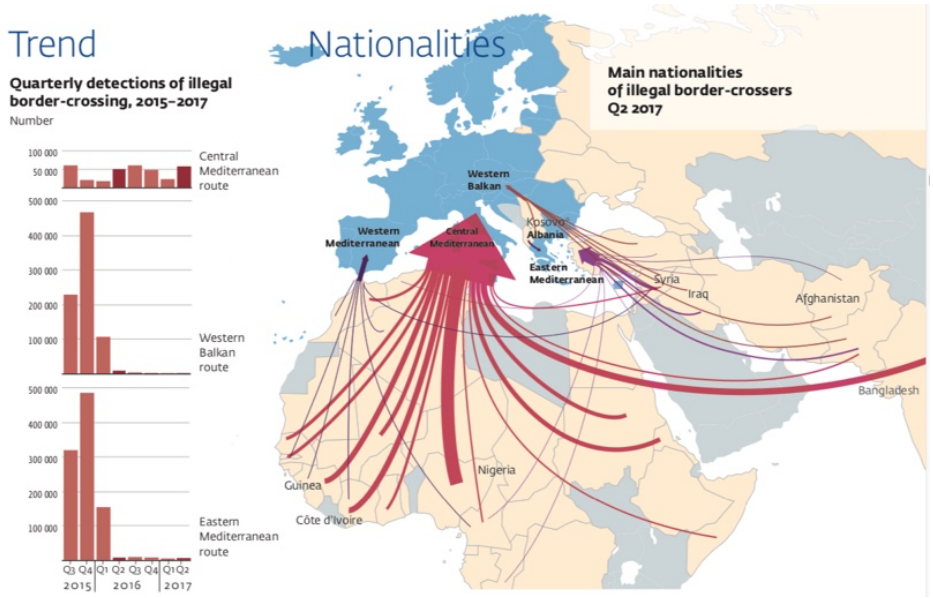

Fig. 44 *Frontex map*, FRAN Quarterly, Quarter 2, April–June 2017.

As demonstrated by van Houtum and Bueno Lacy (2020), by analysing the map's grid, its frame, and its arrows, the undertones of neutrality and objectivity this map conveys appear to be fraudulent. This Frontex cartography, as well as the mainstream maps of migration, are constitutive of what they designate as *cartopolitics*, namely: 'political discourse that relies on cartography to b/order geography and thus to

b/order history, culture and people through the geographical imaginations that maps arouse' (2020: 164). The spelling of the word 'border' is separated by a slash between the 'b' and the 'o' to highlight the power exercised through the making and the dissemination of cartographies. From the point of view of visual anthropology, these cartographies can be seen as reading grids of migratory policies and, furthermore, as part of the 'border spectacle' that shapes today's collective imaginary of migration.

Made of spatial and temporal circulations, this imaginary is marked by the seal of historical events that can explain the persistence of the same visual motifs. The historical domination of Western countries over contemporary refugees can explain the success of the same narrow range of semiotic elements, whose repetition tend to replace the subjects in the images and thus to objectify them. Something that has the function to adorn and to complement something else is something which is objectified at the service of another. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of the term 'motif' designates it as 'A decorative image or design, especially a repeated one forming a pattern'('Motif' 2018). The decorative value of the golden survival blankets has been explored by artists, as shows for example on a Pinterest page dedicated to 'Emergency blanket art' (Zu 2018). The aesthetic force of survival blankets has also been used by fashion designers, sometimes under the guise of activism for refugees.

3. The visual appropriation operated by the fashion industry[29]

In May 2018, the fashion house Givenchy went viral when they were chosen by the future Duchess of Sussex to create her wedding dress. Yet, Riccardo Tisci, its Italian creative director, had already made the headlines six months earlier when presenting Givenchy's Spring/Summer Collection by wrapping the audience in survival blankets. These survival blankets were similar to the ones used by NGOs to warm up migrants saved from drowning in the Mediterranean. Tisci's gesture bears a paradox.

Intended to be seen, in order to be widely disseminated and adopted, fashion trends integrate with daily habits easily and are observed on outfits in the streets. If the cultural appropriation of visual motifs by fashion is a debated question seized by activists, its collusion with finance and a certain contemporary art appears as a more insidious process, shown for example by collaborations between Louis Vuitton and Yayoi Kusama, Richard Prince, Jeff Koons or Takashi Murakami. From this vantage point, the critical perspective on capitalism's alienating effects would be that embraced by the art historian Annie Le Brun (2018) in her recent essay 'What is priceless'.

Serving intermittently as a tool of empowerment and of standardisation of the body, fashion materialises the contradictions of visual activism. It settles down in the conditions of a war of images defining today's globalisation in which, following T.J. Demos (2013: xv), aesthetics is seen as an 'oppositional force'. Based on this theoretical framework, this section investigates two series of artworks that resonate with two series of fashion productions:

1. Roberto Tisci and Ai Weiwei's performative interventions with survival blankets, in view with Norbert Baska's photographs *Der Migrant* for the brand Zara.

[29] This section has been adapted for publication as a book chapter titled 'By a thread: the space left to activism when fashion deals with the refugee "crisis"', for inclusion in *Visual activism in the 21st Century: Art, Protest and Resistance in an Uncertain World* (forthcoming, Bloomsbury).

2. The photographic series *Sneakers like Jay-Z* by Frédéric Delangle and Ambroise Tézenas, in relation to the barbed wire motif used by the Afghan designer Sami Nouri.

These case studies will provide the means to delve into two specific dimensions of visual activism:

1. The media message at the risk of the obscenity: can media motifs of a dire situation be reused in an artistic context and be respectful of the victims? Can artists claim to resist discourses when being promoted by industries whose functioning contradicts them?
2. The narrow path of emancipation through fashion: how can artists and designers in exile assume the past that constitutes their identity, but not be regarded on the art scene only for the activism they embody?

Ai Weiwei and Roberto Tisci's performative interventions with survival blankets, in view with Norbert Baska's photographs *Der Migrant* for the brand Zara.

Fig. 45 Riccardo Tisci, *Givenchy parade* for Spring / Summer 2017 collection, October 2016.

Connecting the fashion sphere to the effects of Western migration policies seems to be a perilous exercise. In these three particular cases, one fashion designer and two visual artists have arranged the meeting of these two universes. What distinguishes these three implementations of a topical issue in the glamourous sphere of fashion is the clarity of their intentions regarding their use of the migrants' fate, which, depending on each specific case, was more or less overtly assumed.

First, on the previously mentioned occasion of the 2017 Givenchy showcase, the Italian fashion designer did not claim the connection between the choice of wrapping the audience in survival blankets and the concomitant humanitarian rescues in the Mediterranean. When reading

fashion magazine articles relating news of the event, it is suggested that the emergency blankets were intended to protect front row guests from chilly October weather (Lau 2016).

It can be supposed that this specific material, described as 'space blankets', had been chosen for aesthetic reasons, because of its shimmering reflections. Yet, if the relationship with contemporary migratory displacements is not overtly claimed, it can be guessed from the event's concomitance with the refugee 'crisis' and from Tisci's previous successes in the fashion industry. Fatherless since the age of four, Tisci grew up in a large family from a poor town in Southern Italy. Propelled at thirty-one to become one of the youngest artistic directors of a Maison Haute Couture, the designer is considered as the precursor of 'street couture' or 'street luxury'. For launching a trend associating garments worn in the street to trendsetting styles, Tisci 'has been ahead of the curve in almost all the most important ways fashion has shifted over the decade' (Cartner-Morley 2018). The relationship between migrants, who, when not held in camps, wander in the streets of Western capitals, and the specific material chosen to cover the showgoers, is not overtly claimed, but it can be inferred from Tisci's artistic choices so far.

In the second case study, the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei clearly stated this link. In February 2016, he proposed to Hollywood stars they should wrap themselves in survival blankets during the *Cinema for Peace* gala organised in Berlin. Known for being an activist, Ai declares himself as 'the most dangerous person in China' (Ai 2018). Because of the authoritarian regime in his home country, Ai (2018) claims he had no choice but to become both an artist and an activist. The event during which he distributed the emergency jackets was held at the Berlin Konzerthaus. The artist, accustomed to accumulating media motifs of the migration 'crisis' in gigantic dimensions, had already covered the outside pillars of the building with discarded lifejackets collected on Lesbos island. The use of survival blankets, namely of another humanitarian item identified in mainstream media with fatal migrations, was expected to bring awareness of the migratory policies that lead to those deaths.

Fig. 46 Ai Weiwei, *Cinema for Peace gala*, February 2016.

The artist's intention relies on the association of two totally opposed universes: that of refugees pushed back to European boundaries and that of film stars evolving under spotlights. Covering actresses with survival blankets would thus aim to contribute to changing European regulations on migration. However, in view of the selfies taken during the gala by Charlize Theron – also known to be Dior's Egeria – Nadya Tolokonnikova, artist and Pussy Riot member, and several other famous guests, Tim Renner, Berlin's culture secretary, declared: 'When Ai Weiwei illustrates the dimensions of terror outside [the gala] with 14,000 lifejackets from Lesbos, it is perhaps not subtle but effective and justified; but when guests of *Cinema for Peace* are prompted by the organizer to don emergency blankets for a group photo, even if understood as an act of solidarity, it has a clearly obscene element' (Barnes 2016). Why did this representative consider Ai's gesture as an offence to victims of migratory policies?

Renner's sense of uneasiness is perhaps due to the fact that an attribute attached to the most repelled population was at the same time being saluted by the most endogenous sphere of Western society. The hype inflicted on exiles would produce antithetical imaginations which reflect, however, a level of hypocrisy towards them. Moreover, today's exiles are not wearing much more than survival blankets, but this fact has not prevented European countries removing from them any meagre belongings they still could have, after they have been exploited by smugglers on their way. A Danish law adopted on the 26 January 2016 establishes the confiscation of goods whose value would exceed 1,340 euros. A year after its introduction, the Danish state had raised around 15,000 euros (France 24 2016). The figure illustrates the deprivation of exiles whose plundering, in France, does not even need to come through a specific law, as NGOs have blamed the National Police for depriving homeless exiles of their sleeping bags and blankets (Baumard 2017).

In this context, the insertion into a gala evening of motifs carried by migrants appears to come under the complex category of 'cultural appropriation'. It designates the dominant culture's, e.g. Western culture's, appropriation of elements of a minority culture, e.g. non-Western or non-white cultures, that bears connotations of exploitation and dominance. For some, like the Irish blogger Kat Clinch (2013), the clothing elements coming from minority cultures are adopted because 'we are simply appreciating!' As Gabrielle Chanel used to invite photographers and designers to 'Come to my place and steal all the ideas you can' (Green and Kaiser 2017: 147), cultural appropriation is not seen as offensive because it appears

to be inherent to fashion itself (Clinch 2013). It is seen as a process of inclusion of one culture into another that goes along with the integration of new communities.

However, this statement must be tempered by two observations. First, from a decolonial perspective, it implies a structural bias (Muñiz-Reed 2017), whereby Western society should make an alien culture their own by re-engineering it to their own standards (Shand 2002). Second, it occurs within the necropolitics regime that is at stake regarding exiles, which considers bodies as objects of power. Governments find their legitimacy in the protection of populations against globalisation, where migrants would be the 'negative side' (Agier 2012: 91). From there, fashion, whose very purpose is to dress bodies, emerges as an instrument of this power. Fashion trends hunt circulating motifs to expel them in a standardised way. Its endeavour is the control of the sensitive signs of self-identification. 'Fashion has an eye for what is up-to-date, wherever it moves in the jungle of what was. It is the tiger's leap into that which has gone before. Only it takes place in an arena in which the ruling classes are in control' (Benjamin 1942: 75). Seen from Walter Benjamin's perspective, Givenchy showgoers would garnish themselves with the ornaments that used to wrap survivors of migratory regimes. During the time of an evening, they would devote themselves to the pleasure of exotic travesty. In the following case study, the photographer Norbert Baksa seems to have literally reversed Benjamin's finding.

Fig. 47 Norbert Baksa, *Der Migrant*, colour photographs, 2015.

The Hungarian artist organised a shooting of the model Monika Jablonczky, with the clear willingness of 'glamourising' border crossings (Huffington Post 2015).

In this series of photographs, the model wears high-heeled boots, stands with legs wide apart, with falsely soiled fingers, and mimes or rather *simulates* media images covering the 'crisis' while dressed in clothes from the brand Zara. The series entitled *Der Migrant* sparked a controversy on social media which led Baksa to remove the images from his website. 'The situation is very ambiguous and we wanted to represent this duality: someone who is miserable, but at the same time very pretty, and who despite her situation has good quality clothes and a smartphone' argued the photographer (Le Parisien 2015). In other words, the photographs' goal was to represent migrants by instilling charming attributes attached to the world of fashion. In this sense, Baksa's approach implicitly admits that migrants would not be 'very pretty' or more precisely they would not be as 'pretty' as the dominant visual regime dictates. Far from being full of the poetry ingrained in Surrealist collages,[30] the confrontation of signs Baksa staged only produces another feeling of unease. His representations overlay, without refinement, the signs belonging to the opposite universe. If striking photographs of migrants arriving on Mediterranean beaches – which welcomed tourists – have succeeded in denouncing a terrible gap between privileged Westerners and migrants,[31] the juxtaposition arranged by Baksa simply provides disgust. This unpleasant sensation comes perhaps from the fact that the use of navigating motifs of migration is fully claimed by the photograph. Unlike the case of the Givenchy fashion show, where survival blankets were distributed with no explanation allowing the audience themselves to connect consciously and openly with migration issues, Baksa's staging is obviously deliberate. His awkward glamourous re-enacting of border crossings operates less as a tribute, than as a masquerade. Far from capturing the refugees' experience, this portrayal reinforces a view of exotic otherness on migrants to which it adds another commercial-like passive sexualisation layer. Yet, at the time when Viktor Orbán, Hungary's Prime Minister, was known for his extreme firmness towards migrants, and was setting up a barbed wire fence along the border with Croatia, the photographer's original intentions might have, in this context, suffered from a misunderstanding. Because of the explicitness of the association

[30] Which could emerge from a 'chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella', (Lautréamont 1938: 256).
[31] In particular, a series of photographs of exiles arriving in the Canary Islands, 'In search for a better life' (Reuters 2010).

between the fashion sphere and the dire conditions of today's migration, this third specific case is perhaps the less offensive to exiles.

As in all his works on migration, Ai makes use of media motifs (such as the rubber boats, the lifejackets, or the survival blankets) and accumulates them in huge sizes and quantities in public places. Yet, while the art historian Michel Thévoz (2017: 56) designates media images as images 'unequivocal, ensured with a meaning, classified as information, humour or fiction, turnkey images, images with instructions for use – those, to put it bluntly, that are broadcast by the media', the Chinese activist precisely selects media motifs repeated in media images to reproduce them in gigantic dimensions. For Le Brun (2018: 23), contemporary artists' tendency to produce very large pieces contributes primarily to producing stupefaction, not reflection, nor reaction. In Ai's works, exiles are summarised within these repeated motifs that reinforce a mental association between these few humanitarian items. This repetition, fostered by social media networks, contributes to legitimise the idea of a population that should be supported. Moreover, as these accumulated first-aid items are covering public spaces and buildings, it increases their association with the idea according to which migrants are supposed to be a burden. This visual repetition engenders a reverse '*Pygmalion Effect*',[32] disseminating images that restrict exiles to a narrow perceptive field referring to passivity and conveying anxiety, operating as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Public opinion and leaders would tend to believe that exiles are a load, and so, they let their plight get worse. The very repetition of these motifs acts as a shield, hiding the common humanity that viewers share with exiles. The diversity and wealth of the multiple identities conveyed by exiles are being reduced to these few motifs operating as protective screens that prevent the viewer from identifying with the individuals behind them. This recurrence also diverts attention from the role played by Western countries in generating these situations. As an example, 70% of arms exports made by the European Union are intended for regions outside the Union, among which the Middle East is the first beneficiary.[33] It feeds the 'hot potato' policy played by European Union member states towards Southern countries inside and outside the Union's borders.[34] These

[32] Also called the '*Golem Effect*', it is mostly studied in an educational environment. See Babad, Inbar and Rosenthal (1982) and Stoichita (2008).
[33] See for example, the European Parliament's (2015) research paper, 'EU Member States' arms exports (2013)'.
[34] The situation helps to explain Italy's position, as advocated by its new Minister of the Interior, in which, since June 2018, it has refused permission for rescue boats of NGOs such as SOS Méditerranée to disembark.

figures are confirmed in the account of Antoine Laurent, former sailor and a rescuer on board of the *Aquarius*, a previous vessel of the NGO SOS Méditerranée: 'When we enter, we are frozen by the smell. A complex mixture of urine, vomit, sweat, exhaust fumes and fuel oil. It's hot as hell and the air is unbreathable. Strangely enough, one smell overcomes all the others: the smell of wood. Till's experience as a naval architect makes him say with astonishment: "This boat was built recently, the wood is still fresh. It was built for this. For human trafficking"' (2021: 151).[35]

Far from conveying identification, and from attracting sympathy from opponents, summarising exiles to these few humanitarian items locks them into the narrow representation already assigned by the media. In view of the reciprocal influence of media and art images, art productions[36] reusing these motifs lag behind media, to which they are content to be echo chambers. Following the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, these artworks would enter into the realm of *simulation*. They miniaturise reality, by adopting clear referents that only show spectacular signs of it. By the artificial resurrection they stand for, artworks consisting of the duplication of these motifs 'substitute reality with signs of reality' (Baudrillard 1994: 2). Whereas in representation, the motifs produced reflect a reality, simulacra do not function as a reflection of reality. A motif operates as a value in itself. In this case, they imply the disappearance of the exiles behind them. Exiles end up having no more reality than the motifs repeatedly encapsulating them. As a consequence, comparing Ai's activism to that of JR, another artist working in the direction of refugees, sociologist Abby Peterson estimates that: 'Ai is speaking *for* refugees from an elevated position of power. His voice is heard, but it is not the voice of the refugees' (2019: 196). He would not meet Lucy Lippard's definition of an artist activist. For Lippard, this would be someone who works within local communities, 'stimulates active participation…and mobilises for change' (1984: 349). This point is not trivial, especially when knowing that the artist generated $40,646,625 in total between 2006 and 2016, and that his rating boosted during the period from 2014 to 2016, namely at the same time as the migrant 'crisis' blew up in the Mediterranean (Observatoire de l'art contemporain 2016). Ai is known for being closely linked to

[35] From : 'Lorsque nous entrons, l'odeur nous glace. Un mélange complexe d'urine, de vomi, de sueur, de gaz d'échappement et de mazout. Il fait une chaleur de plomb et l'air est irrespirable. Étrangement, une odeur domine toutes les autres : l'odeur du bois. L'expérience de Till en tant qu'architecte naval lui fait dire avec étonnement : « Ce bateau a été construit récemment, le bois est encore frais. Il a été construit pour ça. Pour le trafic d'êtres humains »'.

[36] Artists such as Banksy, Gandolfo Gabriele David, Arabella Dorman, Alex Seton and Bianca Argimon have made these motifs central in some of their creations.

capitalist leaders who are building art collections as stock portfolios by opening foundations, such as Bernard Arnault. Arnault is the third richest person in the world, a business magnate and owner of LVMH, the world's largest luxury-goods company, while also holding the Parisian Department store *Le Bon Marché*, as well as the Foundation Louis Vuitton. The Foundation Louis Vuitton, in particular, whose entrance fee was fixed at 14 euros, and whose cost was, for more than half of the total amount, paid thanks to national taxes, materialises for LVMH a means of tax optimisation (Tobelem 2014). Ai exhibited his work both in the clothing store, and in Foundation Louis Vuitton. Collusion between the art and the financial sphere, as Ai embodies, thus renders his potential activism harmless.

Although this fact was not clearly stated during the Givenchy showcase, a fashion company also owned by LVMH, covering the front row audience with survival blankets cannot be a totally selfless act. From the arrival, in 2005, of the subversive artistic director Riccardo Tisci who introduced motifs and textiles originating from the street, to his departure from the fashion house in 2017, he is believed to have increased Givenchy sales revenue to around 500 million euros annually (Friedman 2017). As Le Brun observes in her 2018 essay, multinational companies' tendency to commercialise all sensitive signs corresponds to acts of predation. She reiterates Benjamin's conclusion about the victors' spoil, whose design would be to 'systematically detach the sign from the thing [that] once was signified' (Le Brun 2018: 42), namely the shimmering material from its use in dramatic circumstances caused by restrictive Western migratory policies.

What is outrageous is not the connection between two supposedly opposed universes – that of fashion and elegance, and that of migrants – it is the instrumentalisation of their suffering for selling purposes. Le Brun illustrates this process giving the example of the way the fashion world cut jeans' sizes for years, so that they fall on the hips of millions of young people. The latter were unaware that this dressing habit was originally a sign of solidarity of teenagers from American ghettos with their brothers' inmates, where the prison regime prevented them from wearing belts (Le Brun 2018: 104). For his part, Tisci became famous because his 'skill in blending streetwear with high fashion is highly relevant to today's luxury consumer' (Business to Fashion 2018). He therefore made Givenchy's success by disconnecting visual signs from the deprived environments from which they were originating in order to transform them into high value products.

From this perspective, Baksa's openly claimed association of the fashion sphere and today's migratory displacements that relies on well-trodden tropes of orientalism and otherness, is perhaps less deceitful than the subtle picking of visual signs from the migration imaginary intended to make them sell exorbitantly priced items or artworks.

The photographic series *Sneakers like Jay-Z* by Frédéric Delangle and Ambroise Tézenas, in relation to the barbed wire motif used by the Afghan designer Sami Nouri.

Two other case studies seem to counteract these processes of commercial appropriation and to bear paths of emancipation as a result of fashion. First, the series of photographs by Frédéric Delangle and Ambroise Tézenas reveal an effort to establish the integration and emancipation of exiles through fashion.[37] The two photographers exhibited *Des sneakers comme Jay-Z* (*Some sneakers like Jay-Z)* during the 2018 edition of the Rencontres Européennes de la Photographie in Arles. These pictures aim to illustrate the work of Emmaüs Solidarité, a Parisian NGO who organised a reception centre for migrants including a 'boutique', where men could benefit from clothing donations. A group of migrants were invited to choose clothes, and to pose wearing them. Every photograph is accompanied with a text that expresses their selection. These testimonies remind the viewer that clothes are often the only belongings of exiles. For this very reason, clothes are a subject of major symbolic importance that reflects their identity: the way in which they wish to be seen, and the way they perceive themselves.

[37] Exhibition organised by Association du Méjan (2018) as part of the Associated Program of the Rencontres d'Arles.

Fig. 48 Frédéric Delangle and Ambroise Tézenas, *Ahmed, Des sneakers comme Jay-Z* series, colour photograph, 2018.

J'ai 21 ans. Je viens de Somalie (de Mogadiscio).

Je suis habillé avec une chapka et un manteau qu'on m'a donnés en Russie.
J'adore ce pull qui a le style hip hop !
Si les gens me demandent combien je l'ai acheté, je vais dire que c'est un cadeau. J'adore Paris, les gens sont gentils, comparativement à Stockholm, Berlin ou Varsovie. Si j'avais des sous, j'achèterais une veste noire et des baskets Nike.
Le noir me va bien car j'ai la peau caramel.

I am 21 years old, I come from Somalia (Mogadishu).
I am dressed in an ushanka and a coat that I was given in Russia.
I love this jumper and the hip-hop style.
If I am asked how much I paid for it, I will say it was a present.
I love Paris, the people are nice compared to in Stockholm, Berlin or Warsaw. If I had some money, I would buy a black jacket and Nike trainers.
I look good in black because I have caramel coloured skin.

Fig. 49 Frédéric Delangle and Ambroise Tézenas, *Abdallah*, *Des sneakers comme Jay-Z* series, colour photograph, 2018.

J'ai 24 ans. Je suis soudanais.
Je l'aime bien cette veste, avec toutes ces poches. Ce n'est pas du tout le genre d'habits que je portais avant, au Soudan. Ça me fait bizarre de me voir comme ça.
J'ai l'air plus français avec ça, non ?

I'm 24. I'm from Sudan.
I like this jacket, with all the pockets. It's not at all the kind of clothes I used to wear in Sudan. It's weird to see myself like this.
I look more French with it, don't I?

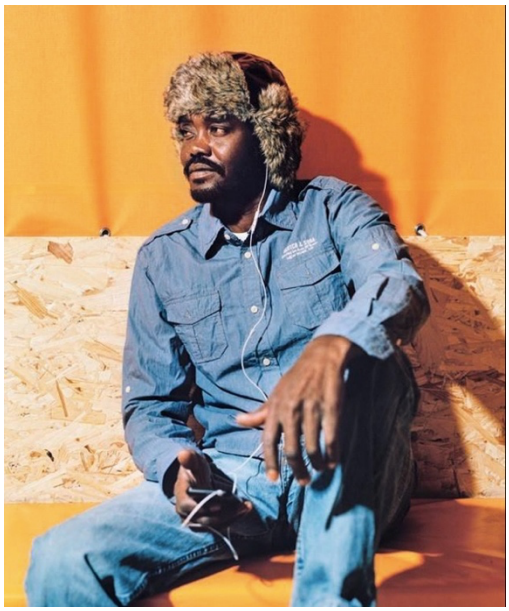

Fig. 50 Frédéric Delangle and Ambroise Tézenas, *Guindo*, *Des sneakers comme Jay-Z* series, colour photograph, 2018.

J'ai 42 ans. Je viens du Soudan.
J'ai choisi cette chemise parce qu'elle est assortie à mon pantalon. Je portais pratiquement la même chose au Soudan, mais dans des couleurs différentes.
Je n'aime pas les couleurs flashy. C'est une question de goût. Comme je suis mat de peau, eh bien, je m'habille donc plutôt en couleurs claires !

I am 42 years old. I come from Sudan.
I chose this shirt because it matches my trousers. I wear almost the same things that I would wear in Sudan, but just with different colours. I don't like flashy colours. It's a question of taste. Because I have darker skin, naturally I wear lighter coloured clothes!

Circulating motifs attached to clothing constitute here the last bastion of a dignity many times violated on the road of exile. In this regard, Dr Monica L. Miller's monograph *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (2009), demonstrates how clothing style, and in particular dandyism, has defined Black people's identity through shifting political and cultural environments. Clothing appears as a way to perform and to reinvest scorned identities. Besides, Miller highlights 'how and why black people became arbiters of style' and stresses antinomic relations inherent in dandy's dress codes, namely how peoples of the African diaspora 'once slaves to fashion – make fashion their slave' (2009: 1). Seizing circulating fashion motifs to make them their own could thus constitute a way for migrants to empower themselves within slave-holding regimes.

The path of Sami Nouri, a 23-year-old fashion designer, also seems to symbolise how fashion may constitute a way towards integration and emancipation. Born in Afghanistan from a father who is a tailor and an activist, Nouri and his family were forced to flee their homeland to escape the Taliban regime. In Iran, at the age of eight, the boy, who is denied access to school, starts helping his father in a makeshift workshop. After another exodus, this time in the direction of Europe, the family is separated by smugglers before trying to cross European borders. At the age of fourteen, Nouri is left alone on a train platform in the city of Tours, south of Paris. Welcomed by social services, he starts going to French school and decides to send 70 applications in order to find a job in the fashion industry. John Galliano accepted him for a three-week internship after which he begins an apprenticeship in Jean-Paul Gaultier's studio. A year and a half after his arrival in France, Nouri manages to find his mother and his sister on Facebook, and they later join him in France. Nouri then makes the headlines of people and fashion magazines. Watering down the fact that the young man languishes because he yearns for news from his father, several media outlets, as for instance *Paris Match*, introduce him as 'The little Prince of couture' (Vollaire 2017) and present his story as a fairy tale. In Nouri's first collection, which is called *Exodus*, emphasis is placed on barbed wire, a specific motif inserted on several models. In 2018, he invites the pop music duo Madame Monsieur, whose song *Mercy*, dedicated to the refugee's fate, was the French entry in the Eurovision Song Contest, to perform at his show. When a later collaboration was proposed with the traditional brand Saint James, reputed worldwide for its striped sailor shirts, the barbed wire motif was revived for the French Normandy company. On two places on the shirt, around the neck and on the elbows, the usual blue straight lines are

replaced by a white barbed wire design on a black background. As in the survival blankets that summarised the refugee's fate during the *Cinema for Peace* gala orchestrated by Ai, barbed wire appears as a tiny digest of the migrants' destiny when trying to reach Europe.

Can this reminder of the designer's traumatic past be seen as a tribute or show support to current exiles? On a television report related to Nouri's story, Luc Lesénécal, CEO of Saint James, explains that 'Barbed wire is as well a way to divert the stripe. This makes it possible to give small touches of elegance, strength, with something authentic' (*Le fabuleux destin de Sami Nouri* 2018). At a time when the usual selling proposition of the company, which presents itself as the fashion house of sailors' ancestral clothing, would be the usual blue stripes, he explains that it would benefit from the introduction of barbed wire motifs. By introducing a pinch of 'true story' into the standard navy shirt, consumers' interest is revived. The oppression of refugees would thus renew Saint James's storytelling and attract new fashionistas, perhaps sensitive to humanitarian causes and to Nouri's media success story. Visual activism can be found here at the service of a sales and marketing strategy to which the young designer is incorporated. If in his original creations the barbed wire's presence was somehow a moving memorial of a childhood abused by war, their duplication into ready-to-wear items precisely makes them lose any authenticity. As Lesénécal indicates, the barbed wire motifs constitute a way to 'divert' consumers' attention, but not from the mere blue stripes. They divert them from the actual objective of the fashion company, which is not to denounce migratory policies that have contributed to establishing barbed wire borders, but to increase its sales figures, by striking a sensitive or subversive chord with potential buyers.

Fig. 51 Sami Nouri, *Saint James collection*, 2018.

Therefore, in light of this, it is worth questioning if a genuine artistic process, such as those of Delangle and Tézenas, can be totally dedicated to the exiles' fate? Rather than focus on the clothing habits of those

represented, which are presented as the mere series' topic, the purpose of such an artistic proposition deserves to be examined under the visual anthropology lens.

In his classic book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said noted more than forty years ago that 'my real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world' (1978: 12). According to Said's logic, the series *Some Sneakers like Jay-Z*, which has been exhibited in French photographic hotspots and made the headlines in the trendiest of media, would be less about representing migrants, than about the Western photographers' gaze on them. Its success within this media segment seems to indicate that the display of the migrants' photographs wearing modish garments appears as an opportunity to address migratory questions in a perhaps lighter tone. As the audience of trendy media and of photographic exhibitions would share the same wardrobe as the migrants, the series would constitute an occasion for bringing exiles closer to the way of life of the latter, namely to identify with the refugees. In her novel, *The Years*, French author Annie Ernaux addresses this irreducible gap. Her book is an intimate and collective narrative of six decades of a life running from 1941 to 2006. It describes photographs but also books, songs, radio and television programmes, and advertising campaigns and headlines in tune with the times, and which compose a collective imaginary.

In relation to the last period of this narrative, and therefore the one closer to us today, Ernaux writes:

> It was a gentle and happy dictatorship against which no one rebelled, one had only to protect oneself from one's excesses, to educate the consumer: that was the first definition of the individual. For everyone, including illegal immigrants huddled on a boat to the Spanish coast, freedom had the face of a shopping centre, hypermarkets crumbling under the abundance. It was normal for products to arrive from all over the world, to circulate freely, and for men to be pushed back to the borders. To cross them, some locked themselves into trucks, made themselves merchandise – inert – died of asphyxiation, forgotten by the driver on a parking lot in June sun in Dover (2006: 229).

Ernaux describes an unspoken tyranny. Stronger than political borders, the market's powerful and invisible reign shares humans in two categories: the insiders who implicitly accept its domination and the outsiders who need to make themselves into goods to have a chance to join it. With the hindsight of surveys produced

by the IOM, it is now admitted that a large majority of today's migrants trying to cross European borders are led to make their bodies merchandise. In a field survey of October 2016, 71% of the interviewed migrants report to have been subjected to human trafficking and other exploitative practices (IOM 2017). In Libya, a place of transit for many migrants, to which the European Union has outsourced border control, these activities would represent a 'turnover' of $350 million in revenue in 2016 (Vincent 2017). In this context, the fact of wearing clothes belonging to the dominant visual culture, to which the title of the exhibition refers explicitly, would signal the migrants' integration into this culture. The online newspaper *Lundimatin* (2019) observes that 'the message that these clichés actually convey [is], namely, "we welcome them on the sine qua non condition that they are and above all that they prove that they want to become, like us, consumers"'. The series of photographs would thus be less telling about the contemporary exiles, than about the way market societies determine Westerners' relationship to clothing. As exemplified with jeans cut loose on the hips, the operating cycle of visual appropriation seems to be achieved: originating from American ghettos this trend has been adopted worldwide, has become trendy street wear, and is now considered as a mark of recognition from the ruling classes towards newcomers.

For his part, by obtaining French nationality with the help of media coverage around his rapid accession into the fashion industry, Nouri has been officially and symbolically thanked for his exceptional integration into commercial society. The price of this success may be that, in exchange, Western society has made his refugee story a fashionable product. By granting him, as a result of French citizenship, the freedom to come and go, this European country may have, at the same time, signed the end of Nouri's freedom to create. As stated by Stacey Copeland (2018: 217) about the presence of another kind of visible minority: 'Like many "Others", queer woman run the risk of falling into a commodified and stereotyped role within the larger media sphere as their voice is used to feed the desires of mass culture for the financial benefit of corporations.' Passed through humanitarian washing of global capitalism, Nouri's intimate experience of oppression and border shutdowns is both underlined and condensed into a repeated visual sign. Absorbed by the fashion industry, the barbed wire turns into a marketing gimmick defused from any 'oppositional force'. It became the designer's passport to access the world that rejected his family. Now surrounded by the borders of market rules that maintain him in his past, Nouri's forever present seems to be kept in exile.

Dealing together with both the art and the fashion spheres, these case studies have been an occasion to show the transmutation of art into merchandise and merchandise into art. The last bastion of one's identity is deprived of its homeland; fashion becomes a theatre of violence against bodies making activism's attempts hardly credible. What brings together artistic answers on the one hand, and fashion answers on the other hand?

First, in a transversal way, what connects the art works of Ai Weiwei's performance with the photographic series of Norbert Baksa, Frédéric Delangle and Ambroise Tézenas? Do they manage to shift beholders' perceptions of migration? If all received more or less harsh criticism, in strict terms of dissemination, only Baksa was led to remove his photographs from his website. Yet, what is striking is Baksa's symmetry with the clearly more acclaimed series of Delangle and Tézenas. With *Der Migrant*, Baksa's model stages and mimics exiles' border crossings, while in *Some Sneakers like Jay-Z*, refugees originating from the African continent seem to be staged as Western models. As only Baksa's series caused a real outrage and did not get artistic recognition, it is perhaps because fashion photographs' codes are increasingly adopted in the Instagram era. Those adopting the dominant dress and visual codes, as the refugees are staging in Delangle and Tézenas photographs, would thus be more consensual than Westerners dressing up or enacting like those who originate from dominated cultures. To defend himself against the outcry he created, Baksa explained that he aimed to show 'a suffering woman, who is also beautiful and despite her situation has some high-quality outfit and a smartphone' (Freeman, 2015). His intention is not far from Ai's motive when proposing to Hollywood stars to wrap themselves in survival blankets. The wide smiles of the celebrities, the selfies they took, and the victory signs they made, highlight the obvious amusement generated by Ai's proposal. Their evident enjoyment is probably at least as strong as the Berlin Deputy Minister of Culture's unease.

In the case of the art works by Ai, Baksa, Delangle and Tézenas, the failure of the proposed artistic dispositions hangs by a thin but sturdy thread: that set by the power of reciprocal representations. In his novel *Compass*, Mathias Énard tells the story of a group of Western scholars visiting Syria. Franz, the main character, states: 'We ourselves, in the desert, under Bedouins' tent, although faced with the most tangible reality of nomad life, were coming up against our own representations, which, by our preconceptions, interfered with the possibility of experiencing this life that was not our own' (2017: 409/839). The power

of representations has perhaps to do with the visual closed-loop generated by migratory policies: that of non-expected forced displacements, leading to a non-managed humanitarian situation whose persistence matches that of a narrow range of motifs in mainstream media. The intense repetition of the latter would act as a visual shield enhancing the strangeness and preventing the experience of otherness.

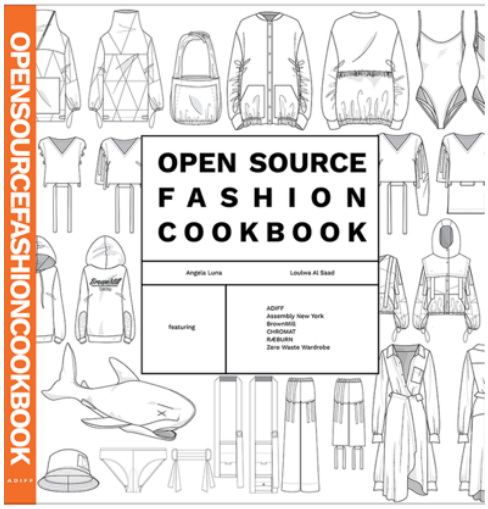

Fig. 52 *Open source fashion cookbook*, Angela Luna and Loulwa Al Saad, Adiff website, 2021.

Second, regarding the relationships between fashion designers whose creations are related to migrations, their main common point seems to be motifs originating from the mainstream images of border crossings by the Mediterranean. Tisci's artistic choice of covering front row showgoers with survival blankets, and Nouri's use of barbed wire patterns, have in common their weakening of the visual motifs coined by media coverage of the 'crisis'. If this is not the choice made by fashion designer Angela Luna in the collection she realised for the termination of her study at New York's Parsons School of Design, the works the young designer currently displays on her Instagram page seem to follow her fellow peers' footsteps. She settled for a while in Greece and went to the Lesbos lifejackets' graveyard to 'upcycle' these dregs of maritime border crossings into fashion items. Her emerging company, in which tent jackets are sold for £350 on the 'buy-one-give-one model', and whose slogan is 'Survivor Made', have been fascinating to follow through the course of this writing, to see how the young woman dealt with the industry's contradictions. After cleaning and assembling pieces of discarded lifejackets for her next collection, Luna hired a group of Afghan resettled refugees based in Athens to manufacture her clothing. The website of her company now bears a continuous display announcing the number of tents donated to refugees and homeless people, the number of masks donated to hospitals and NGOs, and the amount of the salaries paid to her staff of resettled refugees. The degree of emphasis given to these figures and to the rationale of the brand – '*making a difference through fashion*' – transpires the will to defy humanitarian washing critics. Three short paragraphs also describe the story of the team members who, like Nouri, used to be tailors in Afghanistan. ADIFF seems to be the meeting of two worlds: one in which handmade clothing is still common and one in which sewing manual

knowledge is lost. The company thus sells a fashion ‘cookbook’ for those who are not ‘trained sewer[s]’. The thin thread which reconciles activism and the fashion industry could indeed be summarised through the metaphor of the cookbook: a mixing process in which spices used for defending a cause should be adequately balanced, to not erase original taste and to not become a flavourless gimmick.

The sampling of the same motifs throughout history seem to trigger the images' circulation and to impregnate viewers' minds. The four main motifs studied, which seem to haunt the collective subconscious – the bruised child, the colonised people, the slaves, the invaders – are all undergoing a monetary translation: donations of cash and items, extractions of natural wealth, human trafficking and smuggling practices. The cultural and historical genesis of images emerging to represent today's migration by the Mediterranean is marked by global capitalism's manifestations. It also shapes the migrants' journeys. The collective imaginary of migration thus seems subjected to growing markets in which superstar artists, fashion designers, as well as surveillance industries, are the leaders. In a context in which inner and outer landscapes are shaped by market strategies, the loss of aura prophesied by Benjamin has now passed, thanks to digitisation, to an even higher level.

At a time when sight lines are now scanned as barcodes to capture 'the cognitive process of consumers' (Białowąs and Szyszka 2019), migrants have no option but to make themselves goods. In respect of this 'containerisation of people' (Sharpe 2016: 26) a double captivity must be pointed out: those of migrants in distress seeking to be seen, and those of Westerners, imprisoned in marketing channels. Yet, if media images are 'insured with a meaning'(Thévoz 2017: 56),[38] art images can also be rich in polysemous meanings. Through the linkages they can provide, art images can in the same movement broaden but also sharpen critical faculties. This is what I have attempted to do by choosing the framework of cinema to implement my study and to apply my findings.

[38] From: 'assurées d'un sens'.

Chapter 2 - *The People Behind the Scenes*, Creative Research in Practice to Unveil the Collective Imaginary of Migration

To commence this investigation about artistic practices providing alternative imaginaries of migrations, I choose this photograph by Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla entitled *Forecast*.

Fig. 53 Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, *Forecast*, 2010.

It is their response to a request made by the art critic Hans-Ulrich Obrist and the novelist Tom McCarthy who invited various artists, writers, geographers, mathematicians and scientists to contribute to an alternative atlas of cartographies, entitled *Mapping It Out* (2014). The artist duo, who are based in Puerto Rico, created this photograph displaying an amorphous and temporary shape, which was classified by the editors as belonging to the chapter that gathers 'The Unmappable'. The photograph captures the moment when a big net thrown in the air appears as if it is catching an invisible prey in a heavenly landscape from the Puerto Rico archipelago. The net is flying, or more likely, falling in the sea like a human figure whose head would be facing down towards the water surface. If images are of the same nature as migrants, then this net might be a metaphorical representation of their lives. Stateless people, people whose lives and

territories are lastingly in transit, are challenging cartographies. They are 'The Unmappable'. In this image, I see that migrants could be at the same time what is caught by the net, and the net itself. As it is partly transparent, the net allows the viewer to see through. In that perspective, the net could be considered as a reading grid applied on the image to provide another knowledge of the landscape. The shared landscape of the Mediterranean border provides evidences of Rancière's concept of the 'distribution of the sensible' (2004). He states that 'Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (2004, 13). If the Mediterranean space exemplifies a distribution of the sensible in which what can be seen is both the objectifying visual motifs of migrants and postcard images for tourists, and if what can be said amounts to preconceived ideas, then Western viewers' ability to see through sensing technologies and the digital sharing of images, and their talent to speak from these images, make them the exclusive holders of the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. Which aesthetic processes and practices can contribute to building an alternative imaginary of contemporary migrations by the Mediterranean? Building on this idea, artistic practices, in particular filmmaking, will not only be understood as a means to reconfigure 'the distribution of the sensible' (1). They will be used as a way to highlight the collective imaginary of migration (2), and as a cognitive frame for addressing migratory policies (3).

1. Six commandments for reconfiguring the 'distribution of the sensible'

To distance themselves from the actual visual framework shaping the distribution of the sensible in the Mediterranean, formal processes addressing contemporary migrations could firstly seek strategies of withdrawal: from *extra*ordinary situations, from the masses, from heavy demonstrations, from emphasis in the narratives and in the settings. The following passages identify these approaches through examples originating from contemporary art and cinema. These avenues for overcoming the polarised regimes of images are examined through the following series of six commandments which I applied to myself when filmmaking *The People Behind the Scenes*.

a. **Don't be afraid of the mundane.**

Invited by sociologist Michel Maffesoli to reflect on banality in art, art critic Paul Ardenne recalls the French medieval origin of the word 'banal', meaning that which is made available to *all* by the lord by virtue of the right to ban (2002: 75). Visual artist Behjat Omer Abdulla draws his artwork *From a Distance* from this meaning of the word. Composed of two large drawings, his diptych portrays, in a close-up, two almost identical child faces with eyes that are closed.

Fig. 54 Behjat Omer Abdulla, *Head of Child II (From a Distance)*, Graphite powder, 150x150cm.

Fig. 55 Behjat Omer Abdulla, Head of Child II (From a Distance), Pencil on paper, 150x150cm.

Living in Gothenburg, the Kurdish artist created the portraits from stories recounted in Swedish camps. The drawings are accompanied by the following text:

> Under the fear of war, as thousands of families fled their homelands, a mother of twin infants started her journey to seek a safer place. During the journey, a tragedy occurred. Due to the geographical location, the mother was most likely coming from the Middle East or Asia, crossing the deadliest route to Europe over the Mediterranean Sea by boat. During the harsh physical

> struggle of the journey, the mother lost one of her twin infants. Despite the loss, she kept the dead child with her for days on the boat. As tensions rose, the smugglers tried to force the mother to throw the body of her child into the sea. She refused and kept the body with her. One night, while the mother was sleeping, the smugglers took action. The mother woke to realize that her living child was missing and that she had been left with the dead child. The smugglers had mistakenly thrown the sleeping twin into the sea.
>
> I heard this account while it was being retold around Swedish refugee camps, and I began to see it as a kind of myth. I have explored this story through making a series of drawings in order to cope, understand, expose and transmit the potential of this story to further audiences. What happened on the boat that night is one string in a collection of narratives, which also encapsulate what I myself experienced as a refugee fifteen years ago (Mazzara and Ramsay 2019: 6).

The apparent banality of the portraits hides the tragic and untenable act of throwing a child overboard. By occurring during the night, at sea, the event acquires a mythic dimension, reminiscent of seamen's legends. In contrast with mainstream media images that are 'unequivocal, ensured with a meaning' of the 'crisis' (Thévoz 2017: 56), Abdulla's drawings provide a reflection that is suggested in their sub-title: From a Distance. Distance is that which allows time to become interested in the portraits, to delve into the narrative, and to measure the intensity of the horrific conditions during Mediterranean crossings. Drawing on Ardenne, with the distance born from the gap between the apparent gentleness of the toddler faces, and the harshness of the recounted situation, is a two-phased process. The first time, it confuses a first glance understanding of the piece; and the second time, it propels viewers into the spotlight of the dry truth of a true story. 'The horizon that we want to achieve, it is not so much the radical unsubscription of the subject, his descent from the pedestal than anything else: to write the legend of Western man by operating on the upside down, it is to constitute a counter-legend' (Ardenne 2002: 76).[39]

[39] From: 'L'horizon que l'on veut atteindre, ce n'est pas tant la désinscription radicale du sujet, sa descente du piédestal que tout autre chose : écrire la légende de l'homme occidental en opérant à l'envers, constituer une contre-légende'.

The legend that the artist shapes occurs here and now, at the viewer's door, while being too busy looking somewhere else. Abdulla places these two large portraits before the spectator's eyes and leaves him/her free to act. Ardenne notices that artists using banality do not fear to create a feeling of frustration (2002: 77). This is what Abdulla intentionally triggers. The artist trusts the viewer's sense of curiosity to *seek information* and to *take time* to read it. By overthrowing the usual regime of images, Abdulla overthrows the dominant political dialectics on migration: exiles' condition is no longer a ready-made thinking topic among others, it is a human condition potentially shared by all, starting with children and parents, two human relationships to which the viewer, as a fellow human, has been experiencing, and will perhaps be in a situation to experience. Yet, Abdulla's approach is not just a case of technical trickery, it is deeply effective and moving because, as expressed by sociologist Nicole Lapierre, 'migrants are the quiet heroes of modern times'[40]: it takes immense courage to go far away from home, to leave your family, your language, your land in order to find a new future. Migrants are ready to face the most formidable difficulties. It is important to change the way we look at them. Shipwrecked at sea or hanging from the gates of Ceuta, they are objectively in situations of suffering, risk and violence. Nevertheless, we must learn not to consider them only as victims. 'To confine them in this image, even with the best of intentions, is to forget that they are also actors in their own history and that they exercise, in spite of everything, a form of freedom. If we saw them as the heroes of their lives, we would be able to welcome them better' (Fortier 2019a) .[41]

To make us experience migrants' heroism, Abdulla does not fall into a slovenly way of confining them in a single given image. He makes both viewers and viewed play an active role in defining the image and gathering them around it; rather than being separated on each side of it. Directors Charles Heller and Jocelyne Saab proceed in a rather similar way with, in addition, the will to highlight global responsibilities.

[40] Quoted by anthropologist and film director Corinne Fortier (2019a).
[41] From: 'Les enfermer dans cette image, même avec les meilleures intentions du monde, c'est oublier qu'ils sont aussi les acteurs de leur propre histoire et qu'ils exercent, malgré tout, une forme de liberté. Si on les voyait en héros de leur vie, on serait capable de leur faire meilleur accueil'.

b. Carefully choose your medium to highlight your subject

Charles Heller is part of the Forensic Oceanography research group. With his colleague and associate Lorenzo Pezzani, he first refused to produce more images of migration, and to rather 'interrogate the production and circulation of images' (Migrant Image Group 2017: 215). In that order, the two scholars analysed the way European states monitored the Mediterranean border using the logistical support of sensing technologies. Their assessment led to two contradictory but concomitant observations. First, that of an effort to detect migrants' crossings, and second, once their boats are detected, of conflicting 'strategies of invisibilisation' in rescue situations (Migrant Image Group 2017: 217). In view of the paradoxical regime of surveillance images implemented along the Southern shore of the Schengen Area, Heller and Pezzani decided in turn to 'instrumentalise' digital images, constantly scanning the region to highlight both human rights abuses and States' failures to assist persons in danger. The result is a series of actions, notably the film *Liquid Traces* (2014) which puts sensing images at the service of those risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean, and constitutes a piece of evidence during legal proceedings brought against France, Belgium, Spain and Italy. In the end, the Forensic Oceanography team, who first refused to create new images, diverted existing ones from their original purpose in order to designate European states' responsibility for human loss in the Mediterranean.

For her part, recently deceased director Jocelyne Saab, in one of her last films, used the very medium of her own images to denounce global market power forces governing circulations of goods and persons. Her 2016 short film *One Dollar a Day* puts at its core the notion of medium, not only for positioning the Syrian refugees of Beirut's Bekaa camp at the heart of the Lebanese capital, but also to question the way they are perceived. By installing gigantic portraits of women and children of the camp before the eyes of inner-city inhabitants on the same advertising canvas that inner-city citizens are used to seeing, she offers a central space to those who are set aside. In doing so, the Lebanese director points the finger to two conflicting regimes of images: that of the billboards, sought for their lucrative rent, and that of the populations chased to the edge of the city, who live on one dollar a day. As the use of this specific medium relates to the very

material of the refugees' accommodation (their tents are made of these billboards), the images relate to a wider scope than the migratory biopolitics at stake. Far from placing exiles in a top-down victimising situation, Saab position them in a broader field of interactions defined by Arjun Appadurai in his concept of 'scapes' (1996, 33).[42] In this case, the Mediascapes overlap with the Financescapes. Thus, a simple use of billboard canvas makes a quick look and quick conclusions about Saab's images more complicated. As in the work of Behjat Omar Abdulla, Jocelyne Saab slows down the look and imposes an inner self-reflexive movement by the viewer about their consumption patterns and their consecutive patterns of rejections.

Reaching an audience by breaking away from fast-thinking images can also be achieved by reflecting on the narrative chain they bear.

c. Yes to narrativity, but not necessarily linear

For art historian Birgit Mersmann, polysemy in images, particularly in documentary photographs, stems essentially from their relationship to the text that accompanies them (Mersmann 2019: 189). If a written text is an element of contextualisation of images, the notion of narrativity in a broader sense can be applied into films to other visual signposts: 'narrating does not simply mean applying a temporal thread to link things. Fragmentation, accumulation, dispersion, the circular tracking shot, and the shot/countershot contrast are also narrative strategies'.[43] A combination of these visual tools appears to be key in processes of assimilation of visual messages of any content.

In *Images in Spite of All. Four photographs from Auschwitz*, Didi-Huberman (2008) presents four photographs, taken by members of the Sonderkommando,[44] who risked their lives to testify about the horror of the Nazis' camps. The art historian shows how these few images contribute towards shaping a patchy but rare phenomenology of the mass killing process. The first publication of the essay gave rise to

[42] Namely: Mediascapes, Technoscapes, Ethnoscapes, Financescapes, Ideoscapes.
[43] Vicenç Villatoro quoted in Mersmann (2019: 190).
[44] Jewish prisoners forced to help the crematoria staff.

major controversy, in particular from psychoanalyst Gérard Wajcman, who stated that such a small number of images could not describe the situation, and consequently, should not be displayed. Didi-Huberman's response was that although bearing a fragmentary reality, these four photographs constitute temporal gateways documenting the Shoah's terrible everydayness. In support of his argument, the art historian highlights Jean-Luc Godard's work on images, in particular the film series *Histoires du Cinéma* (1988–1998). Taking the film series as an example, Didi-Huberman explains that the director chooses 'to *show* cinema itself and its own reminiscence through a *montage* totally organised around the economy of the *symptom*: accidents, shocks, images collapsing one on top of the other allow something to escape that is not seen in any one fragment of film but *appears*, differentially, with the force of a generalized haunting memory. Each image "is not a just image [*une image juste*], it is just an image [*juste une image*]", as Godard said in a famous phrase. But it allows one "to speak less and to better say" or, rather, to better *speak of it* without having to *say it.*' (Didi-Huberman 2008: 134). Accompanied or unaccompanied with voice-over or captions, a succession of various images produce combinations of meanings, which in turn interact with the viewers' own imaginary. An investigation aiming to dismantle usual mental associations connecting a range of images to an entire group of people can therefore choose this approach to introduce new cognitive frames. At the time when Balibar (2018b), refers to the notion of genocide to describe mass disappearances in the Mediterranean, exploring the figurations created by directors to deal with the difficult subject of the Shoah might thus be relevant. At the other end of the spectrum, another filmmaker chose a radically different approach to show the irrepresentable.

d. Embrace the void

If Godard addressed history in arranging not the collusion – in the Surrealist sense – but rather the *encounter* between diverse cinema footage and his own words, Claude Lanzmann chose the absence of both. In his touchstone 1985 film *Shoah*, the French director does not call upon archive images (as Alain Resnais does in his 1956 *Night and Fog*), nor does he reconstitute the course of actions (as in Rithy Panh's 2003 *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*); instead he makes the spectator revive the event through now empty railway lines, and through the words of survivors that do not manage to speak. A famous

example among the 10 hours and 13 minutes of the film is that of a barber, urged by Lanzmann, off-screen, to describe what happened in the gas chamber: 'You must go on, Abe. You have to'. Unable to articulate, the man bursts into tears. For Jacques Rancière, this emotion, namely the very act of remembering, serves as a testimony.

The tears in the hairdresser's eyes are the sign of his emotion. But this emotion is itself produced by the director's filmmaking system, and once he films those tears and links this shot to other shots, they can no longer be regarded as the naked presence of the recollected event. They belong to a process of figuration that is a process of condensation and displacement. They are there in place of words that were themselves in place of the visual representation of the event. They become an artistic figure, an element in a system that aims to furnish a figurative equivalence of what happened in the gas chamber (Rancière 2009: 94).

Lanzmann demonstrates that the process of figuration is significantly different to visual production. To report the facts implies, most of all, to bring them in the eyes of those who experienced them. A passage of the event on the face of a witness is Lanzmann's archive and reconstitution. Simply calling upon personal memory of the historical event appears more figurative than cinematographic *display* of archives or reconstitutions. Just as the four images saved from Auschwitz carried a phenomenology of the camp, as flawed it may be, the expression passing through the barber's face carries before our eyes the experience of the gas chambers. It is precisely the absence of words that allows the event to reach the viewers. On a paper about photograph series dealing with the 'scene of the event', art historian Raphaële Bertho observes that these images call upon a vacuum to bring a specific situation to mind (2008: 14). Drawing on her analysis, I believe that what is shown in *Shoah* is 'not the representation of an absence or disappearance, but of the lack - the lack of visible traces of the event' (Bertho 2008: abstract). Yet, showing the lack also finds its relevance when the populations addressed are subjected to processes of 'invisibilisation'. This approach, closely linking the form of the image to that of the necropolitics, is therefore fruitful regarding today's asylum seekers. It has been used by photographer Jacqueline Salmon on several occasions, including in her series *Le Hangar* ('The shed').

Salmon uses photography to move social issues into the field of art. In 2001, she directed a series of photographs of the former Red Cross refugee camp in Sangatte, near Calais. Established to be a shelter and accommodation centre, the Sangatte centre was located in a former shed built at the time of the construction of the Channel Tunnel, and housed the equipment used for the construction site. Originally planned to accommodate 200 persons, the Red Cross estimated (CNCDH 2015) that 67,000 persons would transit through the centre in three years: the centre was home to nearly 1,500 illegal immigrants daily, mainly from Afghanistan, Iran or Balkan Europe. It closed its doors in November 2002 on a decision of the French authorities. These photographs operate in a paradoxical way because the centre was overpopulated but, at the moment when the shots are taken, the misery and great difficulty of conditions of life and transit appear without the presence of those suffering from them.

Fig. 56 Jacqueline Salmon, *Le Hangar*, 60x60, 2001.

Fig. 57 Jacqueline Salmon, *Le Hangar*, 60x60, 2001.

Salmon's photographs portray the camp's living conditions and also suggest what they do not show: the exiles. Drawing on Raphaële Bertho's notion, 'images of lack' reflect the institutional management of those considered as illegal. Lack of representation in Salmon's images mirrors the lack of political, social, and cultural representation. The consequence of this absence is to force attention on the imperceptible materiality of the passage of the bodies, as theorised by Duchamp with his concept of *infra thin*. To roughly paraphrase the Surrealist artist: 'Heat left by the body of the exiles in a precarious dormitory is infra thin'. The invisible but yet tangible presence of the camp's temporary inhabitants movingly reveals

the contingent arrangements of a foreign shared space in order to feel homelike. By doing so, these tiny details show in the same movement, insecurity, hopes and uprootedness. Without sordid realism, Salmon suggests the presence of those who 'try the adventure'[45] in all its ingratitude and precariousness (Fortier 2019a). For art historian Dominique Baqué: 'Salmon's choice is ethical as well as aesthetic: here, there is no child on which to throw one's compassionate complaint, no mother with whom to believe to share the pain, no old man of which one would like so much to alleviate the approaching death' (2006: 136).[46] Besides, as with Jocelyne Saab, she chooses the billboard as a medium for her photographs, namely the same material the exiles' tents are made of. Devoid of sensationalism, Salmon's photographs 'of the lack' are imbued with timelessness. As evidence of interchangeable human occupation, they act as so many bridges between viewers and exiles. To establish this relationship deeper, some directors build on their own stories of migration.

e. Allow oneself to incorporate autobiographical elements

Spanish-Swiss director Fernand Melgar gained recognition with three films documenting the conditions of detention of exiles. *La Forteresse* ('The Fortress'*)*, awarded the Golden Leopard at the 2008 Locarno International Film Festival, draws a portrait of the Switzerland Federal Office for Migration from the point of view of asylum seekers and of the administration employees in charge of sorting them. In 2011, *Vol Spécial* ('Special Flight') relates the daily life and migratory paths of applicants detained in the Frambois detention centre located in Geneva's suburbs. The 2013 sequel of *Vol Spécial, Le Monde est comme ça* ('The World is Like This') proceeds with the investigation in Frambois by recounting the paths of the group of asylum seekers introduced in the first film. I will not delve into the analysis of these thought-provoking and important films here (see Fortier 2019b), but will dwell for an instant on *Album de Famille* ('Family Album'), a film that Melgar shot long before in 1993. As its name suggests, *Album de Famille*,

[45] To draw on an expression used by Sahelians leaving their country in search of the Mediterranean Sea quoted by anthroplogist Corinne Fortier in 'Les migrants, ces nouveaux héros. Quête de l'ailleurs, quête de soi et créations filmiques (Présentation)', *Revue Science and Video*, 9, 2019, http://scienceandvideo.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/numeros/9/Pages/09-01.aspx#_ftn1 (Accessed: 20 January 2020).
[46] From: 'Le choix de Salmon est éthique autant qu'esthétique : ici, nul enfant sur lequel jeter sa plainte compassionnelle, nulle mère avec laquelle croire partager la douleur, nul vieillard dont on aimerait tant alléger la mort prochaine'.

relates an intimate story, that of the parents of the director. Of Spanish nationality, Melgar's parents have been in exile in Switzerland for 27 years, working as seasonal workers before returning to their homeland to retire. Melgar retraces their journey with the support of still and moving family images.

Fig. 58 Fernand Melgar, photograms from *Album de Famille*, colour film, 54 min., Climage Prod., 1993.

Beyond the premonitory role of this film in the director's filmography, what is noteworthy, is its final sequence. Before ending the film, Melgar reverses the mirror, until then directed towards his own family intimacy, in direction of the spectators. Interviewed during a bucolic picnic about the way she would sum up her 27 years in Switzerland, his mother describes these years as 'empty'. Discussing the Swiss, she entrusts: 'May they still have enough work to avoid emigration and xenophobia'. This address connects directly to the viewers as well to the previous sequence. As an opening, the picnic scene is interrupted by a televised message announcing the results of a recent popular vote proposing that foreigners living in the canton of Vaud could obtain voting rights. A pictogram of the ballot box inserted in the colourful spring landscape indicates that the initiative was rejected by 73.6% of voters. Written from his own perspective as a white Westerner, the director suggests a parallel with contemporary migrants who are even more likely to experience xenophobia. Melgar does not only speak for his family or his people, he speaks for all exiles having to leave their homelands to make a living.

Director Henri-François Imbert also ties the faith of yesterday's and today's exiles together, this time literally under his camera. As with most of his films, *No Pasaràn, Album souvenir* is an investigation starting with an image, and leading towards other images. In this 2003 documentary, the French director's inquiry begins by the discovery of six postcards in the attic of his great grandparents, who are former Spanish Republican refugees living in the South of France. These old postcards portray groups of people, often walking, queuing or surrounded by wires on sandy beaches. Mention of a serial number and of the same editing company in one corner of the images encourages Imbert to continue collecting them. The postcard series appears to document the 1939 Republican exodus after General Franco's victory, that is called the *Retirada*. During the ten years of the shooting, Imbert acts as an archivist and travels through France to complement the collection, finding 23 postcards to reach the 29 that compose the series. The end of his trip, and of the film, brings him to the shores of Calais where he encounters Afghan and Kurdish refugees trying to reach the UK. Imbert lends them his camera, which the exiles point to the British coast. He also shows them the postcards, which, for most of them, represent other beach environments where other refugees were gathered more than sixty years earlier. The director explains what motivates his lengthy investigation in this film as follows. 'It is as if their disappearance is a symptom of the disappearance of the memory of a human history. I'm trying to save fragments before they go. It's also about rebuilding relationships, which is part of the editing process. Creating a link between the characters and me, then between the characters themselves, and finally with the viewers. Links beyond time and place sometimes; I think of *No Pasaràn*, which begins with the story of the Spanish refugees in 1939 and ends with the Afghan refugees in Sangatte' (Allouche 2014: 117).[47]

[47] From: 'C'est comme si leur disparition était symptôme de la disparition de la mémoire d'une histoire humaine. J'essaie de sauver des fragments avant qu'ils ne partent. Il s'agit aussi de retisser des liens, ce qui rejoint le travail de montage. Créer du lien entre les personnages et moi, puis entre les personnages entre eux, et finalement avec les spectateurs. Des liens au-delà du temps et des lieux parfois ; je pense à *No Pasaran* qui commence avec l'histoire des réfugiés espagnols de 1939 et qui se termine avec celle des réfugiés afghans de Sangatte'.

Fig. 59 Henri-François Imbert, photogram from *No Pasaràn, Album souvenir*, colour film, 1h10 min., Libre Cours Prod., 2003.

Slowly building these relationships through images, Imbert brings together those that he meets during his encounters into a community. For Veronika Schweigl, a former doctoral student in Film Studies who interviewed him in 2013: 'Imbert concentrates on the interstices between the pictures and analyses what remains invisible between them' (2013). This invisible thread bears a phenomenology of exile that connects yesterday's and today's refugees, and attracts sympathy from those assisting at these linkages. Far from cleaving by emphasising exiles' otherness, or seeking a sense of pity, Imbert's images constitute an invitation to join a circle of people sharing the same common humanity beyond borders. For achieving this, the position chosen by the director is key. He does not place himself in a top-down relationship, neither with his interviewees, nor with the viewers, but takes his place within the round of successive exiles that compose history. *No Pasaràn, Album souvenir* is thus not exempt of emotions, but here, they arise as a *consequence* of the figurative system implemented by the director, not as the driving force to inspire fear (through sensationalist settings) or to draw tears (in the aesthetics of pity). What Imbert

creates, by involving himself in the film, is a sense of identification, itself founding a sense of universalism that is in dialogue and on an equal footing with those seen as 'others', and which is thus likely to foster positive attitudes towards them.

f. Overcoming reticence towards emotion and putting it at the service of a message

The presence of emotion in images is commonly called into question by both media and refugees studies specialists (Szörényi 2006: 25; Cava, Parito and Pira 2018: 241; Memou 2019: 84). Their main objection is that emotional content would prevent viewers from critically reflecting on the images and, from there, from engaging in debates and action in favour of refugees. However, the cinema industry seems to have introduced a film, filled with emotions, which concretely engaged public discussion on migration.

In 2009, the feature-fiction *Welcome* appears to have influenced French parliamentary debate. Dealing with the story of a master swimmer in Calais who helps a young Kurdish guy to cross the Channel, the movie became a box-office success by gathering more than one million spectators. It inspired the proposition of a law (Goldberg 2009), explicitly referring to the film. Its aim was to withdraw mention of the 'crime of solidarity' from the French legal corpus. How is it possible to explain the triumph of *Welcome* and its following outcomes in French public life?

In an interview conducted on the occasion of the DVD release of the film, French director Philippe Lioret raises the notion of identification (2010: bonus). He does not estimate that the success of the film lies in its social and political dimension. Based on one hundred public screenings, and on his own writing of the scenario, the director argues that the audience simply sees in it a story about people: 'The film touches the heart first and then moves to the brain. A political pamphlet would engage the mind without involving any feeling, any emotion, and have less impact. When you involve the emotions first, and then engage the mind, it has more impact. That's why the film was such a word of mouth success' (2010). Emotions conveyed by images would be key to building values as the basis of resistance against dominant discourses that could generate commitment at national level. More precisely, by triggering emotions through identification, artistic experience would open up these moral foundations in the viewer. What

differentiates the emotional load present in *Welcome* from that carried in images of border spectacle is, as in the case of *No Pasaràn, Album souvenir*, a complex deployment of parallel feelings between characters and viewers. There are those experienced by the main Western character towards his wife on one side, and those felt by the main refugee character towards Mina, his girlfriend who lives in England. Both men are about to lose their beloved ones: the Frenchman because, as he himself acknowledges, ashamed, he 'was not able to cross the street to get her back'; and the Kurdish man, who travelled from Iraq, because he is unable to cross the last border to prevent Mina's father from marrying her to a wealthy man. First only interested in helping the refugee to impress his wife, who volunteers to help refugees, the master swimmer befriends the young man and helps him. The courage of the Kurdish guy provokes engagement from the French guy, that in turn, shines upon the French audience and politics. Yet the dramatic construction does not aim, at first, to cause this engagement. Its primary goal is, first and foremost, to set the development of emotions. Once it is settled, by interposed figures of projection, critical thinking and action can arise.

Following Christine Tappolet's research on moral psychology and ethics provides another perspective about the effect of emotions specifically attached to art images. Following her, being aware that emotions conveyed by images are built on perceptions of values would be key to exploring art as a form of resistance against dominant discourses. This process would be especially relevant when art evokes dramatically different lives and pathways. 'In the absence of lived experiences, the attendance of certain works of art – one can think of literary works, but also of pictorial art and the seventh art – can have an impact on the way values are perceived. By identifying with the characters in a novel, the reader relives their emotions. As a result, the reader will have the opportunity to experience emotions that were previously unknown to him. In addition, he will learn in which context such emotions are supposed to be appropriate' (Tappolet 2000: 254).[48] According to Tappolet, far from interfering with the development of critical thinking, emotions attached to the aesthetic experience would constitute a learning tool for viewers and a lever for

[48] From: 'En l'absence d'expériences vécues, la fréquentation de certaines œuvres d'art – on peut penser aux œuvres littéraires, mais aussi à l'art pictural et au septième art – peut avoir un impact sur la façon de percevoir les valeurs. […] En s'identifiant avec les personnages d'un roman, le lecteur revit les émotions de ces derniers. […] Le lecteur aura de ce fait l'occasion d'éprouver des émotions qui lui étaient jusqu'alors inconnues. De plus il apprendra dans quel contexte de telles émotions sont supposées être appropriées'.

the building of moral values. Thus emotions should not be evacuated under the pretence of seeking fallacious reactions in spectators. They can develop to the profit of genuine and concrete interest for migrants, but for this, viewers' capacity for entering the dance of intertwining looks must be trusted. This occurs in *No Pasaràn, Album souvenir*, in which setting up a game of looks *in* the film seems to generate a game of looks *out* of the film.

To summarise, activating viewers' ability for imagination by avoiding turnkey photographs 'insured with a meaning' (Thévoz 2017: 56),[49] appears essential to foster positive opinion towards migrants. Images that are apparently mundane (*Head of Child I and II, From a Distance*), or 'empty' at first sight (*Shoah*; *Le Hangar*) are not meaningless; they have an underlying meaning that will make viewers curious. Similarly, the very material of the image (*One Dollar a Day)*, can multiply the effects of what is displayed. By appealing to a viewer's attention to detail, and, by calling upon her sharpest senses, as in Duchamp's infra thin, insights related to plays on the medium of the image can produce exhilarating effects, close to those provoked when deciphering an enigma. Added to the fright attached to the subject of the image in itself, this combination of feelings acts for a long time in the mind and is naturally thought-provoking. Incorporating autobiographical aspects in documentary films (*Album de Famille*; *No Pasaran, Souvenir Album*), allows characters at the core of the action to connect with viewers' proper feelings and experience. In the field of fiction, elements of the director's own life can be replaced by that of the daily life of fictitious characters, although not heroic figures (*Welcome*) but those to whom spectators can also identify.

In light of these findings, and with a travel bursary in hand, I flew to Malta to direct my own film about exile. I could not afford to scout locations shots, as I was going to the archipelago for the first time.

[49] From: 'assurées d'un sens'.

2. *The People Behind the Scenes*, a film to highlight the collective imaginary of migration

a. Motifs' metamorphic ability to reset the imaginaries

Shot in the middle of the Mediterranean, my feature film was an opportunity to visit the *venue of the event* (Bertho 2008: 1), or in other words, to do field research in the place where the migration 'crisis' occurs. Due to an informal agreement with Italy in 2015, Malta is not a *hotspot* in the same way as the islands of Lampedusa or Lesbos, but migration remains a major issue in the news through the presence of camps and negotiations between sea rescue teams and the Maltese maritime authorities. My film *The People Behind the Scenes* is inspired by *The Lovely May*, a film shot in May 1962 by Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme. This documentary presents a sociological portrait of the Parisian population without questioning the interviewees about the imminence of another major *event*, that of Algeria's independence. By doing so, the directors draw a portrait of the place dedicated to the war of Algeria, at the time called, 'the events of Algeria', in the population's unconscious. In the manner of Marker and Lhomme, delineating the contours of the collective imaginary of migration implied a hidden way of moving forward along the forty or so interviews conducted among residents of the archipelago. During the five weeks of shooting, I never mentioned the subject of my study in my preamble to the interviews. My reasoning was as follows: as explicitly stating the focus of the study was the 'migratory crisis' could trigger a visual universe that could orientate the words of the interviewees, I would not mention it when introducing myself. My first hypothesis was the following: by asking generic questions on current events, today's exiles would gradually appear through a collective 'hollow' portrait. For those interviewed on the occasion of street interviews, the chat was initiated with a topical question such as: 'Is there a current event that has marked you recently?' Then, if the person was of a certain age, I would be interested in the most striking memory of her/his life; if the person had recently moved to Malta, I would ask him about her/his dream. The topic of migration would only be addressed head-on when people had mentioned it on their own (for example by two British tourists), or when the mythological story of Ulysses in the archipelago was addressed.

In this framework, the missing image that the film interrogates is that which shows capsizing boats loaded with refugees, an issue that has been repeated to the point of being superfluous. Failing to show it, I chose to focus on the residue, on what remains in the imagination, once the ebb of the media wave has passed. To achieve this, the film plays on the error of language, known as 'parapraxis', which consists in saying one word for another and revealing the workings of the unconscious. For example, this occurs when Winfried Georg Sebald calls his character Austerlitz instead of Auschwitz (2013). It is this *gap* that draws the common unconscious, for example, between what we expected to hear when a British ornithologist talks about the difficulties of 'migrants' on the island, with birds in mind, or when a Maltese lady says that her family went to Australia by boat and not by plane as one might have expected. These 'side effects' helped me to approach the universal dimension of the condition of exile and allowed me to detect my own beliefs. Intertextuality, namely dialogue with other images of collective and personal memories (Daney 1970; Trias 2013),[50] has been organised, in a triangular way between the archives, the film being made, and the media images. The latter are not shown but yet transpire the relationship between various registers of the image. Besides, from the perspective of going beyond categories and categorisations, *The People Behind the Scenes* questions the classifications against which exiles are apprehended. A confusion between administrative fiction and the complexity of the life courses leading to departures is developed during the interview with a statistician from the EASO. The young man sincerely seeks to put categories of 'expatriate' and 'economic migrant' on an equal footing and to contextualise figures, which, by their nature, cannot be limited to human situations. Here, more than the process of identification, what depicts common destiny is, paradoxically, the elusive path of destinies: the 'other' is not in the category assigned by dominant representations, but he is, as I think myself, located somewhere between resistance to essentialisation and claiming to belong to a group. The 'other', like me, is what the images show of him and, in the same movement, everything they hide from her or him. 'The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue' says novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 'but that they are incomplete' (2009). For showing the complex levels of narrations necessary to draw identities, I opted for two visual approaches.

[50] 'Every film is a palimpsest' ('Tout film est un palimpseste') said Serge Daney (1970: 28).

Firstly, the juxtaposition of images, edited one behind an another, are presented in order to bridge the semiotic universes of mobilities and of representation at large. For example, a shot of theatre balconies succeeds one of a shot of a cruise vessel's cabins. Similarly, a shot of an aquarium containing fish species of Disney Nemo and Doris characters (named by a child in the voice-over), follows underwater footage of fishes surrounding a shipwreck. Furthermore, these juxtapositions echo a critical part of the study by exemplifying the circulation of images that Warburg strived to reveal (Warburg 2012). Secondly, I made the choice of a non-linear narrative for visually translating the many facets of someone's identity in exile. The disturbance sought between sound and images, and between sequences, makes it possible to identify a space 'close to' common sense, in which what we are is related to what is shown, but not only what is shown. In Sebald's novel, Jacques Austerlitz, who ignores his past, nevertheless acknowledges himself confusedly in the history of others. The key notion here is that of the echo, the image that the other person sends me, while s/he is different from me, yet nevertheless sends me back to myself.

Also, having started my study from image typologies that led to a panorama of the migratory 'crisis' consisting only of a few motifs, I decided to rely on their repetition in mainstream media, therefore on the impression they would have left in the retinas. By drawing on the imprint resulting from the repetition of media motifs, the film demonstrates how the repeated exposure to the same images, in this case those representing precarious boats in the Mediterranean, penetrates the imagination.

To understand what he designates as epipylogenesis, Stiegler analyses Alain Resnais' film *Same Old Song*. The philosopher observes that in the film the characters lip-synch popular tunes in such a way that each of the songs '*ventriloquize* the characters at the same time as they *spectralize* the time of the film: they trigger an avalanche of *ghostly returns* [*une avalanche de revenances*]' (2014: 23). What Stiegler questions is the formation of a 'we'. Assuming that popular songs and images would operate in the same manner in the building of the collective imaginary, how could repeated discriminating visual motifs of a section of the population, create, by contrast, a 'we'? At the end of the film screening, Stiegler observes that the songs '*fashion me* long before I cite them. I recite them without knowing that I am citing them, without realizing it. They are interlaced with the time of my consciousness, and without my being aware of it, except when,

as in *Same Old Song*, I realize that in fact *every-one*[51] knows the songs, me included. And that, as such, this 'every' is a 'one' rather than a 'we'[52]: I belong to this neutral, impersonal, and yet so intimate, 'one' (2014: 25). By distilling the repeated motifs of the Google Images typology here and there in my film in other situations (the lifejackets are stored on a shelf, the inflatable boat is abandoned on a beach or in tatters on the rocks), and linking these motifs to Maltese or more widely European migration stories (the myth of Ulysses, my own family history), the paradoxical use I make of these media images, I believe, allows me to create a 'we' in two ways. Firstly, this operates by contrast, from the images of European past exiles. Secondly, this operates by equivalence, by showing that, although incomplete and very furtive in my film, these motifs nonetheless draw a common feeling of exile from the unavoidable motifs of the boat, the lifejacket or the victim, and in so doing make it possible to build bridges between each of the Mediterranean shores.

Visual motifs' aptitude to be transformed when coming into contact with motifs falling from another semiotic field is inspired by the Surrealist collages of Max Ernst and Kurt Schwitters. The latter introduced on the canvas material elements, generally of waste, whose juxtaposition aims both to stimulate the imagination and to question reality. In *Figures of History*, Jacques Rancière analyses the metamorphic dimension of these elements: 'equally capable of being subjects, forms or materials' (2014: 80). This property is exploited in the film when showing a plastic water bottle alternatively as an object for hydration, during an aqua gym sequence, and, a few seconds later, in an abandoned boat. Similarly, other motifs repeated by the media, such as that of rubber boats, lifejackets or the disappearance of little Aylan Kurdi, are also suggested, not to define the exiles once again, but to show, as they move along, a community of destinies. In Surrealist collages, a glued metro ticket, could, for example, represent as much material trace of the time, a rectangle inscribing itself as a puzzle piece in a wider shape, and a line on a white background that structures the composition. The intrinsic polysemy of motifs, which can be both visual and narrative, allows us to navigate from one era to another, and in doing so, this is my assumption, from one exile to another. The use of motifs' metamorphic ability in the film makes it possible to measure, in the same movement, the gap and equivalence of human situations on each side of the borders. Shown in the form of fragments, remains of inflatable boats

[51] 'On' in French.
[52] 'Nous' in French.

are inserted when a narrator explains, in voice-over, that Malta is the ideal setting to host epic films. The genesis of two imaginary worlds is associated here: the one that the archipelago provides for the international productions shot there, and the one of media images that depict the crossings of the Mediterranean. To provoke circulations between these imaginaries, soundtrack is key. Based on field recordings gleaned during a trip around the world without flying, the atmospheric music composed by Victor Lisinski (2013) contributes to bond seemingly unconnected sequences, and, in the process, triggers emotions. It also helps intertwine an interplay of glances. To reveal the dominating gaze on refugees and to somehow 'reset' the imaginaries, I took the decision to not display a single image of them. Yet, their presence is palpable because the film plays on the 'sedimentary deposit' (Stiegler 2014: 35) left by the collective imaginary of migration.

In *Art and illusion: A study in the psychology of pictorial representation*, art historian E.H. Gombrich examines the positioning of the main currents of the history of art vis-à-vis outsider creative forms produced by 'children, untutored adults, and primitives' (1988: 19). Drawing on the studies of Gurlitt Hildebrand and Emmanuel Loewy, Gombrich stresses the role of 'vague memory images' that would influence children 'to represent the human body frontally, horses in profile, and lizards from above'. Specialists on medieval art, such as Julius von Schlosser, and on Renaissance art, such as Aby Warburg, have challenged the idea that artists of these times owe their talents to pure observation. They argued, with supporting evidence of iconographic types, that dependence on tradition was significant, even for works of art considered as naturalistic. 'These images were conceived of as the residue of many sense impressions that had been deposited in the memory and there coalesced into typical shapes, much in the way typical images can be created by the superimposition of many photographs' (Gombrich 1988: 19). Deciphering mental associations born from viewed images is a skill which falls more under dream interpretation than image analysis. This explains the research collaboration between Didi-Huberman, one of the main theorists on Warburg's iconology legacy, and psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida. In one recent essay, *Passer, quoi qu'il en coûte* (To pass, whatever it takes) Didi-Huberman analyses Maria Kourkouta's film *Spectres are haunting Europe,* shot in the Greek refugee camps of Idomeni, in the light of Warburg's scholarship on image's afterlives (Giannari and Didi-Huberman 2017). To describe the feeling conveyed by the atmosphere caught by Kourkouta, the art historian refers to a text by Fédida titled 'The indistinct breath of the image' included in the book *Le site de l'étranger* (The stranger's site): the ghostly emergence of psychical images is like the apparition of those

repressed at the borders who keep coming back to haunt us (Giannari and Didi-Huberman 2017: 57). The periodical resurgence of certain mental images would be similar to the cyclical arrival of exiles. If the thread linking mental images and concrete images is complex to track precisely in unconscious meanders, it can sometimes be explained by the imprint of religious iconology. One historical example of this influence lies in the memoirs of Dorothea Lange.

Mandated by the US federal Resettlement Administration to document the Great Depression, the American photojournalist said about her famous 1936 photograph *The Migrant Mother*: 'I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or history… I knew I had recorded the essence of my assignment' (Lange 1996: 152). In the same way that the iconic Pietà image appears to have influenced photographer Nilüfer Demir when photographing the young Aylan Kurdi in the arms of a Turkish coastguard, Lange seemed to have been attracted by the religious image of Madonna and Child (Wright 2002: 59). Visual studies theorist Terrence Wright observes that: 'she had recognized, in the woman's situation, the potential for a cultural/religious icon and had instinctively captured it on film' (2002: 59). Yet, her recognition is not a conscious phenomenon. Neuroscientists have recently shown during a longitudinal survey that images seen for a few seconds were stored in memory at an implicit level, thereby without conscious access, and could be recognised for twelve years afterwards (Larzabal *et al.* 2018). This cognitive process can explain Lange's and Demir's attraction towards the subjects of their photographs and can connect stories on both sides of the Mediterranean.

b. Film as an heuristic tool for migration research

In 1996, W.J.T. Mitchell decided to subjectify images themselves within a seminal text whose title asked 'What do pictures "really" want?' Mitchell's aim was neither to address the author's intention, nor the viewer's interpretation that would result from it, but to consider images as individuals driven by a proper will. Drawing on our 'magical premodern attitudes towards objects and images' (for example that which prevents us from throwing out family images), Mitchell applies to images the subaltern model as theorised by literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in respect to marginalised populations (1996: 72). In other words, he implements dialectics of power and desire to our relationships with images (1996: 74) which evokes the forthcoming comparison he will make between images and migrants (2004: 14) that I put at the core of this study. For him, pictures 'want neither to be levelled into a "history of images" nor elevated into a "history of art", but to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities' (1996: 82). This argument reinforces my formal decision to attempt to transform 'monument' elements into 'document' elements in the film and vice versa. Avoiding a narrative which encapsulates migrants into a single regime of images opens the possibility to introduce various stories of exile, including that of my own family. I assumed my subjectivity meant acknowledging my own multiple identities and positionalities, as a researcher, an artist and an heir of migration stories. Although filmmaking constitutes a long-established practice in social sciences, especially in anthropology, elevating a film to the level of a critical reflection at first appeared challenging to me.

I was given the opportunity to screen a working version of the film during a seminar of Aix-Marseille University's Institute for Advanced Study. I opened the seminar with a presentation of my research, followed by a screening of *The People Behind the Scenes* and then a questions and answers session. As the seminar approached its end, a sociologist in the audience noticed that some of the elements I introduced before the screening were not overlapping with the film and vice versa. In response, a Film Studies researcher, also present in the audience, answered that developing reflections that could only be transmitted through images was the very purpose of a film. Following this opinion, I consider art, and filmmaking in particular, as a trigger for reflection. The artist establishes a proposition that is fully achieved within the interaction with the

viewer. In this respect, the research process in the arts can be compared to the research process in the sciences: the art production constitutes a space for experimentation which only serves its purpose when in contact with its recipient. The artwork can only be understood in the space between the author and the spectator. In a 1961 address to the American Federation of Arts, Marcel Duchamp designated this relationship under the term 'art coefficient' that he defines as 'an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed' (1961). Without sidestepping the remark of the sociologist, two comments can be made regarding the scientific contribution of the film.

Firstly, a natural consequence of my effort to avoid 'turnkey' images is the implication to propose 'multiple entries' images. The presence of the latter increase the potential ways of understanding each sequence. My artistic research is above all a research on the form, and the film is conceived as a laboratory not only open to the public, but, following Duchamp, also requires the presence of the public to be fully functional: 'the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act' (1961). This connects with Rancière's conception of the image's 'pensiveness', which refers to something in the image 'which resists thought – the thought of the person who has produced it and of the person who seeks to identify it' (2009: 131). Examination of images from a semiotic point of view, namely by isolating the different visual elements of meaning that compose them, influenced me in response to trust spectators' ability to decipher images. I have bet on the spectators's gaze and reflexivity to provide the full dimension of the artistic setting I implemented. For this reason, the theoretical explanations may not recover the film and vice versa, because as soon as it is watched by others, the film no longer belongs to me. It also belongs to each viewer with whom it resonates uniquely.

Secondly, as pointed out by the Film Studies scholar present in the audience in Marseilles, visual contributions in the research scope constitute as such scientific intakes. The language used in the case of filmmaking is organised through the editing process. In *The People Behind the Scenes,* the connotative force of the images is aimed to interface with the accompanying voice-over, as well as with the images and narratives selected in the previous and subsequent sequences. For example, the words of the diving instructor when she describes her feelings when she is under water are echoing, in the following sequence, the choppy underwater footage. A third image, of a mental nature, arises from this combination of words that relates to

disappearances at sea. In a conversation with philosopher Régis Debray, Jean-Luc Godard states that 'There is no image, there are only *images*. And there is a certain form of assembling the images: as soon as there are two, there are three [...] It is the foundation of cinema'[53] (Debray 1998: 430). Quoting these words, Georges Didi-Huberman explains that images and words collide so that a 'thought may take place visually' (2015: 173). This interaction makes film a multidimensional language in which the combination of narratives, footage and music interferes with the viewer's mental universe. As a result, research films cannot be confined to be mere illustrations of academic writing's linear language. This would drastically reduce the multilevel wealth of film language and ignore the impact of this centennial art on the collective imaginary. Historian Antoine de Baecque considers for example that 'no viewer can remain insensitive to the influences that the culture of cinematographic images has on the forms of narrative, writing, research and representation of the world. For example, the ideas of 'editing', 'going back', 'close-up', to name but a few major film forms, have had their place not only in films but in the mental universe for a century' (2018: 37).[54] This influence is even bigger when you are the granddaughter of an artist (my grandfather is a painter and an architect) who documented the daily life of his family through hours of footage. The notion of 'chronotope', coined by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, which refers to the time and space invoked by a setting ('Chronotophe' 2019), captures the reflexivity space created by images. The concept can be exemplified in Godard's cinema.

In his series *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998), Godard overturned usual mental associations by colliding footage as different as a documentary of the Nuremberg trials and a sequence from *Vertigo* by Alfred Hitchcock. For him, the encounter between various images, which according to him 'makes history', causes a spark: 'It builds constellations, stars that move closer or further away, as Benjamin wanted' (2015: 175).[55] Yet, with *The People Behind the Scenes*, my aim was not to diametrically oppose these elements, but to defamiliarise the viewer with new associations by suggesting a meaning *next to* 'common sense'. Building

[53] From: 'Il n'y a pas d'image, il n'y a que des images. Et il y a une certaine forme d'assemblage des images : dès qu'il y en deux, il y a trois […] C'est le fondement du cinéma'.
[54] From: 'aucun spectateur ne peut rester insensible aux influences que la culture des images cinématographiques exerce sur les formes du récit, de l'écriture, de la recherche, de la representation du monde. À titre d'exemples, les idées de "montage", de "retour en arrière", de "gros plan", pour n'énumérer que quelques formes cinématographiques majeures, ont leur place non seulement dans les films mais dans l'univers mental, depuis un siècle'.
[55] From: 'Cela construit des constellations, des étoiles qui se rapprochent ou qui s'éloignent, comme le voulait Walter Benjamin'.

on Catherine Grant's video practice in Screen Studies (Grant and Jacobs, 2018), it meant 'decentering and dismantling' the usual contours of the collective imaginary of migration. The film is thus intentionally sometimes puzzling for the spectator. The aim of editing successively family footage shot in Double 8 film and contemporary images of Malta's inhabitants was to create a chronotope together with fragmented images of today's migrations by the Mediterranean. My idea was to use the few media motifs falling within 'common sense' of the 'crisis' to play on different registers potentially conveyed by documentary images. Rancière distinguishes the register of the 'document', namely documentary images' ability to show reality, and that of the 'monument', understood in the original meaning of the term as anything that bears witness to history (2014: 22–23). His reading of the polysemic nature of documentary images complements Godard's willingness to 'make history' by confronting footage of various origins (including images of fiction) and words. The philosopher clarifies Godard's general statement about the making of a third mental image, by claiming that 'The new history, the history involving "the time of history" (the mid-to-late-nineteenth century), can only maintain what it is saying at the cost of endlessly transforming monuments into documents and documents into monuments' (2014: 23–24). More precisely, Rancière stresses that documentary images enable play on the 'intentional and unintentional' mental associations that can potentially be made by the viewer (2014: 24). In practice in the film, it means for instance that 'monuments' would all be references to past and present history, for example: Ulysses' *Odyssey* (through direct allusions to the story and indirect allusion to Penelope through images of the weaving loom), the commemorative panel at Valletta marking children's disappearances at sea after World War Two, a fashion designer's explanations about successive waves of colonisation in Malta, a location coordinator for film studios descriptions of water tanks' use, an NGO member's report about rescues at sea, and an art teacher's expertise about the impact of images on youth. In *The People Behind the Scenes*, the 'documents' would be personal testimonies such as: old ladies' stories about their families' separations, an artist's questions about the work he pursues in relation to refugees, my family archives of Algeria, and a young lady's confession about her feelings as a resident of an island surrounded by drowned bodies. The film editing juxtaposes these 'monuments' and 'documents' elements on one equal basis through the absence of an explanatory voice-over or banners indicating names or professions. By avoiding the explicit labelling of every sequence, the film facilitates the 'transformation of the monument into a document and of the document into a monument', the interaction between the great

history and the little story, and thus creates a chronotope space for the exiles, the Western audience, and myself.

c. Fostering the exchange of glances between exiles, the Western people I encountered, and myself

Chouliaraki argues that media 'compassion fatigue' can be tackled by coupling viewers and sufferers in one single identity. She summarises media's ability to create these links under the notion of 'chronotopic mobility'. She states: 'Mobility is a key quality of the chronotopicity of emergency, because it enables the spectators to inhabit both spaces – the space where dangerous things happen and the safe space where people like 'us' demonstrate in protest. In conjoining the two space–times, mobility suggests that there is, or there should be, a link of action between the spectators, and the sufferers' (2006: 123). I started to apply this approach to myself.

My Spanish forefathers settled in Algeria at the time when this territory was colonised by France and in doing so, became '*pieds-noirs*'. The geopolitical and social contexts of the communities exiled nowadays by the Mediterranean and those of the 1962 returnees are totally different. However, an initial observation of the repetition of stereotyped motifs in this study was accompanied by that of an impediment: today's border spectacle is *a priori* a form of representation which prevents empathy and that keeps viewers at a distance. Drawing on my own family's experience of exile appeared to be a potential lever to overcome stereotypes carried in today's images of exile. My family images could be a means to thwart today's images of migration and to link theoretical research, practical research, and personal history. It was only several months after the shooting in Malta, a first editing, and long hesitations due to guilt related to the fact of being the bearer of a genealogy that did follow the direction of history, that I chose to integrate family exile into my film. This choice is reflected in the images of my grandfather's departure by boat and plane, as well as in the voice-over in which I adopt the first-person singular. To exploit family images as a potential source of identification for viewers, I had to opt for first-person narrative. I decided that the opening and the closing sequences of the film would be dedicated to inner sight and to confidences to spectators about the object of the travel to Malta. My view was that getting involved personally in the exile's narratives displayed in the film would be a means of identification for the viewers, and to bridge, through me, Western and non-Western narratives of exile. Regarding voice-over direction, I decided to avoid a nostalgic tone, often inherent in

pieds-noirs stories,[56] which, I believe, was counter-constructive to triggering empathy. Opting to create emotion from the association of archive footage/music, I chose Chris Marker's neutral tone, specifically that which the director uses in *Sans soleil* ('Sunless'), a documentary film also dealing with travel through images (1983). I see the choice of first-person singular as the most difficult challenge of *The People Behind the Scenes*. Behind this narrative and technical choice, lies my determination to draw, and perhaps to link, despite very different historical and political circumstances, a common sense of exile.

However, when one's own family embodies a national past that does not pass, namely France's colonial past in Algeria, calling for a shared feeling with those who suffer the repercussions of exploitation policies, particularly exploitation of natural resources that have since been perpetuated, is a dangerous exercise. To address this challenge, I decided to make Annette Messager's statement my own. When interviewed on the occasion of Centre Pompidou's retrospective of her work in 2007, she said: 'An artist must be universal and at the same time deep within himself, individual. I believe that the more individual we are, the more universal we are' (Pagé and Parent 2007, 19).[57] Nevertheless, from the individual to the anecdotal, there is only one step, or rather one misstep, that I tried to avoid. I was helped in this by an awareness that came when I was back from the shooting in Malta. While viewing my digitised family archives again, I realised that, on many occasions, I had chosen to film situations or objects in the archipelago that had been precisely filmed by my grandfather in Algeria. All in all, it was quite natural: these family archives constituted my imagination of exile, and I instinctively left in search of images that were present in my memory. This led to the adoption of a process. I decided to structure the film around these twin images (those of today and those of yesterday), by displaying them one after the other. I gave titles to these reminiscences, as many chapters of an imaginary research method that would have for its theme the pursuit of images of exile. This dialogue is also an acknowledgement of the anachronic dimension of images: the archive images announce today's images. Both formats of images have their function. Digital images are intended for the sequences shot today, and the Double 8 footage, displaying family archives, are associated with a more introspective and intimate tone.

[56] See for example, the filmography of Alexandre Arcady.
[57] From : 'Un artiste doit être universel et en même temps au plus profond de lui-même, individuel. Je crois que, plus on est individuel, plus on est dans l'universalité'.

As reflected by film theorist Jean-François Trias when discussing Henri-François Imbert's use of silver film: 'Argentique film is the format of subjectivity' (Trias 2015: 19).[58] I decided to acknowledge the influence of my own imaginary of migration through my family film images. In this way, *The People Behind the Scenes* constitutes an act of contestation against the rhetoric of objectivity generally attached to migration research, and a means to position myself as an 'implicated subject', to create 'long-distance solidarity' and new 'alliances' (Rothberg 2019: 12, 21) with today's migrants.

Considering the various strength of evocation of film supports incorporated – namely family archives, contemporary high-definition images, videos taken on mobile phones, and YouTube video footage – the contours of the collective imaginary of migration by the Mediterranean are delineated through the semiotic and semantic connection between the visual and auditory motifs gathered along the shooting. Dealing with the circulation of images, the structure of the film is built on the dialogue of the images, like Imbert's work on the 'interstices' between the pictures (Schweigl 2013: 38). In a seminal monograph published in 2001, film researcher Hamid Naficy presents how personal experiences of exile and diaspora are translated into film. Although experience of expatriation varies considerably from one person to another, the Iranian researcher, who teaches in California, shows that these films have stylistic similarities. Those he calls 'accented directors' are 'are not just textual structures or fictions within their films; they also are empirical subjects, situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices, who exist outside and prior to their films' (2001: 4).

As the first generation of my family to be born in mainland France, I did not directly experience exile, but my identity was built, however, in the feeling of being exterior to French society, and my film was made with the same informal production and distribution means as those described in Naficy's essay. Seeing that I can be considered as an 'Accented Director', I placed my own 'interstitial' positioning in relationship with the interstice between images experimented by Henri-François Imbert (Schweigl 2013: 38). Driven by the will to put into practice Mitchell's incentive to associate migrants and images, I connect, through the use of

[58] From: 'La pellicule argentique est le format de la subjectivité'.

my own voice-over and of personal images, two in-between situations: that conveyed by the juxtaposition of images of various formats, and that of my family positioning between the two shores of the Mediterranean. As far back as I can remember, my parents and grandparents have described Algeria as a lost paradise to which their youth would forever be attached. This feeling is reinforced by the analysis of the family films my grandfather made in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By exhuming and digitising these images to make them the material of my creations, I made an act of personal archaeology. They can be seen as many short silent films that witness a vanished world. For Portuguese director Miguel Gomes, family films are similar to archaic cinema. In an interview with Cyril Neyrat transcribed in the DVD of his film *Tabu*, Gomes describes screenings of family films prior to the shooting: 'I have seen picnics, walks, birthdays... It really looked like silent movies. These home-movies from the 1960s are a kind of primitive cinema. When I looked at them, I had the feeling I was seeing a sunken world, looking at ghosts' (Gomes 2013).[59] My perception of my parents' homeland is a composite image of numerous relatives' accounts, photographs and family films which, combined altogether, shape an inconsistent portrait of Algeria. When watching the digitised Double 8 films of my grandfather, I recognise those that are mine, but they evolve in a bygone era, and on a land that is unknown to me. 'It is therefore not surprising that descendants often have a relatively confused picture of their parents' country. In any case, Algeria is never conceived as the place of their own history. It is another world, that of their parents, which is foreign to them, the place of a suffering, sometimes unbearable' (Baussant 2002: 435). [60] The tangible feeling I inherited is one of regret at best, of bitterness at worst, born of discrepancy between the image of the exploiting settler portrayed in public opinion, and the reality of small traders and workers that was their own. In 1955, Albert Camus observed in the newspaper *L'Express:* 'Between the metropolis and the French in Algeria, the gap has never been greater. To speak first of the metropolis, everything happens as if the fair trial, finally done in our country to the policy of colonization,

[59] From: 'J'ai vu des pique-niques, des promenades, des anniversaires... Ça ressemblait vraiment au cinéma muet. Ces home-movies des années 1960 sont une sorte de cinéma primitif. En les regardant, j'avais la sensation de voir un monde englouti, de regarder des fantômes'.
[60] From: 'Rien d'étonnant dès lors à ce que les descendants souvent, aient une image relativement confuse du pays de leurs parents. Dans tous les cas, l'Algérie n'est jamais conçue comme le lieu de leur propre histoire. C'est un autre monde, celui de leurs parents, qui leur est étranger, le lieu d'une ascendance en souffrance, parfois insupportable'.

had been extended to all the French people who live there. Reading a certain press, it really seems that Algeria is populated by a million whip and cigar settlers, mounted on Cadillac' (1958: 139).[61]

Embodying a colonial past that does not pass, the *'pieds-noirs*' newcomers are gradually perceived and described as a homogeneous mass and encapsulated in a few clichés. Fiona Barclay notes that press articles rarely give them a voice and that absence of personal details does not facilitate identification (2015: 201).[62] In Marseilles in particular, public services are overwhelmed by the massive arrival of returnees. Only 90,000 of them, out of 450,000, are cared for by the authorities, says historian Jean-Jacques Jordi (L'Obs, 2012). Echoing the opinion of his constituents, the mayor, Gaston Defferre, publicly declared 'Let them readapt elsewhere' (Paris-Presse, L'Intransigeant 1962). On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Algeria's independence, Jordi also describes the animosity to which *'pieds-noirs*' people are subjected: 'The communists immediately displayed strong hostility towards the repatriates from Algeria, collectively accused of being so many big capitalists, racists who had "suer le bournous" [exploited the workforce], and deserved what happened to them' (L'Obs 2012).[63] The historian reports that dockworkers affiliated to the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) trade union painted banners on the harbour claiming: 'Pieds-noirs, go home' or 'Pieds-noirs by the sea' (L'Obs 2012).[64]

As bearer of this heavy legacy and experience of exile, I had to untangle registers of reality and of fiction. It was necessary to synchronise the happy faces of my grandfather's silent films with the oral transmission of stories about latent fear and bitterness. After believing in the fiction of a territory converted to European staging, my people had to open its eyes to an environment that had become hostile. For anthropologist Dominique Casajus, the fiction to which French people in Algeria would have succumbed would be that of French Algeria: 'It is a fiction in which they have been made to believe, in which they still persist in believing

[61] From: 'Entre la métropole et les Français d'Algérie, le fossé n'a jamais été plus grand. Pour parler d'abord de la métropole, tout se passe comme si le juste procès, fait enfin chez nous à la politique de colonisation, avait été étendu à tous les Français qui vivent là-bas. À lire une certaine presse, il semblerait vraiment que l'Algérie soit peuplée d'un million de colons à cravache et cigare, montés sur Cadillac'.

[62] She notes, 'In the face of such numbers, the tone changed subtly: reports of the difficulties of accommodating the rapatriés segued into discussions of the "problem" of the rapatriés themselves' (Barclay 2015: 201).

[63] From: 'Les communistes ont d'emblée affiché une forte hostilité à l'égard des rapatriés d'Algérie, collectivement accusés d'être autant de gros capitalistes, de racistes qui avaient fait « suer le burnous », et méritaient ce qui leur arrivait'.

[64] From: 'Pieds-noirs, rentrez chez vous', 'Les pieds-noirs à la mer'.

despite, for some of them, intermittent lucidity quickly repressed because, seen from the face of it, reality becomes too bitter. What was called French Algeria, with its Haussmann-style streets, its monuments to the dead of our two wars, its small churches with bell towers so similar to those of the villages of the metropolis, all this has never been more than a setting. Real Algeria was behind the scenes, it had remained Arab, Muslim, irredentist and hostile, and they persisted in not seeing it' (Casajus 2009: 284-286).[65]

Considering colonialism as the setting of an imperialist fiction is fruitful for understanding the rejection of the *pied-noirs* who personified the former puppets of a power which could no longer perform a play. It also explains the gap between the fantasised memories of my family, and the dire reality of the war of independence they experienced. For *Tabu*, shot in Mozambique, the last territory of Africa under European colonial domination, the fictional regime imagined by Gomes is that of a black and white Africa from a novel, conceived in the light of Hollywood, featuring stories of explorers and of Tarzan. The Portuguese filmmaker decided to invent characters who make films for themselves, 'who live a kind of dysfunctional *Out of Africa*, denying the reality of things. Like Portugal, which wanted to keep its colonies at all costs when it had become impossible' (Regnier 2012).[66] In this blind waltz, those who cross the Mediterranean are certainly those, yesterday or today, who evoke a colonial past that does not pass, but thanks to whom, the sequence as a whole appears true. Applying the framework of fiction to understand migratory policies in the Mediterranean seemed even more relevant in Malta, a territory of successive colonisations, today entirely dedicated to tourism and to the reception of film shootings, especially of shipwreck scenes.

[65] From: 'C'est une fiction à laquelle on leur a fait croire, à laquelle ils s'obstinent à croire encore malgré, pour quelques-uns d'entre eux, des intermittences de lucidité vite réprimées car, vue en face, la réalité devient trop amère. Ce qu'on appelait l'Algérie française, avec ses rues de style haussmannien, ses monuments aux morts de nos deux guerres, ses petites églises aux clochers si semblables à ceux des villages de la métropole, tout cela n'a jamais été qu'un décor. L'Algérie réelle était derrière le décor, elle était restée arabe, musulmane, irrédentiste et hostile, et ils se sont obstinés à ne pas la voir'.

[66] From: 'qui vivent une sorte de *Out of Africa* dysfonctionnel, en niant la réalité des choses. À l'image du Portugal qui voulait garder ses colonies à tout prix quand c'était devenu impossible'.

3. The cognitive frame of cinema, a tool for addressing migratory policies in the Maltese context

Building on his study of Freudian and Jungian theories about mythology, philosopher Irving Singer designates film as the ultimate medium for mythmaking. He explores 'the hidden as well as overt use, in various films, of major myths that structure and pervade the affective and cognitive lives that people have led in the past and in the present' (Singer 2008: 1). The main assumption of the following analysis is to consider the mythmaking dimension of films, and more broadly the framework of fiction, as an heuristic tool with which to interpret migratory policies in the Mediterranean area.

Keeping in view Tom Mitchell's analogy between migrants and images, a set of three reasons, ranging from general to specific, are making the Maltese archipelago an ideal place for fostering myths through films. Firstly, the Mediterranean landscape, in which Malta enters the scene, appears not only as the theatre of migratory displacements, but also as a maritime basin that hosts about a third of the world's tourism. The landscape and architecture of this entire maritime basin is designed to correspond to a *cliché* shaped by decades of mass tourism: that of a postcard capturing blond sandy beaches in the background of which the blues of the sky and the sea merge. Maltese film researcher Charlie Cauchi thus notices about foreign film productions settling in the archipelago, that 'Malta's anatomy is often used to accentuate its exoticism' and exploited for the 'standard myth of the idyllic Mediterranean setting' (Borg and Cauchi 2015: 7). Secondly, the Maltese archipelago is believed by its population to have truly welcomed Ulysses, the hero in Greek mythology, in particular at Gozo island that is known to be the place where the king of Ithaca will settle for seven years, seduced by the nymph Calypso. During the interviews I conducted, Alda Bugeja, the last weaver of Gozo island, mentioned that she had manufactured a Calypso costume for the local carnival, and Professor of Classics and Maritime Archaeology Timmy Gambin, who investigates the seabed in search of ancient shipwrecks, explained that the *Odyssey* was his bedside table book. Thirdly, by investigating Malta's film studios, *The People Behind the Scenes* also shows how the archipelago's territory became a product placement at the service of the global film industry which contributes to dispossessing the population from its history. In response to the successive foreign occupations to which it has been subjected, this Mediterranean territory has put itself at the service of foreign fictions to the point of no longer existing,

except through them. Tax incentives have allowed development of the film industry on the archipelago, which is the stage for international productions such as *Games of Thrones*, *Troy* and *Gladiator*. With a view to tourism, Maltese scenery has been made available for film productions, in particular for the production of shipwreck scenes. For visitors, it is thus possible to visit the theme park village of *Popeye* or, as one film researcher interviewed in the film indicates, to sunbathe on the beach of *By the Sea*, Angelina Jolie's film. Besides, Maltese studios offer the world's largest water tanks, in which, for example, a version of the Titanic's history has been filmed. In general, actions depicted in films shot in Malta take place at different times and in different regions, with the exception of the island of Malta as such. In the end, the economy, the landscape and the population adapt to its foreign fictions, but Malta is not chosen as the protagonist of the stories that are played out there, which makes Cauchi see her country as 'a veritable blank canvas' and 'a surrogate for other places' (Cauchi 2015: 6).

The interviews I conducted throughout the shooting constituted an opportunity to discover a story specific to Maltese history. The massive destruction caused by the Second World War and the resulting economic recession led the Maltese Government to institutionalise a migration programme to send children from large families to English-speaking countries, including Australia. By inserting in the same sequence a close-up of a commemorative plaque of the children's exodus by boat and a motif of a contemporary migrant boat, the film editing creates connections with current migrations and with a history that is proper to Malta. Combined with foreign invasions that succeeded one another in the archipelago until its independence in 1964, the features mentioned above – exoticism, underlying mythological dimension, blank canvas and surrogate – all establish Maltese territory as an imaging material, open to all fantasies, whether they would be military or cinematographic. In addition, all these notions can also be transferred to Western exploitation of today's exiles. Returning to Mitchell's theorisations allows us to bond these two perspectives on Malta and on migrants, and to think of the cognitive frame of cinema as a means to address migratory policies. For Mitchell, images should be thought of as humans: 'How seriously are we to take the notion that images are like persons or that they are more generally like living things, organisms that move, circulate, proliferate, reproduce, settle and move on?' (2004: 15). Building on this resemblance relationship, if media images of migrants would be humans, they would be considered as 'second-class individuals' and, conversely, if

migrants were images, the current media coverage would make them second-class images, as stereotyped images are. In Malta, like anywhere in the European continent, migrants, whose exploitation in the agricultural sector and surveillance in the field of high technology are currently supporting our economies, would allow official national narratives to exist. The phenomenon is not new, though.

World War Two refugees housed in Cinecittà in the post-war period gradually took the place of extras during the filming that took place there (Bertozzi 2012). The Italian studios suspended their operations at the end of the Second World War to host refugees from the Italian colonies in Libya, survivors of the Battle of Monte Cassino, exiles from Istria and Dalmatia and Jewish survivors of the camps. To immerse spectators in my investigation and discoveries, I indicate in the voice-over that when the studios relaunched their activity, refugees were the first to be recruited as extras in the films, as in the epic, *Quo Vadis*, which was nominated for an Oscar for the best film to the glory of Deborah Kerr and Peter Ustinov (Bertozzi 2012). 'The figure of the extra', notes Marie-José Mondzain, 'operates as an indicator of credibility that gives the star and the story their place in the real factory of our history. An index of reality, without a name, without glory or history, it alone perhaps gives fiction its support and determines its plan for inscribing itself in a sensitive reality, both historical and filmed' (2011: 289).[67] Based on this intuition, between 200 and 300 asylum seekers tried, in vain, to interrupt a play at Comédie Française on Sunday 16 December 2018. The exiles intended to call on Éric Ruf, the theatre administrator, to intervene on their behalf with the French Minister of the Interior (Le Figaro 2018). If asylum seekers turn to the administrator of this public theatrical institution, it may be because, confusingly, they perceive the spectacular dimension of the migration regime staged by a necessarily fictional democracy, since it claims to be concerned about human rights and yet defines and sustains their exclusion. To gather in front of an establishment, that for more than 300 years has officially provided a place for the 'human comedy', was therefore logically the place to go in order to try to interfere in a social game in which they have no place. 'To be an extra', says Didi-Huberman, is 'to be there so as not to appear, to melt into the mass, to serve no purpose, except at the bottom of the story, in the drama,

[67] From : 'La figure du figurant […] opère en fait comme indice de crédibilité qui confère à la star et au récit leur place dans le tissu réel de l'histoire, lui seul donne peut-être à la fiction son appui et détermine son plan d'inscription dans une réalité sensible, à la fois historique et filmée'.

in the action' (2012: 151)[68] as evidenced by the images of crowded boats and endless queues of people. The supporting role of migrants can thus be suppressed when deemed not essential by the media scene management.

Lampedusa's official commemorations of the 3 October 2013 tragedy, in which 358 people lost their lives on the island's shorelines, has been accurately described by Federica Mazzara as a revealing moment of border spectacle's deployment (2019: 91–92). In 2014, for the first-year commemoration of the shipwreck, Italian institutions enacted a commiseration show under RAI TV cameras. Pope Francis, several celebrities including Hollywood actor Richard Gere, and the Coast Guards team took part in the event. The parade did not mention the authority's negligence in responding on time to a distress call emanating from a vessel situated 500 metres from land (Le Monde 2013), nor did the ceremony include any genuine rescuers whose call for the Coast Guards' responsibility in the disaster were not answered.[69] Funerals organised the day after the tragedy also fell in line with authorities' overplayed pity. Meron Estefanos and Father Mussie Zerai, two Eritreans who assisted families of Eritrean victims after the disaster, described the funeral as a 'gimmick arranged for the convenience of politicians' and bear witness to the fact that no survivors, the majority of whom were mourning relatives, were permitted to attend the ceremony (2019: 85, 86). Left off-camera when being extras in film productions, migrants are maintained off-camera in national narratives even when they are the main protagonists in the action game. For writer Niki Giannari, they are surfaces of projections of what is perceived as 'Other': 'they pass and envisage us'[70], she states (Giannari and Did-Huberman, 2017:

[68] From: 'Être figurant: être là pour ne pas comparaitre, pour être fondu dans la masse, pour ne servir à rien, sauf au fond de l'histoire, au drame, à l'action'.

[69] Mazzara (2019: 86) reproduced the letter, written by the eight people who provided assistance to the distressed boat, that was sent to Lampedusa municipality as it is was recorded as an open letter by Askavusa local association. See 'Il naufragio della verità', https://askavusa.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/lampedusa-3-ottobre-2013-il-naufragio-della-veritc3a0-askavusa-2018.pdf [Accessed 23 July 2019]: 'We strongly refuse to take part in any commemoration ceremony organised by the municipality of Lampedusa. As soon as the fact happened and in the following year, we have not been consulted or not even listened to by the mayor, Giusi Nicolini. As a consequence, we do not accept the invitation of the municipality to take part in the ceremony […]. This refusal is addressed to the institutions with full respect of the victims, the survivors and their families. We prefer to remain in our silence and would have preferred if the institution had kept on doing the same; a silence they carried out for twelve months from the day of the tragedy, and that is now broken by a ceremony that is meant to fuel an instrumentalised media spectacle, as well as by useless and costly parades of politicians. Our commemoration remains private, as it has been from the day of the tragedy up until today'.

[70] Personal translation, with the help of Louise Duckling of 'Ils passent et ils nous pensent'.

21). When giving his director's camera to Kurdish refugees in Sangatte, Imbert also seemed to share this perception (2003). On Calais beach facing the English coast, the exiles turn the lens of Imbert's camera towards nearby shores. Their gesture shows both their willingness to appropriate images of exile, and an intuitive feeling of the institutional *setting* which surrounded them.

In the shooting of *The People Behind the Scenes*, this perspective led to the selection of the interviewees. Of the approximately forty interviews I conducted in various locations of the archipelago, the words of Maltese inhabitants were collected either through street interviews, or through appointments. Having in mind a cognitive framework of fiction for addressing migrations guided me to select them. The protaganists of the film had to fall in one of the two following categories. First, interviews were carried out with people connected to the topic of migration and mobility at large; for example, I interviewed a statistician from the European agency for asylum seekers, members of American NGO MOAS, which was the first to operate rescues at sea, or tourists circulating along Mediterranean shores. Second, I was interested in meeting people whose activity is related to the notion of 'representation' in the broadest sense, such as a designer of haute couture clothing, the last weaver in the archipelago, and the person in charge of renting film studios. What has emerged from these encounters is that the statistician oriented his explanations on the importance of accompanying figures to narratives; members of MOAS described the impact of Aylan Kurdi's photographs on their work, and the pictures they had to take onboard of the rescue ship; last, the tourists interviewed (Melvin, the father, is a cameraman) associated migrations in the Mediterranean with its media treatment. Regarding the interviewees related to the sphere of 'representation', the fashion designer happened to dedicate her work to Malta's history, in particular the successive settlements to which the island has been subjected. The weaver insisted on the way her family had been spread by exile, and the location coordinator of the film studios focused his presentation on the capacity of the Rinella studios to stage shipwreck scenes. Without premeditation, both strands of my study were thus intertwined in the words of the people I encountered. If, following Debord's conception of the spectacle mentioned in the opening of the present thesis, 'spectacle is not a set of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (1995: 19), social relationship born from border spectacle acts deep down in the minds to intertwine

migration and representation by bonding mental images associated with both topics, especially in the Maltese environnement.

A member of the European Union since 2004, the archipelago not only shares with exiles the capacity to be an imaging medium. In the same manner that migrants are the people behind the European scene, Malta appears to be the country behind Brussels' official Community space. In terms of its economy, Malta is the sole tax haven featured in the Paradise Papers scandal to be located within the Schengen Area. The country not only sheltered financial arrangements designed to circumvent Community VAT rules, but in the 'Malta Files' scandal, it also used its status as an EU member to accommodate large groups and wealthy private clients for tax purposes, allowing them to evade taxation in their own territories. In terms of representation, Malta is home of the Manoel Theatre, built in 1731 and one of the oldest stages on the continent, whose balconies can be seen in the film when one of the tourists says that migrants are the 'people behind the scenes'. A bearer of myths conveyed since antiquity, the country overly stages obedience to the Catholic religion, through gigantic processions. In sum, the set of three small islands is a chameleon to attract tourists, film productions and to accommodate overseas investors from the biggest EU member states. In the Maltese context, the connection between the fields of migration and of images materialised through the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Malta houses Swiss lawyer and businessman Christian Kälin's company Henley & Partners, whose purpose is to trade European citizenship through Maltese naturalisation in exchange for subscription to treasure bonds. Kälin's company, which employs 300 people, has created a 'passport index' to compare the benefits of each nationality in terms of visa-free travel around the world (Michel and Chastand 2018). The firm's flagship programme is the Maltese passport. As citizenship is granted in exchange for investment in the economy, or single payments to the state treasury (Brunner 2017),[71] the Maltese naturalisation programme yielded a transfer of one billion euros in the two years after its launch. On the way, Henley & Partners gains 4% commission, namely, ten times more than for licensed bond dealers (Brunner 2017). In 2017, Caruana

[71] Passport applicants must, among other things, purchase 150,000 euros worth of government bonds. See Brunner (2017).

Galizia was murdered for having denounced the links between Kälin and the local authorities. At each end of the social hierarchy, the passport market concerns two kinds of antithetical exiles: those purchasing them to save their lives, and those purchasing them for tax optimisation. For the migrants, having no money to afford a 'good' citizenship is the ultimate destitution, more so than having no political status. Caruana Galizia's investigation exemplifies one manifestation of the border migratory regime that seems symptomatic of the functioning of the European economy at large.

The Schengen borders cover a political and economic area of 26 states whose most advanced integration occurs in goods' standardisation. What is the influence of this institutional background in the understanding of actual images and policies applied to migrants? To sketch out an answer implies the need to pay attention to the societal phenomenon of commodification, which contributes to Mitchell's resemblance relationship between images and migrants, and which also affects the Western gaze.

The commodification of images

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin criticised the 'instrumentalisation' of images for commercial purposes. He deplored the loss of aura affecting works of art, especially the emerging genre of cinema. 'The screen actor is conscious, all the while he is before the camera, that in the final analysis he is dealing with the audience: the audience of consumers who constitute the market' (Benjamin 1935: 9). The art historian prophesied the consequences of the process that the author of *Propaganda* (1928) and father of public relations, Edward L. Bernays, was engaging in at the same time on the other side of the Atlantic: the images' adaptation to the market's needs, and their deployment and equivalence at its service, that implied the same narratives should be used to sell washing machines and politicians. Later, the conquest of human attention and the human gaze became particularly apparent when marketing speeches took up the counterculture movement as a new consuming paradigm (Thomas 1997: 133). Since Andy Warhol and Salvador Dalí's first contributions to consumer goods' advertisements, some creators clearly accepted that the art sphere's potential for subversion might be instrumentalised for commercial purposes (Thomas 1997: 141). The media field, which is the main broadcaster of animated and still images, also does not escape from

this logic, all the more so because that system of information is what shapes viewers' collective imaginary, or to put it like Rancière, their 'common sense' (2009, 102). The philosopher defines the notion as 'a community of sensible data, things whose visibility is supposed to be shared by all, modes of perception of these things, and the equally shareable meanings that are conferred on them' (2009: 102). In the days of digital propagation of content, Rancière's 'commodity law of equivalence' (2009: 29) determines that globalised market forces, which standardise differences and unify peculiarities into simplified versions of reality, make content easier to memorise for the consumer-viewer. This context led media expert Susan D. Moeller to state about news stories in the United States: 'One dead fireman in Brooklyn is worth five English bobbies, who are worth 50 Arabs, who are worth 500 Africans' (1999: 22). What Le Brun designates as a 'subjugation of the looks'[72] (2018: 133) marks the ultimate triumph of the market value over potential contestations. Understanding the epistemological contribution of the field of images and in particular that of cinema to migration research entails bearing in mind the economic nature of the relationships of the European *common* market within the Mediterranean region.

The commodification of migrants

Before the historical foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community and then of the European Economic Community, the Mediterranean space had been the stage of an intense trade exchange carried out on its sea routes. 'Competition (which is one of the most striking of the modern era) has reached a singular intensity very early on in the Mediterranean [...] In no region of the globe has such a variety of conditions and elements been so closely brought together, such wealth created and renewed time and time again' (Valery 1963: 256).[73] If the Mediterranean Basin seems to have been at the forefront of the formation of capitalism, 'the history of capital is however inextricable from the history of Atlantic chattel slavery' (Sharpe 2016: 5). In the Mediterranean area, early developments in the fifteenth century of trade exchanges were accompanied with slavery practices (Kaiser 2008, 1). The history of insurance at sea began at the same time.

[72] From: 'regard assujetti'.
[73] From: 'La concurrence (qui est un des très les plus frappants de l'ère moderne), a atteint de très bonne heure, en Méditerranée, une intensité singulière [...] En aucun région du globe, une telle variété de conditions et d'éléments n'a été rapprochée de si près, une telle richesse créée et maintes fois renouvelée'.

The association between migrants and capitalism (Armstrong 2004: 167–168), or more precisely, 'the slave's status as object-commodity', or as a 'purely economic cargo' appears to be rooted in transatlantic slavery that is, for Katherine McKittrick, 'a numerical moment' (McKittrick 2014: 17, 20). The association of today's migrants with one main historical pillar of European wealth is therefore valid for trade in the Mediterranean region which witnessed, with new-born capitalism, the beginning of both slave and insurance practices. The genealogy of today's violence of economic capital would originate from violence against an African population subjected to slavery. At a macro-economic level, migration fuels Western economies. The Migrants' Files (TMF), a team of journalists from fifteen European countries, estimated that a total of €11.3bn had been spent between 2000 and 2015 for achieving Europe's closed immigration policy (2016). An entire technology and surveillance market has grown up from this policy. TMF counted that 39 research and development projects have been financed by the European Union from 2002 to 2013, with a total funding cost of 225 million euros. The development of fingerprint scanners, migrant-detecting drones and vehicles, satellite surveillance, as well as overground and underwater border patrol robots, compose this growing sector. The 28 member states, plus Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland, have spent together at least 11.3 billion euros ($12.8b) on deportations since 2000. This economy swells at the same pace as an unregistered economy. According to TMF, smugglers have benefited by at least €16bn spent by migrants between 2000 and 2015 to come to Europe. The migrants' workforce appears to be at the heart of a developing market all over the Mediterranean Basin. In the south of Spain, around 40,000 migrants are employed illegally to work in the greenhouses forming a vast 'plastic sea' (Gasser and Barrère 2017) that extends the Mediterranean. In Corsica, migrants are paying 6000 to 10,000 euros to come to work in fruit tree plantations. Not to mention the revenues from illegal employment. In Spain, as well as in Corsica, these 'modern-day serfs' (Albertini 2018) are living, in the best of cases, in huts designed with remains of plastic wrapping, or in converted cold rooms grouped in European slums. Subsidised European agriculture, as well as cleaning (in particular industrial cleaning) and food service, are several economic fields that are kept running thanks to a migrant workforce. In the case of the *Poniente Almeriense*, in Spain's Southern region, the highest concentration of greenhouses in the world is supported by undocumented migrants who help to feed European countries (Maxell 2017). A 2012 OECD survey shows that this parallel economy accounted for 19% of European GDP: 2,175 billion euros. In Libya, at the gateway of the Central Mediterranean route to Europe, within a

context of political instability and a degraded economy, the country is led under the reign of militias practising large-scale trafficking in human beings. This activity could represent a ‘turnover’ of $350 million in revenue in 2016 (Vincent 2017).

Fig. 60 The Migrant Files, *The Money Trail* visualisation.

Stronger than political borders, the market's powerful and invisible reign shares humans in two categories: the insiders who implicitly accepts its domination and the outsiders who need to make themselves into goods to have a chance to join it. In 1951, the year when the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was signed, Hannah Arendt wrote: 'If a human being loses his political status, he should, according to the implications of the inborn and inalienable rights of man, come under exactly the situation for which the declarations of such general rights provided. Actually, the opposite is the case […] It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as fellow-man' (1951: 300). If Arendt's statement is more than ever relevant today with regard to migrants, it also more subtly affects Western populations.

The commodification of the Western gaze

The massive amount of money spent on sensing technologies aiming to detect migrants does not prevent the Mediterranean Sea from being a lethal passage for migrants. In the case of rescue at sea, various scenarios are possible to visualise and rescue migrants. The Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Rome can receive a call from a satellite phone and send a Frontex plane or ship to check their position. Sometimes, Frontex airplane pilots can also alert the MRCC which will send an NGO ship. NGOs rescuing people in distress in the Mediterranean, such as SOS Méditerranée, are taking action following the instructions of the MRCC. Lastly, although having radar, the members of the NGOs can simply scan the horizon through binoculars and directly intervene. Antoine Laurent indicates that he prefers scrutinising the Mediterranean with simple binoculars. 'I prefer to have them in the centre of my binoculars, closer to my mouth that will give the order to head towards them, to get them out of this Libyan hell once for all'.[74]

[74] From: 'Je préfère les avoir au centre de mes jumelles, au plus proche de ma bouche qui donnera l'ordre de faire route sur eux, pour les sortir une bonne fois pour toute de cet enfer libyen'. Quoted from unpublished 2017 draft of Laurent's *Journal* (2021).

Fig. 61 Ultan Molloy, screen capture from the documentary *The migrant crisis frontline*, BBC News, 2016.

At the same time in the business world, neuro-marketing studies the eye's movements on images, in order to detect and exploit emotions that are attached to them. To this end, '*Tobii Pro Glasses*' have been designed as an eye tracking solution to determine motifs which are generating buying decisions. Companies using these high-technology glasses analyse the successive points of focus of the look on consumer products to understand what particular colour, inscription or motif could have attracted the buyer's attention, and thus generate the act of purchase (Hermann 2012). With the help of neuroscience, these companies assume that analysing the gaze is analysing the brain. Repeated confrontation with a brand (with its logo and the imagery associated with it) contributes to installing a 'reward circuit' in the brain. From then on, the brand instantly solicits a neurotransmitter, dopamine, which enhances actions considered beneficial to providing pleasure by activating a sort of 'reward system' in the brain (Schaefer and Rotte 2007).[75] The mechanism occurs in a closed circuit: when the consumer's eyes come across the brand motif, this image immediately causes a molecule of pleasure, reinforcing the opinion that he craves for it. In the meanwhile, in the Mediterranean, exiles attempt to attract these eyes on their plight. As Laurent deplores: 'What could be more inhuman than to let them drown while they seek to attract us with their gaze?'[76]. At the time when human emotions are

[75] A hormonal reaction located in the *caudate nucleus* of the limbic system (see Schaefer and Rotte 2007).
[76] From: 'Quoi de plus inhumain que de les laisser se noyer pendant qu'ils nous cherchent du regard ?'. Quoted from unpublished 2017 draft of Laurent's *Journal* (2021).

tracked to gain market shares, those whose appearance is not designed to stimulate reward circuits, by triggering the molecule of pleasure, are left to the Mediterranean depths. In the same way that the confirmation bias, namely the repeated exposure to a brand reinforces the view on a trademark, the repetition of a narrow range of motifs contributes to 'brand' the migrants as either humanitarian items to rescue or menacing figures to repel. With the support of duplicated media motifs, border spectacle's sovereignty aligns any expression of denunciation to one and the same process in which a 'critical system presents itself as a luxury commodity pertaining to the very logic it denounces' (Rancière 2009: 30). Although circulating, the exiles are compelled to a closed-circuit business in which their lives determine the market value. Within an environment where human eyes are manipulated for the purpose of selling, human gazes located outside of the purchase field are the subject of sales. To dare a bad pun, the era of eye tracking is also that of human trafficking.

Conclusion

During one screening of *The People Behind the Scenes* at the Collège de France, a professor of cinema asked me what the film had brought to my theoretical research. Listening to the narratives of the interviewees, in particular by one passenger of a cruise liner, first gave me the title of the film. Starting from this, the making of the film led me to consider Western democracies as a place in which citizens in compliance with migratory policies would be the main actors, and individuals considered as illegal would remain extras. This awareness not only confirmed the choice of filmmaking practice to explore the relationships between images and migrants, it also highlighted two contrasted regimes of images: the one that would apply to those with documentation, and the one that would apply to those without documentation. Drawing on Mitchell, images would be half-objects, half-fantasies and migrants half-objectified, half-fantasised. The material existence of the latter would be determined by the border regime pushing them into the background in the images composing a collective of Western social imaginaries (Anderson 2006; Taylor 2002). In the end, Mitchell's suggestion would have led me to make a film, which in turn, led me to understand migratory policies as a film. This production would be a blockbuster that paid the extras poorly, was stuffed with clichés and ended with an unsurprising scenario. For Mondzain the films we see compose a portrait of ourselves: 'All the films we have loved or hated form shape […] a biographical image, a possible narrative'[77] of our lives (2011: 18). The foundational films I had seen relating to migration were the films shot by my grandfather in his beloved Algeria. They shaped a biographical image of my relationship with the object of my research. My grandfather being an artist, the influence he had in my life had been key to leading me to consider creative practice as the viewpoint from which to address the collective imaginary of migration, and to build alternative visions of today's exiles. Yet, processes of visual appropriation are not limited to artists.

Back in 1995, anthropologist Liisa Malkki was noticing that 'photographs depicting refugees are so abundant that most of us, having seen them before, have a clear and fixed image of what a "refugee" is' (1995: 10). This statement was true until 2020, so during the major part of this doctoral research. Although processes of

[77] From: 'L'ensemble des films que nous avons aimés ou détestés forme […] une image biographique, un récit possible'.

self representations by migrants are not the aim of this research, three visual practices that extend and update the present study must be mentioned for the sake of its completeness. In March 2021, geographers Thomas Lacroix and Nelly Robin created a thread on the social media platform 'Seenthis' with the aim of collecting all press articles covering the topic of migration during the pandemic. Other geographers joined the thread which progressively covered all continents, and I proposed to have a specific look at the images contained in these press articles.[78] As of 12 June 2020, almost 4,250 documents had been collected. These news flows carried images that can be grouped into two typologies. The first typology takes up media imaginary images of timeless and allegorical significance showing individuals walking, carrying or dragging suitcases. It also includes photographs of human masses lined up in interrupted queues spilling out of the frame, similar to those observed during the 2015 migration 'crisis' that are at the core of my doctoral research. The second typology encompasses two novel themes. Firstly, there are images of migrants at work, most often in key sectors of the economy, particularly agriculture and construction. Secondly, many images portray migrants demonstrating against border closures. They show individuals protesting against their fate who are thus presented as active 'subjects' rather than objectified in masses. This trend has been confirmed by the Black Lives Matter movement, another international event that occurred in 2020. Some elements of context must be provided to understand how the event influenced migrants.

[78] https://seenthis.net/people/elsa_gomis

Fig. 62 California is now offering support to document immigrants, in the first relief fund of this kind, *CNN*, 20 May 2020.

Fig. 63 Refugees help the Portuguese during the pandemic, *Euronews*, 14 May 2020.

Fig. 64 Italy considers permits for undocumented migrants to fill a big farmworker gap, *NPR*, 2 May 2020.

Fig. 65 Undocumented delivery workers call for their regularisation and ask for the same rights to obtain papers as employed workers, *Le Monde*, 8 June 2020.

Fig. 66 Undocumented delivery workers call for their regularisation and ask for the same rights to obtain papers as employed workers, *Público*, 28 March 2020.

Fig. 67 Nevada interrupted: Immigrant workers struggling without coronavirus aid call on state to provide economic relief, *Nevada Independent*, 6 May 2020.

Today, arrivals of migrants are less massive than during the 2015 crisis due to the closure of migratory routes and a €455 million agreement between the European Union and Libya's post-revolution regime. But these journeys are not less deadly. In August 2021, at the time I am ending this research, 1,214 refugees have died since 1 January 2021 while attempting to cross the Mediterranean, an average of five daily deaths. Libya has become the main shore of departure for refugees on the Central Mediterranean route. It has also become a hell for refugees who are under constant violation of human rights, subject to high-scale human trafficking

practices and to detentions justified by no ground but that of being dark-skinned. On top of this, the Sudanese refugees in Libya have recently been called 'mercenaries' by Mohamed Hamdan Dogolo, commander of the Janjaweed Forces, one of the most powerful militias in Darfur since the fall of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 (Daily Sabah 2020). Since April 2021, the Facebook page of Watch the Med – Alarmphone, an NGO dedicated to rescues at sea, has borne unfamiliar images of refugees.[79]

Fig. 68 Sudanese refugees protesting in Tripoli, Facebook Watch the Med - Alarmphone Group, posted 6 April 2021.

These images have broken with those falling into the genealogy of iconic images reflecting Western domination analysed along this study. They offer an alternative image of refugees. They show survivors of Darfur's ethnic cleansing as fellow men protesting against the UNHCR and Libyan authorities which prevent their evacuation and escape to safe places. These men are standing, facing the camera, and carrying signs at arms' length, most of which say 'Black Lives Matter', in front of the headquarters of Fayez al-Sarraj, Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya. Unlike the constant deaths in the Mediterranean, these protests have not been covered by mainstream

[79] For example: https://www.facebook.com/watchthemed.alarmphone/photos/pcb.2922324434708447/2922324378041786/

Western media. In April 2021, the world was still not ready to look at them this way and these men were offered no news coverage insofar that Moeller's 1999 statement still seems to apply (1999: 22).

Lastly, the widely practiced use of smartphones for the making of selfies offers a closing remark for this study about the collective imaginary of migration by the Mediterranean. Research carried out by media experts reports that the main motive for making selfies is to indicate a spatial location (Holiday *et al*. 2016: 177). To the question 'What motivates you or others to take and share selfies?', the primary motivation indicated by respondents was 'To show people where I am' (Holiday *et al.* 2016: 181). Migrant populations are no exception to this trend. Photographs published by mainstream media show refugees immortalising their arrival in European shores by taking selfies.

Fig. 69 Emin Mengüarslan, *Refugees arrive on Lesbos island*, Anadolu Images Agency, 2015.

> In these images, a double set of looks is at stake: that of the exiles sharing the memory of their journey, and that of the viewers from the countries of arrival, who, through the eyes of a photographer from the same side of the border, look at newcomers fixing the moment they reach these locations. This game of mirrors expresses a double top-down relationship. First, the one between those who 'made it' and those who stayed. Second, the one between those designated as legitimate to be here, and those who still have to earn this

legitimacy. Here the photographic device operates at a symbolic level to fuel a narcissistic wound: for some, being seen as fortunate to have arrived safe at destination, and for others, being seen as fortunate for not needing to leave their homelands. The photographic lens thus embodies a demarcation line between two territories. The first one, intended for the relatives of the exiles, is located in the Northern Mediterranean shores. The second line, determined by the location of bystanders looking at the mainstream images, is ubiquitous. It fluctuates according to the sales of the news agency and designates the safe anonymous home space of the viewers. If this kind of photograph, catching the intimacy of a group of friends, bears some voyeurism, it is incommensurate with another kind of selfie photograph. In his 2016 documentary *Aylan Kurdi: drowned in a sea of pictures*, Dutch director Misja Pekel returned to the beach near the Turkish resort of Bodrum where the lifeless body of the toddler was found. In the course of his investigation into the media dissemination of Nilüfer Demir's photograph, Pekel captured a selfie while it was being made by a curious visitor attracted by the recent 'fame' of the beach.

Fig. 70 Misja Pekel, *Aylan Kurdi: drowned in a sea of pictures*, photogram, colour film, 32 min. 57 sec., VPRO Prod., 2016.

As in the previous case, the selfie photograph is used by the phone user to show where he is, but here the game of looks enters another dimension. Pekel's image embodies the words of Baudrillard discussed in chapter 1: signs of reality have become more important than reality itself. To describe the relationship

between reality and its representations, Baudrillard compares geographical maps and their corresponding physical territories. In Pekel's photogram extracted from his film *Aylan Kurdi: drowned in a sea of pictures*, reference to the iconic media photograph has more importance than the seaside scenery, that is to say, the map has become more important than the territory (1994: 2). More precisely, Baudrillard's comparison between the map and the territory can be contextualised through both these images. In the preceding photograph, the map, namely the political convention representing spatial positioning of actors (exiles, exiles' relatives, photographer, audience to which photograph is intended) on either side of the borders, supplanted the territory (a Mediterranean beach on which the sun sets majestically). The visual representation of the geographic location, that would be defined by Baudrillard as the 'simulacra', became more decisive than the reality, that is to say, the place in itself. In the photogram extracted from Pekel's film, the dominant regime of mainstream images has established the sovereignty, of what Baudrillard designates as the 'simulation'. The difference between the map, namely the representation, and the territory, namely the referent, has disappeared. In the realm of simulation, sign of the reality, that is Demir's photograph of Aylan Kurdi, becomes the referent. The photograph, in this case a selfie, is no longer a way to trigger the imagination of the viewers (whether it is the relatives of migrants, or Western spectators), it *is* the reality. Here voyeurism reaches a higher stage and verifies Mitchell's suggestion: the image of Aylan Kurdi has become more important than Aylan Kurdi; the existence of migrants is similar to that of images. Both are ethereal and circulating objects and subjects of fascination and repulsion. The attraction of Westerners and the local residents of the countries of destination to migrants can be related to Marx's famous statement about religion: 'It is the opium of the people' (Marx 1843–44: 3). More specifically, it can be read in conjunction with this passage of *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: 'Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people' (Marx 1843–44: 3). Applied to images of migrations, this stance would mean that Westerners project onto exiles a reverse image of their real suffering. Legal citizens designated with the leading roles in European democracies would associate their sufferings with those relegated to playing the second fiddle and designated as illegals. For Balibar, migrants would be the wrong answer to the right question: 'we must face the social divide at the same time as postcolonial resentment'

(2015: 142).[80] I would add that moving in that direction implies an effort of introspection in order to assess images produced to describe contemporary migrations. In the end, to answer the question about what my film brought to my theoretical research, I would say that the experimentation of an alternative creative form allowed me not only to detect and analyse existing reifying representations, but also to draw the contours of a renewed collective imaginary honouring a shared human condition of exile.

[80] From: 'il faut affronter la fracture sociale en même temps que le ressentiment postcolonial'.

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