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Yasmine Tohme

Connecticut College, ytohme@conncoll.edu

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The Power of Filmmaking through a Migratory Lens

Yasmine Tohme

Toor Cummings Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts

Italian Studies Department Senior Integrative Project

Professor Paola Sica

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Abstract

In a divided society, creative mediums such as filmmaking are often used to counter hegemonic narratives to criticize forms of oppression. This engaged artistic narrative thus intends to raise questions on how promoting social cohesiveness between cultures can effectively contribute to the current political climate. Innumerable films of this type have tackled challenging subjects with the same aim, one of them being migration. This essay will bring to light the complexities of undocumented migration through the study of two documentaries made by Italian filmmakers Gianfranco Rosi and Andrea Segre. Additionally, it will examine Italy's migrant crisis and its history of white privilege to contextualize Rosi's and Segre's migratory visual representations in documentary filmmaking focusing on Lampedusa, one of the primary European entry points for North African, Central African, and Middle Eastern refugees. These analyses, accompanied by a personal statement on the power of local and global-scale storytelling, will reveal how films from different corners of the world may be used to counter monological narratives and as educational tools to encourage intercultural understanding and thereby invite viewers to consider the interconnectedness of people across borders.

Introduction

With 108.4 million people registered as forcibly displaced at the end of 2022, migration is one of the chief factors shaping our world today.¹ While on the one hand travel, social media, and globalization are making the world smaller and more connected, on the other, wars, poverty and climate change are fracturing the globe, uprooting and displacing an increasing number of people. This massive displacement of people has had consequences in all parts of the world, fanning the flames of racism. Migration has become one of the most divisive issues facing many nations today. Among the various facets of migration, forced migration for example, has a severe impact on the social and economic framework of both the home and the host country. To illustrate, my country of Lebanon is at the center of the region's political conflicts and unsurprisingly, today one in three of its residents are Palestinian and Syrian refugees.² I have witnessed firsthand the effects of war and displacement. I have seen the Lebanese generosity and hospitality at play, but I have also detected the rising tensions as Lebanese and refugees find themselves competing for already scarce resources and opportunities.

At the age of sixteen, I chose to continue my educational journey outside of Lebanon, finishing my last two years of high school at the United World College of the Adriatic (UWCAD) in Northeast Italy. UWC is known for achieving intercultural understanding within its international student body, its mission statement being “a global movement that makes education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future.”³ With 18 campuses around the world, 80% of enrolled students receive a scholarship, and – with UWC's

¹“Figures at a Glance.” *UNHCR US*, www.unhcr.org/us/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance.

²“Lebanon.” *Oxfam International*, 7 Oct. 2019, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/countries/lebanon>.

³“United World Colleges.” *UWC*, www.uwc.org/.

refugee initiative – 5% of those students are refugees, obtaining full scholarships. Belonging to such a diverse campus enabled me to expand my geopolitical awareness through my peers' exchange in experiences. Among the many stories, the ones that stuck out to me the most were of my peers who risked their lives to come to Italy from the North African region, in search of a better future.

After two years of cultural immersion and developing my proficiency in Italian, I began my undergraduate degree at Connecticut College where I pursued the study of the language as well as my passion for cinema. Throughout my academic career, I grew to understand more of how visual storytelling can be a strong outlet in conveying a message. I especially thought so in my Documentary, Theory and Production course, in which many of the documentaries we watched were international and introduced me to cultures I had little insight on. By the end of that semester, I had become an advocate for documentary filmmaking. I had finally realized its power to give a voice to the unheard and to broaden the viewer's horizon. With a double-major in Film and Italian studies, CISLA has thankfully granted me the chance to merge these two interests and nurture my curiosity in connecting both disciplines.

Therefore, I have decided to center my Senior Integrative Project (SIP) on how films from diverse cultures – specifically documentaries – may be used as educational tools to reclaim social justice and promote intercultural understanding. They will provide a great gateway into diverse cultures, while at the same time highlighting how similar and interdependent we all are. My project will consist of both written and visual work forms. I will be narrowing my research down to the Italian migrant crisis, looking at it through the lens of the island of Lampedusa, the primary European entry point for North African, Central African, and Middle Eastern migrants. In addition, I will supplement my research with my personal experiences in storytelling, which

will also permit me to weave in my Arab identity into my project and redefine what “refugee” means to counter the negative associations with it.

This project will be divided into three parts. The first will be dedicated to linking Italy’s history of racism to its present migration crisis in order to comprehend its current management and suggest a more inclusive approach forward. The second part will focus on the visual depiction of migration through the power of documentary in telling the migrants’ story, through the analysis of two documentaries: *A Sud di Lampedusa* (Segre, 2006) and *Fuocoammare* (Rosi, 2016). Finally, the third part will include my personal statement on migration and how it will play a role in my future career plans with filmmaking.

Italy’s History with White Privilege and Migration

To gain deeper insight into Italy’s migrant crisis, the examination of key historical facts from the nineteenth century onwards seemed pertinent. As I have noticed throughout my research, the study of migration and border control routinely serves to support postcolonial and antiracist claims. In turn, Italian discriminatory patterns can shed light on the country’s struggle with adopting an anchored national identity over the centuries. To better understand the foundation of this legacy, it is important to return to Italy’s unification (“Risorgimento”) in 1861. “Risorgimento” – Italian for “resurgence” – occurred to strengthen its cultural identity, in an effort to achieve political stability. Although all parts of the Italian peninsula successfully joined, the state’s tensions quickly became apparent. The socio-economic disparities between the North and the South created unrest in its citizens, ultimately challenging Italy’s national identity. This decline in the state resulted in mass emigration in the late nineteenth century, with the United States being one of the primary destinations. Once they crossed the Atlantic, Italian immigrants

were met with discrimination due to the host country's nativist dispositions. In the book *Are Italians White? : How Race is Made in America*, scholars Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno shed light on how in "the United States that Italian immigrants encountered was a nation founded upon processes of colonization, dispossession, and slavery, and therefore deeply fractured by race-based hierarchies of inequality."⁴ (3) Although initially unaware of their host country's color line, Italians eventually took notice of the power a citizen had depending on the color assigned to their race. Once again, Italians found themselves beneath other Europeans, in this case as immigrants, as they needed more time to settle into the community than the others. While language and cultural barriers played a relevant factor into why Italian Americans took longer in adjusting, discriminatory practices were the true main cause. Their racial disadvantage to other European immigrants led them to earn limited opportunities in housing and employment. Mainly living within lower-income neighborhoods with people of color, Italians developed "a particular anxiety to assert a white identity in order to effectively distance themselves from their Brown and Black neighbors, and receive the ample rewards that come with being white." (4) As a result, Italian immigrants chose to embrace the American structural racism and apply their whiteness to ensure status and privilege. Their tactic offered them improved living conditions and a beneficial mobility out of the working-class demographic.

Meanwhile, Italy had still been commonly affiliated with the term Mediterraneanness⁵. The negative associations with the word suggested its European inferiority due to its link to colonized countries surrounding the Mediterranean. In a desperate attempt to remain beside strong white powers such as France, Britain and Germany, the country self-assigned its

⁴ Guglielmo, Jennifer, and Salvatore Salerno. *Are Italians White? : How Race Is Made in America*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

⁵This term is coined by Gaia Giuliani in "L'Italiano Negro: The Politics of Colour in Early Twentieth-Century Italy," pp.574.

whiteness. Leaders and scholars pushed the whiteness project by the start of the twentieth century. Pioneer ethnologist Angelo De Gubernatis coined the “Aryan-Mediterranean” idea for Italy’s national identity to inform “the notion of citizenship in the fascist imperial racial laws of the 1930s”⁶ (De Donno, 394) and support the colonial discourse. By 1922, Benito Mussolini took on the political role of Italian Prime Minister and established the Fascist regime. He aimed to enforce Italians’ politically-suitable white identity and reinstate power within Italy. To prove the worthiness of an Aryan title, Mussolini adopted a politically-racist rhetoric with the authoritarian choice to invade Ethiopia in 1936. De Donno asserts, “Mussolini urgently needed a success in foreign policy to maintain his leadership, and the war on Ethiopia and the proclamation of the empire ‘seemed perfect for the purpose.’”⁷ (406) This political strategy earned him a built connection with Germany later that year, thus strengthening Mussolini’s and Hitler’s Nazi agenda in the coming years. Italy's intentional launch to white elitism took effect in World War II. This start inevitably caused a divide between the Northern and Southern regions, and erased all efforts towards a unified country. Henceforth, the South increasingly lost similarities with the North in terms of developing modern urbanization, increasing job opportunities, and sharing cultural identity.

Regardless of Italy’s major and newfound power status, the West continues to unfavorably view the country as a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean. Namely, Lampedusa is the southernmost island of Italy situated far from the mainland. In fact, the island geographically resides closer to Tunisia than to Sicily, only 120 kilometers away from the coast.

⁶ De Donno, Fabrizio. “La Razza Ario-Mediterranea: Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885-1941.” *Interventions (London, England)*, Taylor & Francis Group, vol. 8, no. 3, 2006, pp. 394–412.

⁷ De Donno, Fabrizio. “La Razza Ario-Mediterranea: Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885-1941.” *Interventions (London, England)*, Taylor & Francis Group, vol. 8, no. 3, 2006, pp. 394–412.

This close proximity complicates Italy's self-assigned whiteness, as Lampedusa is widely known for being a main threshold into Europe for migrants traversing the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, the maritime migratory route from Tunisia to Lampedusa has proven to be most dangerous, with hundreds at a time risking their lives in search of a better future. If the migrants – mostly arriving undocumented – were to successfully reach Lampedusa, their struggle to adjust to a new environment would become immediately apparent, especially in an island economically neglected by Italy and Europe. Between the language barrier and Italy's postcolonial background, migrants experience daily encounters with discrimination. They especially face challenges with the Italian government's migratory laws which, overtime, have restricted migrants' chances to attain residence permits or work opportunities.

With newly-elected Italian Prime Minister, Georgia Meloni, taking power in 2022, her right-wing beliefs have exacerbated the migrants' hope for a new life. "In July [2023], in an agreement strongly supported by Ms. Meloni, the Tunisian government promised to tighten its sea borders and speed the returns of those who arrived illegally in Europe from Tunisia, in exchange for a hefty package of aid for its troubled economy."⁸ To translate, Meloni's conservative tendencies towards border control stem from her political ideology to preserve Italian whiteness and maintain its sovereignty. Therefore, Italy's present-day treatment of the migrant crisis can originate from a former, deeply-rooted priority to protect Italy's European status. With Western powers' racist rhetoric and controlled narratives still discreetly intact, migration has been derogatorily used to belittle and dehumanize migrants rather than consider positive aspects that can come with it. Mass media has generated a detrimental perception of the

⁸ Pianigiani, Gaia. "An Italian Island Reflects Giorgia Meloni's Challenges on Migration." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 15 Sept. 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/09/15/world/europe/lampedusa-meloni-migrants.html.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/15/world/europe/lampedusa-meloni-migrants.html>

migrant crisis, hence triggering an outbreak in desensitization and widening the gap between migrants and locals.

Furthermore, the circulation of these propagandistic narratives tailors to Western interests in implementing stricter laws on migrants entering their countries. They aim to persuade Western citizens that sharing communities with migrants would come as a threat to their economy, justifying their political actions towards border control. For this matter, debunking wrongfully-spread information may be a start to alleviate migrants from feeling globally misunderstood. In this regard, migration expert, Federica Mazzara, introduces the concept of innovative collaboration organizations as an approach to humanize migrants' lived experiences and build a bridge with local communities. Mazzara interprets the crucial existence of such organizations and services as “a new frame that offers an alternative to mainstream understanding”⁹ (Mazzara, p.9) Her claims to mend the relationship between migrants and locals entail following initiatives that incorporate two main axes: one being the axis of benefit for both parties; while the other being the axis of action, entailing action taken from both parties to serve the other.

In other words, Mazzara mainly seeks to find results from the organizations through the respect of the migrants. Rather than stereotypically holding a charitable view towards them, she regards them as equal collaborators with the locals. Ultimately, she supports the concept of cohabitation. Further, living in a newly globalized world means that it has become more socially common to share communities with strangers. In Mazzara's words, “migration can become a driver of innovation towards a younger, dynamic, cosmopolitan and, at the end of the day, more resilient Europe” (17), if European powers choose to see the movement of people as an

⁹ Federica Mazzara, *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and Aesthetics of Subversion*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019.

opportunity rather than a threat. Consequently, innovative collaboration may be suited well to today's digital and virtual ways of communicating the hidden face of migration.

Italian Documentaries on Migration

I believe that film as a medium can help give a platform to hidden faces and unheard voices. Unsurprisingly, film distribution on a global scale prioritizes American and British cinema, if not that of other Western countries. This is especially apparent through what is shown in streaming services and movie theaters around the world. Growing up in Lebanon, I had a generous familiarity with the United States and the United Kingdom's respective film industries, knowing that it would not be reciprocated. When attending UWC, many of my international peers expressed similar sentiments: not finding enough of their culture represented in film that would go on to reach mass audiences. With this first-world prioritization, other corners of the world do not receive the same degrees of attention and coverage – sometimes only reaching local or regional recognition. This brings Western film to the mainstream forefront, leaving other cultures to only be seen by attainable spectators. That is precisely why it is crucial that international films be equally distributed on a global scale, as it can be a start to widen the audiences' geopolitical knowledge.

Although international fiction films do not always present a blatant political or cultural message, they can certainly express it through subtexts. Exposure to the characters' way of life can be sufficient commentary to decipher where their positionality stands in their homeland's demographic. Down to the lingo, body language, pastime activities, and career life, all these filmic factors can paint a whole image of where certain citizens locate themselves in their country's nationalistic ideals. The purpose of international films is to help improve intercultural

awareness outside the Western world. Moreover, documentaries can hold an even more impactful message than narrative films. Although it is widely known that documentaries should not be regarded or described as raw and authentic, they do unravel a form of truth, with the purpose to impart an educational lesson. Therefore, international documentaries are the epitome of following a journey of intercultural understanding.

Italy remains as one of the most successful countries outside of the United States and the United Kingdom to have an influential film industry, with it being the country with the highest academy awards. In fact, Italy has been awarded the best foreign-language film Oscar thirteen times¹⁰. Even though Italy is considered to be highly celebrated, parts of its culture – such as the migrant crisis – are far less distributed in international media. Indeed, many Italian films and documentaries have tackled the theme of migration, hoping to achieve an accurate and sensible representation. However, Western powerhouses choose to warp migrants' stories in order to influence large followings to form unjust opinions on the hardships of leaving home. For instance, the 'migratory route' is a term found in Western news and often spoken in a dehumanizing tone to diminish the sacrificial measures in migrants' difficult journey. With the Western voice overshadowing that of the migrants, it can be challenging to persuade stubborn and wrongfully-informed audiences. This causes a low sense of desirability to create a space for Italy's migrant crisis when viewers explore the country's culture through cinema.

As we live in a globalized and digital world, opinions tend to amplify and further contribute to a disparity in political stances. Consequently, difficulty in formulating one's own opinion due to mainstream influence and popularized outlooks, generates laziness in critical

¹⁰ Statista Research Department, and May 4. "Academy Awards: Total Italian Winners 1947-2021." *Statista*, 4 May 2023, www.statista.com/statistics/591307/academy-awards-italian-winners-italy/.

thinking, as well as dependence on Western media. In the same vein, visual representation can hold the power in debunking politically-incorrect perspectives towards migrants, thus emerging as the remedy to their dehumanization. “Show don’t tell” will always stand true, as witnessing emotionally disturbing scenes like rescued migrants from sinking boats can highlight fragility in humanity. Documentaries such as *A Sud di Lampedusa* (Andrea Segre, 2006) and *Fuocoammare* (Gianfranco Rosi, 2016) inform mass audiences about migrants’ obstacles and how they affect the local community they arrive at – in this case, Lampedusa.

***A Sud di Lampedusa* (Andrea Segre, 2006)**

In this short observational documentary, Segre follows men from the Sub-Saharan region, sharing their experience of a challenging journey across the Sahara Desert to reach Libya – and sometimes across the Mediterranean Sea to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa. Through personal interviews and brief insightful moments into their journey, viewers quickly realize that the subjects have endured enough in their home countries (Mali, Nigeria, Togo, etc.) and are willing to sacrifice their lives to search for more deserving ones. Sharing scarce resources and limited job opportunities, the subjects begin their travel towards Libya, hoping to start a new life or eventually embark on a dangerous yet most repeated migratory route towards Italy. One of the subjects – the owner of the truck that transports people to Libya – explains that there are only two modes of reaching the country from the Sub-Saharan region: the first is by flying, which only applies to those who can afford a plane ticket; while the other is through large trucks that carry loads of goods. The second route certainly is more inconvenient and has proven to be difficult for many of the passengers. Segre listens to these passengers who express feelings of impatience but have no choice other than moving at the truck’s pace. The truck owner then informs that their trip from Agadez to Libya usually takes around six days: the truck’s engine can

only function at night, as the burning sun during the day overly raises its temperature. This disadvantage forces passengers to wait for the sun to set in order to move along. He ends his interview by stating, “Trucks are for goods, not for human beings.” Segre follows this segment through capturing the truck driving across the desert with people pouring over the goods. Unfortunately, trucks do not always successfully arrive at their destinations, due to the harsh migratory policies enforced by the law and created by Italy’s government. Most trucks that are transporting an overwhelming number of people are arrested at the Libyan border control and are put in detention camps. The subjects in the documentary emphasize the brutal conditions of these Libyan detention camps, undoubtedly comparing them to prisons. According to one of the subjects and the only to share his name, Yossuf Amin Baba, fifty people would be crammed into one small room, with poor treatment from the detention officers. Some stay detained for three weeks, while others wait for months until they are deported back to their Sub-Saharan countries.

This documentary raises ethical questions about how migrants are treated under European migratory laws. Segre films one of the subjects mentioning former Libyan ruler, Muammar Ghaddafi, to clarify how his actions have affected migration within the African continent. The subject additionally speaks on how Ghaddafi announced that Libya would be a country meant for all, launching great migratory movements from the Sub-Saharan region to North Africa in the late 1990’s. Contrary to what was announced, most Sub-Saharan migrants who reach Libya find trouble adjusting. Many migrants fell victim to Libya’s work policies: if migrants were to find work and not get paid, suing and retrieving their money’s worth do not fall under Libyan regulations. Along with his empty promise about Libya, Ghaddafi selfishly used migration as a way to build ties with Italy. These ties would solely revolve around instituting stricter policies on

African migrants traveling from the Libyan shore to Italy. Accordingly, this information helps spectators deepen their comprehension of the challenges migrants face and the lack of opportunities to find desired purpose in their lives.

With the help of the subjects' personal experiences, along with footage of their inland journey, viewers are presented with migration through a humanistic angle, and encouraged to reflect on the issue at hand. Furthermore, Segre's cinematographic strategies facilitate his objective to build intimacy between the subjects and his audience: filming most interviews at a close-up scale, documenting an annotation of the African map with the journey's length to Libya, fly-on-the-wall shots to showcase several parts of the journey, and following the migrants' inland travel across the desert. Choosing to take this intimate approach towards visual storytelling, Segre urges his audience to question the geopolitical relationship between Italy and most African countries, as well as wealthy nations' moral responsibility towards migrants. As a result, Segre's goal is to more profoundly unlock spectators' thoughts, leaving them to confront their preconceived notions on migratory law and ponder over the true meaning of inclusivity in today's society.

***Fuocoammare* (Gianfranco Rosi, 2016)**

While Andrea Segre and Gianfranco Rosi share an observational execution in their documentaries, Segre follows the participatory mode since we see him interact with his interviewees. His handheld and informal interviews, accompanied by him asking questions on camera, strengthen his bond with his subjects and demonstrate an exemplary participatory documentary. As for Rosi, he employs the direct cinema or *cinéma vérité* mode for his documentary. This directorial choice pushes his audience to live with the subjects in a poetic yet candid filmic world. Although he does not interfere with his subjects, intimacy certainly flows

between the spectators and the screen. Rosi's message in his documentary is assuredly comparable to that of Segre. While *A Sud di Lampedusa* exhibits the failed attempts of migrating and reaching their desired destination, *Fuocoammare* depicts migrants' dangerous journey across the sea, finally arriving, and the effects on Lampedusa's local community. The title *Fuocoammare*, Italian for "Fire at Sea", is an ode to a song played in the local radio channel, which represents hope for better weather to bring on better work. To clarify, the documentary revolves around the theme of work within the island's never-ending turmoil, found through the inhabitants' daily life. Rosi essentially follows three major representations through subjects in relation to Lampedusa: 9-year-old Samuele, the son of a merchant navigating his childhood on the island; African and Middle Eastern migrants reaching Lampedusa after being out at sea for days; and local Lampedusan doctor, Dr. Bartolo.

In Samuele's segment, his scenes carry a sense of tranquility and innocence, permitting the viewer to sit with him enough to piece together how his days are spent. He mainly attends school, in which we only purposely see him learning English through his class hours and homework. The English language acts as a symbol for Samuele's potential life outside of Lampedusa – a major dilemma in Southern Italy's youth – or communicating with visitors that would come to the island. We also see him idly exploring the island's scenic corners with his slingshot, reenacting scenes of violence in his mind to exhibit his naïveté towards the real world. The most important display of all of Samuele's pastimes is when his father teaches him his ways of fishing and rowing a boat. Rosi strategically portrays the cruciality of Samuele learning his father's profession by indicating that their catch of the day results as their dinner.

The film's pace begins to pick up as the second major representation enters the story: the migrants, on their way to Lampedusa in a sinking boat, calling for rescue. These scenes hold a

heavier presence, accenting the contrast in Lampedusa's daily motions. We witness the rescuers exhaustedly locate the endangered migrants and undertake to save as many as they can. Rosi then exhibits who the rescuers encounter on the boats to show variety in migrants' conditions when saved. Many arrive unconscious from dehydration and denutrition after being out at sea for days. Others arrive with chicken pox or are heavily pregnant. Similarly to Segre's documentary, Rosi captures the humanitarian dimensions within the migrants' crisis through the trauma and loss faced by those after being rescued, finally arriving at the shore.

An added dimension contributes to the film through the third main representation, Doctor Pietro Bartolo who plays an impactful role in offering medical assistance to the new arrivals. He additionally provides emotional support, lending an empathetic hand and allowing the migrants to vulnerably express their mental distress. Dr. Bartolo has had to examine cadavers, many of which are young children. In the documentary, Rosi features Bartolo's appointment with a pregnant migrant who had just been rescued to the island. Performing an ultrasound to check her twin babies' health, Bartolo explains to her that she is low on amniotic fluid. This scarceness derives from her long suffering at sea. His humanity shines as he shares that no amount of cadavers or extreme injuries from the migrants' journey could desensitize him from the issue. He stands as an emblem for understanding and compassion towards treating migrants in his local community.

Many points from both documentaries may be individually highlighted and, together, may convey a united humanitarian message. More specifically, one scene from *Fuocoammare* seamlessly bridges into another from *A Sud di Lampedusa*. In this scene, Rosi films the migrants who are praying and preaching post-arrival. They explicitly describe the torment they have had

to endure before making the decision to leave their respective homes. This particular scene holds evidence in Rosi's aim to give a voice to the migrants. They can finally denounce the malnutrition in the Libyan detention camps, the sexual violence and killings from the law officers, the dehydrated days in the desert that led to them drinking their own pee. Somehow, they persevere and resiliently fight for a life that they deserve, as one of the migrants preached, "It is risky in life not to take a risk, because life itself is a risk". With this scene, it is possible to draw a connection to Segre's interviewees, mentioning their commitment to crossing the Sahara Desert. These interviewees would only be able to drive at night due to the unbearable heat during the day, lengthening their journey. If they were to be arrested at the Libyan border, not only would they be deported after serving their time, but they would also be physically beaten by the officers. They would stay in these prisons without charge or trial, unaware of their sentence's longevity. This common point in both documentaries therefore highlights commonality in Libyan detention camps. In other words, the amount of shared experiences at these prisons proves how significantly Italy funds Libya to arrest migrants before even leaving the continent.

A Sud di Lampedusa and *Fuocoammare* go hand-in-hand in testifying how powerfully visual storytelling can remind its spectators of our shared humanity. As we live in a world that keeps pitting us against one another, it is crucial to assess art as a universal language, attainable to anyone with the correct approach to viewing a matter from all its sides and perspectives. In this case, film may be an essential tool to strive for intercultural competence towards the migrant crisis and spread awareness on valuable topics.

The Next Generation of Storytellers

Artistic storytelling has proven effective in conveying important messages that may seem too difficult to express and conceptualize merely through words. From a young age, I have been captivated by the power of stories. Pages of a treasured book, scenes from a favorite film, or the evocative memories of past generations have shown me the magic ability to connect us across the globe, across time and cultures.

As a child concerned about climate change, I wrote a story about a climate refugee whose island was destroyed by hurricanes and submitted it to the Secretary General of the United Nations. In middle school, I made a film documenting my amazing grandmother's story of displacement and exile to honor the unbreakable bond she has to the country and home she left behind, Palestine. My passion for storytelling began to grow and led me to create another documentary about a farmer's market-turned-restaurant using food to reunite war-torn communities, celebrate culinary traditions, and promote sustainable agriculture. And as a garbage crisis in my country exploded, I shadowed a prominent "eco-pioneer", Ziad Abi Chaker, who proposed creative alternatives to the disastrous "solutions" of burning or dumping waste to turn our problems into an opportunity. I then wrote an article in which I described this activist's relationship with waste as "a garbage love story" and it inspired me to create my own love story with my home country of Lebanon and our environment. Moreover, at my international high school in UWC, global stories of cultural heritage, shared by classmates, inspired me, deepening my understanding of the world.

While at Connecticut College, I have been given the opportunity to carve my own path across interdisciplinary work. With the guidance of Toor Cummings Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts (CISLA) and my faculty advisers, I was able to study away in

Prague at FAMU, one of the oldest film schools in the world. Following my study abroad experience, I went to Italy for my fully-funded CISLA internship. Combining my CISLA language with my Film major, I worked in Rome at a film production company named Anele, where I participated in the making of a documentary written and directed by Italian filmmaker Davide Ferrario, *Italo Calvino nelle città (Italo Calvino in the cities)*. The documentary is a journey into the life of Italo Calvino, one of Italy's greatest writers of the twentieth century, and focuses on his 1972 novel *Le città invisibili (The Invisible Cities)*. Both hands-on experiences were a baptism of fire of small budgets, tight schedules, and working in foreign languages, but also critical lessons in effective teamwork and best practices in film production. I acquired thorough knowledge of the art of visual storytelling in both an academic and professional setting. Overtime, I began fine-tuning my individual story and weaving my narrative with others, strengthening my approach to becoming a storyteller. My hope is that my visual storytelling promotes intercultural understanding, widening viewers' outlooks and triggering conversations around difficult subjects, like the short film I made with my team this semester on the alienation and isolation experienced by students of color in predominantly white institutions.

Moving forward, I plan on pursuing my career in filmmaking with the primary goal to tackle themes of migration and war and eventually join the community of Levantine artists. Coming from the Middle East, I cannot be indifferent to the repercussions of war and displacement on both home and host countries. My passion for stories continues to fuel my curiosity and creativity, and it is through filmmaking that I am committed to harnessing the power of storytelling as a force for positive change. When I think of my future trajectory, post-graduate life, I feel a strong responsibility to employ the film medium as a form of

storytelling and help contribute to intercultural dialogue in today's political climate. Using storytelling as an approach to appeal to wider audiences, can aid in closing gaps between cultural identities and build bridges between communities to foster meaningful connections. My generation owes it to the next to utilize our skills to navigate a world in crisis and steer it to a more just and empathetic place for all.

Conclusion

After analyzing Segre's *A Sud di Lampedusa* and Rosi's *Fuocoammare* through critical thinking and film theory, I have concluded my thoughts on storytelling's development and cruciality into modern-day society. I felt that the work of both film directors is vital to them in that it anchors the immigrant experience in their subjects. In the face of destruction, they create art as a form of resistance to injustice. Throughout my research and analysis, I built a connection with my case studies, as I am no stranger to stories about displacement and uprootedness. My grandmother is a refugee that was displaced twice, once from Palestine and the second time from Lebanon during the Civil War. My parents also had to leave Lebanon during the war. Knowing their hopes and insecurities, I can understand the difficult balancing act of belonging to one culture and integrating into another. Hence, I can relate to the filmmakers' interest in shedding light on borders and ruins and loss.

In Lebanon, our galleries are full of paintings from artists that have fled their homeland from Syria to Iraq and Yemen, and that express their experiences and their national identity. It was a natural choice for me to focus my SIP topic within the Italian department on Italy's migration crisis. From there, I decided to develop my research question around how documentaries translate stories of war and displacement, as it is also the story of millions of

migrants around the globe. The story of each migrant subject in *A Sud di Lampedusa* and *Fuocoammare* may be from their own perspective, but in many ways they all describe that same journey that is taking place across continents.

Both of these Italian documentaries on migration powerfully stand against the West's xenophobic and inhumane standpoint, and more so against Italy's government and policies on the crisis. They represent opposition to wrongfully-established narratives, and demonstrate the hidden truths of political exile through a migratory lens. Not only do the vulnerable migrants in each film share their fears and obstacles to reach their desired destination, but the local Italians' reaction in *Fuocoammare* to the dangerous arrivals refute the generalization of Italian citizens, let alone politically-privileged citizens against foreign presence in host countries. This revelation is mainly apparent in *Fuocoammare* during recorded doctor appointments between Dr. Bartolo and the migrant woman. Another apparent moment occurs in the beginning of the film when the local radio host announces the casualties during a recent boat rescue at the Lampedusan shore, and a local lady tuning in says to herself: "Poor souls" as she prepares food. This perspective hints at potential hope that humanity is not totally lost on Western individuals, and that reparations and justice for migrants may possibly be attained. To briefly return to Federica Mazzara's ideology on collaborative initiatives to accommodate migrants, she successfully proposes a system of two axes – the axis of benefit and the axis of action – that can show productive outcomes from individual initiatives in order to develop healthy connections between migrants and locals. She asserts, "every proposal must consider migrants as partners in the process of getting a shared value, and enable them to use at best their sensitivity, skills and knowledge." (19) Mazzara's practice serves as an example for problem-solving, reconnecting

with our primal humanity, and creating a space to assist migrants' abrupt adjustment to Italy or any other host country.

Migrant films present themselves differently than Mazzara's initiatives but carry the same humanistic intention. In turn, there will always be space within the film industry to seek diverse perspectives, challenge established narratives, and amplify marginalized voices from different corners of the world. Visual depictions of human struggles can speak louder than filtered Western news. With the rise of government denial, political censorship and artificial intelligence, consumers may experience trouble with finding trustworthy resources, if not cautious. Despite Western powers' efforts to shelter mass audiences from the injustices in the world, narrative and non-fiction films on migration will continue to circulate and reach accessible platforms. Therefore, it is detrimental for the next generation of adults to be mindful of stories told and stories consumed. The value of art infused with experiences of war and displacement is that – when the news and images of countries such as Palestine and Syria have faded from our memories because of indifference or compassion fatigue – the works of artists including Segre and Rosi will still exist as important reminders of the horror of continued conflict and occupation, and of our shared humanity.

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