

Lampedusa Reloaded

A Global Conversation with Lorenzo Rinelli

Today 22nd October 2015 we had the pleasure to have a very special guest in our class: Professor Lorenzo Rinelli.

He presented to us a part of his latest work: “African Migrants and Europe: Managing the Ultimate Frontier” published by Routledge 2015 in which he analyzes a critical phenomena, such as immigration, through the filter of his camera. The foundations of his work started in Rome, then he moved to Hawaii for 8 years, and now he is back in his home town.

Professor Rinelli wanted us to understand the importance of the tools we use to measure the world, and how photography, mixed with statistics and history, could be an innovative and powerful tool.



Lampedusa's Airport

Through the objectivity of professional photography, Prof. Rinelli managed to reshape the concept of border, to shift the conception of migrants from mediatic to political. Furthermore, he explains us how we can engage politically with migrants: teaching them Italian in voluntary schools (like he did), speaking with them, narrating their incredible stories and lives from their countries, through deserts and seas, and finally here in Italy.

Prof. Rinelli went into the heart of Italian migration, the island of Lampedusa, and reached with his camera places like the ex secret NATO Military Base hidden in a geographical depression, risking to be arrested, which is now a Center where migrants are detained and hidden from the people of the island to show the world the horrors of migration and of the way our nation still treats migrants.



Migrant Center in Lampedusa

He continues his story telling us about the amazing people that he met, and how they contributed to the Lampedusa Festival (held every year in the island): directors, photographers and artists who came to our country looking for opportunities and for a better life who managed to escape deportation. These artists helped by the loving people of Lampedusa, explained Prof. Rinelli, use art as a form of resistance to gain the dignity they deserve.

The festival was created with the idea of transforming something that has been hidden for years to preserve tourism – the boats with which the migrants arrive on our shores, their arts and customs, the migrants themselves, into something visible, palpable. Something which would remind the people who visit Lampedusa that this island is not only about white beaches and blue seas. The island symbolizes much more: the agony, the fear, the struggle of the ones who would rather drown than stay in their country and suffer hunger, war and poverty. It symbolizes death for the ones who could not make it to the shores, but life, hope and relief to the ones who made it.



Migrants Boats that were hidden from the public

Our conversation with Prof. Rinelli ends on a positive note, of course there is still sufferance and death, but he made us realize that times are changing and people evolve and learn to be more accepting and caring for other human beings.

He leaves our room encouraging us to be critical thinkers and to be curious about global phenomena like migration. He made us realize the importance of the concept of border, and how much it is imperative to tear down those walls, which divide us and make us forget what being human is like. We surely are in need of an Open Door that will connect each of us, no matter where we are coming from or where we are going to.



The "door of hope" situated at the shore of Lampedusa

Delfina Belli
Rias Uddin