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Temporality in cosmopolitan solidarity: Archival activism and participatory documentary film as mediated witnessing of suffering at Europe's borders

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Abstract

This paper develops and extends the idea of cosmopolitan solidarity to temporality through a case study of archival activism and participatory filmmaking. It examines mediated witnessing within the Italian online audio-visual archive *Archivio delle memorie migranti* (AMM), which documents and archives the experiences of contemporary migrants in Italy. The moral basis of AMM is cosmopolitan solidarity, which is usually understood as a practice that crosses spatial and communal boundaries. However, the ethics of solidarity also bridges past, present, and future generations. Through the case of AMM, this paper demonstrates the significance of temporality in the theorization of cosmopolitan solidarity.

Keywords: border, participation, cosmopolitan solidarity, refugees, migration, documentary film, memory, archive, witnessing

Introduction

The European Union deprives citizens of countries that have been affected by war and conflict of legal and safe means of travel and entry to its territory. In addition to restrictive visa and family reunification policies, the EU's bordering practices range from the construction of militarized fences at land borders and search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean to outsourcing border management to third countries. As a result, in the past 20 years, more than 20 000 migrants have died while attempting to cross the southern borders of the European Union. In addition, many more have lost their lives before reaching the actual border, in the buffer zones of North Africa and the Balkans. The border zone that stretches beyond the territory of the European Union has become increasingly violent and criminal (Brian and Laczko 2014, 16–24; International Organization for Migration, 2017). Migrants who do finally reach Europe have often survived violence and witnessed the deaths of fellow travellers and family members.

These experiences are becoming a part of social memory in Europe. The inevitable question in the present era of 'memory fever' (Huysen 2000, 37) or 'era of the witness' (Wieviorka 2006) is how the suffering and death currently occurring at Europe's borders will be remembered in the future. It is my intention in this paper to look beyond the social and cultural boundaries that tend to veil these memories and create the illusion that violence at the border—if recognized at all—is distant from European societies.

This paper addresses the spatial and temporal dimensions of suffering at European borders by discussing the ethics of mediated witnessing and remembering. What kinds of aesthetic practices can produce cosmopolitan and transnational spaces where recounting, viewing, and listening to experiences of death and survival become possible? This also entails questions of temporality: How do mediated eyewitness

testimonies construct social memory? How does the acknowledgement of memories shape the future? These questions are particularly difficult due to the fact that border-related violence is on-going and the societies in which survivors have sought protection are implicated in that violence.

I examine these questions by focusing on participatory aesthetics in an exemplary case of cultural and civic activism, *Archivio delle memorie migranti* (AMM), in Italy. AMM operates in two modes: it collects and archives the memories of recent migrants in written, audio, visual, and audio-visual formats, and it co-produces a variety of projects based on migrants' testimonies. AMM's cross-media productions include documentary films, multi-media narratives, books, academic articles, a website and conservation of objects. The archive has developed specific participatory methods to collect and process memories in ethically sustainable ways (Gatta 2016; Triulzi 2016). As the archive's director, historian Alessandro Triulzi (2013, 216), has explained, the archive grew out of a collaboration between scholars, activists, and migrants who recognized the need to provide a 'sympathetic' listening context for migrant narratives and to ethically disseminate these narratives in the public sphere in Italy and beyond. An additional aim was to create a structure to preserve these testimonies for future generations.

The moral basis of AMM is cosmopolitan solidarity: action that goes beyond communal bonds. However, whereas such solidarity is usually understood as crossing spatial and communal boundaries, the ethics of solidarity in AMM also reaches across temporalities. AMM treats collective memory as existing outside of communitarian frameworks and particular bonds, creating a practice for 'transnational memory' (about the term, see Erll 2011, see also Triulzi 2016, 153). This understanding of

collective memory as transnational also helps us see cosmopolitan solidarity in temporal terms, across generations.

In addition to AMM's archival activism, I examine a documentary film co-produced by AMM, titled *Come un uomo sulla terra/Like a Man on Earth* (2008), which portrays migrants' memories of the migration route from the Horn of Africa, through Libya, to Lampedusa, Italy. This work is significant because it is the first professional product of archival activism and participatory aesthetics within the AMM. It was co-directed by an Ethiopian refugee, Dagmawi Yimer, and an Italian filmmaker, Andrea Segre (with Riccardo Biadene). Through an analysis of the film and the archive, I examine how participatory aesthetics are practiced, from the narration of eyewitness testimonies and the production of the film to the political and social engagement that viewing the film enables. A significant part of the film is based on the direct eyewitness accounts of Ethiopian migrants who revisit the violence they experienced during their migration. However, it is also important that the film contextualizes the suffering that migrants experienced at the hands of local smugglers within the European Union's border management strategy and Italy's post-colonial relations with Libya.

In my analysis of the policies and practices of AMM, and more specifically of the production of the documentary film *Like a Man on Earth*, I utilize the lens of cultural sociology (Alexander & Smith 2004), which stresses the social context in which actors and institutions shape cultural practices. I use the concepts of mediated witnessing and participatory aesthetics to examine the ways in which AMM and the film contribute to the social memory of the European border zone and migration. This conjuncture of mediated witnessing and participatory aesthetics moves the analysis beyond most studies on witnessing, which tend to be limited to the analysis of text

and visual communication. Moreover, the analysis goes beyond the media-centric approaches and issues of representation and authorship that have generally been applied to the analysis of ‘migrant’ or ‘accented’ cinema.

In her theorization of cosmopolitan cinema, Maria Rovisco (2012, 2) suggests that cosmopolitan cinema should be understood as a mode of production and cross-cultural practice that generates politically significant public dialogue and engagement. Therefore, analysis of the production of both the archive and the film in their cross-cultural contexts is necessary to understand how these cultural products practice cosmopolitan solidarity. In addition to analyzing the production, I argue that it is also necessary to examine the film’s post-production and its dissemination to various audiences and viewing contexts. This approach allows us to address the issue of politically engaging public dialogue that Rovisco identifies as a crucial aspect of cosmopolitan cinema.

Finally, the paper aims to contribute to the analysis of cosmopolitan cinema by extending the cross-cultural and transnational understanding of cosmopolitanism to temporality. Cosmopolitan cinema is politically and aesthetically relevant not only in the present, but also contributes to the social memory and understanding of the present in the future. This thinking takes inspiration from the ‘sociology of time’ (Adam 2010) and invites us to position ourselves in the future and look back at the present as a *future past*. Therefore, in the analysis I also investigate how the practices of AMM and its film-making contribute to cosmopolitan solidarity in time: How do they bear witness to border-related suffering and violence for future generations?

For this study, I interviewed three film directors who have worked with AMM. Each interview lasted one to two hours. I also studied the materials and documents available on the AMM website and other media and scholarly articles

published by the AMM research team. Additional informal conversations with members of the archive were also valuable¹. These materials allow me to analyze how cosmopolitan solidarity is practiced both in the archive and in the making of the film. I also undertake a textual analysis of the film *Like a Man on Earth* in order to understand how participatory aesthetics are made visible to the viewer.

Mediated witnessing

Social activists have adopted witnessing as a mode of communication in their struggles against structural injustices. Witnessing refers both to seeing things and to an active and responsible mediation of what has been seen (Zelizer 1998, 2007; Durham Peters 2001, 709; Mortensen 2015; Chouliaraki 2015; Frosh & Pinchevski 2008). In human rights advocacy, it is the more active meaning of witnessing, in particular, that has been adopted as a way to address broader social injustices. Sue Tait (2011, 1233) underlines a distinction between ‘witnessing’ and ‘bearing witness’ in journalism, arguing, ‘to bear witness describes the act of appealing to an audience to share responsibility for the suffering of others’. However, as Fuyuki Kurasawa (2009, 95) points out, eyewitness accounts are often dismissed through denial, bureaucratic ‘deresponsibilization’, or ‘compassion fatigue’. Mediated witnessing generally involves some kind of intermediary who brings the experiential level into the communicative level. In the analysis that follows, I treat Italian AMM as a secondary witness: a carrier group that collects, archives, organizes, and mediates the eyewitness testimonies of migrants.

Kurasawa (2009, 96) distinguishes analytically five aspects of the practice of bearing witness, and I operationalize these aspects in my analysis. First, testimonies

document injustices—often silenced ones—by giving voice to the eyewitness. However, in the dynamic between silence and voice, we need to consider the context of listening: What kinds of circumstances are needed for generating a voice? Second, in the case of unauthorized border crossing, mediated witnessing involves the translation and interpretation of experiences that are often incomprehensible to those who can easily move across nation-state borders. One question that carrier groups need to address is: What kinds of aesthetics can bring such experiences into the realm of the comprehensible? Third, the theorization of witnessing stresses the cultivation of empathy as a countering force against ignorance. Through an emotional connection, the audience is drawn away from the position of a bystander or one who is unaware.

Whereas these first three aspects consider witnessing in the present time, the next two aspects involve a shift in temporality, bringing the past and the future into the act of bearing witness. The fourth aspect points out that remembering injustice and commemorating those who died while migrating counters social forgetting. In 2007, when the work of AMM began, only activists and diasporic communities were participating in the public commemoration of border-related deaths in Europe.

Finally, bearing witness is a future-oriented practice. It carries the notion that the present day is the *future past* (Adam 2010). Witnessing through visual imagery and language carries an imperative against repeating the conditions that have led to suffering—the sentiment of ‘never again’. In the context of witnessing violence in the European border zone, however, this ability to think of the future becomes particularly challenging, as the suffering is ongoing; as a social fact, it is not over. Nevertheless, this temporal aspect reminds present-day Europeans that future generations may judge how Europeans are implicated in the deaths at the border—

how they produced a system that lets people die (Albahari 2015; Vaughan-Williams 2015).

Archival activism in *Archivio delle memorie migranti*

AMM is an association of institutions and individuals that aims to collect, present, and archive the memories of present-day migrants in Italy in different forms:

documentary film, documentary photography, images of objects, diaries, letters and other written self-narrations, recorded oral histories, and multimedia productions.

AMM constantly reflects on its practices and reorients its work through discussion and participation with migrant communities. Depending on the wishes of individual migrants, some of the migrant testimonies are not made available for public use at the present time.

The archive began in 2007 as an informal project at a school for migrants in Rome run by the NGO Asinitas. Working with migrants from the Horn of Africa, a group of social activists and scholars began experimenting with narrative circles and audio-visual workshops run in collaboration with the Italian video cooperative ZaLab. AMM explicitly states that they make films with migrants, and not just about them. As the director, historian Alessandro Triulzi (2013), says, ‘We soon found out that “unspeakable truths” could be shared together with fellow migrants within a joint, participatory context which assured both confidence and empathic listening.’

Zakaria Mohamed Ali from Somalia and Dagmawi Yimer from Ethiopia both became filmmakers through these workshops. They started building their lives in Italy while living in the semi-legal migrant squats known as ‘occupations’ and attending the Asinitas school for foreigners in Rome. They had kept diaries during their

journeys and were motivated to communicate their experiences to a wider audience (Mohamed Ali 2016; Yimer 2016b). However, Zakaria Mohamed Ali explains that his aspiration in written journalism in Italy proved difficult because of the language. The communicative mode of video and film felt more accessible. Having control over the story is important for Mohamed Ali, who soon after arrival became frustrated with the Italian media. ‘No one is interested in what happened after I was rescued in Lampedusa. Even after seven years, journalists only call me when there is an emergency, always the same questions. If I say something else, it’s cut out.’ (Mohamed Ali, 2015.)

During the memory workshops, Dagmawi Yimer and Andrea Segre decided to pursue an ambitious documentary film project using the participatory methods Segre had previously experimented with (Segre 2015; for an analysis of Segre’s political interventions in film see O’Healy 2012). The result was *Like a Man on Earth* (2008), which later expanded to a cross-media production comprising the film, a book, and a website. The film was well-received at social activism events and human rights festivals across Europe. In Italy, the public service broadcaster Rai3 aired the documentary in 2009 in connection with the parliamentary vote on the collaboration agreement between Italy and Libya. The film was also part of a nation-wide campaign under the slogan ‘Io non respingo’ (‘I don’t reject’) to initiate a petition for an international inquiry into the Libyan prisons where migrants are held. (Segre 2009, 121).

Like a Man on Earth weaves together three different stories of irregular migration. In the first storyline, the co-director, Dagmawi Yimer, speaks about his personal journey to exile. In the second storyline, Ethiopian protagonists narrate their testimonies, which for most part focus on violent experiences in Libya during their

journey towards Europe. The third storyline unfolds as Yimer confronts Ilkka Laitinen, the director of the European Union's border control agency Frontex, in Frontex headquarters in Warsaw and European Commissioner Franco Frattini, the Forza Italia politician and former Italian foreign minister, during his electoral campaign for Italian parliament. Facing these border management agents eye-to-eye, Yimer asks why they collaborate with Libya and whether they are aware of the violation of migrants' human rights taking place in Libya, in the places where Europe has outsourced its border management.

The testimonies of Yimer and the other protagonists are differentiated by the use of language and address. At times, Yimer speaks directly to the viewer in his new, accented Italian. This forces the listener to pay attention to listening and sensitizes Italians to the accent of new Italians. The other protagonists speak to one another, including Dagmawi Yimer, in Amharic, and these sections are subtitled. In Italy, subtitles are rare, so this decision again pushes the Italian audience into a different kind of listening. The film's use of language de-Italianizes the aesthetics of the documentary film and sensitizes the audience to the transnational listening that is necessary for witnessing contemporary borderized violence.

In the sections with Laitinen and Frattini, the film criticizes European collaboration with Muammar al-Gaddafi's Libya. The European Union has funded migration detention facilities and surveillance technologies in Libya, a project that continued in 2011 with the new Libyan leadership. Under Silvio Berlusconi's leadership in the first decade of the new millennium, Italy officially reconciled with its former colony Libya, culminating in the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation that was signed in 2008. The control of transit migration through Libya was one of the key points in the reconciliation. (Albahari 2015, 151 – 165; Brambilla

2014.) These bordering practices reflect the externalization of European border management to neighboring countries in order to prevent migrants from crossing the actual territorial border of the European Union. These “third countries” have been turned into European buffer zones (Mezzadra & Neilson 2012, 68; Vaughan-Williams 2008, 67). Thus, instead of conceiving of the European border as linear, we should think of it as a set of multiple, heterogenous bordering practices—borderscapes (Brambilla 2014)—including the borderized zones that are intended to control the elasticity and porousness of boundary regions.

Participatory aesthetics in AMM

In cultural production, participation and co-creation are terms that are often used; it is not always clear, however, what they actually mean and to what extent participation reaches the different levels of the production process and distribution. In order to develop the understanding of participatory aesthetics, I distinguish participatory methods into those of the production process, those in the product itself, and those in the post-production phase.

Andrea Segre (2015) explains what the participatory approach means to him:

The participatory approach, on my side, means that you try to rebuild your relationship with the protagonist whose story you are telling as horizontally as you can. Normally when I have the camera, the relation is a vertical one. I am the one who is telling your story and I am the one who has the instruments, the money, and the power. This vertical relation is indebted to the colonial and postcolonial past and I think we need to be conscious about this relationship. It would be naive to believe in a completely horizontal

relationship, especially when you are making a film about a history told by someone from a different culture, told by subjects that have a different historical and economical background. And then, with this consciousness, I try to rebuild the relationship and create another kind of horizon in our relationship and in our dialogue. In order to do that, I need to give the protagonist tools, I have to give some power, some tools in the production we are doing.

In *Like a Man on Earth*, the filmmakers balanced the unequal power dynamic between the vulnerable refugee subjects and media professionals by creating a figure who is able to take an intermediary position. As co-director, Dagmawi Yimer is more than a refugee subject or a gateway to the community of refugees. In this film, he is simultaneously a protagonist and a filmmaker—an eyewitness and the one who mediates other eyewitness testimonies. He has experienced the same journey and carries similar memories of suffering as the migrants who narrate their stories in the film. The multiple roles of Dagmawi Yimer are explicit. As viewers, we see him filming with the camera (in an image that is shot by the Italian director Andrea Segre); we see him interviewing and listening to the other eyewitnesses and posing questions to the director of Frontex and the Italian politician. He also narrates parts of his own migration story. Andrea Segre (2015) terms this explicitness as ‘something like a manifesto of participatory film making’.

Such a manifesto needs to be understood in the context of the Italian documentary film scene in general. There has been a proliferation of migration-related productions among professional, student, and amateur filmmakers, photographers, and journalists since the 1990s, when the issue began to gain political and social relevance. However, the agency of migrants in these productions is often

limited to that of an informant or a gateway to the community. (Grassilli 2008.) Uncompromising ‘accented’ cinema has only been able to develop through independent and guerrilla filmmaking, such as the productions of AMM. In addition, Mariagiulia Grassilli (2008, 1252) argues that a persistent lack of critical thinking among Italian filmmakers on the matters of representation and authorship continues to drive migrants from opportunities in the industry. These complexities and the lack of cosmopolitan solidarity in participation practices and cultural diversity policies are not only characteristic of Italy, but are central in most European countries. In this context, the efforts of AMM to create methods that involve migrants throughout the production process as well as aesthetics that explicitly make visible the participatory approach are important experiments on the European scale.

Dagmawi Yimer (2016a) recalls that the opportunity to tell his story, to be heard, to mediate other peoples’ stories, and to have something meaningful to do in his first months in Italy—to have ‘an adventure’—was a positive experience. However, he also problematizes the participatory approach because ‘it is often an end in itself’, although he has managed to continue as an independent director.

After release, a documentary film typically has an afterlife in broadcasting, festivals, advocacy, and education. Artisanal productions, such as those of AMM, find their audiences through different kinds of civic networks. Online on-demand providers are also increasingly important. The archive has made a deliberate choice to make most of its productions available online under a Creative Commons license.

Particularly in the documentary film scene, an *auteur* culture prevails. The director has the opportunity to present the film at various occasions and to talk about the topic of the film as an expert. The participatory approach often tends to ignore this last phase of public engagement. In the case of *Like a Man on Earth*, the filmmakers

and protagonists shared the opportunities that emerged after the film. AMM and Andrea Segre recommended that event organizers invite one of the protagonists to be a guest at their events, which helped the protagonists create networks in Europe.

Empathetic telling and listening

Witnessing centers around telling and showing something. The notions of ‘voice’ and of ‘giving voice’ to the silenced are core values in mediated witness. However, the complexity of ‘voice’ needs careful reflection. First, there is not one ‘refugee voice’, but many. And there are no genuine, or less genuine, refugee voices—genuine often being understood as belonging to someone who is seen as a ‘suitable victim’, often a woman or a child. Second, memories of violence are narrated in a given immediate context and in a broader context, and in relation to socially available discourses. (Sigona 2015.) Not everything can be said, and not everything is heard.

In a multicultural and transnational environment, the notion of the public also needs careful reflection. In the scholarship of mediated witnessing, it is often assumed that the audience that witnesses suffering through mediation is homogeneous and Western. As Jonathan Corpus Ong (2014, 189) argues, the default viewers are middle-class White Westerners dwelling in their safe zone. However, media productions circulate across borders, and there are millions of people within Europe whose lives are intimately affected by border-related violence. The witnessing of death and violence during migration is experienced differently by diasporic audiences and those who have made the crossing themselves.

Within AMM, the ethical notion of ‘empathetic listening’ developed through self-reflection on the dignity of those who give their testimonies. Instead of

conceptualizing the narration of violence as necessarily ‘unspeakable’, AMM approaches it as ‘inaudible’. Taking this perspective, the listening context and the active role of the listener becomes relevant in the practice of witnessing. (Triulzi 2012, 105; 2013, 216.)

In the following extract, Dagmawi Yimer (2009, 104) addresses both the inability to speak and the lack of listening:

Thousands and thousands of people before me had made this journey. Still, hardly anyone has been able to make the experience visible, to show what it was like. First, because there were no ‘hearts’ willing to hear. And then also, because it is difficult to find the willingness to tell.

He continues by explaining that the willingness to tell, in his case, relates both to his memories of why he left Ethiopia and to his present and future life in Italy. By bearing witness, he takes moral responsibility as an exile: he uses the freedom of expression that he struggled to attain. As a refugee living in Europe, he also takes moral responsibility as a European: he reveals the suffering produced by European politics.

The reason I wanted to give a testimony was that I think I had a huge moral obligation to tell what we had experienced: to reveal the reality in order to save those still facing the violence and discrimination. For me who lives in Italy, to be able to expose this and also to be able to expose the direct responsibility of Italy and Europe satisfies a primary need, the reason I left my

country: freedom of expression and of political engagement. (Yimer 2009, 104.)

In my research interviews, both Dagmawi Yimer (2016a) and Andrea Segre (2016) mention that the most powerful part of *Like a Man on Earth* is the section where eyewitnesses narrate their violent experiences before crossing the Mediterranean to Italy. The inhumane treatment by smugglers and Libyan officials—rape, hunger, forced labor, and human trafficking—is recounted in the kitchen of the Asinitas school; the location plays a significant role in the process of creating an empathetic listening context. While the film was being made, the protagonists lived in squats, which did not feel like ‘home’ to them. As Yimer (2016a) explains, the school had become not merely a school but an emotionally significant place for the migrants because many of them had been spending most of their time there, cooking and making tea. In the kitchen, small groups of protagonists began to talk about their experiences with Yimer, who also spoke Amharic in these scenes.

Segre did most of the filming, without understanding what was being said. This linguistic choice gave the protagonists and Yimer significant power to tell their stories in the moment of filming. The division of labor in the act of bearing witness allowed Segre to focus on visual and non-linguistic communication, which, as he explains, is crucial to ensure the dignity of the eyewitnesses. The dignity of the protagonists is also visualized towards the end of the film, when each of them faces the camera directly for a brief moment. These shots, which resemble portrait photography, were done right after the two-hour-long sessions of giving testimony, allowing the protagonists to show the audience that they feel confident about their testimony.

Another powerful participatory aesthetic device is the movement of the camera between the protagonists. The camera follows not only the act of telling, but also that of listening. The eyewitnesses do not tell their stories directly to the camera, but to one another, in a way that expands the telling into a ‘dialogue of memory’ (Segre 2009, 101). Remembering is a collective labor, where one memory evokes another and the careful listening of others encourages the protagonists to tell their stories. In this aesthetic, the viewer, too, becomes a witness of vernacular telling and listening. Watching a person carefully listen invites the viewer into the circle of narration, as one among the other listeners. By underlining the agency of the protagonists, the filmmakers aim to balance the distance between the refugee who suffered (but survived) and the audience that witnesses the narration of the suffering.

The transnational aspect of witnessing

Various layers of temporal and spatial interconnections are made explicit in *Like a Man on Earth*. The film starts with war images of Italy invading Ethiopia, a visual reference through which viewers realize that the story of unauthorized migration by boat needs to be put into the post-colonial context. Later, the film also explicitly criticizes Italy’s bilateral agreements with al-Gaddafi’s Libya—a revelation that links the post-colonial past to the present-day actions of the Italian government.

Interestingly, this information enters the storyline through an eyewitness testimony. The film depicts a dramatized scene in a shipping container similar to those in which the protagonists were held by traffickers in Libya. A protagonist says, ‘There are two types of containers, small and large. I have been in both. It’s said they came from the Italian government.’ Dagmawi Yimer keys in to this sentence and asks for clarity:

‘From Italy?’ The protagonist responds, ‘Yes, they were a gift from the Italians to Libya. So it’s said.’ The testimony is supported by a text box that appears on screen: ‘Rome shipped to Libya rubber dinghies, off-road vehicles, buses, wetsuits, 12 thousand blankets, 6 thousand mattresses and one thousand body bags.’

When eyewitness accounts of Italian shipping containers emerged in the testimonies, Andrea Segre and others began to investigate the Italian involvement in Libya. They were unaware that Italy had contributed to the confinement of migrants in such a practical way. (Segre 2015.) By exposing Italy’s collaboration in these human rights violations, the filmmakers and AMM criticized the European Union and the Italian government. While these violations took place outside of the territory of the EU and were perpetrated by non-EU agents, they were produced by European politics and facilitated by Italy’s bilateral agreement with Libya.

The historical footage of colonized Ethiopia and the depiction of Italian involvement in modern-day Libya illustrate how the film approaches transnational aspects of memory. As Astrid Erll (2010, 311) has argued, collective memories are not as tightly bound to ‘national culture’ as has been thought. Rather, as she writes, ‘mnemonic processes unfold on levels *above* and *below* the nation’ (Erll 2010, 311; italics in the original). Making explicit the history of the Italian colonial empire shapes the understanding of present migration. This transnational memory reinforces Italy’s responsibility when facing refugees from its former colony. Michael Rothberg’s (2009) notion of multidirectional memory captures well the complexity of such travel of memory across borders. Rothberg theorizes the interaction of different memories and suggests that memory is inherently created through cross-referencing and borrowing from other ‘memory texts’. Financial and material support of the control of transit migrants in Libya—such as the satellite surveillance technology that

the European Union and Italy have funded on the Libyan coast—is embedded into the ‘reconciliation’ of colonial wrongs. Thus, the colonial past can be used in current politics in different ways—both in anti-immigration arguments and in pro-immigration activism.

Another significant transnational aspect of the film is how it reached diasporic audiences and audiences in the protagonists’ country of origin. The protagonists’ networks provided viewing opportunities in diasporic communities in Europe, Africa, and the United States. The film was also screened among family members in Ethiopia. These screenings underline the necessity of extending the understanding of cosmopolitan cinema to practices beyond production. The filmmakers considered the impact the film would have on the lives of the protagonists, their relatives, and other migrants who have gone through similar journeys. In this case, the families of migrants who had usually received calls assuring them that ‘everything is fine’ would instead hear ‘ugly things’ (Yimer 2016a). Alessandro Triulzi (2009) describes how he prepared for the screening that would reveal to the families the wounds of their loved ones. Showing the film in Ethiopia was an important part of the project for the protagonists. Dagmawi Yimer (2016a) felt it was necessary for those who stayed behind to understand those who had made the journey.

When my sister called right after seeing the film, she first apologized for not having understood the kind of experience I had gone through when coming to Italy. She was shocked and touched by the stories in the film. It’s not only one story of a single unlucky person, but the power of the film is that it is the story of many. The impact of the film for the families is that they begin to understand what it means to arrive.

The stories of violence crossed borders and shaped the collective memory of migration in different contexts. The meaning of the journey and the exile changed in the minds of the families in Ethiopia. The transmission of memories was particularly poignant in the context of extreme violence, and it was a factor considered by AMM as the carrier group. The witnessing of border-zone suffering is different for communities in the country of origin and communities whose governments are implicated in bordering. In the case of the former, witnessing can have an impact on transnational relationships and on the hopes of those who consider migrating. Those who have escaped conflict zones are often expected to support those who stayed behind. At best, knowing what migrants have gone through opens a transnational empathetic horizon and enables solidarity between communities in Ethiopia and in diaspora—and between refugees and European audiences.

This mediated witnessing also has a temporal dimension. The collection of testimonies into an archive leaves a mark for future generations, an aspect that is often forgotten in conversations about cosmopolitan solidarity. The memories that migrants have of the places they left and of the journeys they made have a chance of reaching a wider audience both in the present and in future societies. The archive records currently marginalized memories that might one day be acknowledged as part of the cultural heritage of Europe and of the countries of origin and transit. This ‘right to memory’ is another crucial aspect of cosmopolitan solidarity that extends through time. Understanding and evaluating the present in the future requires archives. This temporal orientation shows how witnessing holds the notion of preventing the suffering from happening again, creating solidarity between present and future generations.

However, in addition to the significance of memories to the imagined audience of the future, AMM acknowledges that these marginalized memories are valuable in the present. Archival and communication practices in the present reflect the right of migrants to express their memories and to connect them to past migrations and colonialism (Triulzi 2015, 432 – 433; 2016, 153). The communicative mode of documentary film connects the temporalities of witnessing: the past that is remembered, the present, and the future. As Andrea Segre (2015) explains, the most important point of making *Like a Man on Earth* was that the protagonists collectively constructed the memory of what happened during the journey.

The memories that the migrants brought into the public sphere with AMM are valuable as such: they reveal what the protagonists carry with them in Italy. Acknowledging that as worthy of collective remembering falls into the realm of memory rights. By making the diversity of ‘national’ or ‘European’ collective memory explicit, the film produces a transnational social memory of the border zone and migration. This ‘trauma telling’, an act that produces a collective trauma and makes it visible, also makes it approachable, as Jeffrey Alexander (2004) has argued. In the words of Dagmawi Yimer (2016a), ‘it is important for us [in the refugee community] to confront this issue together’. This sociological understanding of cultural trauma does not claim that an act of violence traumatizes a person, but that trauma is collectively constructed and discussed: it is a framing of what the protagonists remember to have happened. Segre’s understanding of collective memory is similar to Jeffrey Alexander’s notion of cultural trauma. To the question of why these collective memories and ‘traumas’ are socially relevant, Andrea Segre (2015) responds:

The children of Dagmawi and myself will have inside them the memory of a conflict of their parents because, officially, I was a member of the community that tried to stop Dagmawi from coming and Dagmawi was a member of the community that tried to come to us. . . . I think in the work you do in documentary film, it is important to understand what is important in the future. That is the difference between the work of a journalist and me. A journalist needs to give the information today, and I have the responsibility to give the instruments also to the future audience somehow. (Segre 2015.)

Segre acknowledges the project's solidarity with future generations and argues that documentary film as a mode of communication bridges temporalities. The social relevance of archiving these memories in the form of film lies not only in present public engagement, but also in the future.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the archival activism and participatory aesthetics of *Archivio delle Memorie Migranti*, which can be seen as a cultural intermediary in the practice of bearing witness to suffering at Europe's borders. It is a form of mediated memory work (Lohmeier & Pentzhold 2014) that potentially connects different memory communities both in the present and in the future: different groups of Europeans and others from the global North, the refugee diaspora, and those living in Ethiopia. The analysis illuminates how AMM practices a cosmopolitan solidarity that crosses not only group and spatial boundaries, but also temporality. It does so, first, by acknowledging death at European borders in the present moment in ways that create

solidarities across the refugee diaspora, which ‘can confront it together’ (Yimer 2016a). It is not a story of only one person, but of many, which creates the political potential for solidarity across refugee communities. It also creates a horizon of solidarity within transnational families that are divided by borders. AMM also potentially contributes to Europeans’ critical awareness of European responsibility for the deaths.

Second, the sensitivity to the temporal dimension that is present in the work of AMM recognizes the solidarity between past, present, and future generations. Archiving and mediating these memories is informed by the notion of *future past*. Memories provide evidence for future generations that will look back at the present time. Particularly powerful in the work of AMM as an archive and in its participatory documentary films is the vision of a multicultural social future for Europe. They are informed by a vision of Europe as a society where the descendants of both communities—of those who sought refuge and of those who either blocked or welcomed refugees—will live together.

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