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## Performance of memory: testimonies of survival and rescue at Europe's border

Karina Horsti and Ilaria Tucci

### **Introduction**

On 3 October 2013, an overcrowded fishing boat carrying mainly Eritrean refugees shipwrecked close to the Italian island of Lampedusa. At least 366 of the people on the boat died, but 155 people survived the approximately three-hour struggle in the sea until a group of Lampedusans on Vito Fiorino's leisure fishing boat *Gamar* heard the cries of the survivors. This disaster, like so many other mass deaths at the border, is accounted in public by the number of the victims: 366, 368 or 369 depending on the count; some bodies were found washed ashore later. The anti-racist organization United added the figure 373 to their List of Deaths at Europe's borders that they have updated since 1993 based on media reports (United, 2019). The differing numbers of the victims circulating in the public sphere are characteristic of the difficulty involved in the attempt to count border deaths. Despite the impossibility to present the exact numbers, exercises of border fatality metrics have proliferated. For civil society actors such as United, counting is a form of critical activism: quantifying demonstrates the *many*, the masses of the dead. In recent years, International Organization for Migration, Frontex, and several academics have compiled lists and developed methods of counting border deaths. Quantification, in other words, has become the dominant way of representing border deaths.

Scholars have also criticised the nature of the knowledge acquired by fatality metrics. Martina Tazzioli (2015) argues that counting reinforces a governmental gaze at the border by creating a sense that the border and its fatality are merely issues of management. Such a gaze normalises death at the border, flattens the dead, and does not pay attention to the families of the victims. Migrants – dead or alive – turn into objects of governmentality. The knowledge produced by this gaze escapes humanity and social life that are lost or are in danger. Jennifer Hyndman (2007), who writes about fatality metrics in relation to the Iraq war, argues that metrics are incapable of accounting for the destruction of life as they produce a removed and distanced representation of border deaths.

Artists, authors, and activists, in particular, have resisted such distanced representation prevalent in the academic, administrative, and journalistic fields and sought alternative ways of producing knowledge concerning border deaths. Examples can be found, for instance, in the documentary *Sortir du noir* (Liénard and Jimenez, 2019), the ethnography-based theatre project *Miraculi* (Zagaria, 2016), and the art installation *Love Story* (Breitz, 2017). One of the methods suggested is critical optics, a macro lens that focuses on the specificities and details of single disasters, instead of treating border deaths as generic events. For example, *Forensic Oceanography* (Heller and Pezzani, 2012) is an artistic-forensic project that traces the particularities of disasters in the Mediterranean Sea. This project, like many others seek to gain knowledge through details and particularities rather than generalities. Here the testimonies by those who have intimately lived through a disaster at the border – by witnessing death and surviving the disaster – are central. Such approaches account for the embodied spatiality of the border zone and the consequences of the fatal border by listening. In this chapter, we contribute to this alternative engagement with border deaths and argue that a key to critical knowledge is a careful and detailed telling and listening: the *work of listening*. For the Nobel literature laureate Svetlana Alexievich, who works with oral histories, history is

found in little details, and the most interesting knowledge about life is in what she calls ‘mysteries’: the memories that appear when people speak to each other and tell stories of what has happened (Alexievich, 2017). Such work of listening, we argue, is a critical means to produce knowledge on the humanity of disasters at the border. Listening is not the only mode: seeing, being in places, and doing things with those who have survived the border are equally significant ways of gaining embodied and situated knowledge. Seeing border deaths for what they are is obstructed because they appear as accidents, while they, in fact, are disasters that have been produced: they are results of a combination of political, structural, social, and individual action and inaction (see, e.g., Albahari, 2015; De Genova, 2017).

The work of listening that we examine in this chapter is situated in the project *Remembering Lampedusa* (2017–18) during which a group of academics, media professionals, activists, and refugees documented the disaster of 3 October, 2013 by archiving testimonies and documents, and producing short documentary films based on the memories of the witnesses of the disaster. The project, in which the authors of this chapter also worked, is predicated on a participatory approach involving academics, media professionals, activists, refugees, and civil rescuers. The testimonies were edited by Anna Blom (a professional film director), Adal Neguse (human rights activist), and Dominika Daubenbuchel (a professional movie editor) into ten-minutes long short films. The survivors watched the edits, commented on them, and the editing team worked through the proposed changes. The team discussed the role of ‘participation’ extensively, seeking to constantly balance and horizontalize power between those with professional film-making knowledge and those with knowledge and experience of survival and witnessing.

From early on, the telling and listening of witness testimonies became the core methodology for approaching the disaster and producing critical knowledge about it: this is embodied knowledge that would bring the *humanity of the disaster* to the foreground. To

generate such knowledge, Diana Taylor (2011: 272–3) has argued for the use of ‘presence’ as an active verb (Sp. *presenciar*). While being with the witness in the place of events, seeing the sites where violence took place and the embodied feelings and reactions of revisiting the place and the memory are central to “‘presencing’”, it also requires listening to what is being recalled and how the story is performed. ‘I participate not in the events but in his transmission of the affect emanating from the events’, Taylor (2011: 273) writes in the context of presencing the testimony of a torture victim in Villa Grimaldi, Chile.

The *Remembering Lampedusa* project team began to document the stories of four survivors and two Lampedusan civil responders by recording and filming testimonies. However, witnessing and testimony turned out to be complex group–individual practices. As soon as a witness starts telling about the act of experiencing or seeing something, the act turns into a moral act of bearing witness: an act of taking responsibility for the knowledge one has gained (see e.g. Durham Peters, 2001; Felman, 2000; Tait, 2011; Zelizer, 2007). While each testimony is unique, a personal account that cannot be repeated by any other witness, it is also a critical and a political act: the story is told for a particular reason and with implicit consequences in mind. Moreover, a witness testimony is performative, as Shoshana Felman has argued, it is a ‘*performance of a story*’ (Felman, 2000: 41, emphasis original). The story is shared with those who are present in person or who are imagined to be present through mediation: its primary or secondary audience (de Jong, 2018: 40–6). In the case of the documentary film project, while telling, the witnesses knew that their story would be shared with the public. Furthermore, for those who become witnesses *through* mediation (both the film-makers and the audiences of the films) witnessing is inherently ‘a mode of listening’ (Wake, 2009: 82). So, for us, the argument that testimony is a performance of a story is to highlight that testimony does not equal to ‘real’ but moves between ‘pretend and new constructions of the “real”’ (Taylor, 2016: 6). By using the term performance, we

acknowledge that the notion has been used across different fields to describe and analyse a wide range of social behaviour. Our use of the term follows Diana Taylor's (2016) work which highlights that performance creates effects and affects: it is important to analyse what performance does, 'what it allows us to see, to experience, and to theorize, and its complex relation to systems of power' (Taylor, 2016: 6). A testimony documents the disaster, and it does so in a specific relationship between those who tell and to whom they tell it, or imagine to tell it.

In this chapter, we argue that the witness testimonies of the Lampedusa disaster are 'performances of a story', and that careful attention needs to be paid to the complexities of the production of the 'performance'; this is the context in which the story is told and listened to. We analyse the process of creating a listening context as well as the relationships that generated by the act of telling and listening the testimonies. This chapter explores how understanding testimony as performance of a story allows us to be more attentive to the contexts of telling and listening. While we focus on telling and listening in this chapter, we acknowledge that other non-verbal communication and the place of the telling are equally important to the performance of the story. Specifically, we focus on the participatory production of the context in which telling and listening are made possible. These practices are crucial in developing a critical optic required to gain an alternative representation of the fatal border, one that is currently unavailable because of the dominating forms of representation, particularly the quantification of deaths.

We first discuss previous literature on witnessing and listening, and position the *Remembering Lampedusa* project in relation to these. In the analytical section, we examine how we created an emphatic listening context for the two witnesses, and how the relationship to the listeners shaped the performance of the story. Our aim is to examine witnessing and testimony as methods needed to gain knowledge of fatal border and its human consequences,

and argue for the potentiality of these methods in providing alternative representations through arts. Nevertheless, we conclude that these are highly contested and complex practices, that need careful scrutiny and ethical reflection.

### **Politics of witnessing and of listening**

Attention to the context of listening is highly significant in the field of cultural production, particularly because artists, authors, theatre makers, activists, and journalists often use storytelling and testimony in their work with refugees. In addition to journalism and civic activism, arts and culture have recently become central fields in documenting the crisis of the reception of refugees in Europe. There is a strong understanding that art can bear witness to politics, as Lindroos and Möller (2017) have argued (see also Brambilla, in this volume). For example, Belfiore and Bennett (2008: 10) have claimed that art can be a source for ‘ethical vision’ in societies engaging with difficult presents and pasts. One fundamental debate about art that engages with traumatic events has focused on representation of the Holocaust. Michael Rothberg (2000) identifies two contradictory yet coexisting approaches to the demands regarding representing the Holocaust: realist and anti-realist. By the realist approach, Rothberg (2000: 3–4) means ‘both an epistemological claim that the Holocaust is knowable and a representational claim that this knowledge can be translated into a familiar mimetic universe’. The antirealist position, on the contrary, means ‘both a claim that the Holocaust is not knowable or would be knowable only under radically new regimes of knowledge and that it cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata’ (2000: 4). Rothberg presents a third mode of representation that engages with both the realist (or documentary) and the antirealist (or radically new aesthetic), that of traumatic realism. This approach combines the banal everyday and the extreme horrific experiences of Holocaust

survivors. Whether the artwork speaks using ‘realist’, ‘antirealist’, or ‘traumatic realist’ aesthetics, it is uniquely capable of illuminating structures and processes in European societies that produce violent borders. The borders and their consequences are often not seen or felt by the citizens.

In all three modes of knowing concerned with the traumatic event, however, testimony and the first hand eyewitness experience are central. While feminist and post-colonial scholars have criticised the idea of ‘giving voice’ to marginalised communities for several decades (see, e.g., Spivak, 1988), it is still oftentimes debated in the field of the arts field; this critique is currently accompanied by attention to listening and the right to be heard. The contemporary positions on this issue underline that ethical listening is not an attempt to cognitively understand and explain the Other or what is different, but to understand unequal relationships and power dynamics. Instead of providing explanations, listening means presence at the telling of the event and openness to recognize the incompleteness and unsettledness emerging in encounters across differences (see Dreher 2009, 2012; Husband, 1996; Ong, 2014; Rovisco, 2015; Sreberny, 2006).

There is often little attention paid in the actual artwork or activist *Kunstaktion* to the ways in which the story has been produced and listened to, that is, to the performance of the story. The notion of performance includes the presence of a spectator or a listener. The people who listen to the testimonies through mediation become ‘secondary witnesses’ (Wake, 2013) or ‘mediated witnesses’ (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009) to the events. Those who have not been in the moment of disaster in person and, thus, have not witnessed the events in ‘flesh’<sup>1</sup> (Harari, 2009) can nevertheless be moved by the testimony in profound ways. This is sometimes triggered by the artwork itself in the tradition of postmodern aesthetics (Rothberg, 2000: 13), so that the performativity and the power relations in the situation of the telling and listening become audible or visible to the viewer.<sup>2</sup> The self-consciousness of representation



may also occur through other means such as websites, talks, articles, and ‘the making of’ videos produced alongside the main project. The documentary film *Come un uomo sulla terra* directed by Andrea Segre, Riccardo Biadene, and Dagmawi Yimer (2008) is an exemplary project that reflects the listening context at multiple levels. The film is a manifestation of participatory film-making, as it is visible to the viewer that Yimer is simultaneously a protagonist and a film-maker (see Horsti, 2019b). In addition, the DVD version of the film includes a book that reflects on the production process and what one of the project’s collaborators, historian Alessandro Triulzi (2015: 215–17), has termed as the ‘empathic listening context’. The essential elements of this listening context are a willingness to speak but also its participatory setting, where the stories are shared as a joint effort that assures both confidence and empathic listening (Triulzi, 2015). Within the broader project of *Remembering Lampedusa*, this chapter sets out to do something similar: we discuss the complexities of testimony and witnessing by examining the listening context of the project, and in doing so, we aim to contribute to the practice of critical assessment of the production and performance of the story.

### **Creating an empathic listening context**

Our analysis focuses on two testimonies that narrate the 3 October 2013 disaster in Lampedusa. Solomon Ghebrahiwit, from Eritrea, is one of the 155 survivors of the disaster and Vito Fiorino is the first Lampedusan civil responder who saved 47 people in the early morning to his leisure boat, including Ghebrahiwit. Both of the witnesses of the disaster told their stories in their native language, Tigrinya and Italian, in their living rooms to a Finnish-Swedish-Italian-Eritrean research and documentary film crew in 2017. Ghebrahiwit lives presently in Sweden as a refugee and Fiorino in Lampedusa where he has his second home.

The testimonies lasting approximately for one hour were filmed and transcribed in their original language, and then translated into English.

The situations where the memories of the disaster could be evoked and shared took place in the project in an organic and participatory way: none of us academics, media professionals, or refugees was in charge of the moment of the telling. The survivors or the rescuers might express a detail or two about the disaster in the middle of conversation as we spent time together, but the act of remembering meant going into a specific emotional state. Trust was the essential element of that state, particularly so to the survivors, who decided on telling their testimonies collectively. They explained to the non-Eritreans of the project that the lack of public narratives of Eritrean refugees in Europe was due to the fact that Eritreans have kept details about their suffering and personal emotions in the private sphere. The media in Eritrea was controlled by the regime. The ‘culture of secrecy’ that the survivors refer to is echoed in scholarship addressing Eritrean responses to decades of violence and war.

Anthropologist Victoria Bernal (2017) writes about the broader cultural ‘unspeakability’ concerning personal losses among the Eritreans, also among those in diaspora, and sees it as ‘a secondary form of violence’ (Bernal 2014: 7, 27–9). The violence that Eritreans have experienced through generations, during the struggle and war for independence from Ethiopia, during harsh regime of President Isaias Afewerki, and during the escape from the country leading to the refugee experience are not talked about in public. In the official discourse, those who have died in wars are considered to be ‘heroes’ and those who have died while fleeing the regime are ‘traitors’. This is the context in which the participating survivors performed their stories. Eritreans, like many other refugees, have often experienced traumatising events before escaping; and border-crossing, including seeing others dying, is a further traumatic experience. These layers of traumatic events and delayed responses to them shape – or may even prevent – the narrative of the border-crossings (on border, narrative, and

trauma, see Schimanski, 2006: 49–50; 2019; Wolfe, in this volume). There are various geographical, social, and cultural borders that refugees have encountered before leaving Eritrea, during the journey, and while in Europe. In the *Remembering Lampedusa* project, the act of recalling the journey and the disaster as a group was essential to piece the memories together into a narrative. The decision to do so also publicly was done as a group, which was necessary since in the Eritrean diasporic setting to tell one's testimony is a critical and a radical act.

The *Remembering Lampedusa* project involved two stages of producing the listening context empathetically: one was collective and the other one individual. In his definition of the empathetic listening context, Triulzi (2015) emphasises confidence and empathy, which are both founded on trust. Different but equally important layers of relationships of trust were developed in the project, including the relationships among the survivors, those between the survivors and Adal Neguse, the two Lampedusan responders and the survivors, those among the international and multidisciplinary team members, and those between the non-Eritrean team members and the Eritrean survivors. The survivors had created a familial and trustful relationship between the Lampedusan civil rescuers during their return to Lampedusa to commemorate the disaster. Adal Neguse had become an important figure for the survivors in Sweden, where he has helped many of them in their new everyday lives. Karina Horsti who directed the project had collaborated with Adal Neguse and Anna Blom, the co-directors of the films, and she had built relationships with two of the four survivors during collaborative research in Lampedusa. These earlier encounters and friendships were fundamental for the trust needed to embark on the project.

The survivor testimonies were developed in two encounters with the team. The first phase was a memory workshop where the survivors collectively recalled and shared their memories about the disaster within the group. The second one was focused on the individuals'

testimonies, and it was shared through the camera work. However, instead of progressing in a linear way from one stage to another, the process was circular. Individual shootings, meetings, and edited version of conversations were entangled with group meetings, which provided us with the opportunity to confirm and strengthen the feeling of collective trust and safety when sharing the testimonies and working with them. This circular process facilitated the production of informed consent. Each participant signed an informed consent form, but that took place only after the collective workshop and the first shootings, when it was clear to everyone how the project was to be carried out. Informed consent, therefore, is a process, rather than a mere formal act of signing a paper; it is founded on a deep accomplishment and commitment of sharing personal memories, and it is a conscious decision to take a risk through telling.

The memory workshop took place at the home of one of the survivors in Sweden.<sup>3</sup> We first prepared and ate an Eritrean meal with *ingera*, and then the host prepared an Eritrean coffee ritual. During the three or four hours of preparation, eating, and drinking coffee, we chatted about our lives in general, about Swedish, Finnish, and Eritrean cultures, and watched Eritrean and Ethiopian music videos. After the host had collected the coffee making equipment from the living room floor, she sat on a large sofa with the others. It was clear to everyone that this was the moment for speaking about the disaster. The listening context had been created in a joint process of *being together*. The conversation in Tigrinya lasted for two hours. Every now and then, someone would summarize the conversation in Swedish for those without a command of Tigrinya, but nothing was recorded. This was the stage of sharing memories, remembering collectively, but also a stage for collective preparation and decision-making: would some of them want to share their memories with broader publics through the mode of documentary film and filmed testimony?

The second phase of remembering took place 6–12 months later, when the survivors present in the first workshop narrated their stories to Adal Neguse in the presence of the camera and the other team members in their own homes. Solomon Ghebrahiwit's testimony, under analysis in this chapter, took place six months after the first workshop. Again, we prepared *ingera* and enjoyed a meal together. Ghebrahiwit participated in the setting up of the filming equipment in his living room and when that was ready, he sat on the sofa and said when he was ready to start. Ghebrahiwit decided what constituted a testimony – where the disaster began and who were the protagonists in the story. The narrative started with Adal's question: Could you tell me your name and where you come from? After that, Solomon Ghebrahiwit directed the telling, and Adal Neguse made some clarifying questions only. Solomon had the story to a certain extent 'ready' in his mind. The testimony had some of the same elements that he had narrated in the days immediately following the disaster in an interview with Zed Nelson for Channel 4's *Dispatches* program 'Europe's Immigration Disaster' (2014) and some of the elements he had shared in the collective memory workshop.

Creating the listening context with Vito Fiorino was different. When Ilaria Tucci first contacted him by telephone a few months before our actual meeting, the team already knew he was willing to speak openly about his experience and opinions concerning the disaster. He had released numerous interviews about what had happened on 3 of October. We noticed that his interviews had same narrative elements, word-to-word. Fiorino argued in many of the interviews, including the one conducted in this project, that the rescue operation was inefficient and that the arrival of the Italian Coast Guard after his friend's emergency call took longer than was officially reported. He also reminded repeatedly that the survivors had witnessed large military vessels passing by them without stopping for rescue.

Although Vito Fiorino had been interviewed several times before, he was eager to participate in the documentary film project without hesitation. Our willingness to listen to

his story and share it with a wider audience were enough to motivate Fiorino to give his testimony once more, he said. So, on a day with heavy rain, he waited for the authors and the film-makers Anna Blom and Ditte Uljas in his home in Lampedusa. He had bought his house in Lampedusa 17 years ago after a summer holiday spent there. We had already spent time together during our two days in Lampedusa before the filming of the testimony.

After the filming equipment had been set around his dinner table in the living room, Fiorino asked: 'Do you want the short version or the long version of my story?' He was about to perform a story that he had told numerous times before, and he had created different versions of it. Nevertheless, after his one-hour testimony, Fiorino said, the re-telling of the long version was always emotionally tiring and he had to get into a specific emotional state in order to perform the story. Fiorino, like Ghebrahiwit, signalled the moment when the performance of the story started. It started when he had gained the emotional confidence. For example, Ghebrahiwit sat on the sofa in front of the camera that had been placed on a tripod, but he sat still and did not speak before everyone else had also taken their seats. A still moment signalled the beginning of the telling. He also signalled where the story of the disaster started and where it ended, and what aspects were not to be shared – the silences were deliberate.

### **Relationship with the listener(s)**

A crucial element in the listening context of the survivor's testimony concerns the primary listener of the testimony, Adal Neguse, who had a personal connection with the survivors. His brother had died in the shipwreck, and Neguse had travelled to Lampedusa in the days following the disaster to look for his missing younger brother among the survivors. Neguse's motivation to evoke the memories and encourage the public to listen to them was crucial to

the project. Towards the end of the testimony, Solomon Ghebrahiwit recalls the moment he saw Neguse holding a photograph of his brother at the refugee reception centre and asking: 'Do you know this person? Was he on the boat?' For Solomon, the memory of Adal Neguse searching for his missing brother prompted another memory that becomes a part of the former's testimony: the difficulty of calling his own brother, who also had escaped Eritrea, to let him know that he had survived. The difficulty was that, at the same time, he would have to pass the news about those who had not survived. On the boat, there were ten friends whom he knew from Dekemhare, Eritrea, and he was the only one who survived the disaster:

Wasn't the disaster on Thursday? I didn't call on Thursday. It was Friday evening when I called. They had given us a phone card so we could call our relatives. But, you know, I felt ashamed that I had survived. To say that I have survived, I didn't call. I kept quiet. I didn't tell my family, no one. Nevertheless, my brother had heard somehow that I was on that ship and people had already started to console him. He thought I was dead. Some others had already called on Thursday. Then, I called and said 'Hello Musie', my brother said 'Selie' and fainted. He was gone. That was it. And then, soon after, you came with your brother's photo. I felt your emotion so strongly, and I saw my brother in you. We should forget, but honestly, this is what I always remember. When I remember my brother, I remember you and your brother. (Solomon Ghebrahiwit's testimony)

The person to whom Ghebrahiwit narrated the story shaped its performance. The memory of their first encounter brought to the surface the memory of the delayed telephone call to his own brother. This memory also demonstrates how the disaster did not end in the events at sea, and how survival necessitated certain practices in the afterlife as a survivor. These practices

became parts of the testimony. What this means is that survival resulted complex and contradictory feelings as the above quotation illustrates: guilt and grief are stronger than the survivor's potential happiness of being able to tell his brother the news of his survival.

Adal Neguse's presence as a primary listener shaped the story also in other ways. Solomon Ghebrahiwit mentions the names of various places – schools he went to in Eritrea, Mendefera where he worked as a DJ, a mixer in a nightclub, and an announcer in a movie theatre before he was forcibly enslaved in Dekemhare by the army. Ghebrahiwit and his friends prepared for the trip to Libya in Sudan, doing their shopping in Shuq-Ashaebi, a place that Google maps does not recognise. He also talks about a place in Sudan where he was tortured by the kidnapers. All these details would make no sense to those listeners in the room who are not familiar with those places. Possibly, Ghebrahiwit would not have shaped the story in the same detailed way if Neguse were not among listeners. However, it does not mean that those details would not matter to those who are not familiar with Eritrea and the places along the escape route. On the contrary, since those details are in the transcribed testimony that we read as an English translation, they affect us. We become aware that the disaster did not happen only at sea in sight of Lampedusa, but that it began much earlier, before the European border, and that there are many places and worlds we are not familiar with, but which exist as important sites of memory for the survivors. In the European collective imagination, long before the disaster happened, Lampedusa had already become recognized as a symbolic site of memory (Nora, 1996) for death and suffering at the border. It is unquestionably a significant memory site for thousands of migrants that passed through the island, including the survivors of 3 October 2013 disaster. However, as Ghebrahiwit's story demonstrates, there are other borders that remain unacknowledged in the European public sphere. The border zone that produced the fatality extends far beyond the actual European Union border at sea, and the impact of the disaster continues to be present in the life of Solomon Ghebrahiwit in Sweden.



Adal Neguse has the ability to listen to a story told in this way. For the majority of the European public, those places become visible and audible through this testimony and act of narration (Wolfe, in this volume) – and through its translation, potentially. Consequently, the places become meaningful sites of memory also in the small Swedish town where Ghebrahiwit performed his story on a Saturday, the day off from his work as a bus driver. Furthermore, his testimony is shaped by his life in Sweden: when explaining what kind of bread they were able to buy at one smugglers' holding place in Libya, Solomon refers to a Swedish grocery store: 'it was the same long white bread that we can buy here at Hemköp'. The temporality and spatiality of the disaster – as it unfolds in Solomon's testimony – extends beyond 3 October 2013 and the specific site right off Lampedusa. The testimony is a manifestation of transnational memory that connects different sites and people in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, Italy, and Sweden. Similarly, Solomon Ghebrahiwit's motivation to narrate his story has multiple temporal and spatial layers. His memory of Neguse in Lampedusa encourages him to collaborate in the project. His sense of 'survivor citizenship' (Horsti, forthcoming), that is, his acting upon his experience of survival, necessitates that he recalls the disaster for two main reasons: first, for the memory of the dead, and second, for the rights of the living present-day refugees who have suffered along the journey, particularly in Libyan detention centres.

In addition, Vito Fiorino has a strong need to share his testimony by recalling publicly what he had witnessed. Part of Fiorino's (often-repeated) testimony criticises the Coast Guard's slow response to the disaster and the lack of public investigation into the disaster. Fiorino was obliged to repeat his testimony because of the aim of finding justice, he told us. For Fiorino, stating facts of what he had seen on 3 October, 2013 is not enough. The emotional state, embodying the memory, is crucial for the *performance of the story*. Each time he narrates the story, he does that in a specific emotional mode. During his testimony,

Fiorino recognized how the act of remembering intensifies emotions. He said: ‘you amplify this... this moment hundred times more’.<sup>4</sup> This takes place in interaction with the listeners: the emotional power of the testimony is produced in the relation to those who are willing to listen. While for Fiorino the telling of the story is repetitive, for us, as listeners, it takes place for the first time. His presence and telling *embody* his claims concerning the injustice that he witnessed both in the scene and after the disaster.

For Fiorino, repeating the public testimony is also a tool for self-exploration: despite having rescued 47 persons during that night, he feels the frustration of being unable to save more lives. Sharing his memory about the disaster is also a way of living with the experience of having witnessed the deaths of so many people, similar to Ghebrahiwit’s sense of survivorship. Fiorino describes his first reaction to the disaster site as ‘a stab wound’, and re-telling his experience in different contexts has become a way of living and honouring the memory of those who died. In some way, through his testimony, the dignity of the lost human lives can survive.

Vito’s testimony emerges as a personally needed act of healing and at the same time as an act advocating justice. The two levels – personal and public – are strongly interconnected in his telling: ‘What happened that morning, what we experienced, is something that... sooner or later, I should ask some help. The institutional support performed really badly. No-one has thought that we would need some psychological support’. In Vito’s eyes and words, the disaster appears not only in the deaths he witnessed, but also in the absence of cooperation and support from the institutions that manage the border.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined how a conceptualisation of witnessing and testimony as a ‘performance of a story’ contributes to the production of a context where telling and listening to experiences of the border become possible. Instead of ‘giving voice’ to those who have experienced the violence of the border, we have highlighted the ability to listen and to *presence* to those experiences. The analysis of the *Remembering Lampedusa* project demonstrates how at least two aspects are crucial for this end. First, telling and listening are founded on mutual trust and commitment. They need to be nurtured throughout and after the project. Privileges and power relationships are to be taken into consideration constantly, and they need to be discussed and negotiated in order to locate ways of balancing and horizontalising power.

Second, teamwork and intermediaries allow for different kinds of details and memories to appear. This does not mean simply that cultural intermediaries such as Adal Neguse in the project would function as those who translate and explain ‘differences’ to ‘us’, a group whose understanding would form the norm. It is more about learning to listen to accented stories – stories that have places, names, and events that are not familiar to those who listen. In addition, the motivations of those who ask others to narrate their stories need to be scrutinised. Those who tell have the right to justify of their motivations.

Thus, what is fundamental is self-reflexive thinking concerning the motivation of the scholars, activists, authors, and artists who become ‘secondary witnesses’ by documenting and mediating the testimonies of others. In *Remembering Lampedusa* project, we asked question of what is our right to ask for a testimony. Our motivation was founded on the idea of rethinking the ‘cultural’ and ‘national’ memory of the Nordic countries. We took the responsibility to offer our expertise in archiving the testimonies as evidence of the present-day mass death. The governments of the Nordic countries have contributed to the production of the violent EU border, and a majority of those who survived the disaster in

Lampedusa live in Sweden and Norway. The memory of the disaster is central to ‘Swedish’ (and that of other European countries) history, we argue.

Finally, both Vito Fiorino and Solomon Ghebrahiwit had their motivations to tell their stories. In both cases, this did not take place for the first time. On the contrary, both had told their experiences before, and in fact, constructed ‘a story’ (with a short or a long version, as Fiorino noted) that they were able to perform again. Fiorino stressed that the fact that someone wanted to listen to his experience was enough to motivate him to tell – and to embody, presence, his claim. He was driven by a sense of justice – he would continue to tell the story until the victims and survivors receive justice, he said. Fiorino has continued to remind the public that the disaster has not been investigated. The high number of deaths resulted from an inefficient rescue operation, he says. In a similar vein, in his public appearances, alongside with telling his story, Ghebrahiwit advocates for refugees who are presently held in Libyan detention centres. The mutual interest in engaging with the memories of the disaster, although articulated in different ways, has been central to the ability to produce a context for telling and listening testimonies.

## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> By analysing Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Yuval Noah Harari (2009) makes a distinction between two different forms of witnessing that claim distinct modes of authority – eye-witnessing that claims to be objective observation and flesh-witnessing that draws from experiential authority.

<sup>2</sup> In another example, Candice Breitz successfully brings the metarepresentational level and the politics of celebrity and attention visible in her installation *Love Story* (for an analysis see Horsti, 2019a).

<sup>3</sup> In the workshop there were present four survivors (three men and one woman), the husband of the woman, a relative of one victim and the Swedish-Eritrean human rights activist Adal Neguse, the Swedish director Anna Blom, and Karina Horsti.

<sup>4</sup> 'Voi amplificate questa... questo momento cento volte di più in quel momento'. All translations from Italian to English are by Ilaria Tucci.