

Blackness Unchained: Moving Beyond the Postcolonial Subject  
and Humanizing the Black Migrant Experience

PROFESSOR ROSE

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I'm Not Black, and you are Not white

By: Prince EA

I am not Black

I mean, that's what the world calls me, but it's not... me  
I didn't come out of my mother's womb saying, "Hey everybody, I'm... Black."

No, I was taught to be black

And you were taught to call me that

Along with whatever you call yourself

It's just a.... label

See, from birth the world force feeds us these.... labels

And eventually we all swallow them

We digest and accept the labels, never ever doubting them

But there's one problem:

Labels are not you and labels are not me

Labels are just ...labels

But who we truly are is not... skin... deep

See, when I drive my car, no one would ever confuse the car for.... me

Well, when I drive my ....body, why do you confuse me for my... body?

It's.... my ....body....get it? Not me

Let me break it down

See, our bodies are just cars that we operate and drive around

The dealership we'll call society decided to label mine the "black edition,"

Yours the "Irish" or "White edition"

And with no money down, 0% APR, and no test drive

We were forced to own these cars for the rest of our lives

Forgive me, but I fail to see the logic or pride  
In defining myself or judging another by the cars we drive  
Because who we truly are is found inside

Listen, I'm not here to tell you how science has concluded that genetically we're all mixed

And race in the human species doesn't exist  
Or how every historian knows that race was invented in the 15th century  
To divide people from each other and it has worked perfectly...

No.... I'm not here to lecture

I just want to ask one question

Who would you be if the world never gave you a label?

Never gave you a box to check

Would you be White? Black? Mexican?

Asian? Native American? Middle Eastern? Indian?

No. We would be one; we would be together

No longer living in the error

Of calling human beings Black people or White people

These labels that will forever blind us from seeing a person for who they are  
But instead seeing them through the judgmental, prejudicial, artificial filters of who we THINK  
they are

And when you let an artificial label define yourself

Then, my friend, you have chosen smallness over greatness and minimized your.... self

Confined and divided yourself from others

And it is an undeniable fact that

When there is division, there will be conflict

And conflict starts wars

There-fore every war has started over labels

It's always us... versus them  
So the answer to war, racism, sexism, and every other -ism  
Is so simple that every politician has missed it  
It's the labels...  
We must rip them off  
Isn't it funny how no baby is born racist  
Yet, every baby cries when they hear the cries of another  
No matter the gender, culture or color  
Proving that deep down, we were meant to connect and care for each other  
That is our mission, and that it's not my opinion  
That is the truth in a world that has sold us fiction  
Please listen, labels only distort our vision  
Which is why half of those watching this will dismiss it  
Or feel resistance and conflicted  
But, just remember...  
So did the cater-pillar  
Before it broke through its shell and became the magnificent butterfly  
Well, these labels are our shells and we must do the same thing  
So we can finally spread our wings  
Human beings were not meant to be slapped with labels like groceries at supermarkets  
DNA cannot be regulated by the FDA  
We were meant to be free  
And only until you remove them all  
And stop living and thinking so small  
Will we be free to see ourselves and each other for who we....TRULY.... are



*Figure 1 Photo taken by the Mediterranean Migration Mosaic Team. From the port of Lampedusa*

The Mediterranean Sea encompasses many colors, tongues, realities. It is the venue where diversity can be celebrated. Geographically the Mediterranean is the point of intersection of between Europe, Africa, and the Middles East (King, 1997). Biologically, the Mediterranean is fed on a diet of olives and is the mother of Aleppo Pine tree, vines, and cypresses. Culturally, the Mediterranean contains a variety of foods, wines, music, and people who live under the sparkling sunlight that influences the mood of the sea which is expressed through various complexions (King 1997). The beauty and complexity of these multiple colors in the Mediterranean has attracted many people, including the legendary painter Vincent Van Gogh. Vincent Van Gogh described the Mediterranean Sea as “the color of a mackerel. It’s

changeable. You don't always know if its green or violet, you can't even say its blue, because the next moment the changing reflection has taken on a tint of rose or gray" (Di Maio 2006 pg.1) Di Maio suggests that the only color that can symbolically represent the merging of these various colors is black (Di Maio 2006). The blackness of the Mediterranean Sea can be symbolic of the mass migrations from Africa to Europe. However, the Mediterranean has always been black as it is the point of intersection of multiple countries, identities, and cultures. The Mediterranean Sea is not a homogenous environment and the narrative of the Mediterranean Sea is further complicated by human ideologies of power. Politically, the various voices heard within the Mediterranean do not sing in harmony: some voices will drown out others (Di Maio 2006). Throughout history the European voice has dominated and smothered the African voice through systems of oppression. Furthermore, passengers of the sea are giving costumes of identities that divides people into categories of privilege, authority, or inferiority (Lerner 2010). More often than not it is the black body that represents a weak, helpless, refugee in need of European intervention. So, the notion of the Mediterranean Sea as being black is a very interesting statement because, historically, the idea of blackness and the black body was considered inferior, negative, different, and something to be feared.

### Black African Refugees

In the last forty years Europe has been experiencing massive waves of migration from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. At the end of 2012, close to nine million refugees had been living in refugee camps and other settlements in Europe for more than a decade" (Gatrell 2013 pg.1). Furthermore, many of these migrants are refugees coming from various countries in the world and each region has its own particular cause of migration. However,

during my research in Italy, I mostly encountered migrants coming from Sub-Saharan or black Africa. So, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on the causes of migration for Sub-Saharan Africans and their existence in Italy as black persons. While most of the people that I interacted with were refugees from Libya, I also met people coming from Gambia, Senegal, and Nigeria. Thus, it is important that I provide the causes of migration for these four countries.

#### Methods:

My research project was conducted over a period of three weeks in Italy with the Mediterranean Migration Mosaic team. The Mediterranean Migration Mosaic team consisted of a group of 11 students and 3 professors. During, the three weeks of field work in Italy, we traveled to Bologna, Prato, Padua, Palermo, Mazara del Vallo, Sutera, and Lampedusa. In order, to better understand the realities of migrants living in Italy we used a mixed methods approach of ethnography, participant observation, and interviews. Furthermore, within this paper I use methods of auto ethnography to incorporate my experiences and interactions with people from Africa and Italy as a black man from the United States. Also, I will provide a literature review that integrates my research findings and research done by other scholars surrounding this issue. The Mediterranean Migration Mosaic team was able to interview multiple people including refugees, cultural mediators, legal aids, teachers, doctors, politicians, and a United Nations representative. However, my research will focus solely on the interviews and interactions I had with Sub-Saharan Africans. Most of these migrants were refugees from Libya, Gambia, Senegal, and Nigeria. The massive waves of migration coming from African countries has generated ideas of immigration anxiety and fear that Europe is being invaded.

## Statistics of immigration into Italy

The idea that Europe is being invaded by the large numbers of migrants that continue to arrive on the shores of Southern European countries has dominated politics, public opinion, and the media in Europe. In 1991 there were, 6 million illegal immigrants, including asylum seekers who were denied asylum but refused to leave. Then, in 2005 the European Union estimated that there were approximately 3 million, with between 400,000 to 500,000 illegal immigrants arriving annually (D' Appollonia 2012). By 2010, the European Union reported that there were about 17 million immigrants in the 15 member states. The European Union also reported that there are fewer than three million black people in Europe (Sanches, 2011 p. 126). Conversely, the United Nations reported that there are approximately 64 million international migrants in Europe. Corresponding demographics figures provided by the World Bank revealed that close to a third of these immigrants in Europe are from Africa and the Caribbean (Sanches 126). These conflicting numbers on black immigrant populations provided by the European Union and the United Nations raise questions of: How are these numbers used to prevent effective policies from being implemented to support black migrants? In what ways are these statistics used to create immigration anxiety?

Europeans have viewed these numbers to signal an "invasion." The rhetoric of "invasion" is intrinsically linked to illegal immigration. Furthermore, the word "invasion" is a war term that is used to describe enemy forces that seeks to intrude into the space of another country to conquer it. Although, these statistics are alarming to Europeans, phenotypical and cultural characteristics of immigrants also raise fear and immigration anxiety within Europe (D' Appollonia 2012 p. 20). This "other" or enemy that poses this threat has been identified as



“vaguely dark-skinned, meager, most certainly undocumented, from the global South” (Rinelli 2016 p2). Thus, the hyper-visibility of black African migrants exposes them to social exclusion, political and legal discrimination, and labels of *clandestini*, boat people, and/or criminals. Although, black African migrant bodies are hyper-visible physically, they are invisible socially and politically. Abdelmalek Sayad term the alienation of black African migrants as a “double absence.” Abdelmalek Sayad defined the idea of “double absence” as, “the social condition of emigrants/immigrants who are condemned to be absent twice, both in respect to their country of origin and their new society in the host country” (Rinelli 2016 p. XXIX). Many migrants in Europe experience this invisibility as they are physically absent in their home countries, and lack voting rights, money to buy property, and access to education in host countries. Therefore, migrants do not possess the essential tools to create significant change in Italian society. This begs the question of: In what ways do black African immigrants threaten Europeans?

At the core of Europeans’ fear is the threat of diversity. The fear of losing a European identity as being a hegemonic white space (Sanches 2010): of people with pale skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes. However, Europeans do not use race as the basis of their fear. Instead, Europeans refer to the potential threat of cultural erasure caused by immigration (D’ Appollonia 2010). One of the most frequently targeted immigrant populations are Muslims. Islam is one of the widely practiced religions in Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, which is where most of these people migrate from. People have vocalized their fear of Muslims presence as a physical, mental, and cultural invasion that threatens democracy. Others have criticized Muslims for the unwillingness to assimilate and their attack on the values of their host countries (D’ Appollonia 2010). It is important to note that in an Italian context, religion is

extremely important because Italy's white identity coincides with its Catholic identity (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012). This raises the question of: why should black African immigrants be forced to assimilate to western culture in a post-colonial era? Europeans also express concerns about their ethnic future. In 2007, the EU population grew to 497 million and approximately 80 percent of this population growth was due to immigration (D'Appollonia 2010). In response to this David Coleman, co-founder of Migration Watch UK, argued that "this marks the cessation of a specific heritage by changing the social and cultural fabric of receiving societies" (D' Appollonia 2010 p.21) Additionally, anti-migration groups also have a role in the circulation of mythical numbers, by using terminology that is devised to depict new major waves of immigrants as a threat to national cohesion and identity (D'Appollonia 2010). However, D' Appollonia argues that there is not a current "invasion" of Europe by immigrants, because Europe has been able to manage their immigrant population through policies of securitization and externalization to increase border control (22). D' Appollonia adds to this argument that "there is no clash of civilizations in Europe, but there is an increasing clash of misperceptions that aggravate ethnic tensions, and a sense of victimization and frustrations" (22). During, my research in Italy I tried to figure out what this Italian fear of blackness was as I would frequently ask white Italians about the racism on black bodies in Europe? I would eventually refine this question to: How would you characterize race relations between Italians and African migrants? Many white Italians would respond by saying "we do not have a long history with black people in our country like the United States." Every time I heard this statement from white Italians, I thought of the eighty long years that Italians had colonial territories in Africa.

## Formal Italian Colonialism in Africa

During the infancy of Italian colonization there was great national debate on figuring out which structural methods of colonialism would work best for Italian colonialism in Africa. Originally, mass emigration from Italy was humiliating and caused labor problems. However, Benito Mussolini thought that these massive amounts of Italian emigrants located all across the world could benefit Italy in his plan of large scale settlement by using peasants to populate colonial territories abroad (Fuller et al., 2008). This form of colonization was called “demographic colonialism;” it was expensive and old fashioned but unique compared to other European forms of colonialism. However, former colonist of Libya, Lessona argued for “state sponsored demographic colonization that had four distinctive characteristics that could be implemented in four types of land” (Fuller et al., 2008 p.86) First, national demographic colonization would be implemented by state run agencies and peasants would function as military garrisons and eventually gain possession of the land. Second, small settlements were to be worked by Italian farmers who had modest initial capital and know-how. Third, industrial colonization would be used on estates unsuited for demographic settlement and would be given to competent fascist confederations that would work under government supervision. Fourth, native settlements, which included estates owned by Africans who would be given tools, seeds, and instruction by the Italian government (Fuller et al., 2008 p. 86). A third, opinion was suggested that “Italy should provide the basic economic infrastructure for colonies” (Fuller et al., 2008 p.87). However, in the end everyone agreed that “the transplantation of Italian peasants and their way of life would help develop the colonial economy was the best means of guaranteeing Italian sovereignty, civilizing the indigenous

population” (Fuller et al., 2008 p.88). Thus, Italy strategically implemented emigrants as a part of the colonial process by guaranteeing them economic success through policies that protected and awarded them privilege in the African colonies.

#### Policies and Goals of Italian Colonization in Ethiopia and Libya

Italy was the last country to join the “Scramble for Africa,” consequently Italy had to conquer the few African countries in North and East Africa such as Libya and Ethiopia. However, colonialism had functioned differently in these countries. For example, in Ethiopia, the focus was to get Italian emigrants waged labor first and then indigenous people were considered. Furthermore, non-Italians were excluded from any sector in the labor force where they might compete with Italians (Fuller et al., 2008). This labor segregation was also extended to social and spatial segregation. Italians and the indigenous groups were not permitted from interacting with one another. This was a form of psychological manipulation on both groups as each group began to view the other group as an “other”. However, it was made clear under Italian colonialism that the Ethiopians were the inferior “other” that had to assimilate to Italian ways of living (Fuller et al., 2008). Secondly, colonists had to get Italians to believe that they were the dominant superior group and that Africa was theirs to be exploited, under the assumption that Italians would send remittances back to Italy (Fuller et al., 2008). Thus, Italy was only interested in these distant black African colonies for purposes of economic exploitation. However, Italy had a different connection with their colonies in Northern Africa where people had lighter skin like in the case of Libya.

The colonial territory of Libya was championed by Italians and viewed as a fourth shore because of its beauty and its close proximity to Italy (Labanca 2010). These two things attracted thousands of Italians and Libya operated under a regime of demographic colonization. In the early 1900s, thousands of Italians had immigrated to Libya because it had become a symbol for economic prosperity for the proletarian nation (Labanca 2010). However, before colonization, Italians viewed "Libya as one of the most backwards countries in Africa, the people were stuck in stationary civilization and they practiced a monotheistic religion" (Schanzer 1924 p.446-447). Furthermore, Italians viewed Libya as a part of the "dark continent" that represented Black Africa and the Orient" (Labanca 2010 p.3). Therefore, Italians believed that Libya was in need of western intervention to become a more civilized territory. When Italian colonial rule in Libya began in 1911, Italy "deemed their colonial duty to give her vassal territories order, justice, hygiene, technical progress, schools, communications, ports and buildings" (Schanzer, 1924 p.448). However, access to these services was limited to the native people in Libya. Furthermore, these services and Italian ways of life were implemented for the enjoyment and comfortably of the Italians. Although, Italy used a different method of colonization in Libya, the goal was the same: "to establish a regime of scientific exploitation. Where production demands more labor than can be had locally, to create suitable conditions for the sturdy colonists with native workers" (Schanzer 1924 p.448). Thus, Italy wanted to govern African colonies by integrating Italian immigrants and native African people in the workforce without necessarily substituting the former for the latter (Schanzer 1924 p.448). This quote identifies that this process of colonialism fostered an environment of Italian supremacy. Thus, the wealth accumulated by the Italian state was built at the expense of exploiting the people and resources

of African colonies. So, when white Italians respond to my question surrounding racism against black bodies in Europe by saying “we do not have a long history with black people in our country like the United States,” in my head I questioned: Did these Italian people respond in this way because Italians do not have a history of treating black people as their equals and fellow humans or because of colonial amnesia? Do they only view black bodies as reminders of their colonial pass? How was blackness conceptualized in the post-colonial era?

### Race in Post-colonial Italy

Historically, “race in Italy has been a constitutive element in the process of a national identity- it has evaporated from the cultural debate in contemporary Italy as a result of the necessity to obliterate “embarrassing” historical events” (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012 p.221). However, Cristina Lombardi-Diop asserts “that Italy, unlike the United States, has moved to a post-racial phase without ever going through a racial phase” (222). Because, Italy has ignored and refused to talk about its colonial past and the issues of race it has struggled to address issues of race that live within their country. Thus, “Italy as a post-racial society, a society where widespread racism permeates the political discourse, the social behavior, and popular culture, yet race is often unnamed and ultimately silenced” (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012 p.175). Furthermore,” in Italy the condition for such denial of race is rooted in the very articulation of racial difference where blackness is race and whiteness is the non-racialized norm” (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012 p.178). Alessandro Portelli adds that Italians “did not see themselves as white but rather as normal, as humans by default” (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 176) this implies that black people are creatures, sub-humans, and/or objects to be consumed. Italians relationship and perceptions of race because they were once viewed as the

blacks of Europe. However, Italians were “whitened through a process of elevation to wealth, health, social privilege, access to resources, commodities, and technologies, all associated with whiteness at the expense of the exclusion, the restrictions, the marginalization, and the economic deprivation associated with blackness”(Lombardi-Diop 2012 p.177).

This process of whitening the Italian body has created a dichotomous relationship between blackness and Italianess where a person cannot embody both. For example,” second generation immigrants who are both Italian and black create a rupture in the Italian collective imaginary, which has historically associated the population of Italy with whiteness as an absence of color” (Lombardi-Romeo 2012 p.224). As a result these black Italians occupy a space of internal outsiders where fluency in the Italian language and the Italian way of life do not grant them access to being an Italian (Lombardi-Diop 2012). Native Italians have created this boundary because of “fear of an excessive proximity that might blur physical, social and political borders, thus depriving them of their privileges” (Lombardi-Diop 2012 p.227). Italians’ fear to be associated with blackness is a reflection of the colonial past; during the 1930’s blackness was associated with dirt and diseases. Thus, bio-political discourse argued that the Italian race need to be protected from contamination and diseases that black people carried (Lombardi-Romeo 2012 179). In conclusion, internal and external others were crucial steps to the construction of a national identity that justifies the notion that: “Italy has always been and still is a white space that does not acknowledge the presence of blackness” (Lombardi-Romeo 2012 p.222).

The Italian state has used the tactic of racial amnesia as a strategy to bury the history of Italian colonization in North and East Africa. However, the history of Italian colonialism has

been improperly buried as contemporary events of social exclusion on the basis of race, and blatant episodes of violence and discrimination against black bodies function as haunting reminders of the colonial past( Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012 p.222). For example, consider the mass-murder of six African immigrants in Castel Volturno, the shooting of black workers in Rosarno and the subsequent riots in the Calabrian town, the killing of Abdul Salam Guibre, and the racist chants towards Italian black athletes such as Mario Balotelli and Abiola Wabara. However, the Italian media has yet to classify any of these incidents as being racially motivated (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012). Thus, Italy's post-racial era is only, apparently, about the liberation from race and making invisible the many occurrences of racism in postcolonial Italy (Lombardi-Diop 2012 p.177). Therefore, Blackness is a reminder of the colonial past that needs to be muted, buried, and forgotten. Black bodies in Italy can be viewed as post-colonial subject's that are vulnerable to violence. Black Bodies can be destroyed because they do not exist as citizen or human. Black migrant bodies represent a threat to a perceived homogenous white environment in a country that was once known to be a country of emigrants. In Italy black people have been stripped naked of their personhood, reduced to objects that only exist in the global, less-developed south; to some, Black people are just refugees from Libya seeking a *permesso di soggiorno* Italy. Thus, Blackness needs to be controlled and policed by policies, guns, and boats in the Mediterranean Sea.

#### Libya and Gaddafi

Many of the migrants I met in Italy were black Africans who escaped the Libyan civil war in 2011. Furthermore, many of these black Africans had migrated to Libya under the Gaddafi regime. During the post-colonial era Colonel Mummar Gaddafi had become the second leader



of Libya in 1969 and lasted to 2011. When Gaddafi assumed the position as the leader of Libya he quickly used Italy's colonial past to create a national consensus. Gaddafi created this national consensus by labeling the remaining Italian settlers in Libya as colonizers and fascist (Labanca 2010). Furthermore, Gaddafi made it clear that Italians were no longer welcomed in Libya. Then in the 1970's, Colonel Gaddafi expelled Italians and Jewish people and seized all of their possessions and land (Labanca 2010 p.7). After the fall of the Berlin wall, Gaddafi began to distance Libya from the Pan-Arab community and turned towards Africa as he stated in 2007: "Libya is an African country. May Allah help the Arabs and keep them away from us. We don't want anything to do with them" (Chothia 2011).

During this movement towards an African identity, at the Extra-Ordinary Summit of the OAU held in Sirte, Libya on 9 September, 1999 Colonel Muammar Gaddafi re-tabled the proposal of creating an African Union, which was first suggested by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (Wapmuk 2009). During this period Libya was the wealthiest nation in Africa and Gaddafi wanted to unify the continent of Africa. During my research in Italy, many of the black African migrants stated that "Gaddafi welcomed all Africans during the economic boom in Libya to work." Furthermore, these migrants described life to be good in Libya before the uprisings as they were working for transportation agencies, and oil and construction companies. . Others pursued careers in education as school teachers, or as mechanics, and one of the men was pursuing a career in professional boxing. Over the years under the Gaddafi regime Libya had become a hot spot for migration as migrants traveled in and out of Libya. However, the outward migration from Libya to Italy's island of Lampedusa sparked great concern of Libya's immigration "problem." As a response right wing politicians conceived a plan to "help" the

Libyan regime by collaborating on the construction of detention camps called Temporary Stay Centers on Libyan soil for the control of migratory waves”(Labanca 2010 p.12). This plan worked to repress migration by organizing expensive flights for the immediate repatriation of migrants landing in Italy from Libya and other parts of the Mediterranean.

Then, in 2011 the Arab Spring uprisings had spilled into Libya from its neighboring country Tunisia. Originally, the Arab Spring was a revolution led by the people who were discontent with economic hardship, decades of autocratic rule, and corruption. These protestors petitioned the government in a form of civil disobedience (BBC News 2013). However, militia groups had begun to form and Libya entered a state of civil war with the rebels shooting for freedom and Gaddafi’s soldiers shooting to suppress the movement. During this explosion of civil war in Libya, the detention centers that were sponsored by Italy were converted into prisons. In March, 2011 UN Security Council authorized "all necessary measures" to protect civilians, NATO powers launched air strikes on government targets, ostensibly aimed at imposing a no-fly zone (Beaumont and Stephen 2011). However, these orders to protect civilians were not extending to refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, the Italian strict policy of repatriation continued to operate. The Italian push back regime contributed to a cycle of migrant abuse and the smuggling industry.

For example, research was conducted by Médecins Sans Frontières between Libya and Tunisia in 2011 found evidence of widespread, systematic torture of migrants en route to the EU and held in detention facilities in Libya. One of the migrants in this study described this cycle of migrant exploitation as a “revolving door.” He further explained, “The whole system is to make life in Libya so miserable that you are drawn to the coast to leave by boat. This is where

you are then caught again, returned to prison again, asked for money in order to be released again”(Loyd and Mountz p.185). Furthermore, the film *Mare Chiuso* retraces the experience of Libyan refugees who were originally from Eritrea and Somali. These refugees were pushed back to Libya after being rescued by the Italian ships. As these migrants were boarding the Italian ships, Italy’s migration policy changed. The people from Eritrea and Somali recalled when the policy changed: Italian officials began to treat them poorly by denying them water and food. Then after a long night of traveling, these migrants were transferred to Libyan ships to be sent back to a detention center in Libya. As these migrants were being transferred to Libyan authorities, one of the migrants protested “you are throwing us to the murderer’s hands... in the hands of man eaters.” As a result of this “Friendly Treaty” between Italy and Libya, these migrants were raped, beaten with chains, electrocuted, and others were murdered. In the end, many of the migrants featured in the documentary stated “this would have never happened if Italy did not send us back.” These people remained in Libya detention centers for 6 years from 2005 to when the Libya war began in 2011. Furthermore, these migrants stated “when the war started, black migrants had only 2 choices: either flee to Tunisia through the desert or flee to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea.” The people featured in the documentary film, chose the sea.

After eight months of civil war Gaddafi was captured and killed outside Sirte in October 2011 with the help of NATO soldiers (Reported by BBC news). In the aftermath of the fall of Gaddafi and the departure of Western intervention, Libya continued to be in a state of civil war. Today, Libya has become a hotbed of activity for armed militia factions, especially Islamic militias, violently vying for power as well as for ideological and religious dominance (Ronen

2013 545). Furthermore, black people from the Sub-Saharan region of Africa were frowned upon by Libyans after the revolution (Ronen 2013). The citizens of Libya are also afraid of black people because many of them served as a mercenary in Gaddafi's army and were unable to flee after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. As a result, black Africans are untrusted by the residents and militia groups (Ronen 2013). Without an official government or western support to help in the process of reconstruction in Libya, black bodies in Libya populate the prisons for refugees or are on the streets of Tripoli crippled or dead (Szilágyi 2012 pg130). Black people in Libya tend to be untrusted, feared and imprisoned. Moreover, the western world's involvement in assisting the fall of Gaddafi caused massive waves of migration from Africa to Europe. Due to the western world's participation/intervention of the Libyan civil war the public is more familiar this crisis. However, many people in the Western World have not been familiarized with the crisis in Gambia, Senegal, and Nigeria.

The circumstances in Gambia, Senegal, and Nigeria are all different from each other but for the purposes of this paper I am going to rely mainly on the testimony of the people that I encountered during my research in Italy, combined with reports from media outlets and scholars. First, in the case of Gambia, a young man named Fofana explained to me during an interview that there is an oppressive regime under the rule of Yahya Jammeh. Fofana continued explaining that President Yahya Jammeh censors the media and the voices of Gambians by hiring spies. Furthermore, Fofana said that "if you are caught speaking badly about the government you can be arrested or killed by the Gambian police." Fofana stated that most of the Gambian refugees that are fleeing to Europe are seeking to have a freedom of speech. However, President Jammeh ability to censor the media makes it very hard for

Gambians to seek asylum in Italy because the western world view Gambia as a democratic society. Second, the circumstances in Nigeria that is causing migrants to flee to Europe is because there is an extremist Islamic terrorist group by the name of Boko Haram, led by Abubakar Shekau. This terrorist group was founded by Mohammed Yusuf. Yusuf had a strict, fundamentalist interpretation of the Qur'an and believed that the creation of Nigeria by British colonialists had imposed a Western and un-Islamic way of life on Muslims (Smith, Africacheck.org). This group has been reported in the news for attacking UN representatives, Nigerian politicians, murdering and kidnapping children and people in entire villages who are mainly believers in the Christian faith in Northern Nigeria (Africa Check.org and Chothia 2015). Thirdly, Senegal has been experiencing a financial crisis since the 1970's. The economic crisis in Senegal was the after effects of a fishing agreement between Senegal and the European council. The fishing industry had collapsed due to over fishing by European vessels (Focus migration 2007). As a result of this financial crisis many people in Senegal have decided to migrate to other countries, mostly countries in Europe in search of better opportunities. Although, there are many different causes for people migrating from Sub Saharan Africa, most of these migrants find commonality while taking the central route to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea on an overcrowded boat headed towards Italy. There is a very small percentage of sub Saharan Africans that are able to afford to migrate to Europe via plane.

### Burning the Sea

Migration across the Mediterranean Sea is often an act of desperation, a wish for freedom, and a symbol of hope for a better life. As one Gambian man named Charles that I met at Lai Momo reception center in Bologna, explained to me "entering the sea is very dangerous,

it is like selling yourself to death, but in most cases it is your only hope. Alessandra Di Maio reveals in her research:

since the 1980's people in North Africa has referred to the act of crossing the Mediterranean through Europe as "burning" or "haraqqa" which means to burn. Furthermore, in Arabic, to 'burn' a norm, or a law, one is in fact breaking rules, trespassing norms, infringing laws. Thus the burning or crossing of the sea is an act of transgression. Although, this can be viewed as a negative action of self-destruction because of the high chances of dying in the Mediterranean, burning for the individual carrying out this action can be seen as a moment of self-creation. It is inferred that during the processes of burning one encounters a symbolic fire that results in incineration—namely, the end of a previous life or of a territorialized identity. By 'burning' it, the migrant meets a symbolic death by fire. In its waters, however, he (or she) undergoes a "sea-change" with the hopes of finding European shores. And, they have the eagerness to work, to participate in democracy, and establish better life conditions for themselves and their families (3)

Unfortunately, many of these black migrants are *reborn* as hyper visible problems, they are reduced to be seen as invisible refugees, dehumanized by racist politicians, and left in the streets of Italy to beg for change. Thus, many of these people who are saved by Italian naval forces find themselves stuck in Italy struggling to answer this pivotal question: "Why did you (Italy) save me from the sea if you did not want to help me find a better life?" (Nelson).

However, Italy is currently experiencing an economic recession that is horribly impacting the lives of Italian citizens especially the elderly who lack care takers and financial support from the government. Thus, Italy is faced with difficult task of allocating funds to support their citizens and/or migrants. Furthermore, Italy is considered the port to Europe and a primary country of reception as the Island of Lampedusa is closest to Libya. At one point Italy was paying 9 million euros per month to support the Mare Nostrum rescue missions in 2014 (Davies and Nelson 2014). Furthermore, Italy has partnered with reception centers to house these migrants, provide them with phones and Italian classes, food, and three euros a day for spending.

However, these things come at the expense of Italian citizens pay a tax of 35 euros a day which totals 13,000 euros per year (Farrell 2015). As a result, many Italians perceive these migrants as lazy people dependent on the Italian state. Additionally, the presence of these black African migrants in Italy has produced fear and immigration anxiety that Italy is being invaded by black bodies. As a result, political groups such as the Northern League have launched anti-immigration campaigns which, has been arguing for stricter border control policies. The Northern League has been increasing in supporters and has had a negative impact on immigration politics and the support and treatment of migrants in Northern Italy. Thus, in many cases these migrants experience being uncared for by the government, discriminated against, and unwanted for a second time abroad.

#### Black African Migrants New Identities

As black African immigrants in Italy experience systematic oppression and racism, I argue that their bodies need to be revisited and re-conceptualized. The stereotypical narrative of weak, helpless, refugees contradicts the findings in my research on Black African immigrants in Italy. During, my research in Italy, I engaged black African immigrants who were resourceful, entrepreneurial, skilled, and who were community/cultural activists within their respective Italian provinces. Thus, these men (just like any other human beings) are deserving of the proper respect to rename and redefine themselves (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012). Furthermore, black African immigrants have been creating a space for themselves in Italy that claims their right to visibility in academia as an attempt to reverse the negative perceptions of blackness, while also questioning the assumed chromatic homogeneity of an Italian society (Lombardi-Diop Romeo 230). By doing this black African immigrants risk being exposed to

racism but Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo argue “it is necessary first and foremost to acknowledge that racism is a pervasive element in Italian society” (230). Black African immigrants are speaking out on issues of race through: literature, film, public protest, and in practice of their individual lives. However, in the article *The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*, Graziella Parati identifies these as weak forms of resistance that she calls “acts of talking back” (29). Furthermore, Parati states “these weak acts of resistance are able to question hegemonic discourse, but often have a marginal impact on contemporary Italian culture. Additionally, they are able to uncover the process of turning people into non-persons, but they are unable to resist those legal, political, and rhetorical processes of oppression grounded in exclusion” (29). However, these weak forms of resistance of talking back have exposed the intrinsic multicultural entity that Italy is becoming as a more diverse society that embodies various identities (Parati 2006). Through acts of talking back migrants are able to claim agency over their personhood, identities, and challenge one dimensional racist thinking of many Italians. During my research in Italy I interviewed and interacted with various black African immigrants who used the act of talking back to debunk stereotypes, combat injustice, and claim ownership of their own bodies.

Talking back through thinking, speaking, and educating

The first week we were in Bologna we interviewed a man from Senegal named Nago Kaa who worked as a translator and cultural mediator in Bologna. He stood outside the Dickinson Center gates on via Masala in Bologna, Italy. He was well dressed, which communicated to me that he had established himself in Italy. Nago was an older man with graying edges to his hair. He waited patiently at the gates to be let inside the building. As I approached him he began to



smile at me, and as a natural response, I smiled back at him. I was extremely excited because it was our first full day in Italy and I had been hearing about him since the beginning of the semester. My professors had told me that Nago worked as a translator for migrants seeking asylum in Italy. Additionally, they told me that Nago works as a community activist for migrants and has played an instrumental role in helping immigrants establish safe spaces and cultural institutions to help create a better migrant experience in Italy. He walked into the Dickinson Center with his hand cocked for a handshake and said “Buona sera. I’m Nago,” He had a firm handshake and he looked me in my eyes. I held his hand tightly and concentrated on looking him in his eyes to express my respect and appreciation for him visiting. Nago strolled confidentially like a person with great purpose. I could tell he was happy to be there and I knew I was about to learn a lot. Nago told me that he didn’t speak English but told me everything had been going well that day. As I led him to the lobby of the Dickinson center where he was met by Professor Borges and Professor Marini-Maio his smile grew even larger as he hugged the two people he was familiar with and they began to discuss the project and what they had planned for today. I focused on providing good hospitality by offering him drinks and snacks. This was extremely important to me because there was a language barrier between us and I wanted to make him as comfortable as possible. However, I realized that he had already made himself comfortable. He was open to everything and Professor Marini-Maio he had no problem being recorded, speaking in Italian, getting mic’ed up, etc. I was relieved and no longer felt nervous about the interview.

During the interview Nago captured my intellectual spirit several moments, especially when he said, “I don’t have a TV or radio because I just want to think.” When he said this I

thought about how much social media, politics, and blogs attempt to undermine and influence our thoughts to support a certain political party. In a way, it seems as if the people who are in control of the media are trying to program our minds to be monolithic and to accept the news stories that they create. If we allow ourselves to fall into this way of thinking then we will lose our ability to analyze things in a critical manner and from a holistic point of view. It is extremely crucial that we, as citizens, are able to think for ourselves because it allows us to support or protest issues from our own measures of morality. If we were able to achieve this, the world would not be segregated into right and left wing political parties.

Nago's knowledge on the ways the media and politics affected the identities of migrant communities motivated him to dedicate his time to helping new migrants or "the children" as he would refer to them. Nago stressed the importance of knowing how to speak the Italian language well to these young African migrants. He said that knowing the language would afford them the respect of the Italian people. This reminded me of how young black men and women are viewed in America as uneducated and inarticulate if they don't speak proper English. Nago referred to himself as a warrior who has been working to recreate the narrative for African migrants in Italy. He characterized the thought process of many Italians who thought of Africans in a negative light as one-dimensional. Italians who over generalize these African migrants as being thieves, lazy, and criminals miss out on meeting extraordinary people like Nago. However, Nago also acknowledged that African migrants play a role in the existence of these stereotypes. Nago cautioned new migrants to not do bad things like stealing, no matter how desperate they are.

Nago through his work as translator, community activist, and educator continues to debunk the stereotypes about African migrants in Italy. Nago is a man of wisdom, conviction, and great moral character. Nago is a man whose hard work continues to make a positive impact on his peers who are African migrants, Muslims, and the youth. Nago is the type of man that one wishes to have as a father, uncle, and/or friend. Although, Nago has chosen to combat racism and discrimination by encouraging that people think for themselves without being influenced by the media and politics there are other black African immigrants that use forms of political protest.

The Government Listens but Will not help

On March 1<sup>st</sup> the Mediterranean Migration Mosaic research team and I traveled to Padua, Italy. We were there to meet students and interview with a group of people who dedicated their professional work to serve and support migrants. During this meeting I met a black African man named Dambre from Ghana. Dambre is a person that other Africans would refer to as an elder at the age of 46. Dambre was a teacher that taught English in Libya. However, when the wars broke out he said he had to flee and a seat on the Mediterranean was all that he could afford. Dambre said that it was hard for Sub-Saharan Africans there because their darker skin made them vulnerable to being imprisoned and sold to the new form of slavery. This new form of slavery Dambre explained was in Libya, where black African migrants who were in prison or detention center would be leased out to perform labor for local businesses without being paid. Dambre also stated that Black Africans were also prime targets to be murdered because there were hostile racial tensions before the war exploded in Libya. The only escape that Dambre and many other black Africans had was through the

Mediterranean Sea. The issues of race that black Africans face in Libya provides in account on the ways in which African migrants have to confront the issues of blackness within Africa and then across borders in Europe. However, as Dambre was rescued from the sea, he did not relinquish academia as being a part of his identity and profession as a teacher.

In Padua, Dambre works as a teacher assistant in a workshop that helps people learn English as a second language. However, Dambre described that the situation in Padua was not an easy to live as a black man. Dambre stated that there are issues of race on both the bureaucracy and social levels in Italy. First, Dambre began explaining to us the challenges that black African immigrants were battling with the city council in Padua. Dambre said that the city council did not want to house the arriving Africans. However, the black African immigrants that live at Casa de Dona Gallo petitioned to the local government and expressed the importance of providing them with proper housing. Dambre said that the representatives of the council were willing to listen to the migrants' demands but did not put things into practice to create effective change. This information is extremely valuable because it shows how black African immigrants use their voice to participate and advocate for themselves in the political process in Padua. Conversely, this information that Dambre provided helped us better understand the restrictions placed on black bodies without citizenship. These black African immigrants noticed that it was extremely important that they created opportunities for themselves, supported each other, and are social activist for the livelihood of other African immigrants that come to Padua. As the interview ended I wanted to continue talking to Dambre as we walked to the public protest that the students of Padua University had arranged to address the ill treatment of migrants in Padua.

Education is the Key to Success because it can never be taken away

When the interview ended, we walked over to the public demonstration for migrant workers' rights in Padua. As we were walking on the brick pavement of Padua I began to engage Dambre in a conversation surrounding his blackness and strong relationship to education. Dambre said that education is very important to a person; it allows for one to develop the mental capacity essential for wisdom. Furthermore, he said that education is a part of his life style and that it is something that has provided him with many opportunities. He also stated that education and his experience in life had helped him develop his understanding of the world as a man, a black man, and a father. Throughout this conversation with Dambre I could tell that he had a lot of knowledge that he wanted to share with me. For example, I asked him what were his thoughts on learning the Italian language? He replied by saying "yes, it is very important because if you know a man's language, that of his native tongue, than you know his secrets. He can never lie to you or speak badly about you." Hearing these words stuck with me because I once thought that the Italian language was only used to make migrants assimilate to western culture. However, Dambre helped me understand that the Italian language is a way that black African immigrants are able to petition and express their grievances with the local government. Furthermore, the immigrant population in Padua has been institutionally neglected and left on the streets. Moreover, this perspective on the Italian language that Dambre had provided me with helped me understand that being able to speak the Italian language is necessity for living in Italy, migrants' safety, and everyday life depends on this language. Furthermore, people who migrate to Italy need to know the language in order to be employed or perform functions for everyday life like shopping for food. I also noticed that the

Italian language has been instrumental in uniting the migrant community because people come from all different places around the world and speak many different languages, but Italian is the one language that they all know how to speak. Thus, this creates a larger migrant network as people from Mali are able to communicate with African people from Gambia. This knowledge that Dambre had given me during the demonstration left me in deep thought about the formation of black migrant communities within Italy. However, my moment of deep reflection was interrupted by the wailing voice of a young black African man.

### Taking it to the Streets

The voice of this young man caught my attention because he spoke in English and was expressing the pain about the injustice, discrimination, and racism that black African immigrants encounter while living in Padua. I had later learned that this young man named Fofana from Gambia. A was shouting at the crowd of Italians that huddled around him asking them to imagine if they had to leave their home country to escape a civil war, a food drought, or an oppressive dictatorship? He then asked them to imagine losing their babies in the sea from starving or drowning? A answered these questions for the white Italians by saying that “you would want someone to help you. You would pray that someone came to save you.” A was emotional because the people in Padua are aware of these stories but, they are still racist towards black African immigrants in Padua. This provided me with a concrete example of how black African immigrants use their voice to publically debunk stereotypes and confront the racist rhetoric that is present in Padua. However, this demonstration was hypocritical because A had to fight for his right to speak among a group of people who were publically professing to be allies of his

The people who organized this demonstration did not want to allow A to speak because he was going to speak in English. However, with the help of some of the members a part of the Mediterranean Migration mosaic research team that were perceived to be white and A's protest he was able to speak. Initially, this was a white Italian dominated space and the black African immigrant people stood on the outskirts of the demonstration beside me. Although, I am black, I am an American, and a stranger to both the European society and the struggles of the black African immigrants. Yet, we occupied the same physical space as outsiders in an environment that was created to support the issues that black African immigrants face in Padua. This raises the question of: when and where should it be appropriate to allow people from these marginalized groups to speak up for themselves? Or rather when and where should it be acceptable to silence those who have brutalized, unloved, and humanity labeled as a problem to society? In this situation it is important to give the person living in the black body the agency and autonomy to speak up and speak out for themselves. Allowing A to speak at this protest was a powerful moment because the white Italian citizens living in Padua will not ever have to wear the bruises of slavery, colonialism, and structural racism on their backs. In addition, white Italians living in Padua will probably never have to live with the trauma of being stuck in the Mediterranean Sea watching their countrymen, family, and children die. Instead, their white privilege and stable European economy teaches them a process of remembering to forget that these things have happened (Sanches 2014). Thus, one of the most important things that the white Italians in Padua should do is develop a level of empathy and respect for the hardships that their fellow humans have experienced. At this moment I realized that having the

ability to speak is a privilege that is not granted to everyone. As the demonstration was coming to an end, we had informed Dambre that it was my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

#### Fear and Racial tension reschedules dinner

When Dambre figured out that it was my 21st birthday, he said that we should celebrate. We invited him out to dinner with us and he was really excited to join us. Everyone in a part of the Mediterranean Migration team wanted to eat at a local African restaurant and we had asked him if there was one – and if he could take us there  restaurant. However, it was too far away from our hotel. So, we told Dambre we would go to a restaurant near the University. After contemplating if he wanted to go or not, Dambre pulled me aside and said he would like to eat at home. He added I never ate at a good Italian restaurant, I will have trouble. if I eat there, and those people don't like us. I would rather eat at home with my family. When Dambre said this I was completely shocked and in the moment my response was "I understand." However, when I got a chance to think and reflect I began to think of this interaction as an example of the racism and tension that exists between the Italians and migrant communities. I also thought, if this was a way the people in Padua have made the environment uncomfortable for migrants in efforts to push them out of Padua. Then, I thought of how hard social institutions have been working on integrating the migrants. I questioned if this integration process was only occurring behind closed doors with people from other social institutions committed to this cause? Also, has there been a push from social institutions to counteract the negative images in the media about migrants? Additionally, if migrants were afraid to go to places like restaurants, I wondered in what ways have the people of Padua responded to the presence of the migrants? However, I was happy to hear that I would have an



opportunity to see Dambre again tomorrow as he invited us over for lunch at the Casa Don Gallo where he stayed with other refugees.

Lunch with my Brothers- African survival- Hyper-visibility of Blackness hidden at an old bank in Padua

The next day around 2 o'clock we visited the Casa Don Gallo house in Padua for lunch. Casa de Dona Gallo was an old bank office that a program called Racismo Stop had occupied to house the migrants. When we arrived I stopped for a second to observe the location of the Casa Don Gallo. The house was located in the middle of a highway that was heavily populated with zipping cars. This part of Padua seemed like an avenue used for people to get to work, school, other cities, or frequently visited. Furthermore, the Casa Don Gallo had a fence around it, but the double doors were wide open. I could tell that the living conditions were hard there, as I noticed there were trash bags full of unidentifiable items and there was a man with a pot in the back yard cleaning a pan with a little water. I also learned that the house didn't have a heating system or running water. However, these resourceful black Africans had created an alternative mechanism for showering Dambre explained that it just gets hard in the winter time. As I stood at the front gates to further observe the conditions of the Casa Don Gallo three questions had come to my mind: 1) I wondered how many cars had passed by a day without helping these people? 2) How many people knew that this place even existed? 3) How do the people perceive and/or interact with the members of Casa Don Gallo. As I was deep in thought about the relationship between the people who lived at Casa Don Gallo and the Padua community, my concentration was broken by my friend Dambre, who was shouting my name and telling me to come in. Dambre's smile stretched from one ear to the other he was

extremely excited as he said, “man I am just so happy you are all here.” Dambre took me by the hand to introduce me to the rest of the brothers living there. I had later learned that he held my hand to signal to the brotherhood that I was his friend and that it was safe to talk to me. I met men mainly from Ghana and Nigeria, all of them called me brother as we were united through our black skin. This moment was major for me because it helped me understand that the brotherhood in Philadelphia was not accurate. In Philadelphia, your brotherhood is created of those with whom you have struggled, those that you can trust, people who have known you the longest, and those who are as close to you as your mother’s children. The other black men who are not a part of this brotherhood in Philadelphia are your enemies, people to be dominated, or feared because of their ability to destroy your body with a single bullet or stab to the stomach. However, these men showed me that black men could love and support each other. These black men in Padua had not been consumed by the culture of capitalism and materialism that fosters the ills of jealousy, envy, and greed. Dambre said the goal was to see every African doing well, not just himself or the guy standing next to him. He said that they were a family and it was extremely important that they supported one another during such harsh times.

The Beauty of Being African. There’s nothing like home!

Dambre said the beauty of being from Africa is that you learn how to survive with what has been given to you. Thus, the gentlemen living at Casa Don Gallo were extremely resourceful as they created a center for transportation using old bikes, a kitchen, and built extra living spaces out of pieces of wood. Dambre had pointed to a man from Nigeria and told me that he had built the kitchen and storage space for the bikes and tools. I was interested in learning

what they did with so many bikes here. Dambre told me that the Nigerian man was a mechanic at home, and he fixed the bikes to help people be mobile. Dambre began to explain to me that there was a system to lease a bike. Dambre said that a member of the house can only use a bike if he has to go to the city to search for a job, go to school, and/or to see the commissioner. He said that the brothers living at Casa Don Gallo created this system because it was too expensive to travel to the center of the city every day. Dambre then turned to the kitchen area and said this makes me extremely happy. The kitchen made him so happy because it felt like a piece of Ghana had traveled to Italy with him. Dambre further elaborated that the kitchen was a way that they retained their African culture and created jobs for other people. Dambre said that they were able to hire a woman from Ghana named Fatima. Fatima comes to Casa Don Gallo on Mondays to cook for the men and they pay 2 euros per serving. Then Dambre pointed to a small wooden door next to the kitchen area. He said that a man just arrived here about a month ago and built a room there for himself because there was not enough space in the house. These men exemplified the essence of an entrepreneurial work ethic. These men were able to find a source of clean water, extra living space, a bike system, and jobs for each other in an environment that was under resourced and neglected by the state. These men and Fatima were intelligent, skilled, and compassionate despite being outcaste. Dambre wanted to meet his fellow countrymen named David because we were both boxers and David had a very unique story.

#### White Allies and Black Independence

David was tall with a muscular built, dark skin, and a thunderous voice. He was wearing mirror tint sunglasses, that I could see a reflection of myself in, a black bomber jacket, blue

stone washed jeans, and a three button collar shirt. David said that life was good in Libya, he was pursuing a career in professional boxing. However, when the war broke out in Libya he had to flee to Europe in a boat. David described that life had been extremely hard for him in Italy. David started his life in Italy at a reception center in Bari, he met an older women who was volunteering at the Red Cross. David said at first the lady would help him out with buying his necessities like soap and underclothes. However, it had gotten extremely hard for David to live at Casa Don Gallo because of the lack of a heating system and running water during the winters, the distance from the city to find work, and the lack of professional attire. He had asked the women if she would be willing to allow him to move in to her house with her and her daughter. The women agreed and David has been living with her for a year now.

David removed his sunglasses and said to me: my brother do not get confused, I pay to stay there, and I work for everything I own. David said that he had become a master of the Italian language and he was just finishing up his working contract. David was able to save up enough money to buy a car, nice clothes, and send some money home to his daughter who was preparing to go to University. David said that he was trying to get enough money to get a flight back to Ghana to see her before she leaves. I asked David why he did not want to go live in Ghana? He said that he will one day but he wants to go back with enough money to build a house and start a business. He said although it is hard here to find work, he is of more help to his family in Italy because the wages and European currency is worth more than the currency in Ghana. In this way David is helping improve both the lives of his family members and the economy in his home country (Arthur 2010). Moreover, David said as an immigrant in Italy you cannot wait around for anyone, you have to create connections and opportunities for yourself.

Although, this lady provides him with a space to stay if he was not motivated to go out and find work he would not be taking full advantage of this opportunity. By living with this older woman David gained access to the labor force and connections within the inner city (Rinelli 2016). Thus, this form of ally ship created between David and the older woman is a relationship that empowers David to strive to be independent. The story of David provides us with an account of how black African immigrants are not traveling abroad to be dependents of the welfare state (Arthur 2012). Rather, many of these migrants are searching for a place in the world where their person hood will be protected by the government and granted educational and economic opportunities.

There are People who care!

During a group interview held at the University of Padua, there were representatives from various institutions including activist from Razzismo Stop, professors from the University of Padua, a journalist, and a psychotherapist. The representatives of these institutions worked to address different issues that migrants face while living in Italy. For example Marcio of Racismo Stop, works to combat the one dimensional racist thinking of Italians who want to push migrants out of Italy. Marcio helps migrants find places to live after they are released from the reception center. Merca is a psychotherapist that works with helping the brave young children who are experiencing trauma from living in extreme poverty, some are still in shock from being bystanders of the bloodshed of civil war in their home countries, and many are still experiencing trauma after surviving the dangerous journey to Italy through the Mediterranean Sea. Merca also works with an organization named "We Want to Play", which is a program that partnered with police departments to allow sports clubs to have refugee youth on their teams

or to create a team for refugees. This program helps children who are refugees to experience different spaces and enjoy the precious moments of being a child. Sports league to help migrant youth fight for their rights through sports. Moreover, Egi is a journalist who works at the Foreigners Commission to assist with waves of migration. In his field of journalism he questions the treatment of migrants and the ways in which migrant stories are exploited. He also, works to fight for rights of immigrants especially voting rights. Egi believes that voting rights for immigrants are important for the territory of Padua because they make up 15 percent of the population. Lastly, Francesca is a professor at the University of Padua that allows for Dambre to be a teacher assistant at the English workshops. Together this group of people work to combat the injustice, social exclusion, institutional neglect, and racism that migrants experience in Italy.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, as I was standing next to the statue of Madonna in Lampedusa, gazing at the waves of the Mediterranean Sea, I thought of all the black lives lost in the sea that attempted to escape persecution, wars, and famine. I then asked myself why you as a black person would escape one country to go to another country to suffer again. Then, I answered myself, because they should enjoy the liberty to find somewhere that they can feel safe, protected, and institutionally cared for. Furthermore, they should be able to feel safe in any country, the color of their skin should not be used as a justification to exile, imprison, or murder them. I realized that we all had been suffering from racism built on principles of white supremacy. When the winds in Lampedusa had grown stronger I crossed my arms hugging myself with my eyes closed as I meditated. When I reopened them, my eyes were focused on the Italian coast-guard ships. There were only three medium sized ships. These three ships to

me symbolized a country that had made mistakes in the past, but were working progressively to deal with the pressing issue of immigration that was before them. These three ships represented a country whose siblings in the European Union had turned their back on. Finally, I looked at my hands and my passport that read *United States of America*. I questioned my government as I asked: why haven't you tried to help? You are not excused from this issue and neither am I or you reading this. We all hold a responsibility of supporting our fellow humans no matter, their race, religion, sexual orientation, or beliefs.

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