

## THE BLUE ZONE

A column by Nicola Borghesi for *Il Fatto Quotidiano* recounting the seventh search and rescue mission of the Sea-Watch 5 in the central Mediterranean from the point of view of a theatre director embarked to collect material for a show.

1.

### **The Blue Zone**

19<sup>th</sup> July 2024

I embarked on the Sea-Watch 5 a few days ago. I don't know if "embarked" is the right word. The ship is, at the moment, broke, in a so called "drydock", for some repairs to the engine. The crew is preparing to set sail on the seventh mission of this boat that rescues people trying to cross the Mediterranean in extremely dangerous conditions. These are strange days of waiting, especially for me, who am on board to do a documentary theatre show. The alarm clock rings at 7 a.m. and the first meeting is at 8 a.m. Then a rather tight training programme begins. The NGO is German, so we dine at noon and have dinner at 6 p.m. Really absurd times, the German's. Once, lunch was served at 12.03 and the chef apologised to everyone on the radio. The food is completely vegan and, when we will set sail, all alcohol will be banned. A challenge for a fan of these two forbidden genres like me. However, I brought a passito sausage from home. The aim of these days is for the entire crew to be fully prepared for when we leave for the SAR, the search and rescue zone, that portion of the sea where it is more likely for people to need to be picked up from the water before it is too late. All day long we do theoretical lessons and so-called *drills*, practical exercises which, for me as an actor, are particularly fascinating, because you have to pretend to be in an emergency. And people, when they are pretending, are awkward and beautiful in a way that moves me. During a drill on how abandoning a ship, the first officer tells us what you have to do to survive on a lifeboat. He says that the first thing to remember is that human beings are not meant to be in the sea, which is a desert of water. Then he adds that, in case of emergency, we are privileged: we are Europeans, someone would save us within a few hours. The same cannot be said of those who try to reach our shores. He goes on to say that ships are radical places: there are situations where it is better to let someone die behind a watertight door in order to save all the others. The coordinator of the rescue team, on the other hand, explains how people are rescued from the makeshift boats on which they travel. He says that you have to imagine the rescue zone divided into three parts: the zone over which you have control, *i.e.* where people are safe; a zone over which one can exert an influence, in which we cannot have direct control but only mitigate the risks by launching floating devices, some sort of inflatable sausages called *centifloats* to which the castaways can cling; and a third zone over which we must resign ourselves to having no control. To me, this division between things that I can control, influence or that I must leave alone, seems an effective metaphor for many situations in life. The title of this briefing is *Understanding why do people die*. Nice title. However, the most shocking course is the one entitled *Mass casualty plan*, the plan that is activated if there are more than three serious injuries. Something that lately is likely to happen more and more frequently, because in recent months in the Mediterranean there is an increased presence of small wooden boats with a covered deck. In this area often stagnates fuel, which, mixing with sea water, produces toxic miasmas and people travelling below deck are found unconscious or severely intoxicated and many patients are caught between life and death.

In that case, the ship is divided into four zones: green, yellow, red, blue. Into the green zone those who are well are sent. In the yellow zone, manned by a nurse, those who have a serious but not life-threatening problem. The red zone, where a doctor operates, is for serious cases: people who need resuscitation, in a real danger of life. Then, there is the blue zone, to which neither a doctor nor a nurse is assigned, but other members of the crew who agree to accompany someone they do not know to the point of death. Because that is where those who are dead or alive but unrecoverable are sent. In that case one must stop caring for them and concentrate one's energies on the other patients. You have to let them die. Even if they scream, even if they beg. Ships are radical places. The blue zone is itself divided into two different places: one is a dormitory. Here people, according to this plan, can die in a protected, secluded place, with someone watching them one last time. The remaining part of the blue zone, on the other hand, is on the bridge, next to the disembarkation area. A chaotic place, where people die amidst shouting and confusion. It has one advantage, however: it is next to the yellow zone and the nurse can administer painkillers and make the agony less painful. Only during the actual emergency it will be assessed whether it is better to let someone die in chaos, but sedated, or full of pain but in a cosy place. I would have no doubts. The most difficult question, the medical worker who drew up this plan tells me, is: what is the moment when we have to stop risking our lives because there is almost no hope of saving others? Is it worth risking our lives trying to get in with a respirator below deck of a ship full of people who are probably already dead? These are dizzying questions. As we prepare, here, I think that perhaps someone on the other side of the sea is already preparing to leave. Who knows how they are preparing, what they are doing, what they are thinking. Who knows if they wonder what we, on the other side of the sea, are thinking. Who knows if and when we will meet. And, when we meet, what we will say to each other. How we will look at each other. For the moment the only thing we can look at, from the highest deck of the ship, is the sea, this huge blue zone, in which people shout and drown while we are convinced that there are more important things to worry about.

2.

***The So-Called***

*21<sup>st</sup> July 2024*

Training and preparations continue here on Sea-Watch 5. Part of the day is spent in maintenance work. Sea-Watch is a very horizontal organisation, everyone does everything. Everyone cleans (often on the clean), everyone moves things, everyone helps out where is needed. It can also happen that someone who, like me, is on board as a theatre director and journalist is asked to pull away 20 buckets of motor oil with a ladle from a hole. I overcome my natural laziness, disguise myself as a worker and spend a beautiful 40-degree afternoon in the engine room. Since on the website of this newspaper most of the comments claim that I am paid by the left, I just say: I want a raise. Then there is a briefing on the so-called Libyan Coast Guard. Every time they say "Libyan Coast Guard" they also add "so-called". The reason for this adjective is simple: it does not do what the Coast Guard usually does. They are novel villains, according to the documents and videos they show us. They are basically a militia employed by one of the parties to the conflict in Libya that roams the central Mediterranean with very large machine guns and very fast patrol boats graciously donated by our government. They show us some videos: in one they open fire into the water during a rescue to ward off rescuers. In another, from a few weeks ago, they bludgeon migrants brought to safety on a merchant ship and then take them back to Libyan camps. In another they circumnavigate the ship of an NGO holding weapons, saying they must leave the area. The NGO ship replies that they are in international waters and they have no right to send them away and continues its journey. How brave, I think. And then I think that if we found this boat, in that situation, I would not be very happy. All these nice things are financed with our taxes, without however this being able to stop the crossings, because history teaches us that people have always moved and always will. You can beat them, you can slow them down, you can lock them up, but they move and they will always move. The result, it seems to me, is to ensure that people who arrive in our country always arrive traumatised. And I, personally, would be happier and would feel safer sharing my space with people who have not always and necessarily traumatised, moreover with my contribution as a taxpayer. As the sun sets spectacularly orange behind Sicily still close by, I think again at those who are preparing on the other side of the sea. I hope they meet us and not them. I hope that, in this huge sea, the dot they see on the horizon is this blue ship with people on it who are wondering how best to welcome them and not those grey ships paid for with my taxes that are ready to take them back to the hell from whence they came. I look at the horizon: the zone of operations is still far away and it seems to me more and more unsettling.

3.

***Enjoy Your Privilege***

*23rd July 2024*

When you are about to leave for a mission at sea, in the days before, you are pervaded by a strange excitement. You imagine action, rescues, encounters. The reality, as it often happens, is different. Sometimes, like today, it's just a matter of waiting for a bubble of bad weather to pass. It is frustrating, but it also gives the opportunity to look beyond the protocols and ask oneself some questions. For example: why are the people here? I ask someone of the crew. Often they are people who are so used to it, that maybe they haven't think about it, why they do it. Verena, ship's doctor, says that when you start working in humanitarian situations, when you have seen with your own eyes what happens outside the reassuring confines of our European daily routine, something clicks in you. When you watch the news, on television, the image is missing something: you, making yourself useful in some way. It becomes very difficult to enjoy your privileges. And so, driven by who knows what profound force, you find yourself again and again in dangerous, absurd situations, having in your hands the lives of strangers who have only you, at that moment. José, the electrician on board, an American from Houston, but whose parents are Mexican, says that he is here because he seeks family redemption: his parents were immigrants, now he is an American citizen, he has a strong passport, but he struggles to stand by. Because people die in the Rio Grande as in the Mediterranean Sea. He used to work in a merchant ship, always as an electrician, but he was tired of working to make a millionaire even richer. "Here - he says - I work for the interests of the proletariat, not of the bosses". Nikolas says: "If you see someone drowning in the pool, next to you, you try to save them. Then why not if we see someone drowning in the Mediterranean?" Julie says: "Because I like the idea of building a safe place for people who come from danger and go, towards danger". Many respond simply: because we are European citizens and we do not resign ourselves to the idea that European identity is about protecting our borders even at the cost of people's lives. And me? I think for this, to write about it, to tell about it. To also be, in some way, inside the somehow, inside the image of the television set, which, seen up close, is a different story.

4.

***Central Mediterranean***

*25<sup>th</sup> July 2024*

We are off. We have left Sicily behind and Sea-Watch 5 heads straight for the Central Mediterranean, the world's deadliest migration route. After all the training, the preparation, time in port and not far from the reassuringly lit coastline, everything changes everything. Strange to think of preparing for so long for something that, after all, one arrives always, necessarily unprepared: the encounter with the other. The atmosphere on board changes rapidly, the conversation becomes more fluid. The idea of the encounter, perhaps, brings us together more too. The exercises on the RHIBs, the small fast boats launched from the mother ship that physically retrieve people, are completed. The people on them come back soaked and dry their clothes on the deck, which suddenly becomes the courtyard of a railing house, people eat around it and sometimes a wave hits them and it looks like a market day. The view is completely new: around us sea and only sea, sometimes a few cargo ships and a few giant turtles. Watching shifts begin: four hours for each group, in rotation, we watch the horizon with binoculars. The aim is to look for a tiny dot that moves. Many of the rescued boats are found like this, with eyes, too small to be detected by radar, especially with high waves. The sea gets big and someone starts to vomit, someone is knocked unconscious. The waves reach up to two metres and the ship squeaks, shakes, gets wet. The water wants to get in and the ships want to get it out. This is the perverse game of navigation, José explains. When night falls, the high waves disturb, from the top of the ship's deck, in the dark, tried by nausea and frightened by this plunge into the unknown towards Libya and its shadowy so-called coastguard. I try to imagine the same circumstance but from a different perspective: not from above the deck of a large ship overlooking the waves, but from below, in the middle, the waves, towering above, on a small wooden or rubber boat. Around only darkness and moon. No one on the horizon, an even thicker unknown, with no points of reference. Nothingness, everywhere, and a group of people who don't know each other, huddled together, thinking, who knows what they are thinking. Impossible to imagine. If I meet them, I ask them.

5.

#### ***A Unicorn-Shaped Lifeguard***

*27<sup>th</sup> July 2024*

The first alleged distress case we go to rescue turns out to be a small boat of Libyan fishermen who look at us as if to say: and you, what do you want? What a debunking. We spot the first real case early in the morning. It is a small wooden boat, there are thirty people on it. We see it from afar, a tiny dot that slowly, through the binoculars, becomes a boat the same colour as the sea. They send out the rescue lances, in a few minutes they are there, they distribute the life jackets and start boarding. The first one I see boarding is a woman. She is wearing a heavy winter jacket with fur and a handmade pink wool cap and also a matching scarf. She drops it and does not notice it. One of us picks it up and she starts laughing and laughing, never stopping. She is so happy that you can't help but be happy looking at her too. And then again and again, there are about thirty of them. A boundless joy. They stagger, they laugh, they pray, they give thanks. Then we spot a second case: a larger boat, with a covered deck. We board another 120 people. They are in worse conditions than the first. Some, who were below deck, are intoxicated by fuel fumes. Some fall ashore. They are sent to the hospital on board. They recover. If we had not intervened, it is very likely that they would have died. One little girl has a pink unicorn-shaped life jacket. Children, many of them, begin to dart across the bridge and are alive as no human being has ever been alive until today. No one can believe that they have been so lucky. Some people say: last night I did not think I would see another night. When everyone has gone up, a speech is given, in English with Arabic translation. For those who do not speak either language, some friends improvise a translation. The first thing they say, in English, is: we promise that never, under any circumstances, will we take you back to Libya. Applause, enthusiasm from the English speakers. Then, the same sentence in Arabic. Applause from the Arabic speakers and the English speakers. Then small groups translate to friends, more applause. At the end it is all a collective applause for this fact that they are not going back to Libya. I have never seen anyone so happy *not* to go somewhere. Someone cries. The ship is now full of a new life that these few words cannot tell. I will try in the coming days, while the next few years will serve me to understand what I have seen.

6.

#### ***Merriness of Castaways***

*30<sup>th</sup> July 2024*

Shortly after the two rescues we learn that the port assigned to Sea-Watch for the disembarkation of the people rescued in the Mediterranean is La Spezia, basically the Italian port farthest possible from where we are: four days by sea. This happens thanks to the Piantadosi decree, a perverse piece of legislation invented by the government Meloni that aims to exhaust the NGOs, dispersing their energies and making their ships hundreds of kilometres far, increasing costs and decreasing operational capacity. A different approach from Salvini's stupidly muscular, more subtle one. When, during the morning meeting, they announce that we will land in La Spezia, again, everyone applauds. Nobody knows where La Spezia is, nobody is enthusiastic because of the excellent focaccia, but it's clearly not in Libya, so that's fine. The days

are long, lying on blankets on the aft deck. The food is excellent: Sea-Watch's policy is one ship, one meal, so passengers and crew all eat the same things, cooked in an ingenious *rice kitchen* that allows huge quantities of food to be prepared quite easily. In the afternoon something happens that I don't expect. To make the long days of navigation to La Spezia and overcome boredom, it is decided to improvise a party. That's right: a party, in the middle of the Mediterranean, of people who have just escaped a shipwreck. One of the sailors, during the day, asks the passengers what their favourite songs are, he notes them down and then, at half past four, they take a crate and start playing them from Spotify, one after the other. There is awkwardness at first, but then a Syrian lady jumps into the middle and starts dancing, crazy, wild. She takes a broom and uses it as an imaginary guitar. Another passenger, who until now was walking around rather grimly, turns out to be a movingly graceful dancer. The crowd is in delirium, everyone joins in, even the crew, and they start doing choreographic things that only they know. Beautiful. They hips, they shout, they challenge each other. At some point a dance train starts. There is, in this unbridled ritual, something of an homage to life. It is a moment of space time that says: we are alive. Despite torture, life worn down by wars and scarcity, the Coast Guard and Libyan jails, we are here, we are alive, we are safe. A celebration beyond death in the first shred of safe place they have seen for so long. This, this is a party, I think. Maybe I've never been to a party before, if this is a party. Next to us, meanwhile, passes - I swear - a galleon (we later discover that it is an Algerian training ship). This is something that if one were to put it in a film I would say: too much. I don't know how, suddenly *Bella ciao* starts (I think because of *La Casa de Papel*). Many people know it. So, in the middle of the central Mediterranean, 30 Europeans and 156 people fleeing from something that escaped a shipwreck sing in the thin air a song that they don't know what it is about but it is about us, there. Eventually an Egyptian man says to me: it's a Spanish song, isn't it? No, dear friend, it is an Italian song, because when we got rid of Mussolini they still had thirty years of Franco ahead.

6a.

#### ***A Small Note on the Publication of Merriness of Castaways on Il Fatto Quotidiano***

I thought about it for a while before writing this piece, especially since it is not for the relatively protected space of my personal social channels, but for a national newspaper. And, for various reasons, the subject of crossing the Mediterranean is able to evoke the most inveterate sad passions. The comments I happen to read on the subject, especially when read from aboard a ship with all those people on board, are truly desolate, monstrously incomprehensible. So I asked myself: maybe it's better to omit it, that we had such an absurd party? Someone might come along and say: here, look at them, the refugees, they pretend to come from war and misery, but then they are singing and dancing and celebrating. Some might say that it is not appropriate for someone who has just escaped a shipwreck to party. And then I thought no, it should not be omitted. Because that magnificent and absurd party, that moment, if you look at it as a whole, says more than many dramatic narratives, it completes, in negative, the tale of all those boats that never made it to the other shore. But why do we always have to imagine migrants crossing the Mediterranean miserable and desperate? Can they not also be happy, grateful to be alive, cheerful? Are they not people like us, who just want a good life, just want to enjoy what little time we are given to live? The image of the migrant, in our country, often has two possible declinations: either the caricature of the right, which gives us images of cunning and violence, or the pietist simplification, which tells us of human beings undone and eternally desperate, begging and contrite. Two mirror-image narratives that both have the merit of telling a version of human beings at the service of Capital: either scapegoat useful for maintaining the status quo, to pit workers against each other, or the plastic image of the good worker, meek and eternally grateful. The reality, if you look at it closely, as happened to me in this case, is, as always, different: these are people who have escaped shipwreck, who have breathed under the deck of a precarious ship the toxic fumes of fuel, who thought they would die lost in the Mediterranean night and then discovered they were alive, that the world is not just Libyan jails or European detention centres, that people sometimes make a surprisingly kind gesture, they come looking for you and pick you up in the middle of the sea when there is no one around and then, once you have recovered, you just want to dance, to be close, to say dear and stupid things. You just feel like having a party. Like the rest of us.

7.

#### ***The Last Time We See Each Other***

*1<sup>st</sup> August 2024*

When the sun rises the Sea-Watch 5 is not far from the port of La Spezia and there is already an effervescence, on the ship, full of expectation. A patrol boat of the Guardia di Finanza, children wave at it and adults look at it puzzled. They stare in amazement at the inexplicably green hills of Liguria. I struggle to imagine what it means to see a place like Italy for the first time. We have become accustomed to this country beautifully balanced between Europe and the global South, but the first time must be powerful, to meet. A speech is given. They say that we will soon arrive in port and everyone will be fingerprinted, that men will be separated from women but then they will be able to reunite. They conclude by saying: this is probably the last time we will see each other. The guests of the start shouting, in chorus: Sea-

Watch, Sea-Watch! I think it's a way of saying: thank you. The quay approaches and slowly the State's device for managing the disembarkation, made up of gazebos, tents, ambulances, police trucks, barriers, doctors in anti-contamination suits with visors and masks, who are the first to board and make a strange effect next to us in t-shirts. They know nothing, those on the platform, of what has happened over the past four days, of the parties, of the confidences in unknown languages in the half-light, of the meeting absurd encounter in the middle of the Mediterranean. Strange to say, but the foreigners, in this circumstance, seem to me to be my compatriots waiting for us at the port. There is tense effervescence, on the deck of the ship, as if waiting for something beautiful and frightening that is about to happen. They have been waiting for months or years for this moment. The people have already gathered their things. Some have backpacks, others have red or green or yellow canvas bags that Sea-Watch gave them that they wear as backpacks. So basically, everyone has a backpack. They stand excited and agitated, waiting, looking at each other. It feels like the first day of school. The bell is about to ring and a new world to open up. Then, they start to get off, but I might continue to tell you about that in a couple of days, as it is a long story.

8.

### ***Mugshots***

3<sup>rd</sup> August 2024

As the first people begin to disembark from Sea-Watch 5 we arrange ourselves spontaneously in two rows, before the gangway, so that each person disembarking has a chance to greet everyone. They start with the pregnant women, who greet us noisily and cheerful. The crew, on the other hand, seems quite moved. Some are crying. They scold them, with gestures, and seem to say: what are you crying about? Everything went well. Can't you see that we have made it, that we are going to be OK? I think: let's hope you are right. Then it is time for the unaccompanied minors. And here it really feels like the first day of school, full of worry, expectations. They look at this strange agglomeration of tents, ambulances, doctors, police, trying to understand what this new chapter of their lives is. One is hugging a black rubbish bag, with all his things inside. One has his backpack open. I walk over and close it for him and it feels like the most fatherly gesture I have ever made in this childless life of mine. The imaginary bell rings and school starts. They get off. Waiting for them on the platform is a forensic policeman who sticks a number on their chest with a number and takes a mugshot. Then it's time for the families. The mug shot of the seven-year-olds is an incongruous, wrong, as well as difficult for the photographer, those run, they run away. But they don't know that and enjoy posing for the camera. I think it is privilege of childhood to find oneself in disturbing images without knowing it. The girls face the lens with a different grace: they make themselves pretty, they pose and move their heads slightly with each shot, as if the photographer would then choose the best ones for an imaginary photo shoot. The Somali women come down all together, wearing winter down jackets with synthetic fur collars. They explained to me that this often happens: when they leave they take all their things and, since they cannot have luggage, they keep them on. But seeing them like this, while I'm dripping with sweat in my T-shirt and they don't even flinch in their down jackets. I wonder what thermoregulation device these superhuman women have implanted in their bodies. Then it is time for the lonely men, what Piantadosi would gracefully call 'the residual load'. But I'll tell you about that next time.

9.

### ***A musical at the port of La Spezia***

6<sup>th</sup> August 2024

The disembarkation from the Sea-Watch at the port of La Spezia, which had started off at a good pace, at a certain point comes to a standstill. It may be the heat, it may be that 156 people to be disembarked are just so many, it may be that we are in Italy, but things start to get slow in an exasperating way. Then, slowly, everyone starts to get comfortable: the migrants who have to disembark, the Sea-Watch staff, the police, the Red Cross. The heatwave increases, people sweat, the barriers of their respective roles give way and slowly we become just people who are making a big fuss under the sun. It starts a few exchanges of banter from above and below the ship, about the heat and where to eat in La Spezia. One of the sailors picks up the speaker with which speeches are usually made and starts the party playlist. Middle Eastern music makes the scene even more surreal. The immigrants smile as if to say: we had fun these days, hadn't we? And they keep time with their heads. Soon everyone on the ship starts rocking to the music and I think: maybe I've ended up in a musical? Then, even the Red Cross people start moving to the beat. The disembarkation continues in this rhythmic and unreal atmosphere. The farewell committee around the gangplank is increasingly sweaty and battered, a little sorry that the last to disembark receive a less solemn farewell. The music increases in volume. When the last lone male leaves as well, a round of applause starts from the ship. The migrants who are still there join in the applause. Then also those of the Red Cross. The police don't, but I think someone would, because that's how it works in a musical. At that moment, unexpectedly, the voice of Battiato comes out from the box. Magic of the Spotify algorithm. From afar the last Nigerians, who are about to get into the police van, reach out to greet us and shout greetings in

incomprehensible languages. A Red Cross woman starts singing: *ti vengo a cercare / con la scusa di vederti o parlare / perché mi piace quel che pensi e che dici / perché in te vedo le mie radici / questo sentimento popolare / nasce da meccaniche divine*. Then we start singing, too. So do others, even if they don't know the words. It's a musical and in musicals it happens like this: suddenly, without a reason, everyone sings.

10.

**The End**

11<sup>th</sup> August 2024

We have landed. It was not easy, just as it is not easy to end this column. At the end of experiences it always happens, even if it doesn't always make sense, to try to take a balance sheet. After we disembarked the 156 people we rescued, we stayed on board for a few more days. The ship was strangely desolate and we thirty Europeans left were a little lonely, a little sad. To fill one of these melancholic days, one of the officers, Sebastian, decided to make a starshow for the crew. It's a rather simple thing: it involves identifying the main constellations and telling the myths of Cassiopeia punished by Poseidon for her arrogance and sent to the sky forever; the nymph Callisto, loved by Zeus, who takes the eternal form of Ursa Major; the scorpion, transformed into a constellation by the goddess Artemis after killing the giant hunter Orion. I have always looked at the sky with infinite anguish. That senseless desolation of celestial bodies burning lost in eternal nothingness has always annihilated me. But that evening, guided by the skilful and calm Sebastian, the sky seemed almost reassuring, friendly. And I think it's because it's the first time I've seen the sky made of stories, that those ramshackle, random stars seemed to make sense to me. Anything does not make sense if it is not organised in a story. And writing in a newspaper pushes you to ask questions about the stories you choose to tell. For example when, a few days after the rescue, during the long navigation to La Spezia, there was a moment of celebration, I wondered whether it was appropriate to do so. I asked myself: won't someone come along and say: here, look at them, the refugees, they pretend to come from war and misery, but then they are there singing, dancing and celebrating? Doesn't someone come along and say that having a party is not a befitting someone who has just escaped a shipwreck? And then I thought no, it should not be omitted. Because that magnificent and absurd party, that moment, if you look at it as a whole, says more than many dramatic narratives. It complements, in a negative way, the tale of all those boats that never made it to the other shore. But why do we always have to imagine migrants crossing the Mediterranean miserable and desperate? Can they not also be happy, grateful to be alive, cheerful? Not they are people like us, who only want a good life, they only want to rejoice in what little time we are given to live? The image of the migrant, in our country, has two possible declinations: either the caricature of the right, which gives us images of cunning and violence, or the pietist simplification which tells us of human beings undone and eternally desperate, begging and contrite. Two mirror-image narratives that both have the merit of telling a version of human beings at the service of capitalism: either scapegoat useful to maintain the status quo, to pit workers against each other, or the plastic image of the meek and eternally grateful worker. The reality, if you look at it closely, as I did in this case, is, as always, different: these are people who have escaped a shipwreck, who breathed in toxic fuel fumes under the deck of a precarious ship, who thought they would die lost in the Mediterranean night and then discovered they were alive, that the world is not just Libyan jails or European detention centres, that people sometimes make a surprisingly kind gesture, they come and pick you up in the middle of the sea when there is no one around and then, once you have recovered, you just want to dance, to be close, to say dear and stupid things. You just want to have a party. Like the rest of us.

It also occurred to me that this migration thing works basically in the same way as our perception of the night sky. If we think about the immense, epochal phenomenon of migration, its consequences, the enormity of the Earth and its populations that want to move, and how to manage all this, we remain simply annihilated. Because it is an unstoppable phenomenon before which we are tiny, like in front of the firmament. But if, this immensity, you break it down into so many stories heard on the deck of a ship, that of N., an unaccompanied minor recruited by the jihadist Al-Shabbab militia in Somalia and escaped abruptly thanks to the solidarity of a group Thof women friends, that of P., who fled Nigeria because he is gay and persecuted and isolated by all his friends, that of U., whose father is a powerful Taliban general and whom his mother wanted to keep away from that madness, if this immensity - I said - you break it down into all these stories, then it begins to make sense.