

The Face of Many of Us

Bianca Sorminis (October 03, 2013)



About a hundred migrants lost their lives and many more are still missing off the Italian island of Lampedusa, after yet another deadly illegal migrants boat accident.

It's always the same story, many times seen before, the main difference, today, the staggering numbers of those who perished.

Refugees and immigrants from Africa, fleeing from poverty and conflict, crammed into rickety and hardly seaworthy so-called boats, armed with despair and courage, regularly try to cross the distance between Africa and Europe, between a hopeless life and the hope for a future... Teenage boys, young men, their women, their children, their babies... most of them unable to swim, trying their luck by putting their lives in the hands of international criminals...

But for many luck was nowhere in sight yesterday, when a fire prompted most of them to move on



one side of the boat causing it to capsize...

The panic of those last few moments is not hard to imagine...the fire, scores of people moving away from it, the boat rolling on one side, the fear, the frantic search for something to hold on to, for familiar eyes to draw courage from and then the dark, cold, salty water, a deadly blanket that wraps you around and drags you down, while you deliriously try to move your arms and stay afloat, swallowing water and gasping for air, incredulous that what you thought was going to be the journey of your life has just in a few minutes turned into the voyage of your death...And then silence, the only screams probably coming from those that horrified watched how death was likely coming to grab them next...

The island of Lampedusa has witnessed these tragedies many times before, today's one though, is of a different magnitude...

The few thousands of locals living on the island, often outnumbered by those who land on their shores, once again are offering help and comfort to the survivors, and a blanket of dignity to those lying dead on the ground in this improvised open air cemetery.

How to comment this new tragedy without sounding rhetorical, knowing that most probably only a few days separate this carnage from the next...?

We don't know...all I read today, all the comments and condolences coming from all sides of politics, don't ring true...

The politicians, suddenly reawakened to the existence of this global problem, express their sorrow and their pledge to find a solution, to put a stop to this ongoing human tragedy that inescapably renews itself....

And while some take their time to pay respects to the human beings who lost their lives, others don't miss their opportunity to take a swipe at those whom they'd like to consider responsible just to earn a few, cheap, political brownie points ...

Italians have a long history of migrating to foreign countries, but often an opportunistic short memory when it comes to learn from it...

We don't know what the answer to this is...controlling the foreign shores, preventing the boats from leaving in the first place? Establishing offshore European asylum seekers Centers to allow refugees to legally and safely make it to Europe?

Ensuring financial and practical support to Italy at European level in order to properly receive and process the refugees?

Maybe all of this would be helpful, but I somehow feel that this is a hot potato that everybody is trying to offload to someone else, and that there isn't a real desire to positively face this problem as a whole.

The public opinion in Italy, drained by years of inconclusive and often damaging politics, gripped by a financial crisis that our generation has never experienced before and with little hope in immediate changes and improvements, has no time nor will to worry about anything else that is not themselves, and while we still believe that Italians have an innate sense of compassion we also know that asking to make an effort for anybody else but themselves right now is too much to ask for.

We are crying the dead today, but we'll be complaining about the next wave of refugees tomorrow.

This tragedy is twofold: it has the face of those who died, each one of them, and it also has the face of those who through indifference and inaction allowed it to happen...it has the face of many of us.



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