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Identifying dead migrants: forensic care work and relational citizenship

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ABSTRACT

The Mediterranean Sea has become an iconic site in the so-called migration crisis. Thousands of dead bodies have washed up on the southern beaches of Europe. We draw on ethnographic material collected at sites in Italy where the bodies of drowned migrants have been cared for by professionals and volunteers. We argue that while caring for the dead allows them to be identified as persons, it also produces relationships that go beyond formal citizenship. We introduce the notion of forensic care work to analyse the practice of identification and show how it produces a relational citizenship. We follow the movement of bodies from where they are found to examination and burial. We show that this process involves constant tinkering and experimenting with in this specific forensic practice and argue that caring for the dead requires caring for the forensic infrastructure.

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By way of introduction

On the night of 18 April 2015, a vessel carrying more than one thousand migrants sank in the waters between Libya and Italy, the deadliest shipwreck ever recorded in the Mediterranean Sea. Only twenty-eight people were rescued, while the UNCHR estimated that at least eight hundred others drowned with the boat (Hinnant, Thomas, and Larson 2018). Later that year, the Italian government launched an operation to recover the wreck and the bodies trapped inside. The initiative was called Melilli5, as four earlier missions by the Italian Navy recovered 218 bodies drifting around the wreck. ('Melilli' is the name of a coastal Sicilian village.) In the fifth mission, the vessel would be lifted to the surface to retrieve the remaining bodies that were trapped inside.

In this paper, we draw on ethnographic material collected at sites where these and other bodies of drowned migrants have been cared for in Italy. Focusing on forensic identification work, we examine articulations of citizenship in relation to the ways dead bodies are moved, examined, and looked after. Through forensic work, dead bodies become part of a process that starts with cleaning and photographing bodies and personal effects of the victims, to examining and registering these, to finally burying the bodies. One could say that in this process bodies become *matters of forensic care* (cf. de la Bellacasa, Maria 2011). However, we want to be clear that care here is less about

an affective relation, as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa has it (e.g. Pérez-Bustos, Olarte-Sierra and Díaz del Castillo 2014), and more about the practical work of achieving something good through tinkering with unexpected encounters (e.g. the state in which bodies are found), and the ability to experiment within the situation at hand (Mol, Moser, and Pols 2010). The following vignette indicates that this *forensic care work* in the context of migrant deaths cannot be taken for granted:

In June 2016, just before Melilli⁵ began, Cristina Cattaneo, the main forensic figure in this operation, was speaking at a conference in Venice. She said: ‘we have to reinvent forensics anew. Nothing seems to work. The victims often have no fingerprints because their bodies have been in water too long, [there are] no dental records to check, and DNA does not help much because we have no reference databases of the countries that these victims might come from. It seems that pictures on social media and the clothing are the most valuable signs to go by.’

‘Reinventing forensics anew’: this phrase provoked us to explore an emerging forensic infrastructure for caring for dead migrants, an infrastructure in which unexpected actors can join ‘the chain of evidence’, provide clues about the identity of the body, and move out of it again. This forensic infrastructure is more flexible and fluid than the familiar infrastructures that are available within the criminal justice system, where forensic work relies on objectified and standardized procedures (M’charek, Hagendijk, and Vries 2012; Toom 2010). Reinventing forensics anew suggests that the work of identifying drowned migrants’ bodies requires novel protocols and procedures. But it also implies, as we will demonstrate, the ability to respond to situations at hand, by being attentive to the state in which the bodies are found and inventive in how to technically examine them.

We want to suggest that this practical forensic care work is a work of *relational citizenship*. The notion of citizenship is commonly used to connote the relationship between the state and the individual. Individuals become formally and practically part of a collective in which they assume rights and obligations. While in the field of forensics the state and the rights of citizens (and foreigners), cannot be overlooked, people organize themselves in ways that go beyond state governance. In this paper, we analyse citizenship as a relationship of care. We take inspiration from Jeannette Pols’ work on nursing practices and her notion of ‘relational citizenship’, which takes citizenship beyond the realm of the individual (Pols 2016). Relational citizenship indicates that people become citizens through interactions in sociomaterial practices and by establishing relations with one another, thereby making citizenship ‘a matter of sociality’ (ibid., 177). In the case of drowned migrants, these are relationships of forensic care. Salvaging and identifying bodies helps to enrol drowned migrants in a collective. This collective, which we might tentatively describe as ‘citizens of the world’, is bounded by ideas about humanity and acknowledges people as part of a human community and the world in which we live. Through this forensic care work bodies become people, individuals who belong to the community, rather than objects or waste to be disposed of.

While it might seem farfetched or even cynical to conceptualize dead migrants in Europe in terms of citizenship, the notion of establishing citizenship through forensic care might help us elucidate how migrant bodies become part of collectives. As we

elaborate below, given the lack of interest in migrant deaths by governmental institutions, caring for migrant bodies by making them move along a newly created forensic process produces a version of citizenship that goes beyond rights and obligations. The question is how to do that work in practice where standard procedures do not hold. As we show, caring for often nationless bodies goes hand in hand with creating the infrastructure to do so.

Our analysis is based on ethnographic material collected in various parts of Italy. Amade has conducted interviews with key actors involved in the identification of dead migrants and attended forensic conferences and workshops throughout the past four years, while Sara has conducted ethnographic research into the April 2015 shipwreck and other, less publicized cases in Italy. This ethnographic research was conducted between August 2016 and February 2017. It started in the north of Italy, particularly in the city of Milan, where the Laboratory for Forensic Anthropology and Odontology (LABANOF), the forensic laboratory in charge of Melilli5 is based. Here, Sara consulted archives and conducted interviews with forensic scientists, forensic anthropologists, and forensic geneticists involved in Melilli5. Travelling to the south of Italy, Sara interviewed forensic scientists at forensic departments in Pavia, Monza, Parma, Palermo, and Catania, who were involved in the collection of medical and biological data in Melilli5. When possible, observation in forensic laboratories was carried out, occasionally following the movement of deceased bodies among laboratories, cemeteries, and mortuary slabs. At the forensic departments in Palermo and Catania, Sara worked closely with the forensic pathologists who dealt with the unidentified bodies of migrants on a daily basis. In addition, this fieldwork included one day of participant observation in the military hangar in Melilli, a very restricted area where the bodies were examined.

In total, nineteen in-depth interviews were carried out with forensic pathologists and forensic anthropologists, fourteen of which had been involved in Melilli5. In addition to forensic experts, other key actors were interviewed, including activists, International Red Cross volunteers, police officers, lawyers, undertakers, politicians, one representative of the International Commission on Missing Persons, one representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Extraordinary Commissioner of Missing Persons.

This fieldwork allowed us to gain a view on the whole forensic process and its infrastructure. The following sections describe this infrastructure, the movement of bodies through the process, and the protocols that are followed. This background description makes clear that care is central to this forensic work and allows us to argue that this work produces relational citizenships.

Forensic infrastructure

The technologies used in identifying these bodies are not much different from identification processes in the criminal justice system where the aim is to solve a crime. Often it is also the same people who do the work. A prosecutor has to determine whether a dead body is a victim of crime; if a crime is suspected, there is a legal obligation to identify the person. In Italy, there is no legal obligation to perform an autopsy or identify a person who was not a victim of crime (Last 2016). Extending the forensic work of identification to dead migrants might thus be considered an extension or

broadening of citizenship. Mobilising forensic tools, typically used by the state to order subjects and society, allows citizenship to be extended beyond state boundaries and belongings. Deploying, adjusting, and tinkering with forensic tools, as we will show, helps enact not only this individual right but also other relations and collectives.

Although there are differences between the forensics of the criminal justice system and those of a humanitarian setting, both aim at standardised procedures. At a conference in Milan, in November 2013, forensic anthropologists argued for ‘ensuring the use of standardized procedures for the forensic analysis and documentation of the dead by all forensic and investigative agencies and practitioners involved in the management of dead migrants’ (Cattaneo et al. 2015). Given this aspiration of standardization, it is instructive to elaborate briefly on forensics in the context of crime.

Forensic work is based on standardized protocols for handling (biological) material, which will usually become evidence to be used in court. But such material is usually very limited (a cigarette butt, a drop of blood or semen), and therefore precious. One cannot risk losing potential evidence by experimenting on it or compromising it in any way. Standardized methods are thought to guarantee proper handling from the start. Thus, the process – from crime scene to courtroom – should manifest an unbroken chain of evidence (e.g. Lynch et al. 2008). Forensic infrastructure is in place to ensure this unbroken chain, and to make humans, things, and information flow together (M’charek 2016; Lynch et al. 2008).

While identifying the bodies of drowned migrants departs from the criminal justice context, it is still part and parcel of forensic practice. Our analysis focuses on the significance of the forensic protocol, in particular that developed for Melilli5. As a device, a protocol helps forensic practitioners to arrive at a level of standardization, setting out a procedure through which data can be linked to a body and eventually a person. As we will show, a protocol does not simply represent or record the work that goes into making dead bodies move from A to B and thereby be available for examination. It also orders and organizes that work. For example, the eight hundred bodies in Melilli5 were not initially available for forensic examination. The shipwreck had to be lifted from 360 metres below sea level by engineers and their cutting-edge technologies before forensic practitioners could inspect the bodies on examination tables. In focusing on how the Melilli5 protocol acted as an ordering device in the practice of identifying bodies, we embrace it as an ethnographic device; it shapes our narrative and helps us to analyse the practice of identification as a practice of care for bodies and forensic infrastructure. But before going into the details of the Melilli5 protocol for identifying bodies, we situate those bodies in the broader context of what has come to be known as the ‘refugee crisis’.

Moving bodies – dead and alive

There can be little doubt that the so-called refugee crisis has become pivotal in current European politics. The revolutions in the Arab world and the war in Syria have spurred thousands of people to seek refuge in Europe. Already in 2011, responding to the Tunisian revolution, EU policy sought to militarise European borders (Campesi 2011). Borders have been subjected to repeated risk analyses aimed at assessing vulnerabilities – not the vulnerability of the tens of thousands of migrants undertaking dangerous

journeys, but rather of the external borders of Europe (Carrera, Den Hertog, and Parkin 2012). The dramatic increase in human casualties en route to Europe thus attests to a failing border politics, costly not only in terms of resources but also of lives (IOM 2018).

As Kovras and Robins (2015) argue, this border politics makes living migrants some of the most heavily monitored individuals in the EU, while dead migrants merit almost no attention. How many lives precisely have been lost is hard to say, due to a lack of official European numbers. Gradually the numbers of migrant deaths have started to be known through various initiatives of NGOs, such as the list of deaths by UNITED Against Racism, the Missing Migrants Project of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Deaths at the Border Database of the Free University in Amsterdam (Last et al. 2016). Such initiatives have primarily sourced their lists from news media (Last and Spijkerboer 2014; M'charek and Black *Forthcoming*).

According to the Deaths at the Borders Database, between 1990 and 2013 3,188 people died in their attempt to reach Europe.¹ The IOM estimates that numbers spiked between 2011 and June 2016, with at least thirteen thousand people having died or gone missing (IOM 2018). And the numbers jumped dramatically again in the second half of 2016. In a report published in 2016, Médecins Sans Frontières shows that the closing of the Eastern European borders has led people to take the deadliest route to Europe, crossing the Mediterranean basin from Libya to Italy.² Recent figures from the IOM's Missing Migrants Database indicate that since January 2014, more than eighteen thousand people have drowned trying to reach Europe through the Mediterranean route (*ibid.*). As an effect of the so-called Turkey deal, which aims at keeping Syrian refugees within Turkey and out of the European Union, and bilateral deals with Libya, where coastguards simply open fire on people leaving in boats, the number of people arriving in Europe are declining – but the number of those drowning are rising (*ibid.*).

Leanne Weber (2010) has introduced the notion 'regime of self-evidence' to explain that the lack of official numbers contributes to the acceptance of these border-related deaths. Since governments shy away from collecting numbers, they can refrain from assuming accountability, casting border-related death as a matter of individual risk-taking rather than a structural political problem. Dying in the Mediterranean thus appears as a 'natural' consequence of risky and illegal crossings and even an individual choice. This logic and the lack of official numbers, let alone accountability, does not elicit much curiosity as to who these people are who did not make it to Europe alive.

The 'regime of self-evidence' contributes to a denial of recognition of the humanity of migration victims. Initiatives that try to break this policy of militarized borders – and European states' looking away from the devastating consequences of their border management regime – assume an important role within civil society. As Rygiel (2016, 548) argues: 'In order to have rights and status one must be recognized by others (a political community) as a political subject. Rights thus belong not with the individual *per se* but with the individual as a member of a political community'. Citizenship is thus relational and a result of the practical and material work of recognition. By counting, analysing available data, making the numbers of deaths available, and filling in the gap where states fail, these NGOs perform acts of citizenship, as they make the dead members of a community of human beings.

Although very late and very little, a few initiatives that are more or less part of official policy have been developed with the aim of identification (see M'charek and Black [Forthcoming](#)).³ First, there is the Hellenic DNA database established in June 2012. In 2015, the database began to include DNA profiles of dead migrants and their relatives. Confronted with the bodies that constantly washed ashore on the Greek islands and the chaos of families unable to track relatives, this DNA database was aimed at compiling a registry of deceased migrants in the hope of identifying them. This function of the database is the result of the hard work of Dr Penelope Miniati, head of Greece's forensic service.⁴ As of June 2019, the database contains 750 profiles and has helped to identify 170 people.

A second effort was launched in 2014 by the Italian state, when the Office of the Commissioner for Missing Persons dedicated its efforts towards identifying dead migrants (see for example Olivieri et al. [2018](#)). It began working with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a forensic pathologist and scientists from the University of Milan in a pilot study to identify the 386 victims of the Lampedusa migrant shipwrecks that took place on 3 and 11 October 2013. These two cases were defined 'mass disasters', which meant that the identification effort involved special units consisting of the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) unit from Palermo, a police division from Agrigento called the Flying Squad, and the Forensic Science Department (Attia et al. [2016](#)). We elaborate on this pilot study below. Here, it suffices to say that this collaboration as well as the DVI approach set the stage for the commitment and conduct of the commissioner's office and was the basis for the identification efforts in Melilli5.

A third initiative was launched in June 2018 by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP)⁵ to help coordinate the work being done in Italy, Greece, Malta, and Cyprus. This initiative is aimed at building capacity and standardizing identification across European states bordering the Mediterranean. Crucially, the money for this initiative did not come from the European Union but from the Swiss government. One could say that these initiatives that are more or less connected to state policies are important attempts to restore the political subjectivity (Krause and Schramm [2011](#)) of dead persons through the work of forensics.

We now move to the case of Melilli5, attending to the care for the dead and demonstrating how this care goes hand in hand with care for forensic infrastructure. As we have suggested, this careful work towards a possible identification of the individual victim is a work of forensic care that leads to a new citizenship for the drowned persons.

Following the protocol

The recovery of the wreck of 18 April 2015, near the Libyan coast was carried out in July 2016. The Italian government provided 9.5 million euros for retrieving the wreck from the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. A robotic recovery system was designed by a team of engineers to grasp the sunken ship and pull it up. Top-quality equipment was put to use, and the best boats present in the Mediterranean were employed. Twenty crew members and thirty-five technicians participated in the retrieval. This sci-fi-like operation was filmed and partially broadcast on Italian television.⁶ The ship was docked

on the southeast coast of Sicily, in Melilli, near the historic town of Syracuse, where the identification work was to take place.

A large-scale identification process of the victims inside the ship was planned and coordinated by LABANOF in Milan, which was led by Cristina Cattaneo and Prefect Vittorio Piscitelli, the special commissioner for missing persons. In contrast to the work of recovering the ship, the work of identifying the bodies received zero funding from the government. Twenty Italian universities signed an agreement with the Office of the Special Commissioner to provide personnel, facilities, and equipment to examine the bodies and analyse the data. In addition, the ICRC and the Navy were called upon to facilitate the work. An impressive task force – consisting of forensic scientists and pathologists from twenty Italian universities, experts from the ICRC, professionals from the Navy, the police, and the fire brigade, as well as local governmental authorities from Syracuse – was created to face the challenge of retrieving and examining the large number of bodies and body parts. To this end, a protocol was devised providing guidelines for the identification procedures. The protocol was not produced *de novo* but was established and amended following the shipwrecks off the coasts of Lampedusa in 2013, when a first pilot study of identification of dead migrants was carried out. These shipwrecks then became part of the forensic infrastructure, providing experience subsequently formalized in Melilli5.

The Melilli5 protocol instructs practitioners on what to take account of. Even though it refers specifically to the victims of the 18 April shipwreck, it is representative of how the identification of unidentified bodies is assumed to work in general. Guidelines relate to international regulations for forensic identification, such as Interpol's Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) protocols (designed for mass disasters) and the ICRC. Generally speaking, the aim of identification procedures is to compare post mortem data, which is information collected on and from the deceased body, to ante mortem data, the personal data referring to a missing person or biological data from relatives. Identification then relies on comparison: the 'matching' of post mortem and ante mortem data may ultimately lead to the identification of an unidentified body (ICRC 2009; Cattaneo and D'Amico 2016).

In the Melilli5 protocol (Figure 1), the handling of bodies was depicted in a diagram called 'Work flow on site'.

The diagram orders temporally the trajectory of the body and the division of labour among the different practitioners. As described in the protocol, the bodies were to move from a refrigerated ICRC truck (1), to a space where bodies were defrosted and sorted (2), and then to tents for autopsies and external examinations (3). There, anthropological, odontological, and genetic samples would be taken and sent to Milan (4) for further analysis. After a final check, the corpses would be boxed in numbered coffins (5), stored (6), and then distributed to cemeteries around Sicily (7). The document also specifies how the samples and data were to be stored and instructs the user to transcribe all findings on the international forms of both Interpol and ICRC, to facilitate a future exchange of data. Finally, it describes the forensic legal administrative work to be performed before a body could be transported for burial.

The protocol presupposes a linear trajectory and a smooth path along which the body travels from the refrigerated truck to the autopsy table to the grave, easily changing hands and readily available for examination and identification activities.

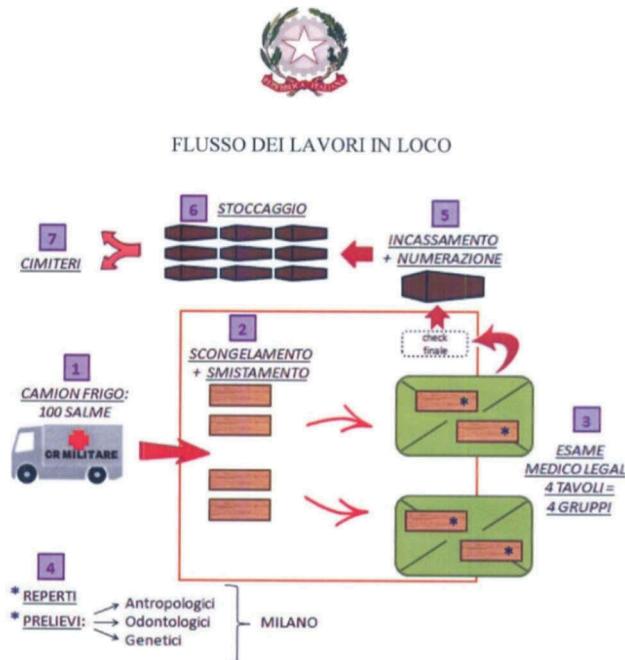


Figure 1. Diagram entitled 'work flow on site'.

This is a trajectory in which bodies or body parts are neatly sorted for inspection, teeth are present for analysis, DNA samples can be retrieved without problem, and photographs can travel from the cameras of forensic doctors to the digital photographic archives of the Scientific Police. The information collected and put on the international standardized forms would likewise travel without difficulty to an ICRC database.

It likely comes as no surprise that in practice there is no such neat sequence of events, as we describe in detail below. Yet the diagram is instructive of a dominant approach to infrastructures and, consequently, of the neglected work of care and of citizenship. The diagram in fact presents a forensic infrastructure as a built system that regulates the movement of bodies in a process towards identification and burial. A common metaphor associated with this depiction of infrastructures is a road, facilitating the movement of cars – a constructed network that both precedes and shapes the direction of movement. This is a version of what Kregg Hetherington (2016) has called 'development thinking', revealing a progressive temporality that promises a new order to come: from disordered and mangled bodies to ordered bodies and information revealing their identities.

In practice, the movement of a dead body is far messier. Once we turn our attention from the protocol to the practices in which bodies are handled, the intended route shifts speed, bends sharply, or disappears altogether. We focus on the work that is trivialised or taken for granted in the protocol, namely the work of caring for the body precisely because it belongs to a person, and the work of caring

for the infrastructure because it facilitates an equal treatment of human beings with dignity and the right to be known.

Encountering bodies

The case of Melilli⁵ is unique in many ways. It is remarkable in its scale as well as the logistic challenges met. The wrecked ship (Figure 2) was docked in the summer, under a scorching sun, when temperatures in the Mediterranean can reach up to 40 degrees Celsius. To prevent the bodies from instantly decomposing and being eaten up by birds and other animals, the entire ship had to be kept at 5 to 10 degrees; a container was designed for the ship in which liquid nitrogen was dispersed to maintain the required temperature. To reach the bodies it was necessary to open a hole in the cargo of the retrieved boat. Forensic pathologists trained a group of firefighters, who crawled into the hole, on how to collect the bodies without overlooking any useful information for future identification. The firefighters entered two at a time: one to collect the bodily remains, the other to supervise their colleague in case they fainted, which was a risk due to the bodies' advanced state of decomposition.⁷

Since the bodies had been in water for such a long time, they had gone through a process called saponification, which is the conversion of soft tissue and fat into a soapy whitish layer covering the body. Saponification stops the decay process because it forms adipocere, a substance called 'cadaver wax'. The process of saponification takes a few months, after which the body begins to fragment into pieces. Indeed, many bodies in the cargo had started to fall apart. Using shovels, the firemen collected 457 body bags full of commingled human remains. Five refrigerated trucks provided by the ICRC transported the body bags from the harbour where the wreck was, to a NATO hangar close by. NATO had agreed to host this ambitious project by providing its base in Melilli. Each of these details is not trivial but key to the movement of bodies.



Figure 2. The shipwreck. Credit: Salvatore Cavalli AP photo.

What is the work of citizenship involved in the care for bodies and infrastructure? Let us start with the care for bodies and the role of the firefighters, the first group of professionals to encounter the dead bodies on land.

Di Bartolo, one of the firefighters, recounts that they found the bodies cramped in a tiny space, 'like a slave ship'. To collect the bodies, he said: '[w]e had to lie across them to pull them up, but we never walked on them. [...] Out of respect, no firefighter ever stepped on a body' (quoted in Hinnant, Thomas, and Larson 2018). Thus, the firefighters were not simply following instructions and the protocol but acted upon the situation they encountered. As professionals they had to tinker with how to handle the bodies, and they also acted 'out of respect', thereby indicating that the site prompted them to honour the humanity of the victims, as people who deserved to be treated with dignity as any other human being. While Cattaneo had asked the firefighters to handle the bodies individually and put clothing and personal effects for each body in its own body bag, the actual practice did not follow the protocol or meet its aim of individual identification. Paolo Quatropani, an inspector from the fire brigade, said: 'At the bottom of the vessel we found the skeletal remains of pregnant women and children clinging on to each other. [...] We were witnesses to the horrific end of their lives as if it was frozen in time' (quoted in Latza Nadeau 2017).

These instances demonstrate that the forensic work of collecting the evidence is simultaneously a work of care, producing relationships and a collective in which victims and firefighters belong together. The professional gaze of forensics – even that of a dedicated forensic anthropologist experienced with migrant deaths and drowning – was aimed at individualizing, and did not match the horrific situations and emotions that dying people go through. Such situations can bracket individuality and cause people to cling to one another and embrace each other. Given these circumstances, the firefighters could not always sort out the bodies as individuals.

The second aspect we want to highlight is the care for the infrastructure. As indicated above, the organisation of Melilli5 was based upon earlier identification endeavours. The October 2013 shipwrecks near Lampedusa served as 'infrastructural experiments' (Jensen and Morita 2015) for the intervention strategy deployed in Melilli. The Lampedusa operations were the first time that the identification of a large number of drowned migrants was attempted. It was, as indicated above, also the first time that the Office of the Commissioner for Missing Persons included migrants missing at sea in his mandate (Olivieri et al. 2018). The commissioner signed a memorandum of understanding with LABANOF, and together they collected the post-mortem data of the more than 360 victims. They also worked together with the Forensic Genetics Lab of the University of Pavia that produced the DNA profiles. Since the DNA profiles were unhelpful in identifying the victims, who originated primarily from Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia, the commissioner's office called the European embassies of these countries to ask for their help. The request was, as Cattaneo had put it, 'to ask refugees from these countries: if you are looking for your beloved ones, who could be involved in this disaster, please come to Rome or Milan and please bring some information'.⁸ Despite the distance and the financial burden, over a period of six to eight months, members of more than fifty families came, which led to the identification of thirty-one of the victims. The Lampedusa case not only exemplifies the importance of infrastructural

work but also makes clear that forensic professionals have to go off the beaten path when engaging with migrant deaths.⁹ This work requires dedication and improvisation, and is a work of citizenship that they find themselves involved in.

Before detailing how care for bodies goes hand in hand with care for infrastructure, we want to point out some important tensions and contradictions. The Lampedusa shipwrecks of 2013 produced a major shock in Italy and beyond. The former Prime Minister, Enrico Letta, visited the island on 4 October and declared: 'The hundreds who lost their lives off Lampedusa yesterday are Italian citizens as of today'.¹⁰ It is vital to note though that while he was extending posthumous citizenship to the dead, those who survived the shipwrecks were arrested and detained for illegal migration (Rygiel 2016).

At the same time, the sociopolitical mood around the Lampedusa shipwrecks provoked a concerted effort of identification that became infrastructural for Melilli⁵, and helped to secure political and financial support for the identification work in Sicily. However, as indicated, while the high-tech work to recover the ship and preserve the bodies received 9.5 million euros from the Italian government, there was no budget for the identification work (Piscitelli et al. 2016). That work was seen as an act of humanitarianism, a contribution of expertise that allowed universities to engage publicly with the issue of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea. At the same time, it provided ample opportunity for research and training students. This also meant that forensic experts from various Italian universities paid for their own trips to Sicily, including their accommodation, but crucially also for the technical equipment needed. Moreover, since Italian coroners (forensic pathologists) work on a freelance basis, they did not receive a salary and were thus volunteers to this project. Such forensic care work and the citizenship it brings about can thus involve significant political or normative tensions. In what follows, we will elaborate on this neglected care work for bodies and demonstrate how it also entails care for the infrastructure.

Caring for bodies, caring for infrastructure

Let us now enter the military hangar in Melilli where bodies are taken care of.¹¹ The space is divided into 'green', 'yellow', and 'red' zones, divided by orange plastic, hanging there as a gentle reminder for those who work there. The green zone consists of two wooden tables, a couple of benches, and three or four computers. Here, members of the Flying Squad, the local state police, 'register all the work that takes place in the yellow and red zone', as Cattaneo puts it. In light of this description, it is interesting that the police are absent in the workflow diagram discussed above. To enter the yellow zone one has to step through a small basin as to disinfect one's boots. There, three or four members of the scientific police, with masks covering their mouth and equipped with cameras, are busy taking pictures of bodies and personal effects of the victims. On the tables, there are cameras, phones, and SIM and memory cards in plastic bags. Immediately after this open space is the red zone: two ICRC tents where autopsies are taking place.

The bodies retrieved from the ship were put in bags and temporarily stored in the refrigerated ICRC truck. On each bag, a unique identification number was assigned to the body, to be used throughout the autopsy process and on the metal coffin as well as

on the plaque put at the eventual grave (Figure 3). This number was also to be found on all personal effects, the samples taken, as well as any data collected about the victim. However, many bags did not carry just one body. Not only because many victims had clung to one another (see plaque below), but also because the bodies were in an advanced stage of decomposition.

In the two tents in the hangar, forensic experts performed autopsies. Despite the terrible state of the human remains, these procedures were elaborate. They photographed the remains and then reassembling the skeleton, looking especially for certain parts, such as the femur, the skull, and the pelvis, that could help to determine the sex, age, and health condition of the victim, including signs of violence and torture. Diagrams of pelvic and skull structures were attached to the interior of the tents as reference material for the team. A 3D scan of each skull was taken, to check against dental records. In cases where bodies were not completely skeletonized, other identification markers, such as tattoos or scars, were recorded and hair samples taken.

The victims' effects also received ample attention. These personal items would end up in little plastic bags, each with the same identification number as the one on the coffin and the plaque. Many of these items were documents and photographs sewn into clothing. There were little wooden sticks that the victims used for cleaning their teeth, photos of saints, or even a spoonful of dirt wrapped up and brought from the victim's



Figure 3. A plaque with the identification numbers of three victims, in the graveyard in Catania, Sicily, indicating that these bodies could not be told apart. Credit: Trisha Thomas.

home country (Thomas 2016). Cattaneo recalled that '[o]ne boy had a report card in his pocket with his grades in chemistry and physics' (quoted in Latza Nadeau 2017). These items could be vital clues in the identification of the victims, things that family members might recognise as belonging to their loved ones. The care put into documenting them was part and parcel of the forensic process.

However, not all items found could be easily linked to specific bodies, as the firefighters found lots of scattered clothes and personal effects. They gathered these in bags separate from the bodily remains. These effects, although not immediately linked to any of the bodies in particular, were classified anyway and were recorded and photographed. Sara was there during this process and was instructed to take notes as the bags were opened. Words were dictated to her at a fast pace. She wrote:

BAG 04, CARGO

11/07 TIME 11.27. YELLOW PLASTIC BAG: AT THE OPENING, CLOTHING IS FOUND. INCLUDING

BROWN JACKET WITH EXTERNAL LATERAL POCKETS: ANTERIOR AND INTERIOR (EMPTY).

INSIDE COVERED WITH FAKE FUR.

BRAND: UNREADABLE

SIZE: XL

BLUE AND WHITE SHOE WITH SYMBOL

BRAND: NIKE

SIZE: 41

As the coroner opened a sweatshirt, Sara saw something falling. It rolled on the floor. She bent over to look. It was a bone. No one seemed to notice, so she pointed it out to a member of the scientific police. He picked it up and put it on the table with the other remains. A bit later Sara registered it under the entry 'dispersed find', a piece of cervical bone, C2.

C2 evokes the contingencies in which bodies move. The movement described here firmly inserted our ethnographer into the forensic infrastructure. It was Sara who saw the bone and made the scientific police act. As bodies move, they change things and people around them. We turn now to this process of change and the way unexpected actors become part of the infrastructure.

Washing as forensic citizenship work

In the hangar, bodies moved from the sealed body bags in order to be examined, sampled, and documented. This process required a crucial yet neglected activity: washing. While washing dead bodies before burial is of great import in many cultures, in forensic practice it is also part of the identification work. Given the state in which the bodies had been found in the cargo of the ship, it was hard to examine them or the personal effects without first cleaning them.

As indicated above, the forensic work in Melilli5 was based on voluntary labour, and the fact that the practitioners did not receive funding for the equipment caused various critical situations in the forensic infrastructure. Focusing on the importance of cleaning the bodies and remains, we want to suggest to view washing as a work of citizenship (cf. Pols 2006). Washing in this setting was an important yet neglected work of caring for

bodies as well as for infrastructure. Washing the victims' garment allowed the forensic practitioners to determine their colours and identify labels, markers that could be important aids in the process of identification by relatives (Figure 4).

But the washing of the human remains was also crucial, as the following two examples make clear. Take the account of Paola, a coroner:

You've got to act domestic, right? The odontologist was annoyed by the fact that the teeth were all dirty. We cannot brush them one by one. I mean, there was no time to do that. I had kept the coffee cup ... by chance ... I said, 'let's put them in the coffee cup, clean and bleach them therein'. (Interview December 2016, Milan)

Teeth possess particular importance in the identification process. When examinations of the body are impossible or insufficient to identify a cadaver, odontological examination and comparison of anatomical and pathological peculiarities of the buccal cavity can give more decisive results. Teeth are preserved more than any other anatomic structure at high temperatures and are a good source of DNA. In this case, however, there was not enough staff or time to polish them properly, and the teeth ended up being too dirty for forensic analysis. Lacking the extra hands, the coroner found a way to adapt the infrastructure. A coffee cup, an everyday object that was part of the breakfast offered to the forensic pathologists by the morticians, became a purposeful container to properly wash the teeth with bleach she paid for herself.

On another occasion, one of the forensic anthropologists was annoyed that while cleaning the bodily remains, small bones kept disappearing in the sink. Given that the firefighters had collected 457 body bags, not bodies, a crucial aspect of the forensic examination was counting. One of the aims of the forensic work was to understand how many people were on the boat, and the bones were important traces in this process of counting. As one practitioner explained, 'If I find two R1 [right radius 1] bones in



Figure 4. Washing the trousers of a young victim before photographing the label. Credit: Salvatore Cavalli AP photo.

a body bag it means there is another person to consider' (Interview November 2016, Milan). Although the bones were not catalogued individually, they were taken into account in order to understand the magnitude of the disaster as well as to have a registry of the number of victims.

This was why the forensic pathologist was bothered by the constant disappearance of small bones. One day, while having her lunch in solitude, she came up with a solution. Part of her lunch was a fresh ricotta cheese. Walking back into the hangar she put the ricotta basket into the sink and was happy to find that it fitted perfectly. It thus became a sieve to catch the small bones. Now the bones could be washed without losing them down the drain.

Washing involves care for the body and bodily remains as well as for infrastructure. Attending to instances of washing allowed us to see how infrastructure was tinkered with and adjusted, in order to make the bodies move in the proper direction. In the words of Pols (2006), who examines washing in the care of mentally ill patients, 'instead of a clearly outlined citizen, this practice of washing presents us with a way of negotiating or practicing citizenship'. Similarly, while engaging in forensic citizenship work, practitioners creatively enrolled everyday objects to optimize infrastructure and to care properly.

Moving bodies, forensic care work, and citizenship

The bodies of dead migrants are found in quite diverse places: washed up on beaches, trapped in fishing nets or in rocks at the bottom of a cliff, clumped in ship holds, and scattered about in the sea (Tapella, Mirto, and Last 2016, 57). Here we have followed bodies as they moved from deep in the Mediterranean Sea to autopsy tables on the island of Sicily. We have drawn attention to a forensic protocol as a device to help shape the infrastructure along which the bodies were to move. With various examples, we have shown that once bodies started to move, they imposed modes of relating to them. They helped to produce the kind of infrastructure through which they were transported. As bodies moved, they changed their environment, and they also changed themselves. In this final section we attend to movement and change, of both the body as well as of those taking care of it.

Although the Melilli5 protocol suggested a neat temporal and spatial orientation, once the body was subjected to forensic examinations, it underwent a process of spatial compression and temporal expansion. First the surface of the body was checked meticulously. Time mattered. Given the high temperatures, it was important to quickly take snapshots, as the body changed rapidly.¹² The body's ornamentation was equally important. Personal effects – clothing, shoes, documents, jewellery, SIM cards, booklets, a Bible – were part and parcel of who the victim was. What was missing was also important: parts of the body, such as missing fingernails, might provide clues of what had happened just before death. In this process, the body expanded spatially, becoming a wide surface consisting of many elements that were connected and assigned to one person.

The exterior of the body is a fount of data pertaining to skin, nails, fractures, teeth, or absence thereof. When the Melilli5 bodies were not intact, skeletons were reassembled to produce an estimate about the physical condition and identity of the

victims. As biological samples were retrieved, surrounding elements moved to the background. Through incisions, the body was exposed, cut and dissected. In contrast with the first inspection, where identity was sought out on the surface of the body and its surroundings, the identity of the victim was now sought out inside. The body here became a fractured skull or a tooth containing DNA. Samples were taken for laboratory examination and tiny bits of the body became part of other networks and travelled long distances. These procedures transformed the body and rearticulated it into a source for forensic identification.

While shrinking spatially on the examination table, the body gained in time, becoming more durable. This process suggests acts of translation, the body becoming something else, becoming data. Legal, physical, bureaucratic, and forensic investigations interfere as the body is translated. It becomes a body multiple (Mol 2002). The body as physical remains is handed over to undertakers who arrange burial; the body as photographs and fingerprints enters the archives of the scientific police; as data compiled in legal forms, it is piled on the desk of a magistrate; and as biological samples, it travels to laboratories for DNA analysis.¹³

As the body moves and changes, it moves and changes those who attend to it as well. In this case, forensic pathologists became volunteers, while a military hangar became a forensic laboratory. Many more elements were changed and enrolled in the process of forensic work, a coffee cup, a ricotta basket. To be sure, these movements and changes did not presuppose a metaphysical relation, but were enacted in practice and required the dedicated care work of many practitioners.

This care work of building infrastructures and caring for bodies is simultaneously the work of citizenship or creating new citizens. While care relates to a moral interpellation to view the dead as human beings (Moon 2016; Last Rights Project 2018), it is through material forensic care work that these drowned people became part of the collective of human beings. Their bodies were respectfully buried, and conditions were built to get to know them as individuals. It is a way of making effective the principle stipulated by the Interpol General Assembly of 1996: that 'human beings have the right not to lose their identities after death'.

While forensics is typically associated with an objectifying scientific practice, one that tends to individualise and to reduce persons to biological traces, we show its capacity for care and citizenship work. We agree with Rygiel (2016) that migrant deaths provide a good example of 'transgressive citizenship': a citizenship that goes beyond the logics of the nation state, since the state takes into account and cares for dead people who are not formally its citizens. As we have shown here, this care for the dead through identification and burial is not set in law or in formal rights. It is dependent on the specific political mood of a country. It is as a case of 'citizenship from the margin' (Rygiel 2016). Forensic care work helps us see how practices of citizenship unfold outside formal responsibilities. As we have shown, care through forensic tools has allowed the dead migrants to become part of the collective of humanity, one that overflows the borders of nation states, producing a version of citizenship beyond rights and obligations.

Forensic care work and the relational citizenship it brings forth deserve more attention, especially from state authorities. Although the state was very present in the case we discussed, forensic care work in this setting is politically neglected. While millions of euros were granted to a commercial company that provided the high-tech

to lift the ship, there was no extra budget for the strenuous and painstaking work of identification. It is telling that despite the scale of the project, now, more than two years later, only two Mauritanian victims were identified.

The Melilli5 case shows how the victims of the shipwreck were made members of a community through the care of various actors who worked all summer on a voluntary basis, from firefighters who laid beside the bodies to recover them and made sure not to step on them, to the forensic pathologist who introduced a ricotta sieve as to not lose count of the victims, to those who washed the bodily remains and personal belongings to produce good evidence. The dedicated care of these forensic practitioners made the victims new citizens, *post mortem*.

Notes

1. <http://www.borderdeaths.org> (last accessed 9 April 2019).
2. <http://www.msf.org/en/article/eu-migration-crisis-update-february-2016> (last accessed 9 April 2019).
3. Kostas Mazitsos during an informal presentation at the 'Consultative Roundtable' of the ICMP meeting in Rome on 11 June 2018.
4. See e.g. <https://www.unhcr.org/gr/en/2999-athens-dna-lab-helps-trace-those-lost-at-sea-on-aegean-crossing.html> (last accessed 9 April 2019).
5. The ICMP is an intergovernmental organization that was established to identify the eight thousand Bosnian Muslims killed during the Bosnian genocide.
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQakgSX6EmE>.
7. In the documentary entitled *Lontano Dagli Occhi*, Domenico Iannacone interviewed the firefighters who participated in Melilli5.
8. This was during a meeting organized by the ICMP that aimed at coordinating the work of identifying missing migrants in southern European countries. The meeting, which was called 'Joint Process to Account for Persons Missing as a Result of Migration in the Mediterranean Region: Consultative roundtable', took place on Monday, 11 June 2018, in Rome, Italy.
9. Although it is standard practice to contact embassies when Western victims are involved, it hardly ever happens in the context of migrant deaths.
10. See <https://euobserver.com/justice/121681> (accessed on 9 April 2019).
11. Since access to the hangar was very restricted, in this part we also draw on published material in various media, as well as on interviews we conducted. See also an Associated Press video in the hangar where Cattaneo is interviewed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rwc5FvD2g6g> (accessed 9 April 2019).
12. See also Last (2016) for an elaboration of the relation between timeliness and the success rate of identification.
13. In January 2017, a protocol was signed (pending permission of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) between the Special Commissioner for Missing Persons and the ICRC and IRC for the missions to collect AM data to start. Regarding DNA samples, the Group of Italian Forensic Geneticists agreed to analyse pro bono the data from the victims of the 18 April shipwreck (Cattaneo and D'Amico 2016, 79).

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