Europa Dreaming

Valeria Burgio & Matteo Moretti (Eds.)

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YEARNING FOR EUROPE FROM THE BRENNER PASS

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The European flag held high by a refugee walking across Hungary along the highway. The European anthem as the accompaniment to the victory of a presidential candidate in France. There have been many attempts lately to re-semanticise the European myth, by taking its flag out of its usual institutional settings and moving it into new situations. A form of removal and re-attribution of values, that seeks to bring new life into a petrified identity searching for new ways to react to what is an obvious crisis of confidence.

The web project *Europa Dreaming* (Moretti et al., 2016) edges its way into this current of thought, questioning the so-called European myth by deconstructing its values. It's an analysis that brings out the contradictions that

Dreaming and Drowning:
A Project of Visual Journalism
on Borders and Europe

VALERIA BURGIO and MATTEO MORETTI

have distinguished Europe from the very moment of its foundation, and in particular during the application and implementation of the project for European unification: the Puglia region caught unprepared for the exodus of the Albanians, the paralysis in the face of the civil war in Yugoslavia, the construction of the barbed wire fence in Ceuta were all events that happened concurrently with the application of the Schengen treaty and the resulting abolition of the borders between European countries (between 1990 and 1992). The crisis we are currently experiencing is a sign that there was an inadequate reaction to those events, one that could have forged a European character capable of accepting difference and able to take a position that champions the rights that it upholds. The European character is still fragile and insecure, because it remains fragmented.

The Syrian immigrant who, after being stopped at the Hungarian border, decides to lead a mass of men in flight holding the European flag in hand, in a strange re-enactment of an Olympic-sort of parade, seems to say: you don't deserve Europe. Whereas we, who have experienced war, lack of freedom, hunger and fear, we know exactly what that flag means: protection, survival, rights. Not *protection from*, but *freedom to*. Two contrasting definitions, two sides in conflict: all condensed in that image, which sublimates the two subjects of that conflict in a possible solution. The fundamental core of *Europa Dreaming*'s narrative is how hard it is to reconcile this *double dream* – the refugees' dream of Europe and the Europeans' dream of keeping trouble and hunger out of their territory. A dream focused on the same object – Europe – but with different subjects – Europeans and non-Europeans; that represents the same values – freedom, economic stability and welfare – but in which the range of the beneficiaries of these values changes on the basis of who is involved. There's not enough for everyone, say those who defend the borders. Freedom is only freedom if it is extended to the entire world, the counterpart seems to assert.

Europa Dreaming (Moretti et al., 2016) responds to this complexity and to the debate about different ideas of Europe, through a kaleidoscope of points of view. The composite plural framework, made by assembling different media and languages, seeks to communicate complexity in response to the hyper-simplified tale of the presumed invasion of Europe by the migrants and the state of emergency perspective proffered by sensationalistic journalism. The choice of a medium such as the web, using the same devices as the news that the project wishes to deconstruct, in fact makes it possible to bring together different voices, different places, different historical eras, to lend scope and critical depth to the ephemeral flare of current affairs.

2. NEW BORDERS WITHIN THE EU?

Through visual means, the online project constructs a wider frame around a local and short-term point of view: the history of the Brenner contains in embryo global processes and world histories. Moreover, the focus on contemporary times is merely a point of departure that helps put current events into a historical perspective. In this way, the project connects a very specific place (the Brenner Pass and, in general, the Austrian-Italian border) with a global issue and the current emergency with the historical given of migratory fluxes.

↑ FIG. 2
The outlet that opened in 2007 in Brenner to
revive the local economy after the border opening.
Photo: Matteo Moretti.

Estonia/Russia, 100km

Calais, 100km

Italy/Austria?

Assothaiom, 175km

Militarized border

Bulgary/Turkey, 33km

Greece/Turkey, 12km

Cyprus, 180km

Ceuta, 8.4km

Melilla, 11km

As a border, Brenner has always been a location for human trafficking and a necessary transit along escape routes. In spite of the abolition of internal border controls, as a result of the Schengen agreements and notwithstanding the new regulations regarding the international protection of stateless persons and refugees (Dublin III Regulation, 2013), the migrants who want to reach Northern Europe, after disembarking in Lampedusa, are stopped in Brenner, a non-place where the lack of any intergovernmental coordination and agreement has repercussions on both police forces and migrants. A perceived situation of emergency at the external borders of Europe is de facto provoking the reintroduction of national borders within the Schengen area. The European Union, which was born through the abolition of its internal frontiers, is now crumbling under the pressure of the refusal by individual nations to receive migrants landed in other EU countries as their first berth in Europe.

As a result, the national European borders, which during the past twenty years had been free of customs and police controls, have once again become areas of surveillance and prohibition. Borders are thus junctions where different escape routes converge and risk ending. A frontier is a no-man's land, where what is behind is not yet abandoned, and what is ahead is still a promised land. It is a space of suspension, a "transition space where forces and subjects fight and meet, changing their identity" (Mezzadra, 2006, p. 72). On the other hand, frontiers today are hyper-legalized objects of bilateral, trilateral agreements, but paradoxically they are also a space of exception where human rights are abdicated. The logic of the frontier is sacrificed to the logic of the border, a division line protecting political, social and symbolic spaces, erected by national systems to put a stop to the free circulation of human beings. While products and money are free to circulate and the world becomes a borderless supermarket, people – who can be used as a labour force only if they remain in their low-wage countries – are refused. Not everybody is stopped, because a frontier has a different meaning depending on who is crossing it, whether a European citizen or a refugee with no documents (Balibar, 1994).

Thus the frontier, which was once a space of political-juridical void, has become a hyper-controlled place where different controlling patrols fight about the interpretation of too many colliding rules.

If once imaginary gates on the Mediterranean sea surrounded what was known as *Fortress Europe* and check points were controlling borders in Ukraine, Moldova and the Middle East, new walls are now being raised within what was called the European Union. Whoever crosses the border is rejected

and sent back to the state where he or she initially landed, as the Dublin transfer to a third country conveys. As it has often been reported by UNHCR and is explained in detail by Fulvio Vassallo in this volume, this rule, instead of guaranteeing protection to the refugees, not only limits the refugees' freedom of movement but also their general level of protection, refusing their right to asylum under legal pretenses.

Focusing on the place of our investigation, the area near Bolzano is crossed by a growing influx of migrants coming from Southern Italy and headed to Northern Europe, in particular Germany. They try to reach Munich by train, but they are stopped beforehand at the Bolzano station, where dozens of refugees sleep in improvised accommodations. They represent only a small number of the many people who are rejected every day at the Brenner border. Though the EU abolished its internal border bars twenty years ago, Brenner has now become an off-limits area for non-EU citizens. Every day, someone tries to climb on a truck or to walk across the border using the motorway, to escape control and internment. And so these people risk their lives once again, after having survived the Mediterranean crossing and the Libyan camps.

These events make the news, and it is not the role of a researcher to repeat what the media says. On the contrary, research should treat the news as symptoms of fears and as possible self-fulfilling prophecies rather than mirrors of reality. The approach to a very topical subject should go beyond the single event (as is the case with news and social media) to approach the *longue durée* – a wider view treating single events as connected symptoms of long-lasting transformations (Braudel, 1987). This is the reason why the Brenner border has been approached in a transhistorical perspective, connecting current migration with previous waves of people who were forced to cross the same border during the XX century.

Since its birth, in 1918, Brenner has been a key passage for migrants and refugees, country people escaping famine during the 30s; deportation trains full of Jews in the 40s; refugees and displaced people after the Second World War; Italian migrants in search of fortune in the 50s and 60s.

During those decades, Italians stormed those very same trains that now carry, among commuters and tourists, mostly sub-Saharan African people towards their land of desire. Nevertheless, while Italians brought everything they owned in a cardboard suitcase, contemporary migrants have nothing but a train ticket and a mobile phone in their pocket, since on the Mediterranean cruises they come from, no luggage is allowed.

↑ FIG. 4
Luis Durnwalder, former governor of the autonomous province of South Tyrol (Italy), and Herbert Kunz, Austrian district authority, remove the bar from the Austrian-Italian border. Photo: Gottfried Rainer.

Alexander Langer, a South Tyrolean activist and politician, former member of the European Parliament, whose grave is not far from the Brenner pass, just a few days before dying, launched his appeal to Europe to take a clear position on the war in the former Yugoslavia: if Europe did not condemn what the Serbians were doing in Bosnia, then it would ratify its own death. Is Europe again displaying indolence and distance in the face of injustice and abuse of human rights? Has Europe chosen separation instead of integration? What is left of the original determination to be united in the defence of human rights?

3. AGAINST THE RHETORIC OF INVASION, A PROJECT OF VISUAL JOURNALISM

The endless stream of news about landings and deaths in the Mediterranean and the daily experience of refugees trying to cross the border and move on to Northern Europe has made us feel the urgency to develop this topic. This urgency is not due to a desire to follow the news but on the contrary to reduce the perception of emergency and to contrast the narrative of invasion that is spreading through media from political discourse to public opinion.

The field in which this inquiry is situated is that of Visual Journalism, a hybrid practice combining data journalism and visual storytelling with the aim of communicating complex phenomena in an accessible and enthralling way. Data journalism is a new practice in which journalists collect and analyse huge datasets as a basis for their inquiry. Data visualization is often used to make the data accessible. Visual journalism is a mixture of information graphics, illustration and photography: all these visual languages contribute to the construction of a narrative that makes a complex phenomenon more understandable and comparable to daily life and experiences. Visual storytelling is supported by different approaches and methodology – such as ethnography, anthropology and semiotics. Its aim is to let everybody have access and cultivate their interest in a social phenomenon, so that they might then embark on a personal exploration of the issue.

The roots of visual journalism can be found as far back as the 1930s, in Otto Neurath's utopia of a universal visual language. Neurath's Isotype was a visual language translating statistics and information into structured systems of figures and images. In this way economic phenomena and social change could be explained to all types of people, even illiterate. Isotype was indeed "a method

↑ FIG. 5
American Field Service's drivers (left) who served in Italy meet drivers of the
French section (right) at the Brenner Pass, Austrian-Italian border, May 1945.
Photo: Loftus B. Cuddy, Archives of the American Field Service.
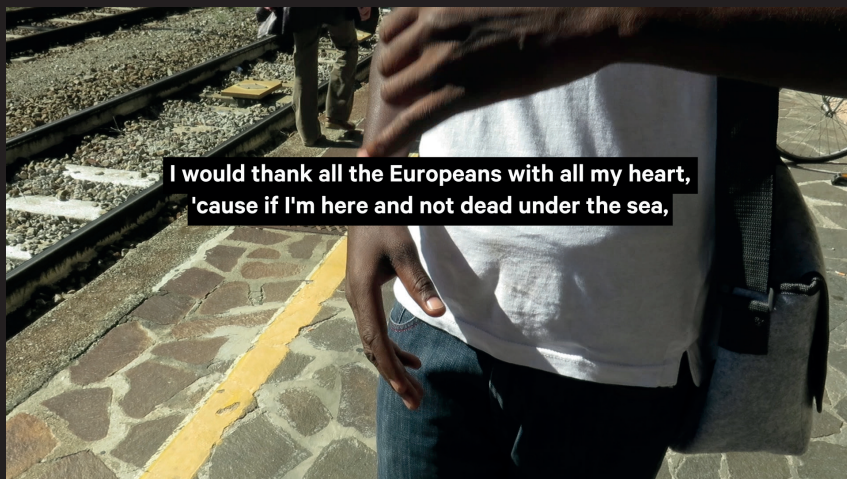
↑ FIG. 6
Still frame from one of the interviews to migrants stopped in Brenner.
("Having to Die to Stay Alive," 2015, 5:03).