

Institution: University of Westminster		
Unit of Assessment: 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: The Art Response to Migration: Reframing the Cultural Narrative of Contemporary Migration		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Federica Mazzara	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer (now Reader) in Intercultural Communication	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Sept 2015 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - Dec 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? <input type="checkbox"/> Y <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Dr Federica Mazzara's research revolves around the ways in which contemporary art and cultural practices can subvert and resist mainstream discourse around migration in Europe. Through <i>Sink Without Trace</i>, a major art exhibition curated by Mazzara with artist Maya Ramsay across June and July 2019, the following impacts were achieved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The enhancement of public understanding via both the exhibition, which demonstrably affected visitor perspectives on migration, and its associated media coverage, by which discussion of the subject matter via the art enabled redress of the dehumanising narrative of the "migrant crisis". Further, a companion installation achieved similar changes in public understanding through artistic communication outside of the gallery context. • Impact on the stakeholders involved in <i>Sink Without Trace</i> through the heightening of visibility for its charity partner, Alarm Phone, and changes in the practice, profile, and opportunities for the artists that featured in the exhibition. 		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Undertaking research on Lampedusa, an Italian island that marks a landing point for migrants entering Europe by sea, Dr Mazzara's work incorporates an interdisciplinary approach to migration and its representation that aims to redress the narrative that Europe is the victim of an unmanageable crisis. Resisting the mainstream representation of migrants as nameless and faceless masses with neither rights nor voice, Mazzara's emphasis on the rights of migrants and refugees to move/escape has contributed to various discourses concerning the politics of migration (e.g. Papadopolus et. al, 2008; Mezzadra, 2010; De Genova, 2017, etc.), and to an understanding of migrants as individuals with agency and self-determination.</p> <p>By contrast to other scholars in the field, Mazzara's research is distinguished by its focus on the ways in which art and cultural expressions have the ability to make visible to the viewer aspects and facets of migration that are commonly overlooked in the media and governmental discourse. Art, it is argued, is able to build a new discourse around migrants and refugees that goes beyond the essentialist approach that labels them as victims and/or criminals. For example, in a 2015 journal article Mazzara provides detailed analysis of the documentary <i>Soltanto il mare</i> [Nothing but the Sea] (2010) by Italo-Ethiopian filmmaker Dagmawi Yimer, exploring the tensions within the visual discourse surrounding forms of migration that are deemed "illegal" [1].</p> <p>Developing this approach, Mazzara has gone on to analyse grassroots documentary and visual art projects that express what she calls an "aesthetics of subversion", by which those normally depicted as "imperceptible bodies" become "subjects of power" that are able to subvert the narrative around their journey, their past, and their desires for the future [2]. The individualising of these persons undermines the fabrication and spectacle of "crisis" that is commonly associated with the arrival of irregularised migrants to the island of Lampedusa and which fuels a "moral panic" to which they are subjected.</p> <p>Elsewhere, Mazzara has examined how the wreckage of refugees' boats on the island of Lampedusa have come to serve as material testimonies to an ongoing and perilous global transit. This includes writings on the work of local activist collective Askavusa, who have a space called Porto M where objects are displayed to the public in order to preserve something tangible from the often traumatic memory of the passage. Mazzara argues that such work not only questions what constitutes aesthetic representation but also exposes the inadequacies of European and</p>		

International policies that continue to render illegal the right of refugees and asylum seekers to move and survive [3].

This interdisciplinary approach to the subject culminated in her 2019 monograph, *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and Aesthetics of Subversion* [4]. Building upon her previous work, this book reframes migration in the Mediterranean, and specifically around the island of Lampedusa, by exploring how a broad range of activism and art forms have become a platform for subverting the dominant narrative of migration. Mazzara identifies how such subversion generates a vital form of political dissent that reveals the contradictions and paradoxes of the securitarian regime that regulates immigration into Europe.

The above research also led to Mazzara conceiving of an exhibition that would function as a crucial component of this broader interdisciplinary project on migration, representation, and aesthetics. *Sink Without Trace* was hosted by the P21 Gallery in King's Cross in London, across June and July 2019, and was co-curated by Mazzara and artist [Maya Ramsay](#). This is one of the first exhibitions to deal specifically with the subject of migrant deaths at sea, with the majority of the works never before exhibited in the UK [5]. The scope of the exhibition was such that the variety of works communicated, explored, and provoked discussion of various aspects of the dangerous journey of migration by sea, through artworks that incorporated found objects (ship wreckage, abandoned items of domesticity), naval data, real and fictional film footage of such journeys, and artistic interpretations of testimony from the migrants who have undertaken them.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Mazzara, F. (2015) 'Spaces of Visibility for the Migrants of Lampedusa', in L. Baracco (ed.), Re-imagining Europe's Borderlands: The Social and Cultural Impact of Undocumented Migrants on Lampedusa. *Italian Studies* (Special issue), 70: 4, 449-464.
- [2] Mazzara, F. (2016) 'Subverting the narrative of the Lampedusa Borderscape'. In F. Mazzara (ed.), Lampedusa: Cultural and artistic spaces for migrant voices. *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture* (Special issue), 7:2, 135-147.
- [3] Mazzara, F. (2018) 'Objects, Debris and Memory of the Mediterranean Passage: Porto M in Lampedusa'. in: Proglia, G. and Odasso, L. (ed.) *Border Lampedusa: Subjectivity, Visibility and Memory in Stories of Sea and Land*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- [4] Mazzara, F. (2019) *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and Aesthetics of Subversion*, Oxford: Peter Lang
- [5] Mazzara, F. and Ramsay, M. (2019) *Sink Without Trace*. Art exhibition at P21 Gallery, London, June 12-July 13. *The exhibition was supported by an Arts Council England grant of £15,000.*

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Enhancing Public Understanding of the Phenomenon of Migration

The Sink Without Trace Exhibition

Sink Without Trace was hosted by the P21 Gallery in King's Cross in London, from June 12 - July 13, 2019. The exhibition presented artworks by 17 artists from 11 countries on the subject of migrant deaths at sea, with a focus on works by artists from refugee and migrant backgrounds. 7 of these artists had personal experience of fleeing to Europe by sea. Several of the works were specially commissioned for the exhibition and it was the first time that many of the works were exhibited in the UK. To date, the exhibition has provided the most in-depth overview of art being made on the subject of migrant deaths at sea and reflects the fact that the majority of migrants that attempt to travel by sea drown and their bodies are never found or counted.

A key aim of the exhibition was to enhance public understanding of the phenomenon of migration by exposing the viewers to facts, data, and stories that are commonly concealed in the public discourse of the mainstream media, in line with the aesthetics of subversion described earlier. This was partly achieved through the extensive media coverage Mazzara and Ramsay obtained, which **successfully functioned to redress the dehumanising narrative of the "migrant crisis" for a diverse audience of media consumers.** The following media articles are collated in document [a] along with several others.

[The Financial Times](#) described the exhibition as having the “distinction [...] that seven of its artists have been refugees” and describes the “heart-wrenching” circumstance of one of these artists in connection to his artwork. This demonstrates how the exhibition enabled mainstream platforms to provide individualised, and humanising, insights into the discourse around migrant journeys. Notably, though the headline of the article referred to an art market featuring Victoria Beckham in order to draw in more readers, Mazzara’s exhibition was given 4 paragraphs as the lead subject of the piece, double the length of each of the three other exhibitions featured.

As with *The Financial Times*, [The Art Newspaper](#) positively emphasised the contextualising of the art pieces in the exhibition, by which “the stories of migrant deaths at sea” are told, via a contrast with a controversial 2019 Venice Biennale piece by Christoph Büchel, who had chosen to show a boat on which 458 migrants died “as a work of art devoid of all context”. The latter article also goes into depth in its description of the artists’ work such that it provides insight into specific stories of migrant deaths at sea, emphasising the human element of such tragedies, where wider media had been focusing on border issues.

[The Institute of Race Relations](#) similarly draws the contrast with Büchel’s piece and points out that “[t]here must be alternative ways of seeing that resist the logic of dehumanisation and also avoid diminishing the enormity of the ongoing calamity. Some of these can be found in *Sink Without Trace*”. The article uses the various artworks of the exhibition to describe the stories of these specific migrant deaths at sea in order to contextualise, and show the human cost of, the UK and EU policy decisions and discourse on migration across recent years.

The [Observer](#) (whose content appears on *The Guardian* website – the UK’s ‘most [widely-read](#) digital newspaper title with over 5.2 million weekly readers in 2019’) dedicated an extended feature article to the exhibition which was shared 1,247 times online. The corrective nature of *Sink Without Trace* on the mainstream narrative around the “migrant crisis” is perhaps best summarised by the following passage on artist Max Hirzel’s exhibited photo series on “the deadliest modern shipwreck in the Mediterranean”. Indicating the way in which art reconfigures how the viewer conceives of the “value” of the migrant experience, the journalist writes that Italian PM “Renzi’s decision to recover the boat was controversial, with critics questioning the €9.5m spent. Hirzel wanted to show the value of these efforts: the series felt like a duty, he says, to victims and their families”.

The above coverage also successfully brought people to the exhibition, as the following feedback comment demonstrates: “I read about it in the Guardian. I am glad I came to see it for myself. I was a bit afraid of feeling like a voyeur. But that has not been my experience. The exhibition is so varied, so raw and shocking in its scope. Everyone should come to see this, especially secondary-age school children” [b].

The above comment is just one amongst many others that highlight how **visitors changed their views on migration as a direct response to viewing the exhibition**. Around 800 people attended the exhibition and the related events (talks, performances, and workshops) between 12 June and 13 July. A questionnaire consisting of three questions was completed by 291 visitors after the visit and is collated in document [b].

Asked the extent to which their views or understanding of migrant deaths at sea had changed upon visiting *Sink Without Trace*, 31% answered “Greatly”, and 43% “Somewhat”; asked whether they are **now more likely to engage with campaigns to improve migration policies in the UK and Europe** due to their visit, 42% answered “Greatly”, and 37% “Somewhat”; while 38% for each of these categories stated that they are now more likely to give to charities involved in rescue at sea.

This is significant given that it **affected the attitudes of persons who were already engaged in the subject matter** (hence the figures for the “Somewhat” category). For instance, one attendee wrote in the space provided for comments: “The way it’s curated had an impact on my conscience even though I’m aware of the issues”, while another said: “I already felt sympathetic to the issue but it gave me info to talk about it with others”. Others emphasised how the artistic dimensions allowed them to see the issue in a new light: “We entered the exhibit full of outrage at EU policy. But these extraordinary series of artworks remembered the policy all the more horrifying in its human dimensions”; “it made me think about the people and the places. [M]uch more cerebral and emotional than political”; “The exhibition prompted a lot of reflection that will take some time to process [...] the show is not didactic... rather, it prompts thought”.

Importantly, the comments also speak to the exhibition’s power to change public consciousness on the issue of migrant deaths at sea: “I think this exhibition can really open the

eyes of people that don't know about it"; "This exhibition is powerful because it pushes the visitor to think about migrants as single persons, as human beings, in a time where medias try to dehumanize them".

The TO6411 Installation

Along with the artworks at P21 gallery, *Sink Without Trace* presented an installation at the nearby Regent's Canal for 7 days during [Refugee Week](#) (17- 23 June 2019). This installation consisted of artist Lucy Wood's migrant boat, *TO6411*; a small fishing boat from Libya, aboard which thirty-six North Africans successfully reached Lampedusa in 2012. Wood's artistic project involved the solo sailing of this boat from Lampedusa to London, stopping off at various Mediterranean ports along the way. Over 400 people visited the moored boat, which enabled **public exposure to artistic communication of the subject matter outside of the gallery context**. In this way the work reached audiences beyond those especially interested in the arts or this subject matter.

Feedback was collected from 53 visitors during those 7 days, through a questionnaire consisting of three questions and a space for comments as with the main exhibition. The responses are collated as document [c].

Asked the extent to which **the visitor's views and understanding of the risks involved in migration by sea had changed** after seeing boat T06411, 47% answered "Greatly" and 34% "Somewhat"; asked whether seeing T06411 changed their impression of the conditions in which migrants travel by sea, 57% answered "Greatly"; and asked the extent to which they were **now more likely to give to charities involved in rescue at sea or to campaign for changes in migration policy**, 55% answered "Greatly" and 30% "Somewhat".

The comments collected spoke to the affective nature of the boat installation and the way it **redressed mainstream media narratives of migration**. For instance: "The starkness of seeing the vessel, its size when thinking of the number of occupants and the remaining and belongings really shows clearly the difficulties they faced and the extent they were willing to suffer for a chance of bettering their lives"; "Syrian refugees, media, awareness raising through social media affected me, but TO6411 got my attention deeply emotionally"; "I feel I have learned a lot. I have been shocked over the years by migrant stories in the media but have not really engaged with the reality before. Visual art can be so powerful and connects with you in a different way"; "Seeing it on news de-humanises it but seeing actual objects hits you with a force. It makes you sad and empathetic".

Impact on the stakeholders involved in Sink Without Trace

Alarm Phone

The exhibition also supported [Alarm Phone](#), a self-organised hotline for refugees in distress in the Mediterranean Sea. Over the past five years, the charity has assisted tens of thousands of migrants by reaching over 2,800 boats in distress. **This charity partner benefitted from this popular exhibition through increased visibility and financial contribution.**

A donation link to Alarm Phone was included on the exhibition's website, and they received the proceeds from 70% of the sales from exhibition catalogues and 50% of sales from tickets for the artists' workshops, with the remainder supporting the gallery that hosted the exhibition. The founders of Alarm Phone valued the visibility created by *Sink Without Trace* as much as the £1000 direct donation to their work raised during the exhibition: "We are very grateful that the curators have chosen the WatchTheMed Alarm Phone as the recipients of the proceeds [...] as they will help us sustain this activist project that is solely funded through private donations. We require donations to maintain our hotline, to pursue information campaigns to make sea crossings safer, to conduct research along the different flight routes, and to organise biannual meetings in which about 100 people participate, coming together from at least 12 countries. We want to thank the curators of Sink Without Trace for raising the visibility around the issue of migrant deaths at sea, and for directly supporting our project that tries to make deaths at sea history" [d].

In respect to increased visibility for the charity itself, it is notable that the aforementioned *Financial Times* article highlighted that the exhibition was "well-pitched" due to the curators being "conscious of the ethics around selling work from their show [...] with proceeds going to the charity Alarm Phone, a hotline for refugees in distress in the Mediterranean Sea that connects them to rescue services", thus bringing exposure to the charity on a page directed towards wealthy collectors (the page is tagged "Collecting" within "The Art Market" category of their content) [a].

Other media articles on the exhibition (for instance, by *The Observer* and *Institute of Race Relations*), also included direct links to the Alarm Phone site where their readers could make donations.

The Artists

Follow up contact with five of the artists involved in *Sink Without Trace* a year after the exhibition – Maya Ramsay, Shorsh Saleh, Victoria Burgher, Max Hirzel, and Tamara Kametani – has elucidated the following impacts the exhibition had on their work and careers [e].

Several of the artists spoke of how engagement with the exhibition had resulted in a **change in their artistic practice**. For instance, Burgher states engagement with Mazzara and Ramsay had been key to determining her work for the exhibition: “Discussions with the curators enabled me to develop an idea and consider its conceptual and material manifestation. This interest and feedback from curators leading to new and developed work is so crucial to artists”. Similarly, Hirzel writes: “in order to make my work fit to be used in the context of an exhibition, I had to do lots of editing on both visual and textual aspects of my work. This has generated something different and potentially more powerful, especially thanks to the contribution of the curators, whose input has been priceless”. Demonstrating long term change to his artistic practice, Saleh states that the audience “responses were very useful as they made it clear to me that the public are most interested in my miniature paintings rather than my mixed media works so I decided to continue to work with that format”.

The artists also confirm that participation in the exhibition has **enhanced their profiles by providing greater media visibility**. Hirzel points out that his participation opened up opportunities previously closed to him: “SWT gave great visibility to my work, thanks especially to the international media attention [...] which I had tried unsuccessfully to attract in the past”. Hirzel highlights the aforementioned Observer article, as well as the publication of a dozen photos from his series on a dedicated webpage on [The Guardian](#) that was shared 339 times [a]. Ramsay and Saleh highlight their involvement in “numerous newspaper articles and TV interviews”, along with interviews with migration focused outlets such as Migration Collective for the Maritime Museum and the journal Justice for All, as a direct result of their participation in the exhibition [e].

Further, it has **enhanced these artists’ careers by enabling them to expand their professional networks**. This is attested to by both Ramsay (who “made many new contacts in the field”) and Kametani: “By taking part in the exhibition, I was able to present my work to a new audience, work with new artists, and grow my professional network”.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[a] Portfolio of media coverage. See also, videos from [TRT World](#) and [Al Jazeera](#)

[b] *Sink Without Trace* exhibition attendee feedback data

[c] *TO6411 Installation* attendee feedback data

[d] Alarm Phone testimony

[e] Follow up testimony from the artists of *Sink Without Trace*, July 2020