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THE MATERIAL PRINCIPLE AND AN ETHICS OF HOSPITALITY AND COMPASSION: REQUIEM FOR LAMPEDUSA

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ABSTRACT

The paper comprises a meditation and an attempt at an ethical analysis of the humanitarian crisis of migrants at Lampedusa. First, a reflection on the mythical tale of Fair Vida is offered in order to inaugurate the poetical and ethical dimensions of the feminine desire to secure the cosmic order for the others. Then follows a reflection on ancient mythological and cosmogonical traditions to provide a context for discussing the growing ethical crisis in the world – i.e., the forgetting of a primeval hospitality, offered to the humanity by those ancient Gods and Nature. A plea for new ethics and an ethical criterion is a part of this reflection; an ethics that is sensitive to the material element in humans. In these contexts, tears are presented and analysed as a sign of this primeval memory in humans towards what has been radically forgotten in our times. In conclusion, the paper offers a meditation on the Buddhist mode of pratityasamutpada, as reflected in the liberating principle – the liberating of our selves from the vicious cycle of recurrent deaths through bodily and visceral compassion and hospitality.

Keywords: hospitality, compassion, material ethics, Lampedusa, Mediterranean, Fair Vida, migrations

IL PRINCIPIO MATERIALE E L'ETICA DELL'OSPITALITÀ E COMPASSIONE: REQUIEM PER LAMPEDUSA

SINTESI

L'articolo rappresenta un momento di meditazione ed una prova di analisi etica sulla crisi umanitaria delle migrazioni nel Mediterraneo, in particolare quella riferita alla tragedia di Lampedusa. In tale circostanza, dapprima, ci dedichiamo al motivo mitologico mediterraneo di Lepa Vida, con il quale si apre lo spazio etico e poetico della bramosia femminile, diretta alla conservazione dell'ordine cosmico nel mondo. Segue la riflessione sulle antiche tradizioni cosmologiche e mitologiche, con la quale si tematizza la crisi etica sempre più presente nel mondo moderno – ovvero la dimenticanza dell'ospitalità primordiale, che veniva offerta agli uomini da dei e natura. L'appello alla nuova etica è parte della presente riflessione, un'etica che si basa sul principio materiale della corporeità e della primazia dei sentimenti, oramai dimenticate nei tempi moderni. Segue l'analisi del capoverso buddista da Chandrak rti, che ci fa notare le dicotomie e le antinomie della logica dell'ospitalità, che viene offerta senza cognizione della logica intracorporea della compassione e che così rappresenta un dono che non è un dono. In conclusione offriamo uno spunto di meditazione sulla compassione e sull'ospitalità concepite quali misericordia, anche alla luce dei pensieri di Bracha Ettinger, Luce Irigaray e Jacques Derrida.

Parole chiave: ospitalità, compassione, etica materiale, Lampedusa, Mediterraneo, Lepa Vida, migrazioni

INTROITUS

Requiem eternam dona eis, Domine.
Et lux perpetua luceat eis.

One year after 366 refugees died off Lampedusa, refugees still have no other choice but to risk their lives in order to seek protection.[1]

More than 2,500 people have drowned or gone missing in the Mediterranean on their way from North Africa since the start of the year.[2]

Life is death, and death is also a life.[3]

Homage to those compassions for migrators, seen as evanescent and empty of inherent existence, like a moon in rippling water.[4]

This symptomatology is as enigmatic as tears. Even if one knows why one weeps, in what situation, and what it signifies (I weep because 1 have lost one of my nearest and dearest, the child cries because he has been beaten or because she is not loved: she causes herself grief, complains, he makes himself complain or allows himself to be felt sorry for – by means of the other), but that still doesn't explain why the lachrymal glands come to secrete these drops of water which are brought to the eyes rather than elsewhere, the mouth or the ears.[5]

For the altars of our city and of our hearths have been tainted, one and all, by birds and dogs, with carrion from the hapless corpse, the son of Oedipus.[6]

Aquamater /noun/ 1. First primordial moisture emanating from The splitting of the Cosmic Egg in Ancient Greek mythology (tripartite form of Phanes, Erikapaios and Metis), therefore maternal water deity of All, and mother of Athena, contrary to popular myth that references Zeus as ruler, father and mother of Athena and the world.[7]

Photo: www.mereja.com

1 See European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2014.
2 See Amnesty International, 2014. According to the IOM (*International Organization for Migration*), 22,000 refugees and migrants died in the Mediterranean from the 2000 trying to reach Europe.
3 Hölderlin's closing verse from "In Beautiful Blue..." (Heidegger, 1996, 118).
4 Newland, 1984, 57.
5 Derrida, 1977, 55.
6 Sophocles, 1900, v. 1017.
7 Hawke, 2014, 1.

KYRIE ELEISON

In a tale from Slovenian folk tradition, the original mythical tale of the so called Fair Vida, a young woman and a mother, is seeking true – or absolute/unconditional – hospitality for her child ("come, come, I will help you") and for her family; however, in reality, being only a woman, she is abducted to a foreign land by the promise of a false hospitality. The principal message from this literary motif stands for the individuals as well as cultures, being threatened or kidnaped (colonised) by the more powerful, by personal, cultural or political domination, and ultimately shows a lack or lacuna in the very structure of a world community and its broken laws of justice and hospitality of any age since now. The legend of *Fair Vida*, about the beautiful, young woman with a sick child, is originally located in the Mediterranean in the early Middle Ages (9–11th century). Out of Vida's pure maternal/feminine desire to help her poor child, she steps aboard the ship belonging to a foreign trader, who promises her to give her the medicine for the sick child. However, instead of receiving the medicine, she is tricked and abducted from her home. Upon knowing the terrible truth and its fatal consequences (she will never more see her child), she jumps from the boat in despair and drowns in the middle of the Mediterranean.[8] What is the relation between the femininity and the water?

This death is not a normal death. It is a suicide somehow related to Antigone's act. It is an act of despair, but also a heroic death act, which aims to prevent – once and for all – the interruption of injustice into this world. Fair Vida will not allow cosmic laws to be violated in this manner. With her act, she claims for justice that which cannot be secured yet for her child and her family, but which is hoped for others in the future. In this sense, her death is a rebellion, but also it is an act having a divine and redemptive character. Let us hold for a moment in our hearts and our thoughts the suffering and vanished hopes of all the mothers, children and men drowned in the Mediterranean, at Lampedusa; and this only because they wanted to reach the promised land of Europe. But Europe did not want to offer hospitality to them. Instead Europe sacrificed many of them by following its own laws. But why? To fulfil justice? Which justice? Whose laws? Should not justice on the contrary be capable of eternally protecting the weak and those in pain? Should not justice eternally transcend our civic laws and offer them a secure path towards their destination?

DIES IRAE ET OFFERTORIUM

This proto-ethical thought of ancient cosmologies (of Egypt and Mesopotamia, ancient other Indo-European cultures and other unjustly marginalised civilisational and cultural loci throughout world history (Dussel, 2013)[9]) was forgotten in order to ground and develop new ontologies in ethics. These ontologies have destabilised the world, suppressed and forgotten the ancient proto-religious/ethical criterion, and established and inaugurated a world of unjust justice,[10] being ignorant of cosmic, sexual, generational, and cultural differences. In this world, the monosubjective Self governs and guides both epistemological as well as ontological enterprises. Our gods remain distant and do not want to accept our offerings – the many compassions and many hospitalities we offer. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, Creon is haunted and cursed by Erinyes, the goddesses, whose altars were polluted by his acts:

> *Then know thou – aye, know it well – that thou shalt not live through many more courses of the sun's swift chariot, ere one begotten of thine own loins shall have been given by thee, a corpse for corpses; because thou hast thrust children of the sunlight to the shades and ruthlessly lodged a living soul in the grave; but keepest in this world one who belongs to the gods infernal, a corpse unburied, unhonoured, all unhallowed. In such thou hast no part, nor have the gods above, but this is a violence done to them by thee. Therefore the avenging destroyers lie in wait for thee, the Furies of Hades and of the gods, that thou mayest be taken in these same ills (Sophocles, 1900, 1064–1077).*

The understanding of this world is marked by its feminine cosmic character: whatever disturbs cosmic laws not only disturbs the sacred order of the life and death, but also transgresses an ancient order of hospitality – the sanctity of the dinner-table (*Odyssey* XXI, 28) – which relates to the care for those who seek refuge and shelter in our house, at our hearth. In his reading of Antigone, Heidegger interprets the hearth as Being: not our stranger, whom we did not invite to our home and offer him the hospitality of our dinner table, but we have been expelled from the hearth (*der Herd ist das Sein*) and now "stand outside of Being" (Heidegger, 1996, 109). It is thus our own strangeness, the

8 For the mythical tale of Fair Vida and its variety of motifs see I. Avsenik Nabergoj (2010), *Hrepenenje in skušnjava v svetu literarure: motiv Lepe Vide*.

9 In this work Dussel chronologically introduces four stages of the "interregional system" (3): the Egyptian-Mesopotamian, Indo-European (with Persian, Hellenistic, Indian, and Mediterranean centres), Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean (with Persian, Chinese, African, and Byzantine-Russian centres) and modern world system (with its centre in Western Europe and "periphery" in Latin America, Africa, Muslim world, India, Southwestern Asia and Eastern Europe).

10 I refer to Lewis R. Gordon's dichotomy between "just justice" and "unjust justice" from *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Gordon, 1977, 166).

Orestes at Delphi flanked by Athena and Pylades among the Erinyes and priestesses of the oracle. From Wikimedia Commons.

strangeness of our being, which leads us to *ignorance* for the life and for the being of the other – on which I will elaborate later. The Erinyes are thus the highest ancient guardians of the cosmic genealogies – those of life and death, of hospitality, and of generational orders (parents and their children, brothers and sisters) (Otto, 1987). We have forgotten those laws; we have also lost our relation to the elements, to the earth and waters, wind (breath) and fire (Sun) as begetters and guardians of our lives. Even Prometheus, in his suffering, calls upon these elements – as witnesses of the injustice he has been enduring, and as witnesses of his broken being:

> *O you bright sky of heaven, you swift-winged breezes, you river-waters, and infinite laughter of the waves of ocean, O universal mother Earth, and you, all-seeing orb of the sun, to you I call! See what I, a god, endure from the gods! (Aeschylus, 1926)*

*
* * *

There is a need for new ethical criterion in today's unjust world. Since the early times of the history of philosophy, Western philosophers have been in a search for a new ethics. In a series of attempts to ground a new ethics, these efforts resulted in the history of ethics, culminating for the first time in Kant's system of morals (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785). Later, the 19th and 20th century anti- or post-Kantian critical thought (Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche; intercultural philosophy, feminism, postcolonial philosophy, liberation philosophy, deconstruction, and phenomenology) convincingly showed the radical insufficiency of the Western ethical hegemonic model with reason/rationality as its sole criterion. Thus, as a result, Enrique Dussel points out (radically, but correctly) that today, neither in Europe nor in the USA "an absolutely postconventional morality [is] possible." (Dussel, 2013, 1). For Dussel, the possibility of this other or new morality builds on the "'great critics' (Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and particularly Marx, Freud, and Levinas) and the Latin American experience" (Dussel, 2013, 218) with its inherent criticism of Modernity and any form of domination (in the systems of ethics, politics and economics and in relations between "races", dominant and marginalised cultures, between sexes, hierarchies of age etc.). However, to this group of thinkers it is important to add Schelling, who stood at the very beginning of this critical line of thinking and whose influence, as Dussel shows, spread among the many immediate listeners of his Berlin lectures – such as Feuerbach and Kierkegaard, or Engels and Bakunin. In his lectures from 1842–43, Schelling approached philosophy from the "positive" point of view and declared old ("negative") metaphysics as one, positing the "first source of knowledge in the pure understanding." (Schelling, 2007, 114)[11] For Schelling the new approach is now to be referred to under the heading of "metaphysical empiricism" and is in its essence directly linked to the content of *life* (Schelling, 2007, 169, 198).[12] But not only life, for death also constitutes part of this logic: in his *Clara*, Schelling argues:

> *Shouldn't we generally more often observe the same sensitivity to the departed that we believe we owe to the living? (Schelling, 2002, 76)*

With this, in the midst of the critical and positive era of philosophy, Schelling already knows intuitively (Clara originates from around 1810) that in order to secure peace for future generations, we have to secure peace for those that passed away. Our care is for them and our hospitality also extends its sensitivities to their dwellings.

LACRIMOSA

However, in order to proceed towards the new ethical criterion that I intend to present and defend in this essay, I offer the following hypothesis: there are two ontological genealogies guiding our ethical lives – the first is the ontology of thinking (which is transcendental) and the second is ontology of love (which is empirical). The topic of hospitality – which represents one of the key questions in today's world – can be a part of both ontologies but it only expresses itself in a "material" way within the latter. We will see that hospitality builds upon compassion; both must be understood and felt as a part of a new *material-maternal-matrixial* ethics. According to Derrida – and this indeed is the secret core of compassion – "one doesn't know *why one trembles*." (Derrida, 1977, 55) Ancient Greek, Semitic and Sanskrit words for compassion all testify equally for this ethics of compassion: they all relate us to the most intimate bodily phenomena of trembling for/with the other, such as Greek verb *spagkhnízomai* ("to be moved by visceral compassion"), the Hebrew word *rakhamim* ("matrixial compassion"), or the Sanskrit Vedic and Buddhist terms *rdudara* and *anukampa* ("compassionate inside" and "compassionate co-trembling"). All these sacred words testify for the *inside* as a locus of compassionate feelings, and also as a locus of hospitality.[13]

We pay homage to *our* civic laws of compassion and *our* civic laws of hospitality, but these were not *their* laws. In the future, we must bring our laws of compassion and hospitality to bear upon this difficult – indeed, impossible – thought. The philosophical genre that testifies to this intrusion I will now refer to as *lamentation* – the lamentation for the thousands of deaths. In *The Gift of Death*, as already noted, Derrida inaugurated the philosophical discipline I want now to put in the most closest vicinity of the new material ethics or thinking of the body: this is the *philosophical symptomatology*. We need to come to that "cause closest to our body, that which means that one trembles or weeps rather than doing something else," as he puts it (Derrida, 1977, 55). Therefore we have an ethical anatomy of the body: one trembles from the outside (skin) to the inside (viscera, bowels) and vice versa; one laments in the eyes (tears) and in the heart (*kardía*); then, finally, one breathes with lungs full of the wind of alterity (*pneûma*) in an inspiration that is yet to come (Levinas). Interiority and exteriority, inside and outside: our tears (and their hidden memory of the primeval and all-encompassing cosmic

11 "Negative" philosophy, for Schelling, is determination and is grounded in Spinoza's *omnis determinatio est negatio* (Schelling, 2007, 24).
12 The negative philosophy is, on the contrary, linked with the *Academy*.
13 For an exposition of this form of compassion see L. Škof (2006), "Metaphysical Ethics Reconsidered: Compassion and World Religions".

The Madonna in Sorrow

waters) are able to transgress this invisible border between the body and soul, debordering them at the very threshold, which is pain, in its most elemental form; lamentation, tears and our sadness – our longest compassion for the pain of mothers, fathers and their children at the shores of Lampedusa, for the hospitality that did not come, with Derrida (1977, 55):

> *God is the cause of the mysterium tremendum, and the death that is given is always what makes us tremble, or what makes us weep as well.*

SANCTUS

> *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus!*
> *Dominus Deus Sabaoth!*
> *Lord God of hosts!* [14]
>
> *Never is he injured whom the Gods*
> *Varuna, Mitra and Aryaman,*
> *The excellently wise, protect.*[15]

LIBERA ME

Let me now begin this questioning of hospitality and compassion with the following words of a great Tibetan philosopher Dzong-ka-ba on compassion:

> *Chandrakirti's homage to compassion observing phenomena is: Homage to compassion viewing migrators as evanescent or momentarily disintegrating, like a moon in the water stirred by a breeze. His homage to compassion observing the unapprehendable is: Homage to compassion viewing migrators as empty of inherent existence, though they appear to exist inherently, like the reflection of the moon in the water. (Newland, 1984, 57)*

According to the Buddhist philosophy, sentient beings do not have a permanent nature; they are composed of impermanent aggregates, which all is based on the Buddhist Mahayana theory of dependent origination and the emptiness (*shunyata*) of all existence. This is the Buddhist metaphysical-material view of the human person and compassion. But there is an intrusion into this logic, which requires from us another view of justice, of compassion, and perhaps hospitality. The intrusion transfers migrators to concrete migrators: we all have been distant witnesses of their deaths, of children, little sisters and brothers, of their mothers and fathers, being drowned in the water, disappearing from the surface, becoming only a reflection for us, being reflected in a terrifying way; disintegrating in front of our eyes, they are the worst possible intrusion into the cosmic order, as depicted by the Buddhist and other ancient cosmologies (Metis and Erinyes; but also other similar genealogies in ancient Greek, ancient Near Eastern and ancient Vedic religions[16]). Already Sophocles' Antigone testifies to this kind of violent death: being violent even towards dead bodies, which are prevented from finding their rest in peace – this is what dangerously interrupts the cosmic order. Without hospitality, there is no peace. Hence gods refuse to take our offerings: our lamentations, sorrows, they all come *plus tard*.

This is what is happening in the Mediterranean Sea, at Lampedusa. For us, these bodies and these souls were emptied of inherent existence, but in a manner that perverts the ontological and ethical order. Between them and us, there was a bond that has been broken; between us and them there was a threshold, but as a place without our visitation: first designating *cháos*, or a primeval gap, difference, grief (der Schmerz; *das Unter-schied*) (Heidegger, 1971), as in the ancient Greek (Hesiod) or ancient Indian (Vedic) cosmogonies – as a threshold, this dwelling on the plane of the first ontological difference between Being and Nonbeing, which can only be secured and, as it were, carried over with love and hospitality, our welcome of the other. There was no compassion or hospitality offered for them when they needed it, nobody was able to give them shelter in the moments when they needed it most. Who is able to liberate us from this ignorance? According to Bracha Ettinger and her ethics of femininity, compassion and hospitality are related to the matrixial (womb-mother) sphere: what must become our home, habitation, and what, at the same moment is the most vulnerable of all, is a "creative gesture in *copoiesis*" – of me for the (m)other, which only brings care to this world (Ettinger, 2007, 114).[17] This care, feminine or maternal (*rakhamim*) in its character, is represented by the primeval compassionate and corporeal relation of the infant and his (m)other. As such, then, our compas-

14 Yahweh Zebaoth as a divine name is etymologically derived from the Semitic root ŞB', found in Hebrew *şābā'* ("army, host") (Toorn et al., 1999, 920). Yahweh Zebaoth, the lord of heavenly host, represents the idea of an intersection between heaven and earth (i.e., his role in the temple): "the temple is the point, at which the dimensions of space are transcended (923) – is this not the ultimate sign of his hospitality towards humans, his act of *debordering* within the cosmos?

15 *The Hymns of the Rgveda* (1995, 27). Hymn 1.41 is dedicated to Vedic Adityas, and among them to Aryaman, the Vedic god of hospitality.

16 Let me here only mention ancient Indian tale of Savitri, a heroine from the *Mahabharata*. Her name originates from the Sanskrit term *prasavitrī* (from *pra-savā*) referring to her roles as being the "procreatrix", "mother", "bestowing progeny" (Parpola, 2000, 197). In this, she inhabits the very threshold between the night and day, between *not-yet-life* and *life*, dying and creating/resurrecting, with femininity and masculinity represented in their different roles. Savitri thus represents ancient cosmic generational and sexual orders, similar to those, propounded by Irigaray in her reading of *Antigone*. (Parpola, 2000; Parpola 1998; Deshpande, 1995).

17 And also: "Hospitality and compassion (...) are not only the direct path to the connection between sacrifice and redemption but also the direct path to the connection between grace, solace, care and misericord." (Ettinger, 2007, 114)

Photo: Alberto Pizzoli

sions and hospitalities are primary and an-archic; together they represent what could be called *misericord*: being compassionately hospitable for the other. Misericord is proximity and home: primarily being home on the most intimate plane – that of our "flesh and breath" (Irigaray, 2008, 26) – and at the same moment offering our place to the other; here Irigaray also rightly observes that what we offer in our everyday hospitalities are empty places and empty gestures, giving to the other what we already and always possess: we offer them "empty territories",[18] our own traumas, our own possessions. In this sense, the hospitality offered by Levite to the stranger ("In the morning ... with her hands on the threshold"; Judges 19:27) is also false hospitality. Moreover, to return for the moment to Candrakirti, we are not yet able to empty our own compassions of their masculinities, directednesses, gravities, all enclosed by a desire we nourish for ourselves; only then, sharing with the others becomes the most precious gift we possess – the offering of the place we yet have to inhabit, our unlimited *misericord*, beyond the interiority-exteriority divide, beyond *our* time, beyond *our* place (Newland, 1984, 74):

> Mercy alone is seen as the seed
> Of a Conqueror's rich harvest,
> As water for development, and as
> Ripening in a state of long enjoyment;
> Therefore at the start I praise compassion.[19]

IN PARADISUM

Absolute hospitality, then. We pay homage to *our* civic laws of compassion, and *our* civic laws of hospitality, we said, but these were not *their* laws. We offer them territories, but they are not their territories; what we offer to them instead of our subtle selflessness is our unhomeliness (Candrakirti), gathered around the hearth of Being (Heidegger), which should be no one's possession. According to Derrida – and here I return to the problem of justice –, "justice is an experience of the impossible" (Derrida, 2002, 244) and law is not justice. In a Levinasian voice, Derrida speaks of that justice, which is only possible when its essential or constitutive part is an ethical relation to the other, as a promise of *sainteté*, a promise, which paradoxically and anarchically comes before all philosophy and all theology (Levinas, 2008)[20]. This emanation of holiness from the ethical plane of *misericord* (as hospitality and compassion) is what now, finally, designates the very materiality of the human person and its ethics, understood within the ethical cluster of *Maternity – Matrix – Material – Matrimony.*[21]

The dignity and the future (*avenir*) of humanity rest on this thought.

Peace, peace, peace.

18 Cf. op. cit., p. 24. Irigaray states: "To be sure, the other will be sheltered, but in an enclosed space, a place already defined by our norms, our rules, our lacks and our voids. The other will have the possibility of dwelling only in a loop of the interlacing of relations where we ourselves are situated by our culture, our language, our surroundings. Blind to our lack of freedom." (Irigaray, 2008, 26)

19 The excerpt is from Candrakirti's *Madhyamakavatarabhasya*.

20 Of course this thought originates from *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas, 1969, 89).

21 On the root *mat-* and its ethical meaning see *After »Rwanda«: In Search of a New Ethics* (Martinon, 2013, 36). Here Martinon refers to Lyotard's genealogies; see n. 79.

MATERIALNO NAČELO IN ETIKA GOSTOLJUBJA IN SOČUTJA: REKVIJEM ZA LAMPEDUSO

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Prispevek tematizira vprašanje sočutja in gostoljubja kot se zastavlja ob humanitarni in etični krizi v Mediteranu, konkretneje ob obalah Lampeduse. Etično vprašanje migracij in tragične usode migrantov je vzgib k razmisleku o našem odnosu do samega temelja etike in zakonov moralnosti ter političnih zakonov, ki iz nje izhajajo. Najprej v članku tematiziramo motiv Lepe Vide, ki ga prepoznamo kot izraz feminilnega sočutja, ki presega sočutje do drugih in se razširja v kozmos – Lepa Vida s svojim dejanjem ščiti kozmični red in ne dovoli vdora kaotičnega in zlega vanj. S tem se vpisuje v tok dejanj, ki jih inavgurira Antigona. V nadaljevanju se ukvarjamo z refleksijo in analizo starih kozmoloških elementov, ki jih najdemo pri starogrški mitologiji in kozmologiji, da bi na tej podlagi lahko utemeljili nov etični kriterij, poimenovan z izrazom materialna etika. V okviru nove etike telesnosti, kot podlage nove etike gostoljubja in sočutja, na podlagi Derridajevega dela Dar smrti analiziramo vlogo solz v etiki. Prispevek sklenemo z meditacijo in refleksijo o anarhični naravi sočutja in gostoljubja kot milosrčnosti (misericordia), navezujoč se na misel B. Ettinger in L. Irigaray.

Ključne besede: gostoljubje, sočutje, materialna etika, Lampedusa, Mediteran, Lepa Vida, migracije

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