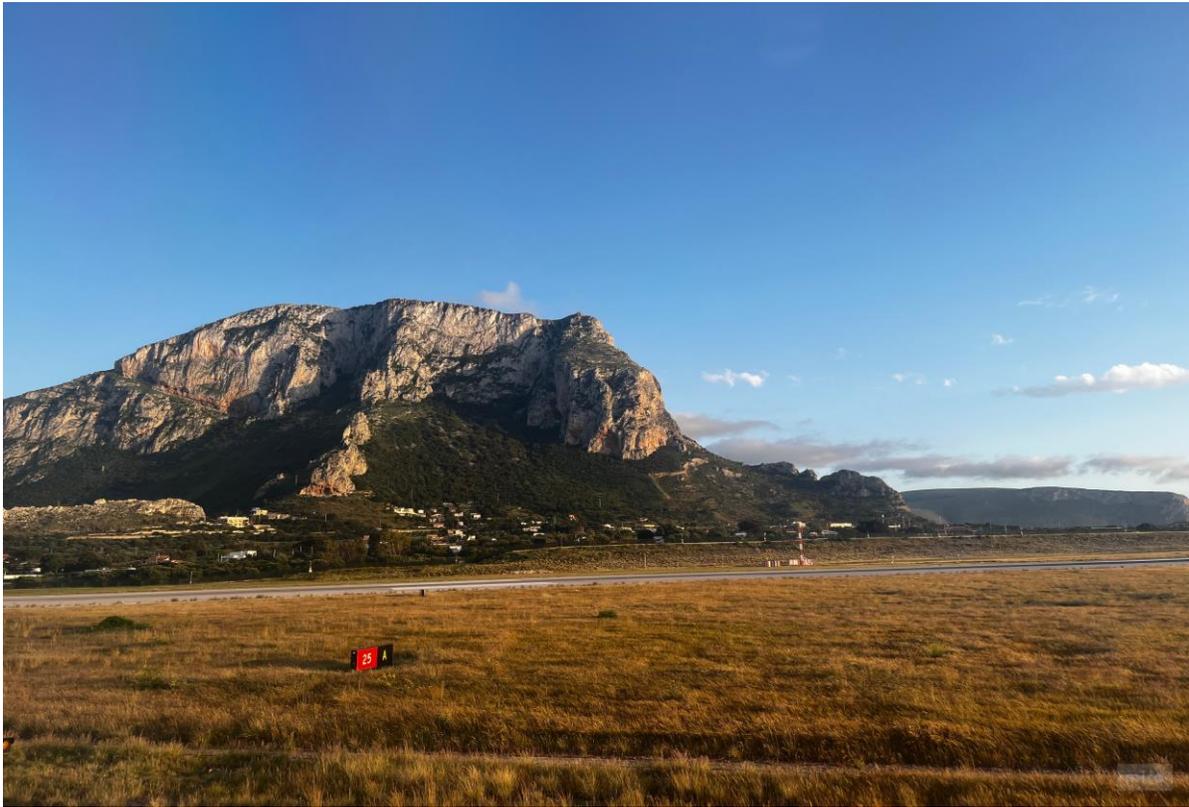


Across the strait, towards Bal'harm



A mountain outside the Palermo Airport

Sicilia and I have known each other ever since I met my partner, Serena.

Across the strait of Messina, a mere few miles from the mainland, a volcanic island speaks of their-stories, whispering tales for centuries.

Palermo was called Bal'harm before there was a name for Italy.



A map of Sicilia representing the island during Arab rule

Old men, sit together, bringing with them: plastic chairs of different colors and age, a few big bottles of beers and many little cups to drink from, some cooked snails, and some kittens attracted by the discarded shells. A horse lives alone, next to them; eating hay in an abandoned lot.



Old men sit outside Cortille Chiavelli on a cloudy afternoon

Poetry was called Sicilian before people knew to speak Italian.



A horse in a vacant lot in Chiavelli

When we travel, do we move, or do we change?



The architecture of colonialism, building through destruction. Some homes fall into decay; others are re-imagined within the master's narrative. Winding streets, cobbled with stones
Narrow streets with debris lining the pavement.



A corner in Capo Market

There was a man, sitting at the intersections of Quattro Canti. Four heads meet and fountain towards the center. Our man sits in the shade, just off to the side.



Church of Saint Mary 'dell'Ammiraglio'

“These narrow streets were built by Arabs, twisting and turning wind to their tune. They were meant to re-distribute breeze and give respite from the heat.” In between hours lounging around the strada, and months spent in luxury hotels lining the wide Via Roma, some tourists will get off their horse-drawn carriages and stroll a few minutes exploring the ancient streets.



Santa Caterina d'Alessandria

Horses faint under the Mediterranean sun, indiscriminately hot, and fail to quench a longing for rest. A boy leaves his home, pulls a cart with ice and water bottles, hands them to foreigners in exchange for some coins. He stands outside the benedictine monastery, where nuns once lived and dedicated their lives to God. They serve sweetmeats now, for a price the child won't be able to afford. Tourists flock in; money serves them sweet ricotta pressed into fried pastries.



“A cannolo for 7 euros?”

“Well, it is said that the nuns still make them.”



Grandmother gave me one kiss before leaving, my cheeks still remain wet. She never truly left, yet we kept waiting for her to come back.



Palermo has a little piece of Jerusalem: a little corner of the ancient Kalsa, dotted with two little cafes. One called Al Quds, with the familiar face of an elder Palestinian proprietor who used to be an elected official of the city in another life. One called TeCo, a small queer tea shop, run by a mother and her kids. Two Gambian brothers work across from each other, in these two different stores. They tell me, “Every year the two owners pitch in and help us visit our family in Gambia, and with us send some money for their well-being”. Balarm, Banjul, and Al Quds; a river running across the sea.



Ponte dell'Ammiraglio

“If the Norman’s did not come with builders, if they were mercenaries for hire, why do we call this Norman-Arab?” Perhaps a familiar question haunted the Arab masons of Balarm in the 10th century, finishing work, and being told to exit a world they build. Left behind a thousand-year-old bridge over the Oreto, the river has since changed its course.

“Look at my skin, the northerners call us Arabs as a joke.”

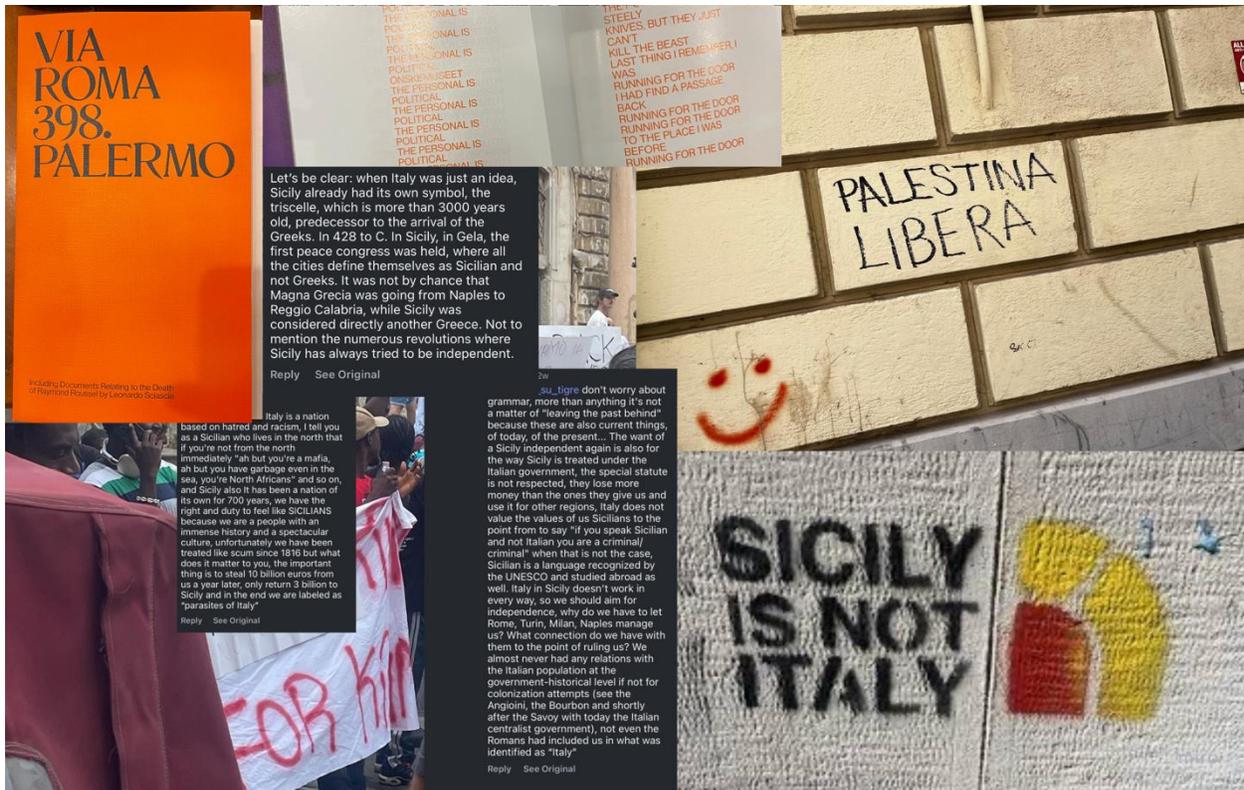
A “defaced” exit of Pallazo Orleans Station



“How does that make you feel?”

“They joke; they think it is a laughing matter.”

“And?”



A book, a death, two walls staging a protest, a few perspectives

“It's a matter of pride, but of course we come from the Arabs. If we weren't also Arabs, we would not be Sicilian.”

“I used to grow food and sell it in the north, back in the day, I made a good living. Now the water belongs to the north, and only they can afford to grow food here. I water my father's olive tree, but my grandfather's land stays thirsty.”



The policewoman finds her way across the populated piazza, hundreds of phones held up to influence, money made in the clouds, out of nothing. She finds a tired man behind the cart, selling fresh juices.

Petralia, a mountain town near Palermo

He lacks the permit to be there. The tourists making videos of their 1 euro fruit juice do not need one. He is told to leave. Violent altercation. He throws his fruits in anger, walks away with a courageous dissidence, a few more uniformed men surround him, throw him to the ground. Meanwhile, a tourist crashes a moped into the cop car by the cathedral. She swiftly departs; the commotion surrounding the juice vendor drowns her loud escape.



I hear Bengali in every street I turn to. I noticed a small restaurant, and a familiar smell. A few euros for some chicken curry and rice. Does my nose smell the difference between Bengal and Bangladesh? Are the differences more important than similarities? Which roots make our roots? Is that a question worth asking? The routes of our roots, emerging from lands rotting under the weight of colonial trash.



When are you me? When is me you? Is/are you me? Are/is me you?

“The north colonizes me, and then calls me by names that now lay with him.”

“If I am European, why do I smell the boot on my neck? If I am Sicilian, what does Europe have to do with me?”



“The north only knows how to take, take, take, until there is nothing left to take; then they remind us we are poor because we have nothing.”



Memories of a stolen book, archived. A violent present kills histories. There is no future.

I used to think of unique predicaments, now it occurs to me, our fates are intertwined.

“Why are there so many Palestinian flags in the mountains?”



“Who do you think brought watermelons to Sicily? We knew the Palestinians before there was even a Europe.”

Oppression that goes unnoticed somewhere tells us of how oppression permeates everything.



Pain that is silenced somewhere is pain that belongs everywhere.

Travelling to move, to change. Orienting towards others, dis-orienting our arrogance.



The socio-cultural life of pain permeates all our efforts to travel.

Do we travel to avoid pain, or do we travel to embrace it, face each other?

From a closed place, the open world.



Like water that turns with a river, and moves through seas; holding the undercarriage of an open boat.



Like water, we return to our shores in distant lands.

Like water, we erode mountains to carve our rivers.

Like water, our rivers move to the sea, contaminating their purity, and un-settling our separation.

He is independent of her; she is independent from him.

There is ~~love~~ in this independence.

Their dependence was obscured and so was Love; in vengeance, they invented arrogance.