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Records of Forced Displacement and Refugee Narratives: A Case Study from the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives in Budapest

“In the photograph, the building was hollow, disemboweled by a shell, which had evidently fallen through the roof and dropped down a few floors. The supermarket now existed only in the flooded storage space of my memory.” (Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives*)

1 Introduction: The Role of Archives in the Global Refugee Experience

*Liquid Traces – The Left-to-Die Boat Case*¹ is a forensic reconstruction of the circumstances in which a rubber boat carrying 72 refugees from Libya to Lampedusa, Italy in March 2011 was left to drift in the waters of the Mediterranean for 14 days under the gaze of military patrols and the ‘digital eyes’ of a wealth of remote sensing devices. In this animated account, the sea is shown as an archival space populated with signs and traces left behind by the boat, which can ultimately be investigated to attest to the tragic death of all but nine of its passengers. Without displaying concrete visual images of the refugees, the succinct, factual and at times monotonous narration of the story, accompanied by the never ending sound of sonars, radars and the deep sea, make it one of the most impacting refugee accounts of the past few years.

According to a recent estimation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in every single minute of the day, 31 people were displaced. By the end of 2017, this trend resulted in a record number of 68.5 million people registered as refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum-seekers, who were forced to leave their homes due to persecution, human rights abuses, armed con-

¹ Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani (Forensic Oceanography): *Liquid Traces – The Left-to-Die Boat Case*, <https://vimeo.com/89790770> (Accessed: 22 January 2019).