Riace

Jelka Zorn

Domenico Lucano, the mayor of the Riace municipality in the south of Italy, was **criminalized** for his policy of solidarity with refugees. In 1998, a program welcoming migrants was implemented in a sparsely populated and mostly deserted town, referred to in the literature as the “Riace model” (Driel 2020). This action was initiated after around 300 Kurdish refugees landed on the Ionian coast. The locals accepted these refugees and have since established a program of settling migrants in abandoned houses and their vocational training with local artisans. This lead to the revitalization of the town, the migrants and the locals formed a community, and the local school was saved from closing, as families also moved to Riace. While most cities tried to stop migrants from moving in, Riace welcomed them. The community and the left-wing mayor Lucano have received several international awards, including the Dresden Peace Prize. In October 2018 (shortly after the right-wing government including Matteo Salvini took office), Domenico Lucano was arrested and detained by the financial police on charges of encouraging illegal migration, embezzlement and fraud. In September 2021, he was sentenced to 13 years in prison. This persecution is a racist attack on the idea of living together in peace. This case is only one of 158 criminal proceedings against physical persons and 16 against NGOs in the EU from 2015 to April 2019 (Vosyliūtė and Conte 2019: 6).

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Literature

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