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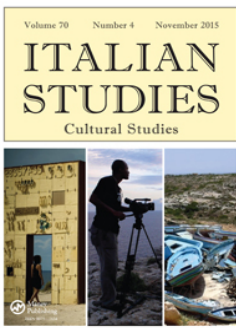
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Lampedusa: From a Fishing Island in the Middle of the Mediterranean to a Tourist Destination in the Middle of Europe's External Border

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By placing the inhabitants of Lampedusa at the centre of the analysis, this paper seeks to interpret the events that occurred on the island in 2011 — relating to the arrival of 50,000 boat migrants — through the lens of the major local sociocultural transformations taking place in Lampedusa over the previous decades. In fact, a profound change of the island's geography has occurred that turned this Mediterranean fishing island into today's tourist destination located at the frontier of the EU border regime. The article will give space to local voices while showing the micro sociocultural dynamics of locals' responses and reactions to the bordering of the island. In doing so, it will demonstrate not only how that border shapes the lives of Lampedusans, but how the border is itself shaped and performed by local Lampedusans.

KEYWORDS border, hospitality, violence, fishery, tourism

The native's muscles are always tensed. You can't say that he is terrorized, or even apprehensive. He is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of quarry for that of hunter. The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor.¹

Introduction

Lampedusa has come to represent an icon of today's European border regime. The tiny Italian island constitutes the core of political, academic, and media analysis and

¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), p. 52.

representations of Europe's border regime and migration policies – a point made more salient than ever with the world's attention drawn to the island on October 2 2013, as 360 asylum seekers lost their lives when their boat capsized less than a mile off Lampedusa.² More than twenty years ago, Europe's external border landed on the island. Now, after more than twenty years of intense borderization — the process of becoming a border - of such a tiny and detached territory, it is as if Lampedusa exists solely because of the border which has been established on it.³ Lampedusans seemingly disappear from the sight of non-islanders' gaze as Europe's border has been authoritatively established on the island. The border became the main — if not the only — lens through which the world looked upon Lampedusa since the island came to the rest of the world's attention. Pre-border Lampedusa ceased to exist: locals found themselves expropriated of their land, sea, culture, and history. As a subaltern and defenceless audience, Lampedusans have come to live outside the margins of the narrative and working of the border that now frames the island's existence.⁴

However, Europe's external border did not land on a sociocultural vacuum. Rather, the external frontier of the Schengen space of free movement of people was established over a rapidly transforming isolated community. The community of approximately 6,000 people who live on the island today draw their main income from tourism, although less than thirty years ago fishing and a local flourishing bluefish canning industry employed almost the entire population, women and children included. To bring back the now silenced perception of the island held by local people, this article will look at the border from their own eyes to uncover some of the features of that local sociocultural milieu that plays a role in the daily working and staging of Europe's frontier on Lampedusa. In order to demonstrate how the local fabric of the island shapes, and is in turn shaped by, the border, I will concentrate my analysis around the events of 2011. In particular, I will focus on the quick and dramatic change of locals' attitudes towards the thousands of boat migrants reaching the island during that year, fleeing from the coasts of Tunisia first, and then Libya. My approach to these events will frame them in relation to the major sociocultural transformation experienced by the island's community beyond, as well as along, the border. Hence, I will show how the attitude of an entire people dramatically shifted from hospitality into intolerance because of a series of local sociocultural transformations combined with those institutional pressures deriving from the local establishment and working of Europe's external border. The analysis will pay particular attention to the world of the local fishery whose experience of such a dramatic sociocultural change interacts with the border not only on land, but also at sea where they work and fish. Thus, I will disentangle the complex socio-cultural fabric of the

² Giacomo Orsini, Ilaria Vecchi, and Giacomo Sferlazzo, 'Lampedusa: A Cruel and Corrupt System', *Discover Society*, 8 (2014) <<http://www.discoverysociety.org/2014/05/06/lampedusa-a-cruel-and-corrupt-system/>> [accessed 4 January 2014]

³ The process of borderization suggests that borders are the result of the placing and interaction of 'spatial bodies', as well as of legislative measures and international relations. Besides their geographical essence, borders' degree of *borderness* – as the condition of being at the border typified by multiple marginalities and centralities – also depends on political choices, on policies, practices and discourses that have been developed in and around the island: a set of processes called borderization. Paolo Cuttitta, *Lo spettacolo del confine. Lampedusa tra produzione e messa in scena della frontiera* (Mimesis: Milano, 2012), p. 25.

⁴ Heidrun Friese, 'Border Economies. Lampedusa and the Nascent Migration Industry', *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, 6.2 (2012), 66–84.

small island in order to bring to light elements that may have played a role in the violent events occurring in Lampedusa during 2011. From this angle, I explain the border in Lampedusa as reflecting those tensions which local society has undergone throughout the island's shift away from fishing and the Mediterranean.

The discussion will focus on the events that shocked Lampedusa in 2011, and that brought the island once again to the centre stage of the world's media. As a consequence of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and, later, of the civil war in Libya, thousands left the coasts of North Africa heading to Europe by boat, via Sicily and Lampedusa. Confronted with the situation, Italian institutions treated the arrival of over 50,000 migrants during the initial months of 2011 as an opportunity to introduce, with extreme force, 'the spectacle of the border'.⁵ This was a relatively typical increase of arrivals and did not represent, numerically speaking, anything extraordinary for both that part of the Sicilian channel and the island of Lampedusa itself. However, it was treated by the Italian government as a serious emergency which had to be dealt with by the EU through a harsh institutional approach: for weeks, more than 10,000 migrants had to sleep in the open, without any assistance from either national or European institutions. Prior to this situation, which was for many seen to have emerged through deliberate mismanagement, locals reacted by voluntarily welcoming and assisting migrants coming from the sea; a response which contrasted strongly with the approach adopted by the Italian state. Thus, I will analyse precisely this discrepancy between institutional practices and local people's reaction since it provides an extremely interesting opportunity to disclose the role played by the local sociocultural milieu in resisting repressive institutional practices. A contrast produced by several dynamics relating to a complex set of historical, social, cultural, and political interactions will be explored in the following pages.

My analysis will draw on ethnographic data collected during five months of fieldwork on the island, where I passed most of the time in close contact with Lampedusans, and in particular, with local fishermen still working in the island's surrounding waters. For the duration of the research, I lived side by side with islanders, experiencing first-hand the hardships of a winter of isolation in the middle of the sea. From this data I will disentangle how, on Lampedusa, dynamics beyond the mere effect of institutional practices played a key role in shaping the relationship between locals and the Other. What happens in this marginal micro-reality characterized by a high gradient borderization can be understood by taking account of the local implementation of several European and national policies, more or less in relation to the construction and working of the EU external border. However, when studying a fishing community whose island was for centuries a safe harbour in the middle of the Mediterranean, it is essential to take into account the role played by the relations that many islanders have with Tunisia, their nearest mainland.⁶ Moreover, it is also necessary to take into account the character of this old and isolated community that has lived on fish and fishing for generations, before converting to tourism.

The essay is structured in five main sections. Firstly, I will chronicle the events marking 2011 on the island. Secondly, I will focus on locals' mutating reactions towards those foreigners coming from the sea. Subsequently, I will concentrate on the rapport that the islanders have with the diverse institutional levels involved, both national and European,

⁵ Cuttitta, pp. 11–16.

⁶ Ferruccio Formentini, *I corsari del canale di Sicilia*, (Roma: CSD, 1999).

in managing the 2011 crisis. Finally, I will examine the violent clashes taking place in the island during September 2011, to extend my analysis to the actuality of the reformulated relations between locals and those foreigners who kept arriving from the sea.

Chronicles of an unnecessary emergency in the middle of the Mediterranean

In mid-January 2011, immediately after the Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled Tunisia to escape the unfolding revolution, boat-migrants started leaving the coasts of the North African country heading towards Italy and the EU.⁷ At the beginning of February, there were already 1,500 Tunisians in Lampedusa. In the following weeks arrivals increased steadily, reaching a peak during March when boat migrants began to outnumber residents. Later the same month, when rumours of the Italian government's plan to establish a refugee camp on the island spread among Lampedusans, islanders immediately occupied the old port in order to block authorities unloading tents from the ferry. Protesters denounced the inhumane conditions in which young Tunisians had been kept, claiming the island was being turned into an open air concentration camp. Local protesters did not hesitate to claim in front of the cameras of national as well as international broadcasters that they were struggling on the same side as the boat migrants, against the deliberate misconduct of national and EU institutions.⁸ When the island's population of Lampedusans, migrants, and law enforcement personnel reached around 15,000, essential supplies such as drinking water which are transported weekly to Lampedusa by tanker began to run out. In the face of the increasingly intense protests by both Tunisians and Lampedusans to denounce institutional failures, the number of boat migrants retained on the island continued to increase. The numbers of new arrivals to Lampedusa exceeded the numbers which the authorities were evacuating to mainland Sicily. With a situation which some suspected to have been deliberately exacerbated, the Italian government declared a state of emergency and asked for financial and logistical support from the EU, while leaving migrants to sleep in the open air over the area surrounding the island's old port.

At this point, only a few portable toilets, but no showers or adequate food provisions, were available to deal with the crisis. While many migrants had to arrange their own makeshift shelters, others were given a roof over their head as many islanders spontaneously decided to make available their holiday homes or offered accommodation in their own homes to the young undocumented Tunisians. Faced with the emergency, Lampedusans responded with a Derridian sense of 'unconditional hospitality'.⁹ Many interviewees confirmed that during the first weeks and months of the emergency locals provided undocumented migrants and asylum seekers with the assistance that institutions had failed to make available. Before the emergence of such distressing circumstances, locals reacted by voluntarily welcoming and assisting migrants coming from the sea; this being the complete opposite of the approach adopted by both state and EU institutions.

⁷ Gilad Lotan et al. 'The Revolutions were Tweeted: Information Flows During the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions', *International Journal of Communication*, 5 (2011), 1375–405.

⁸ *La collina della vergogna. L'informazione in emergenza. Lampedusa*. Dir. Antonino Maggiore. Libera Espressione. 2012.

⁹ Clelia Bartoli, *Razzisti per Legge. L'Italia che Discrimina*, (Bari: Laterza. 2012), pp. 120–21.

In April, the situation improved as authorities started transferring migrants to mainland Sicily and the rest of Italy more quickly. At the same time, the government decided to reopen the migrants' 'Centro di primo soccorso e accoglienza' and, by distributing newcomers between the centre and the former Loran NATO barracks located at the uninhabited westernmost corner of the island, no one remained sleeping in the open air. Nevertheless, given the national as well as European media coverage of the events taking place on the island, the 2011 tourist season began with around eighty per cent of cancellations, which had a significant financial impact on the local economy.¹⁰

With growing tension on the island, boat migrants' arrivals started to increase again as thousands of people began fleeing Libya. In September, the Italian government announced that existing bilateral agreements had been re-established with the new Tunisian government and authorities could start deporting Tunisians directly from Lampedusa's airport back to Tunisia. On September 22, hundreds of Tunisians organized a rally to protest against the threat of being forcibly taken back to their country. After having protested along the streets of the island's small town, Tunisians gathered in front of one of the two petrol stations on Lampedusa and, faced with riot police, threatened to explode a gas cylinder they had taken there. At that point, the local population who felt threatened by those same people they had helped in the previous months reacted alongside the police by assaulting migrants and beating them with clubs and sticks.¹¹ Within one week, following these extremely violent events screened all over the world by global media, no more migrants remained on Lampedusa which was soon declared an unsafe landing place by the Italian government.

When the foreigner of the institution is your neighbour of the same sea: narratives of fishing, voyages, and migrations between Lampedusa and Tunisia

The reasons which contributed to the dramatic shift in the relations between Lampedusans and Tunisians expressed through the events of 22 September 2011 need to be subjected to rigorous analysis. It is important to examine the historical origins and the socio-cultural dynamics that have contributed to the initial unexpected reaction of islanders, and the following dramatic shift of September of that same year. What were the underlying causes that pushed the local population to voluntarily provide time and resources to help those who European and national institutions had criminalized for years through the spectre of an invasion?¹² How is it, then, that those same locals suddenly changed their attitudes, transforming hospitality into violence?

As previously noted, despite the poor institutional practices implemented during the first months of 2011, a substantial number of Lampedusans responded to the artificially created emergency with hospitality. Evaluating the reasons behind such an apparently unpredictable local response to institutional failures, the first step is to redefine the category of foreigner/stranger in the context of an isolated rock situated along the Italian and European border, a few hours by sea from Tunisia. Historically, there is indeed a close

¹⁰ Clelia Bartoli, *Razzisti per Legge. L'Italia che Discrimina* (Bari: La Terza, 2012), pp. 120–21.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hein de Haas, 'The Myth of Invasion: The Inconvenient Realities of African Migration to Europe', *Third World Quarterly*, 29.7 (2008), 1305–22.

relation between the island and the North African shore of the Mediterranean, with the biographies of islanders being tightly knit with Tunisia. Giovanni, eighty-eight years old and possibly the most locally respected fisherman and captain, describes Lampedusa's fishing industry and its relation with Tunisia in the following terms:

[...] a partire da novembre, andavamo a pescare a Madhia dove facevamo la salagione del pescato [...] Poi, a marzo, [quando] le condizioni del mare miglioravano, tornavamo a pescare a Lampedusa. [...] I più poveri [...] che non avevano i soldi per togliere la barca dall'acqua per la manutenzione invernale dello scafo, rimanevano nelle secche di Sfax. Lì si faceva la pulizia dello scafo usando le maree ed un sistema di pesi a bordo piuttosto semplice. Lo si faceva ogni anno, ed una volta terminata la manutenzione, si tornava a Lampedusa.¹³

Located on the same latitude as Lampedusa, Madhia is the closest Tunisian seaport to the tiny Italian island. Sfax, the second largest Tunisian town, is around one hundred kilometres south along the eastern coast of Tunisia. The historical memory of Lampedusa tells us that Tunisia was possibly the closest harbour to the island rather than a distant foreign land.¹⁴ Since the end of the nineteenth century, big communities of Sicilians had been established and flourished in Tunisia until the French colonial power obliged them to leave in the late 1950s.¹⁵ One sector of La Goulette, one of Tunisia's main seaports just a few kilometres off from Tunis, is still named 'Little Sicily'.¹⁶ Given the geographical proximity of the island, its relations with the North African shores were even more intense than most other parts of the Sicilian region.

This relation between the island and its close African shore has been put to the test over the last twenty years by the construction of Europe's external border and its implementation in Lampedusa.¹⁷ Yet a continuing relationship between the island and Tunisia remains. As Antonio, a Lampedusan fisherman in his forties, explained to me:

L'ultima volta che sono andato in Tunisia era durante le vacanze di Natale e capodanno: tra poco mi sposo con una ragazza tunisina! [...] Mediamente vado in Tunisia quattro o cinque volte all'anno assieme ad un po' di amici lampedusani. [...] O vado in traghetto da Palermo, oppure in barca direttamente da qua: si tratta di poche ore di navigazione.¹⁸

Although Antonio's cross-border wedding does not seem to represent a common occurrence on the island, navigating the strait dividing Lampedusa from North Africa is a frequent activity for locals, many of whom spend their holidays in Tunisia, which they reach directly by boat from the island. The only existing aquaculture plant on Lampedusa – *Aquacoltura Lampedusa spa*. – buys juvenile fish stocks directly from

¹³ Interview with Giovanni conducted by the author in Lampedusa (January 22, 2013).

¹⁴ Friese, pp. 323–41.

¹⁵ Mark Choate, 'Tunisia, Contested: Italian Nationalism, French Imperial Rule, and Migration in the Mediterranean Basin', in *California Italian Studies*, 1.1 (2010) <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8k97g1nc>> [accessed 3 May 2014] and Mark Choate, 'Identity, Politics and Political Perception in the European Settlement of Tunisia: The French Colony versus Italian Colony', *French Colonial History*, 8 (2008), 97–109.

¹⁶ Mohamed Chérif Ferjani, 'Le processus de ségrégation sociale et spatiale dans le grand Tunis', in *Anthropologie et sociologie de l'espace urbain*, ed. by B. Ganne and P. Haeringer (Bron: Université de Lyon, 1986), pp. 151–59.

¹⁷ Simon McMahon, 'North African Migration and Europe's Contextual Mediterranean Border in Light of the Lampedusa Migrant Crisis of 2011', in *EUI Working Paper SPS 07* (2012) <http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/24754/SPS_2012_07.pdf?sequence=1> [accessed 22 May 2014].

¹⁸ Interview with Antonio conducted by the author on Lampedusa (December 12, 2012).

Tunisia. A special boat to transport them reaches the harbour of the island on a weekly basis coming directly from the North African country. Thus, to consider Tunisians as foreigners in Lampedusa works to silence the history of this rather intense relationship. Consequently, the alarmist rhetoric emanating from institutions and the media surrounding the 2011 events crossing these two close shores of the Mediterranean has had scarce impact on Lampedusans. Yet the combined effect of significant media attention and political alarmism on the islanders was diluted by other elements characterizing Lampedusa's *borderness* which profoundly shape life on the small island as described in the following section.¹⁹

The margins at the centre: experienced marginality versus discursive centrality

To understand Lampedusa and why during the initial months of the 2011 crisis islanders did not conform to the negligent approach adopted by national and EU institutions on the island, attention must be paid to the geopolitical position of Lampedusa: simultaneously at the geographical margins of Italy and the EU and at the centre of Europe's immigration and border policies. This apparently paradoxical condition implies a peculiar formulation of the relationship between locals and regional, national and European institutions. In a way, the creation and the management of the border in Lampedusa brings its inherent contradictions to the surface. As I have emphasized already, the heightened political significance of the island and the national and European media attention it attracts focuses almost exclusively around the theme of immigration and the border.²⁰ The substantial marginality of the island and its inhabitants in relation to public policies and services stands in sharp contrast to its political and media significance which seems disproportionate for such a tiny territory and population. The current mayor of the island, Giusi Nicolini, effectively summarized this inconsistent situation as follows:

Le mie uniche priorità per quest'isola sono combattere l'abusivismo edilizio e fornire ai miei concittadini delle scuole ed un servizio sanitario adeguati. [...] Per quanto riguarda il confine, qua non ha fatto altro che portare giornalisti e forze dell'ordine. [...] In quest'isola l'immigrazione viene deliberatamente enfatizzata per creare uno stato d'emergenza permanente, a causa del quale tutto il resto sembra non contare più nulla, nonostante la presenza sproporzionata di forze di polizia.²¹

The contradictory political use and media representations of Lampedusa resemble what can be defined as a formal or discursive centrality, since it has no direct positive impact on the local population and is matched by a real marginality found in the everyday lives of the island's inhabitants. For many on the island, this striking paradox constitutes a serious concern:

Mi spieghi perché ci devono essere tutti questi soldati e poliziotti sull'isola, se poi all'interno di una comunità così piccola come la nostra la gente continua a costruirsi la prima, la seconda e pure la terza casa dove gli pare, senza curarsi minimamente di ottenere i permessi

¹⁹ Cuttitta, pp. 86–88.

²⁰ Paolo Cuttitta, "Borderizing" the Island Setting and Narratives of the Lampedusa "Border Play", *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 13.2 (2014), 196–219.

²¹ Interview with Giusi Nicolini conducted by the author on Lampedusa (October 28, 2012).

necessari? Perché poi c'è tutta questa polizia, se poi praticamente chiunque pesca e vende il pescato senza licenza? Mi spieghi com'è possibile che su quest'isola dove sono venuti tutti i ministri a far le loro sfilate, non abbiamo nemmeno un traghetto decente che ci mantenga in collegamento con il resto della Sicilia – e che è, tra l'altro, l'unico mezzo a nostra disposizione per l'approvvigionamento di beni primari sull'isola, nonché per la commercializzazione del nostro pescato?²²

During my stay on the island, the ferry service would run on an irregular basis during the harshest months of the winter, perhaps only one or two days per week, irrespective of the weather conditions. When the sea did become rougher, the ferry did not arrive in Lampedusa for as many as twenty consecutive days, with no fresh fruit, vegetables, or meat reaching the island; a situation which also cut off Lampedusa's fishing products from Sicilian markets. These incidents of isolation only add to a situation of existing marginality characterized by no adequate hospital and school facilities to the extent that expectant mothers have to fly to Palermo at their own expense to give birth while the island's elementary school was evacuated in October 2013 due to the risk of it collapsing from disrepair.

Faced with these conditions, how can the small and closed population of Lampedusa, deprived of adequate basic public services, rely on those institutions that bear the main, if not the sole, responsibility for these inefficiencies? How can locals make sense of these deprivations in light of the substantial financial capital invested in the island by those same institutions in order to keep the border fully functioning? This border shows its contradictory and artificial essence when experienced at first hand. During the 2011 emergency, from the perspective of Lampedusa, national and EU authorities appeared almost clumsy in their attempt to convince national and European audiences of what, seen from the physical location of the border, could not but appear as an artificial and avoidable emergency.²³

It is as if, during those early months of 2011, the immigration emergency announced several times and then officially declared following the arrival of the first boats, became a self-fulfilling prophesy. The official declaration of the situation as an emergency progressively lost its credibility on the island in light of the everyday interactions of locals who witnessed first-hand the institutional mismanagement of the border as a deliberate strategy to subsequently justify the introduction of a range of special measures. Such suspicions among the locals appeared to grow in direct relation to the increasing number of young Tunisians forced to remain on the island and sleep in the open for weeks, without any adequate hygienic, legal, or medical assistance. The status of the situation as an emergency appeared to be so contrived as to lose all credibility when viewed from within, through the eyes of locals who in the past had witnessed similar arrivals by boat migrants, yet which had been managed in very different and more efficient ways.

When hospitality turns to violence

This presentation of the events contrasts with what many consider the final incident of 2011 on Lampedusa: the explosion of violence by locals and police against migrants at

²² Interview with Pietro conducted by the author on Lampedusa (December 12, 2012).

²³ Bartoli, p. 19.

the end of September, which was reported by the global media. As previously noted, when the government made public the intention to proceed with the immediate expulsion of migrants from the island, those Tunisians who had remained on Lampedusa decided to express their dissent with force, culminating in the final violent reaction of the islanders. The crisis took place as locals became exhausted by the interminable wait for any institutional decision to resolve the dramatic situation which had been building up throughout the previous months. In addition, locals were increasingly concerned about the economic consequences of the disastrous tourist season that had just concluded, with the main local financial resources to survive the approaching winter being significantly down for that year. Under these conditions, the situation reached a breaking point, as the presence of migrants and institutional neglect combined with growing financial insecurity leading to the exasperation of locals and the sudden outbreak of violence.²⁴

Although these immediate factors remain important, I argue that several other factors related to Lampedusa's major transformation from a fishing island into a tourist destination on Europe's border need to be examined in order to explain such an unexpected violent reaction. Indeed, these events can also be read as the expression of a kind of ultimate watershed, leaving behind the old communalistic Lampedusa characterized by fishing for the tourist island and the location of Europe's border of today. Central to this perspective is, then, the belief that beyond and alongside the local impact of the construction and management of the European external border, the island's population had for a number of years been experiencing a gradual, but traumatic, socio-cultural split driven by a radical move away from the ethics of fishing to the support of the tourist industry: a profound transformation which the construction of the EU's external boundary simultaneously accelerated and complicated. Indeed, overshadowed by the implementation of the frontier, something else was changing the soul of this isolated community living in the middle of the Mediterranean.

Speaking about the island, retired teacher, local historian, and former mayor of Lampedusa (1983–1993), Professor Giovanni Fragapane told me:

Se devo dirti la verità, l'unico cambiamento che ho notato in quest'isola è economico. È l'economia che cambia il carattere di un popolo. Il carattere di una cittadinanza non cambia dalla notte alla mattina perché s'incontra con un gruppo di migranti. Devi considerare che qua a Lampedusa abbiamo convissuto con settant'anni di confine politico ed esilio misto. Ciononostante, non abbiamo cambiato il nostro carattere: siamo riamasti quelli che eravamo. Non è stato qualcuno a cambiarci. Piuttosto, è stato qualcosa ad averci cambiato.²⁵

Nicola, a local fisherman, captain and restaurateur in his seventies, describes this transformation as follows:

Una volta a Lampedusa eravamo tutti fratelli e sorelle: è stato l'arrivo dei turisti a complicare le cose. Un po' alla volta abbiamo cominciato ad odiarci l'un l'altro, come non avveniva

²⁴ Bartoli, p. 24

²⁵ Interview with Giovanni Fragapane conducted by the author on Lampedusa (October 26, 2012).

in precedenza. Devo ammettere, con un po' d'amarezza, che la situazione tra noi isolani è cambiata in maniera drammatica.²⁶

As long as Lampedusa remained the 'mackerel island' with its local economy completely centred on fishing and the canning of local catches, Lampedusans lived a self-supportive communal way of life.²⁷ As in other similar Sicilian locations whose economy was devoted to fishing and its related canning industry, besides the few powerful owners of factories and fishing vessels, the rest of the population lived in very similar deprived economic conditions.²⁸ Lampedusans experienced, interiorized, and reproduced some of the main features of the local labour market:

Una volta [circa 30 anni fa] lavoravamo tutti nelle industrie d'inscatolamento del pesce: donne, anziani e bambini. Gli uomini invece andavano a pescare. [...] Sull'isola lavoravamo tutti assieme [...] al punto che si mangiava pure tutti insieme. Al tempo, se avevi bisogno di qualcosa, bastava chiedere: per farla breve, era come se fossimo tutti fratelli e sorelle.²⁹

On the one hand, it is clear there are elements of an idealized nostalgia in older people's accounts of the past on the island. Certainly, a series of internal tensions existed before the advent of mass tourism in Lampedusa.³⁰ Once back in Lampedusa months after I finished the major part of my fieldwork there, I gave a similar version of this article written in Italian to some of my interviewees and friends in order to have their comments before submitting it.³¹ While many agreed with most of my arguments, some remarked that tensions existed in the past just as they exist today between islanders. As Pasquale, a retired local fisherman, put it:

Lampedusa non è un paradiso oggi come non lo era ieri, e non lo sarà domani: qua molti di noi erano pronti a tutto pur di ricevere qualche lira in più dai padroni! La fame può trasformare il tuo miglior amico nel tuo peggior nemico.³²

However, the difficulties of an isolated life in the middle of the sea obliged islanders to rely on each other especially in the middle of the winter, when the fishing season was off for months and food provisions available on the island were unavoidably low.³³ Moreover, a tension exists between the realities of fishing and tourism, which finds its roots in the difference distinguishing the ethics of the sea from the competitiveness of tourism. There is not necessarily a generational element involved but, rather, the impossible coexistence between two partially incompatible value systems. Although the island's elders expressed substantial criticisms of a younger generation that had

²⁶ Interview with Nicola conducted by the author on Lampedusa (November 4, 2012).

²⁷ The expression appears in the title of an article about the island in 1954: G. Roghi, 'L'isola degli sgombri', *L'illustrazione Italiana* 81(12)(1954) 56–61.

²⁸ Antonino Taranto, *Breve storia di Lampedusa*, (Lampedusa: Lampedusa Art Gallery, 2012).

²⁹ Interview with Angelina conducted by the author in Lampedusa (January 30, 2012).

³⁰ Giovanna Cosenza, 'I contrasti delle Pelagie fra turismo di massa ambientalismo e migranti', in *Effetto Med. Immagini, discorsi, luoghi*, ed. by Anna Maria Lorusso, Patrizia Violi (Bologna: Lupetti, 2011), pp. 283–319.

³¹ Giacomo Orsini, 'Un'isola in mezzo al confine: oltre il razzismo istituzionale e ritorno. Storie di pesca e migrazioni a Lampedusa', in *Razzismi, discriminazioni e confinamenti*, ed. by Mario Grasso (Roma: Ediesse, 2013), pp. 347–58.

³² Interview with Pasquale conducted by the author in Lampedusa (July 20, 2013).

³³ Sandra Rachele Enns, 'There is no other land, there is no other life but this: An investigation into the impact of gender on social capital and resilience in four rural, island communities of British Columbia', (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 2008), *Canadian Social Economy Hub* <<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/1009>> [accessed 4 January 2014]

abandoned fishery in favour of tourism, empirical data and observations suggest that it was the local elders themselves who had initiated this process by being the first to invest in the tourist sector. From these initial investments tourism on the island was to boom throughout the 1990s and continued growing without any regulation, with those quickest to construct new buildings and collude with the local authorities becoming the most successful tourism entrepreneurs.³⁴ After all, 'the disciplinary power at work in the closed spaces of the [canning factories and the fishing vessels] by confining and fixing bodies to the production apparatuses, [collides with the entrepreneurship of the local tourist industry] dispersing bodies and individuals through privatization and isolation'.³⁵

With this shift in the local economy, the seafarers' logic of mutual assistance and reciprocity, which had been necessary to endure such an extreme geographic and economic context, became obsolete in ensuring survival in the new context of a growing mass tourism industry. While fish represented a common factor of production which unified locals taking part in the process of its commodification from fishing to canning, now tourists became the scarce resource to catch, but on a competitive individual or familial basis which transformed an enormous amount of cubic meters on the island into privately owned holiday accommodation. Pietro was a professional fisherman for decades, since he was thirteen years old. Now, he owns two holiday houses in Lampedusa and he uses his former fishing vessels to take tourists around the island during the summer. As for the rest of the year, he uses that same vessel to go fishing illegally. While at sea, twenty nautical miles south of Lampedusa and only a few hundreds of meters away from one of the Italian navy boats deployed to patrol the border, fishing without any licence, he explained to me his move away from professional fishing:

Tra gli anni ottanta e novanta, qui a Lampedusa praticamente chiunque ha potuto ha demolito il proprio peschereccio, ha incassato il sussidio dell'UE, ha abbandonato la pesca professionale, e s'è comprato o costruito uno o più appartamenti da affittare ai turisti durante l'estate. Sebbene io ami la pesca, si tratta comunque di un lavoro duro ed a volte anche pericoloso: inoltre, economicamente parlando, con i turisti si guadagna molto di più lavorando molto meno. A partire dagli anni novanta s'è cominciato a guadagnare sempre meno con la pesca.³⁶

With this quick turnabout of the local economy, individual competition to host tourists progressively replaced the communitarian ethic that appears to have been an integral expression of a local economic model based around small-scale fishing and the processing and canning of catches.

Alongside such a dramatic change in the local socio-economic landscape, the ethics of a fishing community were also jeopardized by the construction of Europe's external border. Numerous fishermen I worked with confirmed that they often changed course when sighting a migrant boat in distress at sea. In total contrast to the law of the sea, local fisher folk expressed a deep inner conflict which they had been grappling with for

³⁴ Riccardo Bocca, 'Lampedusa. L'isola degli abusi edilizi,' in *l'Espresso*, 31 October, 2012 < <http://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/cronaca/2012/10/31/news/lampedusa-l-isola-degli-abusi-edilizi-1.47829> > [accessed 25 September 2014]

³⁵ Jason Read, 'A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity', *Foucault Studies*, 6 (2009), 25–36 (p. 34).

³⁶ Interview with Pietro conducted by the author on the seawaters surrounding Lampedusa (April 21, 2012).

years. For with the establishment of the border, those fishermen who came to the aid of migrant boats in distress now ran the risk of interminable and costly legal consequences, in addition to the immediate, temporary seizure of their trawler.

Ora come ora non possiamo più aiutare i migranti a mare. [...] Il problema è che se ne prendi anche solo uno a bordo, la Guardia Costiera ti sequestra immediatamente il peschereccio. Poi magari te lo ridà dopo una settimana. Nel frattempo però, se non puoi lavorare come fai a dar da mangiare ai tuoi figli?³⁷

Mimmo, a forty-year-old fisherman from Porto Empedocle, the closest Sicilian port, who works in Lampedusa during the good season, does not hide his resignation towards a practice he does not approve of. Again, the logic of reciprocal sustenance essential to survive at sea succumbs in favour of a mere economic calculation.

In a sense, then, it is possible to understand symbolically that in the early months of 2011, the ethics of the sea returned to the island. As a reaction to an extreme situation, Lampedusans once again drew upon that community spirit which had been indispensable in overcoming the adverse conditions associated with a previous era of being a Mediterranean fishing island, and in doing so successfully avoided more severe consequences. The sea surrounding the island returned to its geographical function of a bridge unifying the island with Tunisia. However, the exceptional duration of such a difficult situation, the context of the island's more recent dependence on a tourist industry – which for that year had been severely depressed – and the deep socio-cultural transformations experienced within the community throughout its recent economic transformation, combined to explode in an unprecedented showdown between locals and migrants in late September 2011. Moreover, it must also be recognised that when Tunisian protesters threatened to blow up a local gas installation in protest against the Italian government, Lampedusans came to perceive them as ungrateful guests who had forgotten the hospitality of the previous months in favour of a wider struggle against Italy and Europe. Islanders suddenly felt themselves pushed back to their usual and subaltern role as silent spectators of the 'border play' staged on their island, and turned into hostages of that conflict between Tunisians and institutions that was now unfolding above their heads. The hospitality set in place beforehand mutated so far that North Africans opted for a violent reaction, regardless of those islanders who had struggled alongside them since winter.³⁸

Lampedusa 2.0: the 'poor African' versus the 'bad Tunisian'. The shifting value of Otherness

Referring to the two migrants who were walking along the pier of the old port, from the door of his shed Pietro, another local fisherman in his fifties, told me:³⁹

³⁷ Interview with Mimmo conducted by the author on Lampedusa (November 13, 2012)

³⁸ Matei Candea, 'Derrida en Corse? Hospitality as Scale-Free Abstraction', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 18 (2012), 34–48.

³⁹ Fishermen's sheds in Lampedusa are the historical warehouses where fishermen over the centuries stored all their fishing tools, from nets to buoys and fishing hooks. Several of them, in the old port, are built into natural caves disposed all along the piers. In winter, when the conditions of the sea do not allow fishing, fishermen usually spend their days together inside their sheds doing maintenance work.

Io lo so che quelli sono bravi ragazzi: devono essere eritrei! Nonostante io vada spesso in Tunisia, qui a Lampedusa ho problemi esclusivamente con i tunisini. Io ho problemi solo con quelli che prendono la loro barca e vengono qua pensando di fare quello che gli pare. Giusto per essere chiari, quando [nel 2011] cominciarono ad arrivare, io gli ho lasciato il mio deposito degli attrezzi per dormire. Purtroppo però, alla fine mi hanno fatto danni per €2000: si sono bruciati tutte le cassette che vedi — e che uso per portare il pesce dalla barca al magazzino — oltre a tutto il resto. Io posso capire che per via del freddo e dell'umidità, un modo per scaldarsi lo dovevano pur trovare. Detto ciò, non dovevano farmi tutto quel casino dopo che li avevo aiutati ed assistiti. Prenditela con il governo italiano o l'Unione Europea, non con me!

Following 2011, Tunisians in Lampedusa had become intrusive and dangerous neighbours. On the other hand, sub-Saharan immigrants counterbalanced this rapid reversal: it is as if post-2011, they took the place of Tunisians in the heart of Lampedusans. This, I argue, is associated with the substantial shift away from the Lampedusa placed in the middle of the Mediterranean a few miles from North Africa, to the touristic island located in the middle of the EU border of today. Besides the move away from fishing in favour of tourism, for more than twenty years the island had literally been placed at the centre of an almost surreal media-political panopticon, attracting to Lampedusa, journalists, activists, artists, and academics, myself included, from all over the world. During the first two weeks of my stay, there were five other researchers from four different universities with me on the island, not to mention filmmakers, journalists, and artists. It was an unusual situation for a population of just 6,000 inhabitants which until a few years ago used to experience significant isolation, and one which produced a pervasive and ever-present consciousness among the locals of being the inhabitants of the frontier dividing Europe from Africa. This intense mediatization of the island pushes locals somehow to perform the border as if to satisfy the outside world's expectations of it. Especially when under the gaze of visitors, Lampedusans tend to perform the border according to the observers' expectations, rather than based on their own experience of it.

Today's attitude among many locals towards sub-Saharan migrants and asylum seekers on the island is semantically different from the empathy felt by many towards those Tunisians who reached Lampedusa during the first few months of 2011. The newcomers are indeed no longer the island's geographical and cultural neighbours, with whom to share recent history and join in protesting against institutional failures. Now, Tunisians arrive only in small numbers and in little groups because of the reactivation of the bilateral migration and border management agreements that were in place before the Tunisian revolution.⁴⁰ As many stated on the island, those reaching Lampedusa by boat today are 'desperate people fleeing wars and deprivations'.⁴¹ They are no longer young Tunisians from the other shore of the Mediterranean: neighbours with whom to resist institutional prevarications. Although migrants continued to arrive in Lampedusa after the media had screened the violent events of September 2011, now the image of the island had to be restored — if not for anything else but to ensure the flow of tourist for the following summer.

⁴⁰ Amanda Ufheil-Somers, 'Lampedusa: A Primer', *Middle East Report*, Winter (2011), 20–21.

⁴¹ Interview with Lampedusa's priest conducted by the author on Lampedusa (January 25, 2013).

Lampedusans' hospitality offered to Sub-Saharan Africans differs from that offered to Tunisians during the initial months of 2011. After the screening of such violent scenes, islanders' relation to those strangers coming from the sea became a sort of moral obligation, a conscious exhibition of hospitality to be displayed to the outside world — rather than an emphatic reaction towards a suffering neighbour. Locals' attitudes towards the newcomers changed from an everyday experience and cultural neighbour, to a somewhat more detached, and at times paternalistic attitude, addressing culturally more distant or diverse individuals.⁴² This was one of the most superficial, yet highly visible outcomes of a transformation which Lampedusans had experienced alongside, and simultaneously with, the sociocultural metamorphosis from a fishing island to a tourist destination; a change impelled by media and political intrusiveness associated with the working of Europe's border regime. As a consequence of such intrusiveness, locals have experienced a shared sense of being constantly in the spotlight and a reduction of privacy which plays a key role shaping locals' more recent paternalistic attitudes towards the newcomers.⁴³

What is interesting to note is how the reality of the surviving remnants of the local fishing community responded to these profound changes, changing itself to adapt to the course of events. Since fishing has now been pushed to the margins of the island's economy and socio-cultural milieu, even the remaining fisher folk have turned the page: magically, Tunisians suddenly became the enemy both on land and at sea. Since the rupture of September 2011, Lampedusa's fisher folk have come to see Tunisia as the cause of all their troubles. Tunisians were exclusively blamed for the demise of the local bluefish fishing and canning industry, with the only canning factory still operating in Lampedusa processing Tunisian rather than Lampedusan mackerel. This represents a dramatic U-turn for a local economy once based entirely on the mackerel canning industry with more than fifteen factories operating in Lampedusa.⁴⁴

Oggi giorno solamente due fabbriche per l'inscatolamento del pesce continuano a funzionare sull'isola: io sono il proprietario di questa, mentre mia sorella è proprietaria dell'altra. Ad ogni modo, lei lavora solo poche settimane l'anno perché usa sgombri lampedusani. Noi invece lavoriamo tutto l'anno, anche se [...] i pescatori locali non pescano più pesce azzurro: è rimasta solo una barca che lo pesca. Prima di tutto, non ci sono praticamente più sgombri nelle acque dell'isola. Poi, [...] i pescatori locali preferiscono specie più pregiate — e remunerative — come ricciola o il pesce spada, anche perché sono le più richieste dai turisti. [...] Ora io compro gli sgombri dalla Sicilia e dalla Calabria, ma alcune volte anche dalla Tunisia. [...] A me risulta semplicemente più conveniente: tra l'altro, i tunisini pescano con le stesse tecniche che usavamo qua a Lampedusa, ed esattamente nelle stesse acque in cui pescavano i lampedusani.⁴⁵

From this angle, the dynamics of fishery around Lampedusa resemble Bonacich's split labour market where Lampedusa's fishermen, a better-paid labour force, began perceiving

⁴² Sonja Buckel and Jens Wissel, 'State Project Europe: The Transformation of the European Border Regime and the Production of Bare Life', *International Political Sociology*, 4.1 (2010), 33–49.

⁴³ Donald Carter and Heather Merrill, 'Bordering Humanism: Life and Death on the Margins of Europe', *Geopolitics*, 12.2 (2007), 248–64.

⁴⁴ Annamaria Brignone, 'Lampedusa: la vita marinara e le attività di pesca', *Quaderni dell'Associazione Culturale Archivio Storico di Lampedusa*, 3 (2014) <<https://docs.google.com/file/d/oB3Mt-6kUIOAbcTBJV1pSY2hqRoE/edit>> [accessed 11 November 2014]

⁴⁵ Interview with Pasqualino Famularo conducted by the author on Lampedusa (January 21, 2013)

its economic status threatened by the intrusion of Tunisians, a new ethno-national group, now competing on the basis of the lower cost of their labour force.⁴⁶ Thus, the death of Lampedusa's bluefish canning industry and with it the island's fishing industry was not attributable to the actions of Lampedusa's fisher folk who have abandoned professional fishing for the more lucrative and less tiring tourism sector, although some of whom continue to fish without permits to the detriment of the few licensed fishermen who remain on the island. The death of the fishing industry was not even the result of nearly fifty years of overfishing practiced by Lampedusans in the waters surrounding the island. The blame, instead, is attributed to Tunisian fishermen, a growing fishery that is becoming increasingly competitive in that stretch of the sea. Tunisian fishing vessels are indeed often found fishing in Lampedusa's traditional fishing grounds inside Italian territorial waters, a practice strangely tolerated by the Italian authorities yet one that mirrors the tolerance of Lampedusan vessels fishing in Tunisian waters in a previous era. Despite these repeated claims, many factors have been identified as having contributed to the decline of Lampedusa's fishing industry — the Tunisian fishery cannot be considered the sole or even major cause of this decline.

Conclusions

The events that shocked the tiny Italian and European island of Lampedusa provide countless avenues for analysis and further theoretical elaboration. I examined the year 2011 on the island as the outcome of two major and simultaneous sociocultural transformations of the last decades, which converted the historically Mediterranean and fishing island of Lampedusa into a tourist destination and a location of today's European border regime. It is only by taking the nature of such transformations into account that we can gain a clearer understanding of the changing attitudes of locals towards those people coming from the sea. At the heart of this profound change in the traditionally humanitarian sentiments displayed by locals towards the presence of boat migrants on the island has been the move away from the ethics of the sea and communitarian subsistence necessary to endure relative economic deprivation and geographical isolation, in favour of a competition-riven local tourist industry combined with the disproportionate presence of media and politics on the island consequent on the establishment of Europe's external border.

In attempting to elaborate on local events and dynamics, I framed the violent events of September 2011 as an outcome of locals' transformation into a governmental subject whose anthropology is one of competition.⁴⁷ What was at stake in that tragic September of 2011 in Lampedusa was the final struggle between two diverse and perhaps mutually exclusive sets of values generated by the operation of two diverse local economies. The individualities of the new Lampedusans that left the fishing industry to make up their earnings by competing to host tourists arriving on the island structures along 'operative terms [that are] interest, investment and competition'.⁴⁸ Testing these new individualities

⁴⁶ Edna Bonacich, 'A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labour Market', *American Sociological Review*, 37 (5) (1972), 604–28.

⁴⁷ Read, pp. 25–36.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

throughout their encounters with the Other, the attitudes of the local population seem to have moved from hospitality and acceptance for Tunisians to the complete denial of them. Now Tunisians are the worst and closest competitors at sea, the cause of all the island's ills. Tunisians, once neighbours of the same sea, became the most dreaded strangers. The focus shifts towards a more utilitarian understanding of the racialized Other, where migrants must be welcome only in light of their perceived economic utility or, alternatively, and partly paternalistically, exclusively when they are weak, powerless, and desperate refugees fleeing wars and persecution.⁴⁹ There is no more space for cultural ties and experienced proximity: watching south from Lampedusa, that sea which once acted as a bridge to the nearby land of North Africa has now become a frontier, a line drawn into the sea, dividing us from them. That sea, once crossed to access the richer, calmer and warmer Tunisian waters to fish, is now the fishing ground of the increasingly competitive Tunisian fishery. With the removal of Tunisians and the paternalistic rendering of sub-Saharan migrants and asylum seekers as weak and powerless subjects, the perceived presence of a threatening and disruptive Other has been silenced, allowing Lampedusa once again to continue on its journey away from a fishing island in the middle of the Mediterranean to a tourist destination in the middle of a border. Finally, reflecting on Lampedusans' interpretations of the changes in their community and relationships with Tunisians we can perceive a sense of self-apology which seeks to critique their present ways from the point of view of a previous set of values and a past that seems to be valorized in the process.

⁴⁹ Harald Bauder, 'Neoliberalism and the Economic Utility of Immigration: Media Perspectives on Germany's Immigration Law', *Antipode*, 40.1 (2008), 55–78; Cynthia Hardy and Nelson Philips, 'No Joking Matter: Discursive Struggle in the Canadian Refugee System', *Organization Studies*, 20.1 (1999), 1–24.