

# BORDER ECONOMIES

## Lampedusa and the Nascent Migration Industry

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### Abstract

Given extensive media coverage, the island of Lampedusa became a prominent symbol of undocumented mobility in the Mediterranean. The intensification of border controls, the Schengen treaty and the externalisation of borders to the European ex-colonies in North Africa fostered informal economic activities. Moreover, mobile actors invented new strategies to adapt or to circumvent impediments to free movement. Whereas new forms of Foucault's concept of *gouvernementalité* have been critically scrutinised, the interplay between the informal and the formal, institutionalised border economies has escaped attention so far. Based on long-term and multi-sited anthropological fieldwork on Lampedusa and Tunisia, this addresses the border regime and the nascent migration industry that involves various local, national and supra-national actors such as the Italian Civil Defence Department, the (private-public) detention system and NGOs (such as the International Organisation for Migration, Save the Children, and the Italian Red Cross).

### Keywords

Undocumented mobility, border regime, border economy, Lampedusa

### Introduction

*In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up* - Michel Foucault (1986: 27)

Situated between Tunisia and Sicily, the tiny island of Lampedusa has become a prominent symbol for Mediterranean borderlands, European Union (EU) migration policies and cross-border governance.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the right to mobility is part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, undocumented people encounter – not least with the introduction of the Schengen-treaty and the visa system in 1986 – legal systems and border regimes set up a variety of limits to the freedom of movement and upon their capacity to stay.<sup>2</sup> Due to EU pressure and various bilateral accords, in Morocco undocumented border crossing has been a legal offence since 2003, in Algeria since 2008 and in Tunisia since 2004.<sup>3</sup> However, the externalisation of European borders to former colonies did not block mobility. Since 2011, after the Tunisian Revolution of Freedom and Dignity (*Thawrat al hurriyyah wa al-karamah*) and the fall of

the regime in Libya, around 60,000 people contested being excluded from the right to mobility and crossed the Mediterranean to reach Lampedusa.



Figure 1 – Lampedusa and location in the Mediterranean

Undocumented mobility and the “border regime” (Sciortino, 2004: 32) involve a multitude of local and (supra)national actors, whose practices relate to each other even though they are not guided by a central logic or rationality (Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe, 2007: 13-14). The border regime also articulates shifting relations between the global and the local, centre and periphery and leads to incessant processes and mobile textures of de/re-localisations, de-bordering and re-bordering which blur the internal and the external (Bigo, 2010:16-21; Cuttita, 2007; Mezzadra, 2006), the formal and the informal economic sector, relating various actors and networks. The *harraga* (as those who ‘burn their papers’ are called in North West Africa), their friends, families and networks, self-made entrepreneurs who arrange the voyages on one hand, and actors who organise the reception of mobile people on a day-to-day-basis on the other: members of the Coast Guard and security forces, the employees of privatised ‘reception centres’, local entrepreneurs, the local municipality and political forces.

The border regime also fosters an expanding group of competing NGOs (such as International Catholic Migration Committee ICMC); the International Organisation for Migration (IOM); the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD); Save the Children; Médecins sans Frontières), public-private enterprises, research institutes which generate knowledge and infrastructures that are to manage mobility and make up a dense transnational fabric of actors, practices, policies, and powerful images of undocumented mobility. Images of ‘flow’, ‘invasion’, ‘crisis’ or ‘emergency’ are an integral part of such an industry as the media gaze produces and disseminates dominant views of undocumented mobility. The dominant gaze situates the mobile subject both as a victim and as a threat to national security and systems of welfare, and is part of a powerful social *imaginaire* of catastrophes and thus, legitimises policies by which the emergency, the exception becomes the rule (Agamben, 1995).

So far, shifting fields of sovereignty, the multiplicity of power relations, technologies, programmes and strategies of liberal and neo-liberal governance have been critically scrutinised (Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996). Practices of hospitality (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 1997), as well as the quest for renewed cosmopolitan concepts (Honig, 2001; Benhabib, 2004) and the need of new forms of citizenship have been acknowledged (Bauböck, 1994; Carens, 1995; Kostakopoulou, 2008). Adopting praxelological, Foucauldian and/or Deleuzian approaches, recent studies of border regimes have thoroughly criticised prevailing concepts which saw migration as one-dimensional processes structurally governed by mechanical push-and-pull factors or as an inevitable effect of macro-structural developments in times of globalisation and (neo)-liberal economic restructuring (Hess, 2011; Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe, 2007).

However, the political economies, the nascent migration industry and especially the intersections between local and trans-local/transnational informal and formal economies have largely escaped attention so far. The 'production of illegality' (de Genova, 2002) contributes not only to brute exploitation of 'illegalised' manpower. It enhances the security sector, an emergent market providing technically sophisticated devices for the detection of undocumented border crossers (Walters, 2006: 196-7; Bigo, 2007), as well as the privatised reception and detention system competing for public funding.

At the same time, the border regimes foster the production of subjectivities, of cross-border actors and their strategies to circumvent – or to actively use – established procedures and routines for individual projects of mobility. Borders are both a means of exclusion *and* permeable zones of contact, encounter, cross-border commuting and in/formal commerce (be it 'legal' or 'illegal'), providing a livelihood for inhabitants of these regions. Last but not least, the reception of illegalised mobile people brings forth local conflicts about the allocation of public resources.

In the following sections, I will first look at various agents enacting (new) forms of governance of undocumented mobility and the massive economic interests that are at stake for (supra-)national *and* local entrepreneurs (Section 1). Against this background and based on a multi-sited anthropological research on Lampedusa, Sicily and ports in Tunisia, engagement will be devoted to transnational and local conflicts about resources and the intersections between formal and informal economies. Attention however, will not be dedicated to 'traffickers' but rather to the (in)formal clientelistic arrangements that make up the border industry on Lampedusa relating the island to the national (political) spheres. The arrival of illegalised people on Lampedusa has been governed up to now via decrees of emergency. As the political economy of the border (Section 2) is closely related to the formal declaration of the state of emergency on the island, powerful visualisations of "catastrophes" will briefly be looked at (Section 3); visualisation that, in turn, allows a legitimisation of the declaration of the state of emergency and its economical dimensions.

## 1. Governing Undocumented Mobility and Economic Interests

Issues of (undocumented) mobility have become a core part of political and economic relations between the EU and its neighbours across the Mediterranean. It has been widely acknowledged that current European political efforts promote twofold action in containing movement and undocumented mobility: the shifting of borders beyond

borders and at the same time, their increasing control and multiplication. Borders, as Walters points out, “operate like filters or gateways”, selecting “the good and the bad, the useful and the dangerous, the licit and the illicit... immobilising and removing the risky elements so as to speed the circulation of the rest” (2006: 197).

Therefore, cooperation and efforts in the externalisation of controlling mobility in the Mediterranean and the ex-colonies have been strengthened. A dense fabric of think tanks, research institutes and NGOs seek to set the political agenda and compete for donors and public funding. The most prominent organisations operating in the Mediterranean are, next to the International Catholic Migration Committee (ICMC), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). In 2002, the ‘5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean’ was established. It allowed ‘partner and observer institutions’, such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) to build a private-public political forum for “information exchange, joint management of international borders, agreed forms of labour migration, migration for development, and protection of the rights of migrants”<sup>4</sup>.

Maintaining “partnerships with relevant governmental, multilateral and private sector industry partners” (IOM [nd]: online), IOM is one of the generators of the externalisation of borders, implementing EU policies that it managed to influence. Its decentralised organisational structure does not work on an annual operating budget, but competes for project-related funding and donor states. It is one of the big players providing service and migration management in an expanding sector. Its membership increased from 67 States in 1998 to 146 States in 2012 and continues to grow. The total expenditure increased from US\$ 242.2 million in 1998 to US\$ 1.3 billion in 2011. Given its structure, it depends upon the funds it manages or generates (Caillault, 2012: 143). During the Arab Revolutions, for example, the EU and IOM expanded cooperation to stabilise at-risk communities and enhance migration management to support transitions in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. In December 2011, a contribution agreement was signed in Tunis, whereby the EU entrusted IOM with EUR 9.9 million for a three year program to support transition processes and promote sustainable recoveries in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. More specifically IOM will seek to address emerging migration-related challenges in each target country (IOM, 2011).

Multilateral cooperation with Libya and Tunisia has been consolidated now with Tunisia hosting the first meeting of the 5+5 dialogue in 2002 and Libya joined the IOM as a Member State in June 2004.

*Since 2003 the IOM and Libya have participated in a series of technical and policy consultations, resulting in the development of a one-year plan of action, scheduled to begin in late 2004, under the Programme for the Enhancement of Transit and Irregular Migration Management in Libya – TRIM (Hamood, 2006: 24).*

Envisaged were voluntary programs for irregular migrants, the enhancement of three reception centres (ibid) that are promoting the ex-territorialisation of the detention system into the former colonies.

Additionally, another institutional actor emerged that is concentrated on state actors' concerns. In 2002, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) encouraged the intergovernmental Mediterranean Transit Migration Dialogue (MTM) between migration officials in countries of origin, transit and destination along migration routes in Africa, Europe and the Middle East, covering aspects of irregular migration. In 2009, the MTM Dialogue entered its 4th phase, 'a dialogue in action', following the guidelines of the main global, African and European policy in combating trafficking and smuggling. MTM collaborates with the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), the Union for the Mediterranean (EuroMed), the Africa-EU Migration, Mobility and Employment Partnership (MME), the Rabat Process and the 5+5 Dialogue. The guiding principles are explicitly designed to contribute to the opinion-forming of state officials and to operate at the technical level.<sup>5</sup>

Border management and technologies of *gouvernementalité* (Michel Foucault) are designed to detect and combat resourceful strategies of border crossings (before they even occur) and to fix mobile people. The generation of knowledge thus becomes a remunerative resource and product to place on the highly competitive market. "In order to elaborate knowledge-based approaches to migration, be this at policy level, strategic level, or through concrete actions, access to comprehensive and updated information is a prerequisite" as the International Centre for Migration Policy Development states (*i-Map*, 2011: online). Statistics, screening, mapping and visualisation have a long tradition in techniques of surveillance, policing and *gouvernementalité*. Not by chance the *International Centre for Migration Policy Development* hosts an interactive map – its fancy name is *i-map* – entailing visualisations of movement, routes, 'hubs' and 'flows'.<sup>6</sup> Implementing partners on irregular and mixed migration are Europol, Frontex, Interpol, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); and on migration and development, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).<sup>7</sup>

Bilateral agreements are part of the border regime and efforts to controlling mobility.<sup>8</sup> In August 2004, relations between Italy and Libya had improved and in October the EU embargo on military technology sales to the country was dropped, which allowed Libya to buy up to date systems of surveillance and speedboats and to train police forces. Following these accords more than 1,000 people were deported from Lampedusa to Tripoli (an action which has been sharply criticised by UNHCR, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in 2005). In December 2007 another agreement between Italy and Libya was signed. It includes joint collaboration – especially against "the criminal organisations that are dedicated to human trafficking and to the exploitation of clandestine immigration" (Ministero dell'Interno, 2007: online). Given that bilateral cooperation with Albania had been successful, it was envisaged that collaborative patrols could shut down these routes.

The EU border agency *Frontex* became one of the key players of migration management. The agency is 'intelligence driven' and is to provide additional 'border management systems' to Member States. The EU Commission is the most important donor at present, funding more than 95% of the agency's budget (Kasperek and Wagner, 2012: 175). Since its inception in 2005, its annual budget has increased rapidly from EUR 6 million to the current EUR 82 million. The Agency employs 290 staff (Frontex, 2011; 4). Frontex is mentioned in the Italian-Libyan protocol (the 'treaty of friendship' between Italy and the former regime) and its representatives had been

carrying out a mission in Libya and visited some detention camps for irregular migrants. Those were evaluated as extremely poor, however and, rather ironically, throughout the mission, the members of the mission were treated to extremely warm hospitality by the Libyan hosts and useful operational contacts have been established which it is hoped will advance future cooperation on border security issues (Frontex, 2007: 3). After the downfall of the regime – which was certainly not known for respecting human rights – bilateral contacts between Italy and the provisional government have been re-established,<sup>9</sup> as have those with Tunisia, not least with a view on containing mobility.

These few examples display a multi-level system of governance, the increasing role of non-governmental, competing actors who have a fundamental *economic interest* in the ‘management’ of mobility and the implementation of its policies. At the same time, they generate ‘problems’ and offer ‘solutions’ to the problems they managed to hoist on the political agenda in the first place. Following such a remunerative logic, fighting undocumented mobility is fighting ‘human trafficking’ and subsequently, financing programmes against trafficking is legitimised, morally even highly valued and politically most welcomed. (Scientific) discourse, the political agenda setting and fundraising in a competitive ‘market-segment’ are part of the dynamics of the border regime and the ways mobility is conceived. In the same vein already, “the concept of transit migration was only invented during the 1990s and publicised by certain institutions, notably IOM, ICMPD, the Council of Europe and various UN agencies” (Düvell, 2008: online).

Being part of particular border regimes, ‘migration management’ comprises a set of discourses, images and practices, carried out by a multitude of actors, who are intertwined in a highly complex, heterogeneous, competitive and often antagonistic, conflictive manner. It is also a highly profitable business at the intersection of formal and informal economies. At the same time, these practices, discourses and images relate to local actors, economic interests and conflicts about the allocation of resources. Local conflicts, antagonism and the quest for political participation are an integral part of the border regime.

## 2. The Political Economy of Borders

*Harga*, undocumented mobility and the border regime are made up of specific social spaces and (in)formal economies. Despite the dominant political discourse about ‘human trafficking’ – so dear to European politicians and stakeholders who envisaged the remunerative topic – crossings from Tunisia to Lampedusa, especially on small boats or inflatable dinghies, are often self-organised<sup>10</sup> *Harraga* mostly rely on neighbourhood relations, kin, personal (trans-local/national) networks or sheer chance (Mabrouk, 2010). However, *laguatas*, ‘jokers’, *khit* (thread), *jellebas* (sheep merchants), mediators, ‘smugglers’ – or better: informal border entrepreneurs or travel agents – have a recognised social status. They have a strong incentive to deliver their service to the satisfaction of those who rely on their skills. Thus, they have to maintain, display and enhance their reliability, honesty, sincerity and reputation in this competitive market. Ports in Tunisia were highly controlled by port authorities and police informers under the former regime. Local border entrepreneurs therefore, worked in a highly risky market segment by providing services to mobile people who are excluded from the official market and ‘legal’ mobility. The current fee on the direct route from Tunisia to Lampedusa is around €1,000 and some service comprises all-inclusive offers including transfer to final destination.

Routes to reach Lampedusa via Libya were well-organised and more expensive, as they relied on smugglers (especially of petrol) with good contacts with agents of the border-control/customs, and on specialised *passeurs*. In the southern regions of Tunisia, smuggling became an important source of income, especially after the international embargo of Libya in the early 1990s. This informal sector traversed severe crisis when the embargo was lifted and the transport of undocumented border crossing partly substituted this activity.

As local fishermen have the means of transport at their disposal, they play a decisive role in the organisation of *harga*. Since juridical sanctions and administrative restrictions complicate the legal handover of boats, Tunisian fishermen – who during the revolution protected their ports – complained about the theft of boats (some were however, hidden sales). Especially on bigger boats, which are not easy to handle by inexperienced *harraga*, the *rais* (commander, the pilot) and the *dmangi* (the assistant of the commander/captain) have been former fishermen who cannot make a living from that activity any longer or want to invest in other activities.

Due to dramatic over-fishing of the Mediterranean Sea, the fishing industry in Tunisia and Lampedusa – and particularly the shore fishery – faces a severe crisis. The local industry on Lampedusa is no longer competitive in a globalised market. Structural handicaps, such as higher prices for diesel fuel and the lack of efficient transport aggravate the situation. Lampedusa is traversed by several conflicts about increasingly scarce resources. Whereas Lampedusans once fished along the Tunisian shores, Tunisians started to approach Italian national waters and, thus, the traditional fishing grounds around the island. The structural crisis increasingly leads to quarrels about the violation of national borders. As the Coast Guard does not intervene despite various protests, local fishermen feel ‘assaulted’ and ‘ruined’ by Tunisian fishermen – irregular border commuters – and want ‘to be left alone’, that is, not to be recognised as political subjects by politicians and public authorities.

Yet another arena of conflict has been established. Since the boom of the 1980s, the tourism industry has become one of the main economic pillars of the small community and its 6,000 inhabitants. As many as 50,000 tourists visit Lampedusa each year, making the hospitality industry the main source of income on the island. The fear that media coverage and the visibility of the clandestine (ie the invisibles) could harm tourism – accepted forms of mobility - is used in populist rhetoric, and not just in times of local elections.

### 3. The economy of the camp

In accordance with the fisherman’s ethos of hospitality and aid to the shipwrecked, the first boatpeople arriving on Lampedusa were taken care of by local volunteers. Locals recall that women cooked for them and collected clothing. Families and individuals such as a former *carabiniere* (military policeman) sheltered some of them at home, recalling in conversation with me that, “we didn’t know where to accommodate them”. A group of volunteers was formed, young people who – having been trained by the Italian Red Cross – organised care around the clock. Due to factors such as national legislation regulating the general principles of immigration policies, the Legge Turco-Napolitano (1998) and the establishment of reception centres (Centri di accoglienza),

spontaneous local hospitality became increasingly institutionalised. 'Professionalisation' changed the relation between those who arrived and local solidarity, multiple gestures of hospitality converted into institutional reception and best practice fictions. Whereas boatpeople had been visible as individuals for locals, they have been turned into invisibles in a doubled sense of the term: they are *clandestini* who have a fantastic presence and are assigned - as 'extraterritorial' - to a segregated place, a 'heterotopic' space of transition and a space of 'inclusive exclusion' (Agamben, 1995; Diken and Laustsen, 2005).<sup>11</sup>

The first local Centre of Temporary Stay and Assistance (Centro di Permanenza Temporanea ed Assistenza, CPTA) was managed by the Misericordia since July 1998.<sup>12</sup> Former Red Cross volunteers (who worked with a rather small budget) were replaced and for the most part were not considered for the upcoming paid jobs. "Just a few of us have got jobs, the director came from Corleone – need I say more?" a former activist told me, using reference to Corleone as a metaphor for mafia, clientelism, personal interests and the interplay of formal and informal border economies.

The former centre was situated next to the airport at the edge of town. It comprised several metal containers that could accommodate 150 people and included a mensa, a section for bathrooms, a wing hosting the administration, the Carabinieri and collaborators of the Misericordia, that run the centre until Spring 2007. The complex was barb-wired and inmates could not freely move on the island. After a period of identification – and mostly without information about the procedure for asylum – people were flown out to be 'distributed' to other facilities on Sicily or mainland Italy. Such flights included *refoulement* to Libya. Due to severe overcrowding, facilities had to be expanded. During the construction of the new centre, fierce local conflicts arose about the designated site. One local faction favoured a new building (in a rather obvious attempt to sell land), while the opposition insisted on the use of existing barracks in order to minimise environmental impact. Due to public protest – which became part of local memory as *sciopero* ('strike') - the construction of a new building was prevented. The new facility, which should have become a 'model for all existing facilities, however, was built in a protected area and was formally illegal. It was inaugurated in August 2007 and was designed for a maximum of 800 internees.

In 2007, two cooperatives associated with the leftist trade union Legacoop formed a consortium, Lampedusa Accoglienza srl (reception), and won the public bid to run the new centre. Since Tangentopoli (the anti-corruption movement that shook the foundations of the Italian political system in the early 1990s) around 40% of public commissions are assigned to consortiums. Given that participation in the procedure requires the kind of (legal and financial) means small cooperatives can rarely afford; the usual procedure is that several individual co-ops form a consortium, with the Legacoop serving as a formal umbrella that participates in public tenders. However, the outcome dissatisfied not only anti-racist groups. Exponents of the regional Legacoop told me that the two co-operatives in question – Blu Coop of Agrigento and Sisifo of Catania – had already sealed the deal before the tender was released and thus had excluded other regional competitors. In addition, the political affiliations and clientelist relations of both co-ops, which are more or less run by 'family and friends', are well known.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, although the procedure was legally correct, the affair sheds light on how reception has become a business in which personal interests are intertwined with clientelist political networks and forms of governance.

After publication of an article in the newspaper *Manifesto* (1 April 2007), anti-racist groups occupied the head offices of *Legacoop* in Bologna and Palermo, arguing that co-operatives should reflect the tradition and values of trade unions and the workers' movements and therefore should not support the detention system. They also criticised the manner in which the co-ops had won the public tender by undercutting their competing bidder *Misericordia*, which previously ran the facility, by more than 30%. In order to render financial transactions more transparent and to avoid further waste of public resources, the Ministry of the Interior limited the expenses for every 'guest' (*ospite*) to €50 per day. *Misericordia* offered €50, another Sicilian co-op based in Trapani, Connecting People, offered €37,<sup>14</sup> and Lampedusa Accoglienza offered €33. The Vice-President of Sisifo, a member of the then-existing party La Margherita, which has since merged into the Democratic Party (PD), stated that it calculated the cost of running the service as around €2 million per year, that they would do a marvellous job and that service would not suffer if transferred to them. However, the centre was no longer a Centre of Temporary Stay (CPT) but was converted into a 'Centre for Aid and First Reception' (Centro di Soccorso e Prima Accoglienza, CSPA), which means, at least in theory, that new arrivals were not to stay there for more than 48 hours, in order to get identified and eventually apply for asylum. In practice however, inmates have to stay for quite extended times ranging from 8 to 25 days (obviously enhancing the profits of the co-op).<sup>15</sup> The facility comprises around 150 (local) employees and contributes to the island's economy, even if the punctual payment of salaries is not always guaranteed. Whereas locals complain about the 'militarisation' of the island, a consistent number of security staff is deployed and hosted in local hotels assuring its owners (as well as restaurants and bars) a secured income beyond the tourist season.

Financing became a serious issue. In 2005, the first project, *Praesidium I* (Potenziamento dell'accoglienza rispetto ai flussi migratori) ('Enhancing migration reception'), was financed by the EU ARGO program<sup>16</sup> and has been constantly renewed since then.

*On 1 July 2005 the European Commission allocated 2 million Euros (just under one-third of its 6.7 million Euro budget) under the ARGO Work Programme to 'support operational activities to address the emergencies caused by illegal immigration in the Mediterranean. (Hamood, 2006: 75)*

The project is a joint collaboration between the IOM, the Italian Red Cross, and UNHCR on Lampedusa (since April 2008 it also involves the NGO Save the Children which is in charge of taking care of unaccompanied minors). The aim of the projects is to 'improve reception' and services for unaccompanied minors, to streamline procedures for the identification of migrants, and to reduce 'clashes between different ethnic groups'. In 2008, the Ministry of the Interior requested around €760,000 from the European Commission (European Commission ARGO). Public-private business was quite successful, as in April 2010 *Praesidium* entered its fifth year (Ministero dell'Interno, 2010). In 2011, the annual budget of Save the Children included €52,348 for the 'emergency Lampedusa' (Save the Children, 2011: 38).

#### 4. Dumping boats

With the arrival of the boat people, another problem emerged: the disposal of the vessels. The ships used by *harraga* to cross the Mediterranean are inevitably destined to cross the Mediterranean for the last time. Hard-sided and inflatable boats reaching the island are confiscated by the border and customs service (Guardia di Finanza, GdF) and kept at the local dump or at the former US Long Range Navigation (LORAN) base. In 2007, the triennial plan of the municipality included €550,000 for the ‘establishment of a provisional depot for the nautical relics of the extra-communitarians’ which was funded by the Civil Defence Department (Protezione Civile). Ironically, the site that had been planned for only 30 boats was soon shut down because it was built without authorisation and no report on its ecological compatibility had been submitted—incidentally, it is located by a road with a picturesque panoramic view.

Fostering political and economic clientelism, the law no. 225 (1992), which imposes the ‘state of emergency’ – is designed to cope with natural disasters – had been extended by the Berlusconi government to circumvent usual procedures of public tenders.<sup>17</sup> As Lampedusa was declared as being in a state of emergency, the Civil Defence Department became an integral part of the border regime and economic interests. In 2004, it was tasked to deal with the ‘emergency’ of dumping boats, thus allowing it to circumvent rules for public commissions (being involved in various scandals, the former head of the department, Guido Bertolaso came under critical national public scrutiny and was replaced in 2010). His deputy identified a new site for the boat dump and the Edilmeccanica G. Campione S.r.l in Agrigento won the public tender. The company is part of the group controlled by Giuseppe Campione, a politician rumoured to be involved in Mafia activities (Senato della Repubblica, 2004). However, because the site was badly constructed, part of its walls crumbled in 2006. In 2007, the company *SEAP* was provisionally commissioned to scrap the boats. This contract was revoked by Civil Defence in 2008. *SEAP* appealed this decision and won the case in December 2009. In December 2008, the site was burnt down (probably intentionally, given that setting fire is a quite common Mafia warning and an easy way not to fulfil the rather costly requirements for ecological sound decommissioning). In April 2009, a public tender worth €350,000 was released (Dipartimento della Protezione Civile, 2009). In the meantime, the general administrator at *SEAP* and a personal friend of the former Italian Minister of Justice, Angelino Alfano (*Popolo della Libertà, Pdl*) from Agrigento, accused the mayor of Lampedusa of corruption and to have received €70,000 in bribes. The mayor was taken into custody in July 2009 and removed from office (he was subsequently released and returned to office in August. Running for mayor, he was not re-elected in Spring 2012).

The ‘cemetery of boats’ is a very impressive site (Friese, 2007, 2011a). In 2007, an estimated more than 200 boats and inflatable boats were piled up. Locals wondered why boats were not sold at public auctions like in Malta, one informing that, “I could never afford a boat. I would be happy to get even a small one for €2,000 or €3,000 and here new boats are left to rot”. The latter also raises doubts about the whereabouts of the outboard motors: “They divide them among themselves”, he suspected, “I’ve never seen any up here. There is a black market, but what can we do? The laws are made by those who rule”. Even if motors are neatly piled up in the ex-LORAN station, some deposit sites are open to the public and costly propellers and other replacement parts are dismantled and disappear in the informal market.

In late September 2011, yet another public tender amounting to €1,671,740 was released to handle boats arriving after the Tunisian revolution (Dipartimento della Protezione Civile, 2011). The declaration of the state of emergency became an ongoing rationale to cope with people who insist on the universal right to mobility. It became as well a prevailing mode to circumvent usual norms of public tenders and part of the political economy of borders.

### 3. Visualising Catastrophes and the State of Emergency

Again, in February 2011 the 'state of humanitarian emergency in the territory of North Africa' (sic) was declared "in order to allow efficient measures hindering the exceptional influx of aliens on national territory" (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2011). Following the suggestions of the Head of the Civil Protection and the Commissioner for the 'emergency of immigration', in January 2012 €300 million were allocated to cope with the "humanitarian emergency due to the exceptional influx of Northern Africans to Italy".<sup>18</sup>

Part of the 'emergency' was a fiscal moratorium for local tourist operators and hotel owners who complained about the decline of the sector because of the 'migratory fluxes' and extensive media coverage harming the image of an 'uncontaminated' paradise. Indeed, the dominant media-gaze fostered the social *imaginaire* of being assaulted. The production of such images was part of a political strategy of the former Minister of the Interior, (Northern League Party member) Maroni, not least to press the EU for financial aid. The arriving *harraga* were not immediately transported to mainland Sicily but had to camp in the streets of the small village. For weeks, the island resembled an open-air TV studio hosting journalists and freelance photographers from all over the world who co-produced the 'humanitarian crisis'.

The moratorium (decided by Silvio Berlusconi who visited the island during the politically produced state of emergency, promising inhabitants [metaphorical] milk and honey) was prolonged by the Monti government until June 2012. In July, referring to the measures adopted by the Government in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Aquila, the newly elected mayor of Lampedusa – a left-wing activist – demanded yet another extension until December 2012. The 'state of emergency' has become indeed, the normality and it fosters the economic interests of (local) actors. The decree of emergency authorised as well expenditures of €495 million in 2012 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2011, art. 23.11) and allowed for the renovation of local schools and the construction of a purifier of waste water – problems which have been for a long time on the political agenda of the local administration.

The permanent state of emergency, the normalisation of the exception was promoted by highly symbolic visualisations of undocumented mobility<sup>19</sup> "(H)ighly visible interceptions of smuggling operations tend to play out as contemporary crisis", as Alison Mountz remarks (2010: xv), and dominant media coverage reproduced images of a 'biblical exodus', the alarming 'human tsunami' etc.. Images thus, became a powerful resource increasingly mined in order to boost legitimacy and the authority of cross-border policies and the permanent state of emergency. The *imaginaire* of mobile people as sudden, abrupt catastrophes comparable to disasters such as devastating earthquakes, penetrated civil society, generating a public siege mentality which in turn has to be calmed by efficient, well-calculated measures of border management.

Dominant mass media images, policies of border management and the state of exception are interrelated: images re-iterate the exception, as the exception needs its images in order to get public and political legitimacy. At the same time however, they foster local economic interests that are part of the nascent migration industry.

As we have seen, in recent years new players emerged to make up the nascent migration industry. 'Engaging Business and Civil Society' (IOM, 2006), the border regime encompasses various stakeholders and (institutional) actors of the public and private sector and its vital economic interests. At the intersection between formal and informal economy, it includes entrepreneurs in border zones arranging the voyages of those who insist on their right to mobility. It encompasses conflicts about resources, the production and commercialisation of knowledge and services, media coverage of 'catastrophe' and political discourse: the production of knowledge and images, policy and economic interests coincide. The arrival of *harraga* has become an integral part of a powerful political arena and clientelistic networks connecting the island of Lampedusa with the regional and national political context. In line with current policies of border management, it became a rather lucrative business. What are at stake are public works and commissions, subsidies, jobs, and the control of public resources. The border regime thus articulates the entanglement of economic interests, (new) modes of governance, knowledge production and visualisation. Research on the 'limits of hospitality' and the nascent migration industry are part of the border regime.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The following remarks are part of a multi-sited research project on The Limits of Hospitality envisioning undocumented mobility (Lampedusa, mainland Sicily and

<sup>2</sup> On the role of the private sector/corporations in 'moving the controls of borders' and the Schengen visa system, see Guild (2001).

<sup>3</sup> Ben Cheikh/Chekir (2008:6-8); Fargues (2009)

<sup>4</sup> See [www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/860](http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/860). Members include Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauretania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia. Tunisia chaired the first meeting in 2002, the following meetings were held in Rabat (2003) and Algiers (2004).

<sup>5</sup> See ICMPD (nd: online).

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed view, see Tsianos (nd: online).

<sup>7</sup> Main donors are the European Commission and co-funding states, such as France, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Switzerland and the UK.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of the bilateral readmission treaties concluded by the EU Member States with third countries and its paradoxes, see the contributions in Cassarino (ed) (2010).

<sup>9</sup> The protocol of a meeting between the Italian Minister of the Interior, Annamaria Cancellieri (on 3 April 2012) and her Libyan colleague Fawzi Altaher Abdulali further affirmed bilateral efforts to contrast 'illegal' migration. It referred to the Palermo Convention against organised crime (2000) and the bilateral accords against 'human trafficking' and intended to strengthen police collaboration, 'cross-border information systems', the establishment of a 'Centre of First Aid' for 'illegal immigrants' at Kufra and other Centres in Libya (Ministero dell'Interno Italiano, 3 April 2012). After Italy's

conviction at the European Court for Human Rights in 2012 however, collaboration in *refoulement* is – at least explicitly – no longer part of the protocol of mutual understanding.

<sup>10</sup> See also de Haas (2007: 24-7).

<sup>11</sup> “Refugees are marked out by their precise lack of rights. Their a- or extra-territorial form of existence seems to consign them to an abject condition of speechlessness which leaves them with little or no remit to challenge often ill-intentioned depictions (as well as occasional brutality or violence)” (Rajam and Gundy-Warr, 2004: 37). However, local actors actively took part in the revolt of inmates in 2009, as boat people forced open the gates of the overcrowded facility to protest against their treatment and imminent deportation, resulting in the facility being burnt down. Chanting “Freedom! Freedom!” and “Grazie Lampedusa”, they joined the demonstrating residents who were contesting plans of the government and the Minister of the Interior, Maroni to convert the centre into a centre of identification and expulsion (CIE). The protest opened a shared space of contestation, the borderlands and the limits of hospitality became a site of engagement, solidarity, and antagonistic transnational political practice (Friese, 2011). In a protest in 2011 about lack of local participation in political decision-making the facility was burnt again and had to be closed.

<sup>12</sup> The Italian system is made up of four types of centres: centres of first aid and assistance (CSPA), centres of reception (CPA), centres for asylum seekers (CARA) and centres for identification and expulsion (CIE). The costs of this system amount to €200,000/day and the costs from 1999 to 2011 amounted to €985.4 million (Manconi and Anastasia, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Klepp’s account of the Centre (2011: 334-40) misses this point.

<sup>14</sup> The Sicilian co-op ‘Connecting people’ operates in various Italian regions and runs 17 centres. In August 2012, the district attorney of Gorizia in the Northern region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia opened an investigation on fraud against the co-op, contesting the sum of €1.5 million and the manipulation of the effective numbers of inmates as well as the corruption of the local vice-prefect (Pasqualetto, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> In fact, in 2011 the vice-president of Sisifo – the co-op runs other facilities as well – has been charged of fraud and ‘illicit profit’ of €468,280 because asylum seekers had been registered as ‘guests’ at the Centre in Sant’Angelo di Brolo (Sicily) after they got their residency permit.

<sup>16</sup> See [europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/other/l33170\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/other/l33170_en.htm) for details.

<sup>17</sup> It was extended even to ‘great events’, such as the construction of facilities for the FINA World Championship in Rome, 2009. In 2010, Franco Gabrielli, a former director of the SISDE (Intelligence and Democratic Security Service) became the head of the Civil Defence.

<sup>18</sup> “€101 million are designated to fulfil the accords with Tunisia which have been stipulated in April 2011, €197.4 million for necessary measures to cope with the emergency and finally €8 million for allowance of police forces and the fire department which assure public order” (lettera43, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> In contrast, images taken with the cellphones of *harraga* and which are widely distributed via YouTube, display liberation and agency against the deprivation of the freedom of movement (Friese, 2012).

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