

Human smuggling at the gates of Europe

- A case study on the diversities of human smuggling at the Italian island of Lampedusa

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Introduction

This article spans on a case study carried out on the Italian island of Lampedusa, an island that has become part of the feared imagery of “Fortress Europe”. I expand on observations and interviews with residents on Lampedusa and connect this material to the landing of 1200 smuggled migrants intercepted by Italian border patrols on March 14 2005, a landing happening when I stayed at the island. I report preliminary findings from a research project, a project exploring how distinct characteristics of human smuggling plays a crucial role in the lives of those residing on Lampedusa. The purpose of the project is to illustrate how Lampedusa has changed from an anonymous island to become an important migration location where among other the EU’s fight against illegal migration is waged. Entering into a full scale discussion on this matter here, is not the prime objective for this article, but plays a significant role. The case study primarily questions the meaning of state *borders*, and the role of human smuggling operations in relation to the nation-state’s right to regulate and defend its territories. The article is theoretically anchored within debates in the social sciences examining new state formations and how state sovereignty transforms under current global conditions (see Hardt & Negri 2000 & Kapferer 2005).

Exploring these matters in detail are not the main subject of, but I wish to cast light on distinct traits of human smuggling activities and acknowledge their cultural diversities, as they connect to local, but globalised realities on Lampedusa. The case study demonstrates that human smuggling to Europe is a human rights issue. I take side with Khalid Koser’s (2001:59), who claims that human smuggling is a migration matter as it is an human rights issue. Although the study of human smuggling is a new research field, especially with focus on the Mediterranean Sea, the cross-disciplinary approaches that frames the research field, remove vital approaches, as neglecting to see that human smuggling operations are integrated onto wider regional social structures (Kyle & Dale 2001:30). Studies are in a way prone to cut off cultural realities in which they are part of, as other approaches are provided the upper hand. One hardly encounters studies telling the tale of people who are unwillingly implicated in human smuggling operations, as researchers often underline the role of state aggressiveness and transnational mafia organizations.

This article is structured around the idea of exploring those who live at borders and experience human smuggling at their “doorstep”. I first begin with comments on methods, and thereafter underline the changing nature of the migration situation in Mediterranean, especially with focus on the complexities of human smuggling operations. I then briefly describe the changing face of the EU’s migration polices, which clearly has actualised human rights aspects, as non-Europeans are

increasingly meeting larger difficulties in entering the EU. I also apply this to the Italian reality, as the country's migration management strategies have made it tougher to be an immigrant. I then move to consider the migration situation on Lampedusa, and present local voices of those who experience human smuggling as a characteristic of their lives. I end the discussion with a contextualisation of border patrols activities on Lampedusa, activities as sign of heavy militarization of the island. The amending intentions with human smuggling to Lampedusa are accounted for last.

Research Methods

The findings here presented are based on a case study I conducted from March to April 2005, and reviews of relevant academic and journalistic literature on human smuggling activities in the Mediterranean Sea. During my stay on Lampedusa, it was impossible to speak with the detained migrants, as they are imprisoned at the transit centre for illegal migrants located on the island. Any attempt to interview them is declined by Italian authorities. My main intention has then been to generate academic knowledge on human smuggling, as they are valid on Lampedusa. I conversed with those who experience human smuggling as an event in their everyday life. I do emphasise the need to concentrate on other agents in the smuggling event, such as the media, NGOs that monitor the state's treatment of smuggled migrants. I have carried out interviews with Italians who work in the Italian Coastguard, a local historian, a hotel owner and two Lampedusians. I have also written extensive field notes and carried out ethnographic observations across the island.

The regional context - contesting human smuggling at borders

Migrations within the Mediterranean basin are a well-established phenomenon with long historical and socio-political implications, but are changing face because of new migration factors. Baldwin-Edwards (2004) argues that the Mediterranean Sea has been characterized as Europe's "Rio Grande", the famous river separating the developed U.S. from poor the Mexico. But this truth has become multifaceted for several reasons. Baldwin-Edwards identifies three major shifts in the region. First, the political landscape has transformed with the opening up of Albania and other former communist countries since 1991, and the inclusion of new Mediterranean countries into the EU such as Cyprus and Malta. Second, traditional regional migration patterns have almost been overtaken over by the use of North Africa, Turkey and Balkan countries as transit zones for more globalised migration patterns. Third, an imperative factor, the Southern European countries have had to adapt to tougher migration controls passed on by EU bodies and the maintenance of the Schengen Treaty. The interactions of these shifts have to be grasped in relation to other perspective as well. Several Mediterranean countries have experienced growth in new immigrant populations. In Spain, for example, the country's municipal register reveals that by 2003, the leading immigrant groups are no longer Moroccan, but Ecuadorian, followed by with high numbers of Colombians, Romanians, and Argentines. When Italy's immigrant legalization program of 2003 was carried out, on

the other hand, this resulted in a surprising 705,000 applicants of which 20 percent were Romanian, 15 percent Ukrainian, eight percent Albanian, and eight percent Moroccan (ibid.). These changes have indeed involved that Mediterranean countries are recognising themselves as receiving countries instead of transit zones for patterns of global migration flows, a cultural trait which is more than evident in Italy, for example (Cesareo 2005).

Behind these national admittances, however, human smuggling operations at state borders, in particular at sea, is the thorniest issue holding grip of the political agenda in various Southern European countries. In way, their social implications mostly direct national migration management processes and planning. The human smuggling activities at sea consumes political resources, and is a form of operation where rickety vessels are used to transport migrants over a relatively short distance from a distinct sender location in an African country to a receiver location somewhere along South European shores. Various national migration authorities have reacted to the situation differently, and have approached it since the 90s or perhaps earlier than that. The most common measures taken to combat the subject have been increased monitoring of sea borders and the signing of rejection agreements of undocumented migrants back to a transit country or their country of origin. Human smuggling renders stories of despair and its realities have actualised a humanitarian situation at the shores of the Mediterranean, a situation similar found in international conflict zones. This is foremost connected to the methods state agents employ to process smuggled migrants and the horrible tales from failed crossings and cases of abuse. Since 1992, for instance, more than 1000 migrants are reported drowned in failed crossings only at the Strait of Gibraltar.

The precise description of the situation is under public debate, and definitely effects island communities and countries with long sea borderlines. Although Baldwin-Edwards (ibid.) describes migrants who employ services offered by smugglers at sea for “boat migrants”, or unauthorised migrants, the numbers are small as far as interception are accounted for. According to statistics obtained by him, for 2003, 14.000 migrants were intercepted at Italy’s borders. In 2002, 11.000 boat migrants were arrested at Spanish borders and 4000 unauthorised migrants were stopped by Greek border patrols (ibid). On the other hand, such data should be regarded carefully, as they tend to be characterised by low compulsion rate. Other reports make different conclusions. In 2005, for example, a trip to Lampedusa conducted by a delegation from the European Parliament, estimated that roughly 15.000 migrants were intercepted each year at this entry point to Europe (EUL/NGL 2006). The regional migration patterns emerging from such a context, is that one observes networks of human smuggling routes manifesting across the Mediterranean Sea operating at distinct locations. In turn, their activities form particular *entry points* to Europe, and expose “gateways” or transit location to Europe, where human smuggling and border controls activities are dense. The cultural implications contribute constructing a border separating Europe from rest of the world.

An entry point is similar to that what Koser (2001:62) calls *illegal channel*, a migration concept suggesting to have formatted since the end of the 1990s. An illegal channel

refers to a mode of unintended political effect from tougher European asylum policies. Koser contends that “just as closing down labour migration channel forced economic migrants into asylum channels, increasing restrictions upon this asylum channel are now forcing asylum seekers into a new, illegal channel” (ibid.). Asylum seekers, economic migrants and other types of deprived people are increasingly forced to employ migration routes monopolized by smugglers and traffickers to enter a transit country or new host state. To a sense, through the migration routes in which they employ to migrate, they are rationally led to distinct smuggler locations, locations where smugglers, local populations, state agents and migrants interact in a type of globalised and criminalised migration economy.

The Greek Aegean islands close to Turkey, Crete, Malta, Cyprus, the Canary islands, and the Italian islands of Sicily, Pantellena, Linosa and Lampedusa, for example, are such sites where human smuggling is a baked part of local identities. As they are the “gateways to Europe”, the islands are as well compelled to handle human smuggling in relation to other factors. Such are dealing with other forms of commercial and global migrations, being Europe’s external border represented through the Schengen-agreement, and recognise the actualities of a humanitarian situation at their shores. Many of the mentioned islands depend on national and global tourism, as this economy constitutes an important way of living for local populations. This important economy often conflict with the controversial symbolisms connected to human smuggling, and state agents’ way of dealing with the matter. Some of the islands are heavily militarised and have large presences of military and police resources posted on them, resources which have surfaced as a result of tougher national and international policies to crack down on transnational mafia at state borders. Each of these islands has adjusted to the migration situation differently, and how state agents, smugglers and migrants relate to human smuggling is also diverse. It can be suggested that some of the island communities experience a relatively low influx of human smuggling activities, while others have endured the fatal imagery of “Fortress Europe”.

The activities that have transpired at the Spanish-Moroccan border over the last decades, for example, actualises a way of grasping the meaning of human smuggling operations in larger social contexts, especially to underline the diversified meaning of entry points. The borderline between the two countries generates large media attention, and epitomizes Néstor Rodríguez’s (1996) account of the U.S.-Mexican border, which he calls the “battle for the border”. The battle for the border, as Rodríguez sees it, involves comprehending the distinctions and methods employed between those who want to enter the U.S., the Mexicans, and the other part preventing them to fulfil it, the U.S. government. The weapons Mexicans use are mostly social, while the U.S. government defends itself with paramilitary and bureaucratic resources.

The central part of this battle is the attempts to regulate labour migration, and the Mexicans can claim to have won the battle so far. By the mid 1990s’, more than 7 million Mexicans had settled in the U.S. (Binational Study 1997). Most Mexicans have entered the country illegally through the help from a complex web of relationships

spanning the state border, and smugglers have played a crucial role in helping millions of Mexicans to fulfil their “crossover dreams” to the U.S. (Spener 2001:132). The counteroffensives the U.S. has lunched against Mexican migrants and smugglers, on the other hand, include the use of border police, population controls and technological surveillances. These are similar to the actions taken by Spanish authorities, which also protect their borders with paramilitary and bureaucratic instruments. The enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, and the Strait of Gibraltar, for example, are also hallmarks, as they are entry points to Europe, where a battle for the border is found.

African migrants attempt to enter these locations through the use of social weapons, and smugglers play an important role in assisting them, but Spanish authorities try to hold them off through their technological superiority. Here, the work of the anthropologist Henk Driessen (1998) is interesting, as he hints that one effect from the battle for the border at entry points involves a humanitarian situation, as state agents concentrate their resources there. As with poor Mexicans, the Africans Driessen met during his fieldwork in Tarifa, Spain, and Tangier, Morocco, in 1992, locations located at the Strait of Gibraltar, were labour migrants. These migrants want to be perceived as European citizens and have been part of the seasonal labour force that has migrated between the two countries for years, a research field approached by other researcher in great detail (see Castles & Miller 1993).

Many African migrants find work in constructions, agriculture and cleaning, but face difficulties when seeking housing, health and education. Being in a deprived situation, they gradually depended on social weapons to enter Europe. The migrants steer away from the regular channels used for applying for temporary residency. In the wake of Spanish authorities’ retaliations at the entry points, these migrants have had to develop new strategies to cross borders using almost the same social resources that have normally driven them. This has implied a renewed trust in the border and the possible smugglers who operate at there. But there is a price to pay, as interaction between state hostility, smugglers and failed crossings at entry points, shapes an unwanted effect – violence and human despair. As at the U.S.-Mexican borders, many Mexicans have died in failed attempts to cross the border or been apprehended by U.S. border patrols and returned to Mexico, actualising a human rights situation.

A similar situation is increasingly portrayed in Europe too. The activities at Europe’s borders, especially at the entry points, indicate that the battle for border transforms labour migration into a type of refugee and clandestine migration. Instead of calling this migration for “illegal”, Driessen suggests the term “new immigration” to “avoid an a priori stigmatisation of these people as criminals” (Driessen 1998:99). Since Driessen’s work, the new immigration has attracted interest among actors advocating for civil liberties and human rights in Europe. These actors react to state aggressiveness, and to the proliferation of Temporary Holding Centres for Migrants (THC), centres which have been constructed in vast numbers across Europe. This is an instrument that has started to dominate migration planning, and is employed as a direct measure at migrants trying to enter Europe. Many of them are found at state borders, being a firmly embedded part of the entry points. The THCs are under

serious critic due to that they violate fundamental freedoms, human rights, cases of violence and inhuman conditions. Regardless the conditions, the contextualisation pushes forward new approaches, as it is important to recognise that the diversities of human smuggling operations include human right issues and is part of larger political contexts.

“Fortress Europe” in the Mediterranean Sea - The Changing Political Context

The humanitarian situation at Europe’s external borders, must be grasped in context of changing migration policies that have surfaced following the signing of the Amsterdam agreement in 1997, several EU enlargements, administration of the Schengen Treaty, and related subjects dealing with migration management to Europe. Over the last ten to 15 years, this has provided life to institute Fortress Europe, a term which is used, *pejoratively*, about the EU to keep non-EU goods, businesses and nationals out of the Union’s realm. The dimensions of violence and human despair, seen as an unwanted outcome of the battle for the border, interconnects to the enforcing of the Schengen-agreement, and ascends as a flipside to those who show “disrespect for Europe” (Robins 1994:94) –migrants of non-European origins. Fortress Europe includes human right issues primarily because of human right organisations and left-centred politicians and organisations oppose to the measures which the Union has employed to protect its borders.

Except from the controversial holding centres, member states have intensified the monitoring of their borders with more border patrols, to suggestions of reducing development aid to transit or sender countries that do not fight illegal migration. The EU approaches migration in terms of war metaphors, as one identifies policies and initiatives that appraise movements of people according to entities the nation-state must “fight” and “detain” (Feldman 2004). The fight against illegal migration has materialized as a diffuse term which not only embraces the combating of smuggling and trafficking, but also drastically amends the right to asylum and refugee status (see Van der Klaauw 2002). Pressure on Europe’s external borders is questioning if the EU is undermining the asylum statute and agreements intended to protect those attempting to escape global violence, as implied by Alian Morice (2004). Migration policies are increasingly formed by bodies and law-enforcement institutions that deal with security issues, such as the EU Justice and Home Affairs. The price for a free and secure Europe involves repressive actions against undocumented migrants and refugees, and for EU-citizens, “freedom” means to travel and reside within territory of the Union, according to commentators (Hayes 2006). Increasing inequalities in welfare states produce social fear for an uncontrolled wave of migrants.

When turning to the national arena, the above context is identified, but human smuggling is regarded as part of the “illegal migration” framework. Considering Italy, human smuggling is understood equally as a matter that has to be viewed in terms of a human right issue and something that must be combated through the state’s apparatuses. Human smuggling corresponds to a notion of illegality, and runs along with recognition that Italy is no longer a transit country for migrations, but has instead changed into a destination site as the new millennium started. *The Tenth*

Italian Report on Migrations 2004 published by the Italian research institution *Fondazione Iniziative e Studi sulla Multietnicità* (ISMU) (2005), offers, surpassingly, little space to analyse the impacts on human smuggling on the Italian society, as ten years of immigration to Italy is analysed in the volume. A crucial observation pointed out from the informative report, however, is that through the 90s there has been an increase in the number of laws and regulations aimed at regulating inflows of migration to Italy.

The revision of existing migration laws have been characterised according to “emergency” logics, a statement indicating that Italy has been caught off-guard and has had to respond rapidly to regain control over a migration pressure at state borders (see Codini 2005). Due to that migrants are coming to the country in larger numbers before, this has generated a political need to enforce laws on tougher levels to deal with immigration. To encounter answers and solutions are equally important, and among them are the problems associated with human smuggling - and with it has involved re-thinking of migration management. This regards both planning and implementation of migration management processes, and implemented laws are aimed at protecting those allegedly exploited from human smuggling and punish the smugglers. National and regional governments are supposed to cooperate in larger degree than before to secure a sense of control over the migration situation, and combat ethnic mafia organisations. But one of the forged claims explaining the need for altering migration planning relates to the migration processes themselves. From 1991, the Italian society has had to deal with the despair of various people and conflicts: the influx of Albanese, the civil war of the 90s at the Balkans, the Kosovo-conflict. In part, these factors have played a role in the development of expulsion methods and normative framework forming migration management.

The interesting aspect is that the introduced migration laws are contradictory - they both *provide* and increasingly *punish* those who are supposed to be ascribed rights. Of the migration laws passed on in the Italian parliament, immigrants have been provided rights and obligations visa-a-versa the Italian-nation state. This regards the acknowledgement of refugee status, entry regulations for non-EU citizens and seasonal workers, and periodical amnesties. But in contrast to this, an impressive expulsion regime has as well emerged from the law-making process, a rejection system threatening to undermine the rights granted to immigrants in the first place. The dispositions and compositions of migration flows are employed as a leading argument explaining why there is a governmental need for rejection systems. The rejection systems that first emerged in Italy are related to the informal human smuggling economies that emerged in the wake of the Civil War on the Balkans, the Kosovo-conflict, and the collapse of Communism.

These informal economies indeed have the potential to become counterhegemonic practices as they transgress and transcend state borders and challenge the state’s “propaganda, rules and surveillance”, as Caroline Staudt (1998:161) notes. As human smuggling became a reality, and ethnic mafia organisations were said to be the wrongdoers, rejection systems have built up across the Italian border at land and sea.

In turn, to return smuggled migrants back to their country of origin and crack down on informal economics have been the state mission. Italian authorities have constructed several holding centres for undocumented migrants, and signed several return agreements since the beginning of the 1990s, meaning a new pillar in migration planning. A controversial one was signed with Lybia in 2002, an agreement that has been renewed in 2004 involving closer collaboration between Italian and Libyan police and constructions of THCs in Lybia. This forms one strategy where migration planning attempts to reduce migration within the territory of other countries, but also indicates how the EU's member states redefined their borders. One effect with the blending of state aggressiveness and informal economy activities is the formatting of "entry points" for migration patterns (see Delicato 2004). Entry points are migration locations where human movements is delineated as "irregular", and severs as locations where migration is attempted stopped or rigidly controlled by state agents. One is found on Lampedusa.

At the border - Entering Lampedusa

Just after arriving Lampedusa midways trough March 2005, my host during the field trip and important informant, Giovanni, a hotel owner and Lampedusian in his mid '40s, explained to me about the arrival of 1200 smuggled migrants intercepted by Italian border police on 14 of March 2005. When I was picked up by Giovanni at the island's airport, and we headed for his apartments, he accounted for the matter that was on everybody's tongues. Within the last 48 hours, the island which regarded as part of African territories but falls under the jurisdiction of the Italian nation-state, experienced an influx of smuggled migrants, migrants who later would be readmitted to Lybia or flown to other holding centres for immigrants located on the Italian mainland. The arrest was not a new sight, as Lampedusians and the Italian public had seen similar events many times before. Luckily, none of the smuggled migrants, or, *cladenstinis*, as they are named in Italian, drowned in the crossing from somewhere in Lybia to Lampedusa's shore.

The interception was one of the largest single arrests at sea on record in Italy. In the Sicilian Canal, Italian border patrols boarded six old unsteady boats and escorted them ashore to the Lampedusian port. Each boat, which had Arabic writings on in the bow, was packed with *cladenstinis* on board. According to pictures taken by the Italian Customs Service, *La Guardia di Finanzia*, roughly 150 to 200 migrants with different nationalities had doughtily challenged their lives during the crossing. The employed boats for the smuggling operations had no roof and measured from 15 to 20 meters, and were built in wood and painted in blue. The passengers were sparsely dressed, and had little warm clothing to block out the low night temperatures common in the Mediterranean spring. The interception certainly generated large media interest, and national journalists from different branches reported live on television and radio or trough extensive news stories published the following day in local, regional and national newspapers. To the media institutions, the interception was a media event immensely coloured with a dramatic texture, where reporters competed to portray the incident from different angles. An overt focal point, for example, was directed at the managing of the smuggled migrants, which often

embodied state agents' registration and transportation of helpless *cladenstinis* to the THC.

Giovanni is one of the 5300 Lampedusians who has become an observer to human smuggling at his doorstep, and exemplifies one illustration of the people who are unwillingly mixed up in it. His experience is an ambivalent and emotional one, and the landing of the 1200 *cladenstinis* is an event he has observed many times before. Giovanni is subtly connected to the phenomenon in two distinct ways, where he on the one side, benefits from the many border patrol officers who live temporary at his hotel resort combating the violations of Italian sovereignty, while he on the other hand, seems to sympathize with the detained *cladenstinis* in the holding centre for migrants located on airport's territory. Giovanni originates from Lampedusa and has most of his life lived on the "blue pearl". Lampedusa is in local tourist promotion displayed as *il blau perle*, the blue pearl, and has taken the turtle as the island's symbol. Only interrupted by a couple years stay on Sicily and abroad, in Spain, Giovanni has managed to construct an impressive self-run hotel business aimed at the expanding national tourism. Although his home island is defined as Europe's most southern point within the Mediterranean Sea, and is situated about 220 km south of Sicily, and 120 km east of Tunisia, the geographically isolated nature of the island - Lampedusa is only accessible by air or sea - has not prevented him from forming his outlooks. To him, the phenomenon in which the *cladenstinis* are an integral part of, constitutes an off-putting image to the island. He explains:

"The matter is not viewed positively, and people here don't like this idea of being a "passage" for African migration to Italy or other European countries. This passage is a "no" to tourism. The people who come here on vacations, do not like to embrace this image of Lampedusa as an island overcrowded of cladenstinis, an image which the media has created of Lampedusa." (Interview March 2005)

Giovanni refers to a larger social context. The cultural implications of having human smuggling at their doorstep, has involved a radical transformation of Lampedusa to a passageway or entry point where the flows of illegal migration to Italy and Europe go through. This picture generates potential tension and the island's inhabitants wrestle with two types of cultural representations of local identities - one in which they control, while the other concerns an image ascribed on them by global forces and conditions. The conflicting dualities of local identities are in many ways similar to Fredrik Barth's (1969) concept of ethnic boundaries and their functions. According to Barth, the factors defining an ethnic group were not a complete inventory of cultural traits, but the boundaries constructed through "self-ascription" as criteria of membership, where individuals select to employ a few cultural attributes as the "overt signals or signs", which form the constituting unit. The self-representation or "overt signs" of Lampedusa, which Giovanni alludes to, is that the business which he is part of, wish to commune to Italian mainlanders - who largely constitute the national tourist - a representation of the island as a type of chill-out-place from the metropolitan stress.

Such symbols include the communing of Lampedusa as a beautiful Mediterranean pearl located in blue water and an emphasis on the astonishing maritime wildlife to be found there, wildlife which is protected under Italian law. Lampedusa represents a type of paradise, and few traces of violence and human despair is to be found there. But as large parts of the island's population work in the tourist business - and as other alternatives for work prospects reside with fishing, construction, service business, and the public sector - the Lampedusians economically depend on national tourists from the industrial north to stay their during the tourist season and spend their money there. As fishing, however, has been in economic decay for several years, the constant reminders in national media that the island is a crime scene for human smuggling, is an external and imposed representation of the island they do not control. And this constitutes a moral dilemma. On the one hand, it is claimed that tourism is exceedingly vulnerable to the constant and damaging reminders that the island is passage for African migration to Europe, while on the other hand, this picture tells to the globalised world about Lampedusa's existence. Tales of human smuggling is most likely to drive away potential tourists and the island can possible experience a rapid economic downfall. But these postulations are likely invalid, as national tourism is increasingly growing in large scales. Social actors which travel to Lampedusa to report and document the reality of human smuggling activities, such as NGOs, the press, in a way, provides exposure to Europe and the rest of the world about Lampedusa's life.

Another powerful implication and local experience of human smuggling activities, is the emotion of being part of Europe's external borders. Lampedusa is per definition not only a borderland where Italian sovereignty is protected and maintained, but also the national sovereignties of several EU-member states interconnected to the Schengen-agreement are at stake too. To a certain degree, the border activities provides interesting inputs to embrace the rapid and contentious Europeanization processes of Italian culture and society, especially what regards resistance on grass root levels against the EU and Italian involvements (see Shore 2000). When setting foot on the island, there are little explicit signs or activities indicating that one is strolling the gates of "Fortress Europe". No European flags are found, for instance, and the border patrols employ signs and symbols from the various branches Italian police forces. Lampedusa is strictly the opposite to Europe - it is Italian territory. The significance of a European border is articulated culturally, and materializes trough critical discourse - a female informant explains:

"Europe has forgotten Lampedusa. Let's face it - first, Lampedusa is the door to Europe, and second, what we got here is a humanitarian situation represented trough the different people who have arrived here in their distinct ways, people which are returned to Lybia and we don't know what happen with them there." (Interview March 2005)

In the Italian nation-state's attempts to define and redefine its outer limits in context of fighting human smuggling, informants hint that the government's measures taken to deal with it, mainly is a battle to concentrate the matter on Lampedusa and have it

firmly blocked there. In contrast, there have been suggestions of more military resources, but such initiatives have been turned down by the Lampedusian in among other referendums. In 2004, for example, the suggestion of extending the receiver capacity at the holding centre from 200 to 500 places was turned down by the Lampedusians. Such actions generate a clear mistrust in governmental bodies, especially against the Italian and European ones. Lampedusians display themselves to “suffer” from state incompetence and feel forgotten by central authorities.

The militarization of Lampedusa - Border police functions and the THC

Lampedusa has become one of many entry points to Italy and Europe where human smuggling activities are attempted blocked decisively by state agents. The island, however, enters into a larger geographic construct of human smuggling routes, which in fact, includes a distinct part of the Mediterranean region – the Sicilian Canal. The Sicilian Canal constitutes several entry points, and forms a complex network of human smuggling routes and lugs different islands into a community which displays itself to suffer from criminal border activities – and in it, Lampedusa plays a vital part. Sicily, Linosa, Malta and Pantelleria, for example, are entry points to Europe as they well are islands claimed to suffer from criminal border operations. Human smuggling to Pantelleria is professed to be marginal, as few interceptions are on record there. In an interview I conducted with the head officer for the Italian Custom Service on Lampedusa, he stated that few apprehensions are registered there.

During my field trip, nonetheless, between 15 to 20 migrants were picked up by Italian border police, where six or seven of them were found in lifeless condition with Chinese origins. To the officer, this was the first incident where migrants with Asian nationalities were encountered in the sea next to Lampedusa. Sicily and Malta, on the other hand, are essential routes, and according to data obtained by Baldwin-Edwards (2004), in 2003, roughly 1700 migrants were intercepted by the Maltese coastguard, for example. The majority of the migrants, conversely, depart from the Libyan coast and their main destination is the Agrigento shore, which means that in most cases they head for Lampedusa. Lybia is often depicted as a transit country, and the majority of the migrants come from Egypt, the Horn of Africa, West Africa, and Indian sub-continent, which in turn make human smuggling to Lampedusa to form of African/Asian migration route. Migration flows from Tunisia follows the same route, and involves migrants from the Maghreb (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco), and to a lesser extent, migrants from the Sub-Saharan Africa. The nature of such features has entailed a build-up of border police patrolling the Sicilian Canal. At Lampedusa, the border build-up is a militarization, and manifests paramilitary means found in state campaigning against human smuggling.

Across the island, one quickly runs into classes of police and military installations having posters notifying the public to stay away. It also explains to bypassers the potential risks of being indicted by authorities if the locations and intentions with these installations are revealed. There is always police or military officers who are either strolling the streets or heading somewhere in police or military cars. The fence is thus a strange symbol separating and explaining bypassers the existence of

military and police territories within the Italian nation-state itself. At strategic locations, the different agents of the Italian state have created off-limit locations, and such are found at the port and the airport where they conduct their deeds. The techniques employed by state agents in the managing of human smuggling operations, follow a three-divided process where they intercept, detain and reject migrants from Italian territories. I will comment on the detention routines at the transit centre later in this section.

The Italian Customs service, *La Guardia di Finanzia*, however, is the branch of the state operating outside the shores of Lampedusa in search for smuggled migrants, and performs the interception functions. The *Guardia di Finanzia* is assisted by the Italian coastguard, but largely, conduct the patrolling by themselves. They employ modern technologies such as radars, video surveillance equipment and helicopters. The Custom Service is according to Italian law allowed to operate about 100 to 180 nautical miles exterior to Lampedusa. When a vessel is encountered with smuggled migrants on board, one of the first assignments awaiting is to establish identity of intercepted ship, and to register passengers. The officers first target the captain of the boarded ship, but seldom there is a captain or navigator on board. This is completed with the aim of attaining connections to smuggler networks, as the identity of the captain is most likely to be in league with them. But rarely do they find them. The illicit boats are brought to the Lampedusian port where registration is carried out, and the detention routines start. The passengers are asked for age, sex and nationality, or any kind of document that can distinguish national origins. But the smuggled migrants lie on national identity in order to obtain refugee rights and aver rejection from Italy. It is thus common to destroy travel documents prior to interception. At the port, alternatively, a complete scenario is staged, as other state agents enter the detention process. Men in various types of uniform dominate the port picture, and Italian media, by routine, has managed to enter the island's port and has commenced with direct reporting from the migration scene.

However, the press coverage depends entirely on the scale of the interception. The national military police *Carabinieri*, the domestic police, *La Policia*, and other arms of the military sections that function at sea, land and air are also involved. Depending on the severity of an interception, the migrants are provided with essential medical care, provisions and other type of assistances. The next step in the detention process is transportation of the smuggled migrants to the THC, where they can be detained for maximally 30 days, according to Italian law (see Codini 2005). The *Carabinieri* is the arm of the state which guards the migrants at the THC, but this task force is also assisted by the *Guardia di Finanzia*. After this, commences the rejection practice of smuggled migrants from Italian and European territories. The various readmission agreements which the Italian government has signed with Libyan authorities include among other the implementation of an air bridge that transports smuggled migrants back to Lybia. But migrants are also transported to other THCs located at various places in Italy. Normally, the Italian Air Force participates in this work with use of Hercules aircrafts. When these are not employed, commercial aircrafts are chartered to conduct the repatriation of migrants.

Despite the paramilitary actions, the presence of the holding centre for illegal migrants has actualised a humanitarian situation and displays the significance of the nation-state's methods of protecting its borders against migrations. This THC on Lampedusa has emerged as one of the most notorious ones in Italy and Europe. Its existence manifests the import of having human right approaches in studies of human smuggling operations at borders. The centre lately has been under considerable criticism from human right organisations, politicians and other actors contending it to be an institution embezzling basic human freedom. There is little or no public knowledge to what happens inside the THC, as it is off-area to the public. Except from the *cladenstinis* who have been detained there, they generally tell stories about abuse. As a note for this article, for example, obtaining stories from detained migrants was difficult during fieldwork, as any requests to interview them were declined by officials. Finding firm documentations, which reports independently on the conditions inside the THC, is even more difficult. But a few stories provide insight as a start. The mystique the THC generates, though, produces certain mandate to various people to undertake hazardous deeds to ascertain the truth and inform the public. This was the case with the courageous Italian journalist Fabrizio Gatti.

Gatti is a reporter for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, and has since 1991 dedicated himself to reveal the truths connected to prostitution, human smuggling and black labour in his homeland. With background in investigative journalism, this led him to Lampedusa in 2005, where he disclosed the activities inside the THC. To do so, he jumped into the sea exterior to the shores of Lampedusa, where he was intercepted by Italian border police that patrols this area every day. Here he pretended being a Kurdish refugee, and as the police did not recognise him, he was transferred to the island for listing at the holding centre. Next, the trip went to the THC, where he was detained for eight days. At the THC, Gatti had to undress for national police. The THC had not been cleaned for weeks, and the stench of urine came from everywhere. With a formal capacity for 186 persons, at the time Gatti was there, approximately 600 *cladenstinis* were in custody. In the wake of Gatti's disclosures, Italian politicians demanded the THC to be closed instantly. But the outburst in which the reporter caused is in fact nothing new, as the THC has been criticised by NGOs for having inhumane conditions. NGOs such as Doctors without Borders and Amnesty International, have pointed out, long before Gatti's arrival, that the THCs violate human right agreements.

In contrast to Gatti's journalistic and sensational account, other official sources depict a similar, but modest version. According to a report submitted by a delegation from the European Parliament's Justice and Home Affairs, a delegation that visited the centre in July 2005, interesting data can be considered (EUL/NGL 2006). The imperative concerns and arguments expressed by the delegation, is to challenge if the THC violates international and European laws protecting refugees and human rights. The allegations presented by the delegation, contended that the conditions were inhuman, while Italian authorities, on the other hand, averred that treaties were respected. The delegation indicated, among other, that medical treatments were laboured, migrants had signed legal documents which did not understand the

implications of, documents telling arrival and departures dates for migrants were tampered with, and previous to the delegation's arrival, 700 persons were transported off the island to unknown destinations, according to the delegation.

The delegation's conclusions states that the living conditions were improper and authorities had not shown enough transparency in providing access to documents certifying the legal situation of the detained persons. The report, in other words, demonstrates a contesting of reality - while the delegation sees the detained people as refugees, Italian migration authorities, on the other hand, see them as economic migrants or illegal migrants. Although the THC was established in 1998, the centre is conveyed as a place "surrounded by an enclosure made of metal grills and a large amount of barbed wire, like a military zone (ibid.:28). The centre is legitimate as it is a result of migration laws passed on the Italian parliament during the 1990's (see Cesareo 2005). The legal apparatuses connected to managing of the centre derive from the "Bossi-Law" of 2002, a law which seems to provide officials more power to expel migrants.

The THC is by principal a centre where migrants are hold for a short period of time, and functions as a tool to reduce or manage smuggled migrants, or "illegal migrants", which is the preferred term used by Italian authorities. It functions as a migration instrument which orders migrants' status and classifies individuals who can claim refugee rights, asylum seeker candidates, and rejects those who belong to other categories qualifying for expulsion. Since most of those arriving Lampedusa either have no documents or hold false papers, large efforts are invested into finding out who the migrants really are. Various means are used to accomplish the task, but this work starts after the migrants have been transported from the port to the THC. When detained, migrants are given a medical check, and receive clothing, cigarettes and telephone cards. After this, the ascertaining process of migrant's identities beings.

Interviews with interpreters are used to classify migrants' nationalities, and when officials are uncertain about nationality, assumed national characteristics are used to categorise migrant's national identity. All persons who arrive at Lampedusa have to be fingerprinted using a high-tech ink-free scanner system. Asylum seekers' fingerprints are sent to the Eurodoc system, whereas those of other arrival remain with the Italian authorities. The delegation expressed their concerns and doubts that a person's identity can be established after a meeting lasting only a few minutes and depending entire on the person's accent and skin colour. The THC, according to Italian authorities, is not an identification centre for asylum seekers. It works as an institution which rejects, and, in a way, only informs about migrants' right to claim asylum in Italy. To the delegation's surprise, authorities stated that almost all migrants who arrive at the centre are Egyptians.

The interception which occurred during my field, for example, of the 1235 smuggled migrants, 421 expressed their intentions to claim asylum, while 494 were sent back to Libya and 126 repatriated to Egypt (EUL/NGL 2006:27). But in contrast to an interview I conducted with the head of the *La Guardia di Finanzia*, the 10.000 to 15.000

migrants who stay at the centre each year, have origins on and off the African continent. The figures supplied to the delegation from Italian authorities, indicate that in 2004, 10.497 people stayed at the centre, all of them men, except from 412 minors and 309 women (ibid.:26). The average daily detained migrants were between 300 to 400 migrants, but on certain days in the summer, up to a thousand were detained at the centre, meaning outdoor sleeping for several migrants. The average length of a stay is between four and five days, and the day-to-day administration of the centre, in terms of regular maintenances, is carried out by an NGO named Misericordia, an NGO providing basic assistance such as providing distribution of meals, water, and first aid treatment where necessary. In sum, the costs for air tickets and other technical expenses in 2004 used in the running of the THC, amounted to € 21 326 000 (ibid.:28).

The traits with these reports illustrating the contention that human smuggling is a human rights issue is identified in the measures employed to treat the detained migrants. The detained migrants have been *smuggled* directly into the THC, a point often missing from accounts. The existence of the THC, and the conditions inside and around it, and the direct threat of deportation of migrants to Lybia, a country claimed to undermine democracy and human right, and so forth, implies that the militarization of Lampedusa has generated a humanitarian situation at Europe's external borders.

The nature of smuggling to Lampedusa

To address the nature of human smuggling operations to Lampedusa, this must be seen in context of the border patrol economy in the Sicilian Canal. To a certain extent, the meanings and intentions with human smuggling operations raise question if one is identifying a distinct form of smuggling activities characteristic for the Sicilian Canal. Compared to the human smuggling motions at the US-Mexican border, for example, which Peter Andreas (2001:108) divides into three types, that of self-smuggling, the local individual smuggling entrepreneurs, the "coyotes", to the organised and sophisticated transnational smuggling networks, human smuggling to Lampedusa is different. I argue that it seems to be a blending of the first and last types described by Andreas, nonetheless, a maritime form of human smuggling made up self-smuggling and transnational smuggling networks.

As I indicated earlier in the article, human smuggling operations in the Sicilian Canal are distinct maritime events where former fish boats are employed to transport people from either Tunisia or Libyan to Lampedusa. A crossing in itself is characterised by overfilled fish boats constructed in wood, and the boats employed measure from ten to 15 meters. A crossing normally takes about 24 hours to complete. Rarely do the boats have any roof for shelter in case of bad weather conditions, and hardly any toilets are also found on board. A boat can be filled with 100 to 200 persons, meaning a dangerous play with human life. Crossings happen several times a year, but depending on organizational aspects, everything from 50 up to about 1700 migrants on board have been reported intercepted by Italian border patrols. One large crossing occurred from 29 September to the 8 October 2004, for

example, when 1787 migrants were smuggled directly to Lampedusa. 544 claimed asylum and were transferred to other holding centres in Italy, while 1553 were repatriated directly to Libya on 11 chartered flights, all of them believed to be Egyptians (EUL/NGL 2006:27).

In the middle of October 2003, in contrast, a boat with about 80 migrants on board was said to have dumped 50 bodies into the sea. Several of the migrants on board died because of starvation or froze to death. Most of these ones came from the civil war zone in Somalia, and started the crossing in October. Without a captain to navigate, the boat lost course and drifted for 17 days ending in a tragedy. In other words, many crossings are not on record, and statistics on human smuggling are rarely correct or characterised by slow compulsion rate. But there is a distinct pattern with them, as more interceptions occur at summer than winter, for example. When a boat is intercepted, since the last interception, one or two months have normally passed.

One trait with human smuggling to Lampedusa is that it is argued that one does not know the identities of smugglers. The smugglers are claimed to operate from the shores of Libya and Tunisia, and seem to concentrate their resources of directing the transport of migrants largely to Lampedusa, seldom to other islands located in the Sicilian Canal. The high number of smuggled migrants only to Lampedusa, can suggest such a claim. As there are few interceptions registered from Linosa and Pantelleria, the intentions with the human smuggling is to transport migrants to Lampedusa, and perhaps, only to this destination. And this is interesting. While smugglers either operate at both sides of borders or guide migrants from sender to receiver locations, this border entrepreneur business seems to profit from only *sending* or shipping migrants into the hands of the Italian border patrols. This trademark demonstrates the specialisations of maritime human smuggling, where its clients have non-European, can reach their destination sites in Italy through the help from Italian state agents.

Transportation goes through the state apparatuses, for example, and as migrants claim asylum and are transported to other holding centres in Italy by state agents with possibilities to be released, the human smuggling operation can be seen as a success – when seen from the smugglers' perspective. This suggests that human smuggling operations and border patrol economies are fairly integrated and subsidise each others' existences. According to sources in the Italian border police units, however, some facets remain definite. Since there is no captain or navigator, here grasped as guide, who follows the passengers on board – a trait which seems to be valid for most of the crossings on record, the migrants are left to themselves to find the sea way to Lampedusa. And from there, they have to travel through state violence as manifested in the THC to reach their destination location. Informants state that the people who engage into smuggling must be motivated by the large number of money that can be made from it. One smuggled migrant stated to a Norwegian reporter that he paid \$ 1200 for a crossing.

Contrasted against the type of smugglers who operate on the Tex-Mex border, to the objective of the smugglers operating in the Sicilian Canal is simply to smuggle to Lampedusa. Whereas Spener (2001:135) shows that smugglers offers a wide range of services with different qualities in return for monetary payment, the nature of payment for a crossing from Lybia trough the Sicilian Cannel indicates something different. In a way, the smuggled migrant is a smuggler him/herself, when considering the nature of payment and recruiting of passengers to a crossing. When there are no interceptions, this suggests recruiting of migrants take place in Lybia. This is likely done to create lager profits, and to facilitate the organisational part of crossings. When I interviewed a represent from the Italian border police, he underlined to me that not only the smugglers participate in the recruitment of clients, but also the potential passengers themselves partake. This is probably conducted as migrants who can recruit enough clients at sender location are not charged for a crossing. To a sense, the smuggled migrant is a smuggler too. It seems difficult to determine if smugglers are operating at individual or in larger organisations, but they are significantly professionalized. The smuggling is strictly commercial, similar to that on the Tex-Mew border (Andreas 2001:137-138), as smugglers in Lybia appear to serve a large clientele consisting of different nationalities. The different type of nationalities in which the anonymous smugglers send from the Libyan shore, suggests that smugglers do not transport kinfolk. On the contrary, it might be the other way around. They are rather transnational, and it might be that these smuggling enterprises are integrated in larger transnational networks known to exist across Africa.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to explore the cultural diversities of human smuggling as they manifest on the Italian island of Lampedusa. I have attempted to demonstrate that human smuggling is both a human rights issue and a migration issue. I have focused on those who are unwillingly implicated in human smuggling operations, as this article is structured around the idea of seeing the matter from their perspectives. I first began with comments on methods, and thereafter underlined the changing nature of the migration situation in Mediterranean. I briefly described the changing face of the EU's migration polices, which clearly have actualised a human rights aspect, as non-Europeans met lager difficulties in entering the EU legally. Its relevance in Italy was also accounted for. I then moved on to consider the migration situation on Lampedusa, and presented local voices of those who experience human smuggling as a characteristic of their everyday lives. The article ended with a contextualisation of the border patrols activities and the holding centre for migrants, and I accounted for the changing nature of smuggling operations to Lampedusa.

NOTES

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^[2] See <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/>

^[3] My translation. The interviews were recorded in Italian, and I have translated them to English.

^[4] My translation.

^[5] See the Italian newspaper L'Espresso. Web-link:
<http://www.espressonline.it/eol/free/jsp/detail.jsp?idCategory=4821&idContent=1129502&m2s=a>.

^[6] See Verdens Gang 20/100/2003.

^[7] See Dagbladet: <http://www.dagbladet.no/magasinet/2004/10/08/410749.html>

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