

**People at the Gates of Tomorrow:  
Challenging Social Anti-Immigration Perceptions in  
Lampedusa**

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## **Table of Content**

### **Acknowledgment**

### **I. Abstract**

### **II. Introduction**

### **III. Research Methodology**

- **An ethnographic approach**
- **Structured Interviews**

### **IV. The social psychology of anti-immigrant prejudices and stereotypes**

- a. **Fortress Europe**
- b. **Prejudice**
- c. **Stereotypes**
- d. **Examples of common anti-immigration stereotypes**

### **V. Racism in Italy: A Political and Legal Discourse**

### **VI. Empirical Analysis**

1. **The island that does not exist”<sup>1</sup> – Lampedusa, a case study**
2. **'The Black Lady' – the destructive role of the Italian Mass Media in the construction of social perceptions**
  - a. *Cronaca Nera*
  - b. **Security**
  - c. **Provincial Information**
3. **Empirical Facts: perceptions, views and attitudes of Lampedusians**
  - **Theme I: “Journalists have destroyed the island” - The Role of mass media**
  - **Theme II: Theme 2: “A crisis created by the government.” – The role of the Berlusconi administration in the manufacturing of a humanitarian crisis.**
  - **Theme 3 :solidarity over racism**

### **VII. Conclusion**

### **VIII. Bibliography**

### **IX. Appendix**

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## **Acknowledgements.**

I would like to thank Dr. David Cantor for his tenacious patience, extremely valuable advice and for always reminding that I needed a structure. This paper would not have been possible without him. I would also like to thank Riccardo Noury and Giusy d'Alconzo, Press Officer and Director of Communication for Amnesty International Italy, for the wealth of information they have supplied me with me. Thank you also to all of my fellow course mates, who have been precious guides and have made this last year an unforgettable experience. Thank you also to my parents and grandmother who have extremely important sources of trust and comfort. And lastly, thank you to the people of Lampedusa, for their precious stories, experiences and food, and for showing me that solidarity, humanity and compassion still exist.

## I. Abstract

Studies show that western attitudes towards immigrants, asylum-seekers or refugees are becoming increasingly negative, even though the benefits of immigration have been demonstrated.

The aim of this dissertation is to address the issue of social perceptions about immigrants and asylum-seekers and whether they are true in the case of Lampedusa, an Italian island off the coast of Sicily which has been described as the main entry point for illegal immigration into Europe. Always a major port for migrants from the North African coast, it has since the beginning of the unrests in the Middle East, experienced unprecedented influxes of illegal immigrants and has been portrayed by the national and international media as being on the verge of collapse.

The research starts off by looking at the social psychology of negative perceptions, i.e. prejudices and stereotypes and analysing some of its most recurrent examples. What are the reasons and sources behind the conception of such attitudes?

And finally, in order to create an honest and satisfactory research, a 12 day long field research trip to Lampedusa took place, in order to experience the situation and talk with those whose voice has been heard the least in the news, the people from Lampedusa. Finally, the study has found that recurrent negative perceptions that have been identified to apply to most western nations, do not necessarily apply in the case of Lampedusa. What exactly these are and what the other findings have shown will be explored in this paper.

## II. Introduction

Since January 2011 the small southern Italian island of Lampedusa has been experiencing an unprecedented wave of illegal immigration coming from the African continent and bringing it to the verge of a collapse. An island with an area of less than 7.7 square miles, images of Lampedusa submerged by mass landings have been broadcast worldwide. It has overtaken Greece as the main gateway for illegal immigration into Europe<sup>2</sup> and prompted the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to declare an immigration crisis in February 2011.<sup>3</sup>

Both the Italian and international media have however rarely investigated how the inhabitants of the island were experiencing the situation and have restricted their reporting to statements by government forces and representatives. Yet, if the images aired are a portrayal of the every-day reality that Lampedusians are confronted with, they must have opinions and perceptions about the state of the island as well as about the theme of immigration. These questions are even more pertinent when we specifically take into account the happenings between the months of February and March, which represented the peak of the immigration crisis. These months were marked by the presence of over 6000 stranded immigrants for a local population of 5000.<sup>4</sup>

Research has shown that most of the ideas western societies have about asylum-seekers are negative.<sup>5</sup> To what extent does this apply to Lampedusians, and what are their views on the situation? This paper will aim to address these issues. Its main objective is to document the social perceptions of immigrants that are shared by the islanders as opposed to current mainstream perceptions. The paper will first look at the meaning of negative perceptions; it will focus particularly on the idea of prejudice and stereotype and expose three of the most recurrent immigration stereotypes. Since immigrant perceptions are predominantly negative, the paper will then turn to look at the Berlusconi administration by analysing current immigration policies. **The aim of this chapter is to emphasise the decline of Italian immigration laws as evidence and confirmation of negative perception.**

**Comment [JS1]:** The aim of what? The final section on Berlusconi or the whole thesis/dissertation?

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<sup>2</sup> Financial Times, 'Italy: main gateway for illegal immigration into Europe' 12 February 2011 <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8df0d02c-96bb-11e0-baca-00144feab49a.html#axzz1WKsRtrIT>

<sup>3</sup> Blitz News Locali 'Immigrazione, Berlusconi firma ordinanza' 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011 <http://news.blitzquotidiano.it/hercole-notizie-cronaca-emergenza-1588150/>

<sup>4</sup> In March 2011 an Amnesty International delegation visited Lampedusa during the peak of what was defined by the government a 'humanitarian crisis'. The mission stated that the conditions on the island were appalling and many had not been provided the most basic humanitarian assistance such as shelter, blankets or medical check-up.

<sup>5</sup> This statement will further be explored in detail in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of this paper

Central to the arguments made in this thesis is the empirical data chapter. It examines the results of the data that was collected during the field research period in Lampedusa and will aim to answer the following questions:

- What has been the role of the Italian mass media in the creation of the so-called “immigration crisis”?
- What was the media further contribution to the creation of negative perceptions in Italy?
- What are the social perceptions held by Lampedusians?
- Do these adhere to the general views held by the wider society or are they different?

**Comment [JS2]:** Don't use this word, I feel it has negative connotations. Be confident, use phrases like “an important section of this thesis is” or “central to the arguments made in this thesis is the empirical data which can be found in section...x...” “following this” “the final section” “the empirical analysis chapter” etc etc.

### III. Research Methodology

To understand the complexities of what is happening in social situations it is necessary to employ an ethnographic approach, which 'captures and records the voices of lived experience ... contextualises experience ... goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances ... presents details, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another'<sup>6</sup>

**Comment [JS3]:** I would use first person.... Instead say "To understand the complexities of what is happening in social situations, it is necessary to employ an enthno....."

To comply with the nature of the paper and in order to present a truthful, authentic and well-researched analysis, the author has travelled to Lampedusa between the 23 July and the 5<sup>nd</sup> August 2011. The first 7 days were spent taking part to the Amnesty International summer camp for human rights. The camp's main objective was to give participants the opportunity to understand the current circumstances on the island by allowing them to build their own opinion of the situation.<sup>7</sup>

**Comment [JS4]:** GOOD!

The remaining days were used to conduct structured interviews with members of the local community whilst getting to know practices and customs.

The Amnesty International camp offered easier access to many local and international NGO representatives working on the island. The timetable of the week was structured around meetings, lectures, film screenings and informal discussions on the subject of immigration. Since the relevant literature on the subject is limited, the first week was also used as a means to gather general information about Lampedusa, such as some key elements on its historical background and on the history of immigration.

**Comment [JS5]:** Label?

In contrast, the remaining days gave the researcher the opportunity to gather information on the social conditions of the islanders and their views on the immigration phenomenon on the island.

**Comment [JS6]:** Events? Situation? Refugee phenomenon... happenings is too vague I think.

This study was conducted between the dates of 23.07 – 05.08, and data collected is not representative of an in-depth analysis of the nation-wide social perceptions of immigrants in Italy. The importance of the research however, is in this study's empirical research undertaken in the location of Lampedusa, on the front line of illegal immigration into Europe. There is currently very little/no research which has been undertaken in the communities who live at this important entry point for immigrants from North Africa. The study for this particular subject does by no mean claim to be exhaustive and the information gathered during amount to a series of small fragments, collected in a limited amount of time, rather than an in-depth analysis of the nation-wide social perceptions of immigrants in Italy.

**Comment [JS7]:** You don't have to use this, but just trying to inject some authority into your research methods, reiterating the importance of this study, if you say A. "this is not representitive of the whole country etc" you should try and follow up with a reason of why it is important etc... otherwise it can seem like you are putting your own research down.

<sup>6</sup> Denzin K (1994) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications: London, p. 83

<sup>7</sup> Most of the participants of the camp highlighted their desire to witness the reality of the happenings on Lampedusa as the main incentive to participate to the camp. (informal discussions)

## A. Ethnographic approach

In undertaking a comprehensive research study into the before mentioned research questions, the primary research tools have been structured interviews as well as a superficial overt ethnographic approach. During the time that research was undertaken, the researcher adopted an ethnographic approach to the collection of primary research. During the short time that the researcher was able to spend in the Lampedusian community and with the immigrants, they were able to undertake structured interviews with members of the local community, analyse data gathered from important stakeholders in immigration procedure and draw conclusions about the complex relationships between the Lampedusians and incoming immigrants.

Researchers point out to the fact that even though there are many definitions of ethnography, all tend to include the fact that 'the participant observer/ethnographer immerses him-or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and the fieldworker, and asking questions'<sup>8</sup>, which includes also traits that characterise structured interviews.<sup>9</sup>

The importance of an extended period of time when doing ethnographic research is obvious. Enough 'time in the field is needed to discern both the depth and complexity of social structures and relations'<sup>10</sup>. However Jeffrey and Troman also argue that it is difficult to establish an ideal length of time to spend in the field. Another factor one has to take into consideration is that the social world is not a timely limited realm, that 'social life is ongoing, developing, fluctuating, becoming. It never arrives or ends. Some forms of behaviour may be fairly stable, others variable, others emergent. Some forms of interaction proceed in stages or phases.'<sup>11</sup> Social conditions are prone to change as well.

More importantly for this study, if one accepts that we can produce a 'thick description'<sup>12</sup> that emphasises the need for a long and sustained immersions of the researcher in a social setting, there could also be room for the argument of a "thin description", i.e. a less sustained and in-depth research with the aim of taking the first introductory steps towards a proper, thick research; or what Wolcott calls a *micro-ethnography*<sup>13</sup>. Put more simply, it is clear that a shorter amount of time will not result in an in-depth and thorough study, but rather an introduction to a complex issue; the introduction to a book and a first step towards the understanding of the situation that is in need of more research.

**Comment [JS8]:** For referencing you need to pick on or the other. Whatever you do, be consistent, if you decide to reference in text, then you need to keep doing it, if you decide to footnote everything, then *keep doing it all the way through!* David was pretty clear on this, you can pick whatever referencing style you like, just make it consistent.

<sup>8</sup> Bryman, A. (2008) *Social Research Methods*, Oxford University Press: Oxford. P.402

<sup>9</sup> Authors such as Gills (1998) and Agar (1996) give particular mention the importance of taking time to observe the interviewee whilst asking questions in order to also record different types of expression and attitudes.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey, B. & Troman, G. (2010) Time for Ethnography, *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol.30, no.4, August 2004. Available under <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1502175> p.535

<sup>11</sup> id *supra* note 9

<sup>12</sup> Geertz, C (1973) *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, New York: Basic Books

<sup>13</sup> Wolcott (1990) *Making a Study "more ethnographic"*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 44-72

The methodology itself draws on several *qualitative research* motifs, 'such as the preference for seeing through the eye of the people being studied... and a naturalistic stance ('in their own setting').<sup>14</sup> To understand Lampedusian cultures, traditions and other social conditions it is essential to approach it leaving behind any kind of preconceived idea, (for example those put forward in mainstream media); hence to be "involved in this ... social world, to find out how its participants see that world and to be able as researchers to describe how its culture ticks,"<sup>15</sup> which according to Somekh and Lewin is a central purpose behind any form of social studies.

**Comment [JS9]:** If it is a quote... you should really use double speech marks... "like this", as it is a direct quote...

This paragraph is good though.

## B. Structured interviews

A structured interview is constituted of 'the administration of an interview schedule by an interviewer [and] the aim is for all interviewees to be given exactly the same context of questioning.'<sup>16</sup> The questionnaire elaborated for the study entailed a series of 13 questions, all of which were used for the 15 formal interviews that took place during the second period of the field trip. Structured interviewing theory points to the fact that only the exact replication of the questions would give the possibility to aggregate the answers in order to find a common thread. A few scholars argue that a potential problem arises when structured interviews address perceptions<sup>17</sup>. Accordingly interview responses can 'be treated as giving direct access 'to experience' or as actively constructed narratives'<sup>18</sup> and although both positions are entirely legitimate<sup>19</sup> the researcher needs to explain his choice.

**Comment [JS10]:** Good!

In case of the paper, the author assumes that the answers given to the questions reflect the wider perceptions held by the islanders. This is justified further by reports published by various NGOs which have agreed with the results that were identified on the island<sup>20</sup>; and more importantly by the high presence of local Lampedusian organisations working on the subject of immigrations. *Alternativa Giovani*, for instance, is currently the largest local association -all its members are islanders- and together with various other groups, organises a range of awareness-raising campaigns and social events with a high attendance percentage and participation of the local population<sup>21</sup>. Moreover empirical findings also play a key role for this statement.

The paper will expand more on this point in the data analysis section.

<sup>14</sup> Bryman 2008:402

<sup>15</sup> Somekh, B. & Lewin, C. (eds) (2005) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. Sage Publications: London, p12

<sup>16</sup> Bryman 2008:107

<sup>17</sup> Gubrium & Holstein (2009) *Analyzing Narrative Reality*, Sage Publications: London

<sup>18</sup> Reisman as quoted in Silverman, D. (2005) *Doing Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications: London, p.45

<sup>19</sup> Silverman 2005:52

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Amnesty International Italy, 2005, *Lampedusa: Ingresso Vietato*; Amnesty International Italy, 2006: *Invisibili*

<sup>21</sup> Information on current and past events and campaigns, plus evaluation results can be found on the official *Alternativa Giovani* webpage <http://www.alternativagiovani.it/>

#### IV. The social psychology of anti-immigrant prejudices and stereotypes

The paper will now turn to the debate on the subject of perceptions, specifically negative perceptions in the form of prejudice and stereotype.

In the last few years, the theme of immigration has become prevalent in the mainstream media throughout Europe. In September, the French senate voted overwhelmingly in favour of a ban on face-covering veils in public spaces<sup>22</sup>. Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom, known for his anti-immigrant and anti-Islam platform, won 15% of the votes and the second place in European elections for the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup> In 2009, the Italian senate approved an emergency decree known as “Security Package” that includes various discriminatory measures against immigrants and Roma.<sup>24</sup>

These facts highlight a negative trend of general attitudes towards immigrations. Surveys have shown that most countries in Europe perceived immigration as a problem, with Canada being the only country perceiving it as an opportunity.<sup>25</sup> The current state of affairs points towards a trend of growing pessimism about immigration. Fears range from cultural incompatibility to the precariousness of national job markets and its age-old statement: 'immigrants steal jobs' that can be read in the tabloid press recurrently. However, despite the tabloids press, “paying for the blood of those who 'sponge' off the welfare system, illegal immigrants do not undertake the risks of migration for such a pathetic ambition”<sup>26</sup>.

Chapter III aims to expose some of these negatives views for what they are: deeply-rooted stereotypes. First, the paper will look at the common traits of stereotypes and prejudices. It will proceed by giving a quick overview of the concept of “Fortress Europe” as a prejudice-enhancing element, therefore unfavourable to perceptions. Ultimately, the paper will examine 3 of the most common anti-immigration stereotypes, and assess whether these are legitimate or not.

**Comment [JS11]:** Is this a quote? If so reference, otherwise it sounds far too personal. Try to stay neutral with your writing, otherwise it gives off a sense of bias, and as a researcher you shouldn't be biased, you should be objective.

**Comment [JS12]:** Same again!

<sup>22</sup> Al-Jazeera, “French Senate passes face-veil ban” 14<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2010/09/2010914184958118128.html>

<sup>23</sup> The Guardian, “Anti-immigrant right win 15% of Dutch vote in European elections” 5<sup>th</sup> June 2009

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/jun/05/european-elections-the-netherlands-far-right>

<sup>24</sup> Challenge, Liberty and Security, “The Italian (In)Security Package: Security vs. Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights in the EU” 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009 <http://www.libertysecurity.org/article2432.html>

<sup>25</sup> Transatlantic Trends, “Immigration, 2010 Key Findings report”

[http://trends.gmfus.org/immigration/doc/TTI2010\\_English\\_Key.pdf](http://trends.gmfus.org/immigration/doc/TTI2010_English_Key.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Harris, N. (2001) *Thinking the Unthinkable: The Immigration Myth Exposed*, I.B.Tauris: New York

## A. Fortress Europe

The terminology Fortress Europe was historically first coined as a propaganda term during World War II and referred to Nazi-occupied areas. Today, the term is mostly used in relation to the theme of immigration: on the one side it points to the influxes of undocumented immigrants that try to access Europe on an almost daily basis; on the other hand it highlights specifically the deterioration of immigration policies in the European territories.<sup>27</sup> Thus even though the walls between the member-states fall as the European Union grows; so the exterior walls seem to grow taller. The word "fortress" is accompanied by a sense of defensiveness and self-sufficiency. This is however misleading, as Europe is not self-sufficient but rather selective, allowing only a certain rank of people to enter; thus drawing a line between the skilled and the unskilled. A firm grasp on the reality that understanding official obsessions as to why individuals should be prevented to cross the borders into Fortress Europe is time-consuming, especially since most of these perceptions can be challenged by current research and empirical evidence that emphasize their improbability. But more importantly, such views fail to address the most destructive effect of preventing people to enter Europe: the demolishing of the right to asylum, accompanied by the turning of victims fleeing persecution, poverty or war in their homeland 'into 'illegal immigrants' in the country they turn to for safety.'<sup>28</sup>

What is more, some argue that since the phrase "Fortress Europe" is drawn from Nazi ideology it has and will continue to encourage racism and xenophobia<sup>29</sup>; hence, the use of such a term helps the development as sustaining of negative perceptions.

The next section will therefore examine the nature of negative perceptions and will address the concepts of prejudice and stereotype

## B. Prejudice

A significant part of human history has been the pervasiveness of conflicts between groups, yet the advances in technology and military power and armament have introduced massacres of such a large scale that they have managed to change such past historical wrongs, into insignificant matters, in comparison. Underlying such brutalities are generally prejudiced attitudes and beliefs; social, religious or national. Prejudice, 'the tendency of individuals to think and feel in negative ways about members of other groups'<sup>30</sup> has only recently started to be considered a severe issue

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<sup>27</sup> INDYMEDIA UK, "Autonomous rear Entrances to Fortress Europe?!" 01.10.2006  
<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2006/10/352363.html>

<sup>28</sup> Harris 2002:4

<sup>29</sup> Marfleet, P (1999) "Nationalism and New Internationalism in the new Europe" Issue 84 of *INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM JOURNAL*. Issue 84, 1999  
<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj84/marfleet.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Healey, J. F., & O'Brien, E. T. (Eds.). (2007). *Race, Ethnicity, and Gender: Selected Readings* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. P.42

in need of more scientific investigation. Some argue that it is exactly its pervasiveness that has allowed it to be viewed as essentially natural and normal.<sup>31</sup>

How are prejudiced attitudes generated?

It is an intricate construct to conceptualise and usually defined as an ‘unjustified attitude’<sup>32</sup>. General theories concerned with the psychological fundamentals of prejudice that are of specific concern for anti-immigration attitudes include “Frustration-Aggression-Displacement” theory which states that aggression that cannot be expressed directly is displaced onto scapegoat.<sup>33</sup> “Belief Congruence and Similarity” is another example: it states that individuals are attracted to those who are similar and dislike those who are dissimilar.<sup>34</sup>

All theories describe basic cognitive and perceptual mechanisms that are common to all individuals. But according to Duckitt even though theories ‘determine an inherent human propensity for prejudice... certain cues or stimuli from the social environment appear to be necessary to elicit...these processes’<sup>35</sup>

Experimental social psychologists insist on the fact that there is no need for extreme prejudice, that even very subtle or “everyday” prejudice can provide the foundation for contemporary racism.’ Sniderman argues that in the case of Italy, for instance ‘charges that immigrants are sopping up public benefits have become routine; so, too, have claims that immigrants promote crime, spread disease, and increase unemployment.’<sup>36</sup> Accordingly the country has also experienced a rise in the levels of anti-immigration racism, confirmed by regional actions such as “Operation White Christmas” aiming at removing all illegal immigrants before Christmas Day.<sup>37</sup>

**Comment [JS13]:** Good, this reads really well. nice theories too!

**Comment [AU14]:** Add or change the prejudice section. Make links to immigration. Ask Patrick for advice

**Comment [JS15]:** Yeah, you need to link this to immigration... try and bring it back to your research questions or theme/topic aka.... Italy/immigrants...

### C. Stereotypes

With prejudice appears another characteristic of perception that have contributed to the creation of the immigration myth: stereotyping.

‘Stereotypes are generalizations about groups of people that are exaggerated, overly simplistic, and resistant to disproof’,[they] ‘stress a few traits and assume that these characteristics apply to all members of the group, regardless of individual characteristics. Highly prejudiced people will

<sup>31</sup> Citations as found in Duckitt, 1999: ‘out-group rejection was inborn or instinctive, derived from ‘consciousness of kind’ (Giddings 1906); ‘Humans like animals were thought to possess a biologically controlled fear of strangers, and, for example, an innate sense of race’ (Vaughn 1988)

<sup>32</sup> Milner (1975) in Duckitt (1991)

<sup>33</sup> Cf Dollard et al, 1939; LeVine & Campbell,1972

<sup>34</sup> Cf Byrne 1971; Newcomb 1961

<sup>35</sup> Duckitt 1991 “A dual-process cognitive-motivational theory of ideology and prejudice” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* Volume 33, 2001, Pages 41-113:93

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0065260101800046>

<sup>36</sup> . Sniderman et al, 2000:6

<sup>37</sup> ‘Operation White Christmas was headed by Claudio Abiendi, the mayor of the town of Coccaglio, a town near Milan. Moreover the campaign was also endorsed by Minister of the Interior, Roberto Maroni. Information about the current situation of racism in Italy can be found on the webpage of the Italian organisation [www.sosrazzismo.org](http://www.sosrazzismo.org)

maintain their stereotypical views even in the face of massive evidence that their views are wrong.<sup>38</sup>

Stereotypes have various features:

1) Homogeneity and exaggeration.

Stereotypes render individuals associated with a particular physical or behavioural feature uniform. Elements are taken out of context, exaggerated and people are 'reduced to the characteristics isolated by the stereotype in its designation of what [these characteristics] mean.'<sup>39</sup> Thus stereotyping also becomes a form of social control<sup>40</sup>, which is simplistic and fails to take into account the particularities of subjective values of groups and individuals.

**Comment [JS16]:** Nice. Love manufacturing consent by chomsky

2) Discrimination.

Moreover stereotypes are based on discriminatory traits that damage the social position of the individual they target. 'Stereotypes are also discriminatory because the stunted features or attributes of others which characterise them are considered to form the basis for negative or hostile judgements, the rationale for exploitative, unjust treatment, or the justification for aggressive behaviour.'<sup>41</sup>

3) Stereotypes are simple and complex<sup>42</sup>

One has to be careful when defining stereotypes as being simple. They are indeed simple but they are also complex. Therefore if it may well be true that lack of information could constitute the breeding ground for stereotypes one cannot simply assume that providing the right information will help redress such misinterpretation as the 'rigidity and resistance to information which contradicts them is undoubtedly one of their most salient features.' (Tajfel 1981:133). Engaging with the right information is of course an important factor and not a wrong move but it would be naive to assume that information on its own is the only needed element for the eradication of a stereotype. Believing the opposite would mean that there are always firm grounds to rectify such labels. Female stereotypes, for instance, are now contested. But despite the growing presence of claims for gender equality, women remain socialised within certain gender norms and thus stereotypes do not diminish, nor do they dissolve.

The concept of stereotype is a complex tool within cultural analysis and it has become a central issue in many areas of study.<sup>43</sup> Some argue however that the use of stereotype as a discursive tool in order to uncover prejudiced ideas of social identities is certainly useful, but that its

<sup>38</sup> Pettigrew in Healey 2008:85

<sup>39</sup> Pickering 2001

<sup>40</sup> The social control theory is widespread and is studied as an integral part of various fields. Originally coined in areas such as politics and laws (formal social control), it has become a separate field of research and studied as an integral part of cultural and media studies (cf Noam Chomsky (2002), *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*)

<sup>41</sup> Pickering 2001:10.

<sup>42</sup> Perkins 1979:139

<sup>43</sup> Michael Pickering argues that the stereotypes, its causes and consequences have been taken up in disciplines such as cultural history or human geography, and various social movements such as feminism and anti homophobia and xenophobia movements. Pickering, 2001:2

application as a concept cannot always be assumed as being transparent, thus in need of high scrutiny, and 'while we need to understand stereotypes as elements of broad cultural practices and processes, carrying with them quite a few ideological views and values, they are not necessarily integral to our perceptual and cognitive organisation of the social worlds we live in.'<sup>44</sup>

Interesting aspects appear moreover when looking at the historical background. Stereotypes construct difference as something dangerous or defiant; characteristics that has always been imbedded within the concept of stereotype, but over the last centuries, within a more and more globalised world whereby encounters with diverse societies with different cultural practices have become more and more frequent, this characteristic has been more accentuated. (Pickering 2001) Obvious phenomena include such processes as industrialization and the development of colonialism. In his 1884 memoir *Hayti or the Black Republic*, the British envoy Sir Spencer St John wrote:

'I know what the black man is, and I have no hesitation in declaring that he is capable of the art of government, and that to entrust him with framing and working the laws of our islands is to condemn them to inevitable ruin. What the negro may become after centuries of civilised education I cannot tell, but what I know is that he is not fit to govern now.'  
(St John as cited in Rigby, 1996:17)

The abstract illustrates the economically convenient idea during the period of British slave trade that 'the happy-go-lucky negro' (Perkins 1979) was incapable of cultivating and developing natural resources and certainly not fit to govern themselves. An idea that was further cultivated around the same period in Canada and Australia, whilst developing the idea of *native title* whereby colonisers asserted that indigenous people could not be considered owners of lands as they were incapable of cultivating them.<sup>45</sup>

These two examples highlight the historical roots of stereotypes in the industrialised and colonialist discourse.

A few characteristics need to be taken into consideration when talking about stereotypes:

1) It is important to make the difference between categories and stereotypes.

'Thinking in relation to categories is a necessary way of organising the world in our minds, creating mental maps for working out how we view the world and negotiating our ways through it in our everyday social relations and interactions.'

We use categories as a tool to organise our understanding of the social world we live in, but they should not be understood as the central basis for our thoughts. According to Potter (1998) and Pickering (2001) category and stereotype are not synonyms for each other even though they sometimes overlap.

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<sup>44</sup> Pickering 2001: 3

<sup>45</sup> See for instance Short, Damien (2010) "The Social Construction of Indigenous 'Native Title' Land Rights in Australia" *Current Sociology*, September 2010 <http://csi.sagepub.com/content/55/6/857.short>

2) What is the central dilemma that lies at the heart of stereotypes?

'To resort to one-sided representations in the interests of order, security and dominance, or to allow for a more complex vision, a more open attitude, a more flexible way of thinking' (p3-4)? Pickering argues further that even though stereotyping may aim to endow a social world with a sense of order in the same way categories do, the crucial difference here lies in the fact that stereotypes do not allow for any flexible thinking with categories for the sake of the structures of power that they try to preserve. (Pickering 2001)

Indeed, 'the comfort of inflexibility which stereotypes provide reinforces the conviction that existing relations of power are necessary and fixed.' (Pickering 2001:3) Therefore believing that migrants will eventually displace local workers and become a burden to the national social welfare contributes to the subsequent reasoning that there is a need for legislations and regulations that are expensive for migrants as well as national citizen of a country. Moreover it creates an apparent hierarchical order that that generates a feeling of security or even superiority, which may help to explain 'why such imprecise referencing of other people or other cultures spreads rapidly as is taken up uncritically on a widespread basis.'

Hence stereotyping migrants is used to evaluate, control and subordinate them to non-migrants or nationals of the country they are present in.

Stereotypes are flagrantly present in our daily routine. And so are prejudices. Roma communities are for instance at the heart of heavy prejudices and stereotypes. They are the main victims of waves of widespread discrimination – forced evictions in France and Serbia and the denial of proper education in Slovakia and Hungary, to name but a few - and are labelled as thieves or people living off government benefits<sup>46</sup>.

Immigrants and asylum seekers worldwide experience similar treatments and the next section will explore two of the most frequent perceptions we have about them. To do so, it will follow a model set out by journalist and author Philippe Legrain.

#### **D. Examples of common anti-immigration stereotypes**

Migrants and asylum seekers leave their countries for a great number of reasons: to escape from war, famine or diseases, to flee from religious or political persecution, or natural disasters; other leave for economic reasons and travel often very long distances in order to try to secure more opportunities and a better future for themselves and their families.

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<sup>46</sup> Roma stereotyping and stigma is a widespread phenomenon. More information on the different forms of discriminations they are subjected to can be found on the Amnesty International UK webpage under the following link: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/feature-stories/europes-roma-community-still-facing-massive-discrimination-20090408>

Whatever the reason, individuals risking their lives on long and often dangerous journeys, by earth or by sea, hope to arrive in a promised land, where protection and security will be granted to them.

However countries in the Western hemisphere are less and less inclined to accept migrants and their hostile stance keeps on becoming more and more accentuated. This hostility is accompanied by a large array of visions about migrants, or well-established set of stereotypes and prejudices that undermines whatever arriving people might contribute to the wealth fare of a country.

And as seen in the chapter before, prejudice and stereotype come with fear, anger, and hatred and with a sense that these people need to be fought against.

What are the most common perceptions or forms of prejudices migrants suffer under?

**1) Immigrants have a harmful effect on employment opportunities for national workers, or to put it more bluntly, immigrants steal jobs from natives and they displace them.**

The Federation for American Immigration Reform - quite inappropriately abbreviated to FAIR (Legrain 2007: 133)- affirms that 'Mass immigration is displacing American workers by importing a constant flow of immigrants willing to work for substandard wages' and that 'large-scale immigration is flooding the labour market and driving down wages for everyone, immigrants and native-born workers alike.'<sup>47</sup> Moreover the federation shows a series of polls that highlight ideas some US citizens have towards illegal immigration: 63% believe immigration is too high; 72% that there are enough American workers available to fill unskilled jobs; 71% believe that illegal immigration is due to a lack of enforcement, not unfair limits on legal immigration; 58% favour increased enforcement efforts to cause illegal aliens to return to their home countries.<sup>48</sup>

Considering its historical background, most of the studies on immigration and its effect on the labour market are based on studies on the United States; but in a major UK based research, Christian Dustmann and other professors from the University College London assert that there is indeed no strong evidence of the negative impact of immigrants on national labour or wages; that on the opposite, there are suggestions that foreign input enhances the growth of domestic wages<sup>49</sup>.

The perception that immigrants impact negatively on the national job industry appears under different headings, on of the extreme versions suggesting that for every immigrant that enters the US, an American citizen is displaced or loses an employment opportunity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> FAIR report quotes as found in Legrain, P. (2007): *Immigrants: Your country needs them*, London: Little, Brown & Company; p. 133-134

<sup>48</sup> FAIR polls on Labour Issues. Statistics by US polling firm Zogby, November 2009

[http://www.fairus.org/site/PageNavigator/facts/polls\\_labor/](http://www.fairus.org/site/PageNavigator/facts/polls_labor/)

<sup>49</sup> Dustmann *et al*, (2003) "Class Size, Education, and Wages", *The Economic Journal*:

[https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/research/browse/show-publication?pub\\_id=67554&source\\_id=1](https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/research/browse/show-publication?pub_id=67554&source_id=1)

<sup>50</sup> Borjas in Jacobson, D. (1998): *The immigration reader: America in a multidisciplinary perspective* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd

According to George Borjas 'such assertions are not based on empirical evidence but follow from a set of assumptions about the kind of labour market that characterises the economy and the types of workers that migrate.'<sup>51</sup> Borjas insists that such assertions are based on 3 assumptions: First, the idea that the job quota in the market is fixed and that there is a constant competition between current workers and new entering ones that are competing for the same job. Consequently this reinforces the earlier stated perception that for each new worker another person is displaced. Second is the supposition that immigrants and native workers are identical and thus interchangeable; they can therefore take over tasks done by immigrants. However scholars assert that the more likely reality is that immigrants do jobs that natives deliberately avoid<sup>52</sup>. The final assumption comes as a natural consequence of the second: the idea that immigrants work for lower wages than natives for which Borjas suggests that there is no sufficient evidence and therefore the whole vision of immigrants displacing natives is based on erroneous facts.

Also quite rightfully one could assume that if indeed the growing size of a national labour market was the reason behind an increase in unemployment, then surely this could be prevented and even cured by stopping women from working.<sup>53</sup>

The elements set forth in this section further assert the reality of the social world surrounding immigration prejudices: that 'the only reason why people are forever seeking to blame unemployment on immigrants is that foreigners make convenient scapegoats.' (Legrain 2007:136). Fears and prejudices of immigrants stealing jobs and displacing local workers are age-old, deeply rooted and based on a few incorrect assumptions that even immigration experts tend to do. And because this perception is deeply rooted, changes of attitude will not be attained as quickly as one may hope. But 'in a land where few will help and all seem hostile, the price of failing to find work can be self-destruction.'<sup>54</sup>

## **2) What about the recurrent presumption that immigrants are a threat to national identity and unity?**

With a common fear of terrorism and the rise of Islamophobia the suggestion the aliens threaten the national and cultural identity of a country is constantly growing.

We live in an increasingly globalized world where people, information and resources are increasingly moving, where country borders are being dropped and where currencies are being transformed into one; ironically the social world we live in is constructed on an opposite basis, where the nation state and its sovereign government are the main stakeholders.

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218

<sup>51</sup> *id supra* note 6

<sup>52</sup> Legrain 2007, Prior 1979

<sup>53</sup> *Cf supra* note 51

<sup>54</sup> Harris 2002:3

Supposedly indeed the world is subdivided in numerous sovereign states, each controlling a distinctive piece of land. This does however not mean that it is a fixed world: changes are constantly happening. Partly it is a voluntary decision, by deciding to adhere to international pacts and treaties, for instance. In other cases, states have no choice: for instance 'pressure groups increasingly assert a right to intervene in states' affairs in the name of a higher good<sup>55</sup>, or the presence of illegal immigrants highlight the lack of its control over national borders and changes that happen within a country – for instance the amount of children that a born- cannot be controlled. Therefore 'irrespective of immigration, nations change'.<sup>56</sup>

Some disagree: Peter Brimelow (himself a British national later naturalised American citizen) asserts that 'the mass immigration so thoughtlessly triggered in 1965 risks making America an *alien nation* [...]'<sup>57</sup> He describes 'bilingualism' as 'foreign language-ism' –although Americans and people world-wide are actively encouraged to learn a second or more languages- and points to 'multiculturalism' as 'anti-Americanism', thereby stating the immigrants have values that are not compatible with American ones. Should all Americans have the same cultural practices, watch the same shows and have the same routines? Immigrants like natives abide to domestic values like everyone else does. Such ideas are unrealistic, unless people live in an Orwell-esque *nineteen eighty-four* Airstrip One society.

So accordingly the views that anti-immigration perceptions are a threat towards national identity are based on wrong information and prejudices. Throughout so-called western nations we can observe 'small conglomerates of ethnicities'<sup>58</sup> as can be seen with the example of Spain-Catalans, Basques and other under one rule- or in France with Bretons, Basques and Corsicans, to name but a few.

Another example that highlights this misconceived perception is Canada. The 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act states that it aims to 'recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future'<sup>59</sup>. And according to the National Immigration Identity, Canada has welcomed an average of 221,000 immigrants and refugees a year stating that 'Immigration stimulates Canada's growth, prosperity and cultural diversity'<sup>60</sup>. Here again it is true that not all Canadians agree, and a 2006 survey shows that 51% of Canadians believe that immigration has 'a good influence' on the Canadian society, whereas 40% disagree.<sup>61</sup> This again highlights the truth behind perceptions: they are deeply rooted and getting them right demands a lot comprehension and the correct information. A 1995 article states that Canada's is 'a modern nationalism: liberal, decent, tolerant, and colour-blind'.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Legrain 2007:209

<sup>56</sup> Legrain 2007: 210

<sup>57</sup> Brimelow, P. (1998) "The Case against Immigration as We Know It" 30<sup>th</sup> April 1998  
<http://www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/6521>

<sup>58</sup> id *supra* note 9

<sup>59</sup> Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988: paragraph 3.1 (b)

<sup>60</sup> Statistics and text can be found under the following link: <http://www.how2immigrate.net/canada/>

<sup>61</sup> Ipsos Reid Poll as found in Legrain, 2007:222

<sup>62</sup> as found in Legrain 2007:216

Eventually, the debate about Canadian nationalism 'captures the ineffable nature of modern nationhood: Canadians are sure they have a unique national identity, without being quite sure what it comprises. Stripped of the myths of ethnic nationhood and confronted with the reality of the diversity of global individualism.'<sup>63</sup>

The notion of identity is closely linked to concepts such as "Fortress Europe" and perceptions or attitudes. Yet the world itself is in a phase of transition – moving for instance from a set of separate national economies to one single global economy. Capitals and individuals are constantly flowing and moving –without a sense of national identity, as it were. Yet the idea of undocumented immigrants remains an idea of threat to the work industry and state unity and identity. If such ideas are maintained, prejudices and stereotypes cannot be erased and replaced by truthful statements. Governmental decisions and immigration policies can be seen to sometimes endorse such anti-immigration perceptions by passing laws that are increasingly detrimental to the case of undocumented migrants worldwide.

And Italy is a foremost example of such a statement.

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<sup>63</sup> Legrain 2007:224-225

## V. Racism in Italy: a political and legal discourse

This paper will turn to look at some aspects of the Italian anti-racism trend as presented in the governmental rhetoric and further emphasized by the obvious degradation Italian immigration policies. The paper will close this section enumerating a handful of key laws characterized by increasing unfavorable aspect towards immigration. The aim is to use such information as evidence for immigration perceptions shared by the Italian government. The main argument in doing so is to highlight the fact that the Italian administration has developed an increasingly anti-immigration discourse, thus reflecting and endorsing some of the earlier exposed anti-immigration attitudes. Finally, by inserting these facts, the study also seeks to stress even more the discrepancy of the government's position as opposed to the position held by the inhabitants of Lampedusa, as will be explored in the following chapter.

*Help...I'm becoming a racist*<sup>64</sup>.

Italy is a country with an important history of emigration- an estimated 24 million Italians emigrated abroad between 1876 and 1976<sup>65</sup>- and since the 1970s its role has changed; it has become a country of immigration, with a particularly high increase over the last 10 years. But racism and xenophobia rhetoric have also seen a dramatic rise, prompting international headlines to declare a 'racism crisis' in 2008.

Anti-racism NGOs and international organisations have discerned a close link between racist and political language, reflected, for instance, by politicians widespread use of hatred speeches and 'a political discourse that links immigration to criminality...(that) has helped to create and perpetuate an environment of intolerance'.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, immigration issues have become a predominant feature on the political agenda of Silvio Berlusconi's government – which is, since 2008, in coalition with *Lega Nord*, the openly anti-immigration Northern League party. The government's prevailing approach has been to frame immigration as a public concern, linking it closely to the subject of security.

In a recent Human Rights Watch Report, Jean-Léonard Touadi, the first black Italian politician, defines Italy's situation as a "slow approach to racism", divided up in 3 phases:

The first one starts with the 1991 influx of Albanian immigrants and Touadi argues that it kick-started the cultivation of a "syndrome of invasion". The attacks of 9/11 constitute the second phase, launching a proper nationwide Islamophobic campaign whereby Muslims are considered the

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<sup>64</sup> Letter published in La Repubblica, May 7, 2007, <http://www.repubblica.it/2007/05/sezioni/cronaca/sfoglettore/sfogo-lettore/sfogo-lettore.html> (accessed February 4, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Human Rights Watch (2011) *Everyday Intolerance: Racist and Xenophobic Violence in Italy*: p.13 <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/italy0311WebRevised.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> HRW 2011 :13

enemy of the Italian community and the Christian identity. And finally a "security syndrome" describes the last and current phase in which immigration and criminality are closely linked together.<sup>67</sup>

There is an obvious trend within the Italian racism paradigm held by the government, which is further depicted in the domestic immigration framework.

- The first important law, the so-called *Martelli* Law provides in 1990 is relatively innocuous but introduces more complex provisions and steps for the recognition of asylum-seekers and defines in more detail the concept of refugee status.

- A few years later, the *Turco-Napolitano* Law introduces compulsory detention for irregular immigrants under the centre-right government of. The law hence further complicated entry procedures and measures for the attainment of regular residence permit to the country

- The 2002 *Bossi-Fini* Law further strengthens immigration detention by setting an extendable detention period and by allowing police forces to carry out border controls, including expulsions

- Finally in 2009, the Berlusconi government launched the controversial Law 94/2009, the so-called "*Security Package*" aiming to strengthen national security, criminalize irregular immigrants and facilitate their expulsion. 'Whereas migrants had been consistently depicted as authors of crimes, the criminal code was reformed to make it a crime to *be* an undocumented migrant<sup>68</sup>; and being an undocumented migrant becomes an offense punishable by a fine up to 10.000 €.

It is clear that under its international human rights obligations Italy has the duty to protect people from discrimination and xenophobic attacks, as well as the duty to provide an effective remedy; and both apply 'whether the perpetrators are state or non-state actors.<sup>69</sup> These are duties that are reflected under Italy's domestic obligation, as stated in Art 3 of the Constitution which guarantees "equal dignity" of all citizens and the principle of equality before the law "without distinction based on sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, or personal and social conditions."<sup>70</sup>

Italy has failed to respect such obligations as racist attacks are perpetrated by the general public and the state. The recurring use of an anti-immigration political discourse can be a reflection of the negative perceptions held by a state which is known for its commitment to blocking irregular

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<sup>67</sup> For the purpose of this research, only a restricted amount of information was used. The entire statement by Jean-Léonard Touadi can be found in the latest Human Rights Watch Report. <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/italy0311WebRevised.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> HRW 2011:8

<sup>69</sup> see for instance the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966 Art 2(1) and Art 26 (equality under the law); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), 1965 Art 5(b)

<sup>70</sup> Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana (1947), Art 3. <http://www.governo.it/governo/costituzione/costituzionerepubblicaitaliana.pdf>

immigration; but also, by creating laws detrimental to migrants and by linking immigration to criminality, it encourages prejudice and stereotypes.

It is clear the government and some parts of the Italian community endorse negative attitudes towards migrants. The question now however is to examine whether this is true also for the people living in the place that has been defined the main gateway for illegal immigration into Europe: Lampedusa.

## VI. empirical analysis

### 1. “The island that does not exist”<sup>71</sup> – Lampedusa, a case study

Along the western African coast and off the city of Tunis, lays Lampedusa, a minuscule island, part of the pelagic archipelago and with an almost symbolic population of less than 6000 inhabitants; it is Italy's very last patch. The 11 by 2,5 km large islands' strategic position in the middle of the Mediterranean sea, 210 kilometres from Sicily and 128 kilometres from Tunisia; makes it Europe's most southern border Italy's most southern port and the first European destination for many immigrants and refugees each year.

**Comment [LS17]:** So people from western African countires like Senegal, sierra leone, Guineea, western saharah region? Tunisia north africa

**Comment [LS18]:** Last patch?

**Comment [LS19]:** How does this compare with Spanish, Greek, French ports?

For the natives, Lampedusa it is often a place of hardship and isolation; where people's lives are governed by the sea. A place where the petrol you need for your fishing boat is three times as expensive; and when winter brings rough seas, the ships with supplies and food cannot arrive. There is no hospital on the island, so people cannot even give birth, and have to travel to the Sicilian mainland.

For the migrants and refugees who have survived the journey across the rough seas of the Mediterranean, it is the destination of what the media has baptized "the journey of hope"; a stretched out hand that offers shelter and salvation.

Throughout the year, and particularly during summer, islanders assist to the almost daily landings of hundreds of people after their long, exhausting and dangerous journeys on small and precarious vessels. Persons arriving from the poorest and most deprived places in the world who in order to escape wars, persecutions, religious and cultural problems, or simply trying to find a better life, are increasingly forced to entrust their lives to traffickers. The stereotypes, images and perceptions of why immigrants and refugees leave their countries of origin that characterize European understandings; fail to take into consideration how dangerous the journey is, and how severe the motivations for leaving must be. This is a phenomenon that is adopting increasingly worrying dimensions since the numbers of people arriving on the island since the beginnings of the unrest in the Middle East have increased significantly; a reality that has been portrayed in headlines of much national and international news over the past months.

**Comment [LS20]:** capitalised

**Comment [LS21]:** which countries, ?

**Comment [LS22]:** Or North Africa? not sure which more geographically correct?

Italy has always been the maritime crossroads for western/European societies heading towards the North Africa and the Middle East southern cone. In the last 300 years, it has experienced a growing role as a country of immigration destination, going from a presence of a little less than 300000 immigrants in 1980 to almost 4 million in leading to an overall population of 60 million

**Comment [LS23]:** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern\\_Cone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Cone) wikipedia says this is in s amereica

**Comment [LS24]:** Either use spaces or commas

**Comment [LS25]:** date

<sup>71</sup> This is a sentence used by one of the interviewees when asked to characterize the island.  
Interview 3

people in. In Lampedusa alone, more than 75 000 immigrant arrivals have been registered between January 2005 and December 2008,<sup>72</sup> Since January 2011, over 24000 migrants have arrived on the island.<sup>73</sup>

Comment [LS26]: date

The country is in the process of transition towards a cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic society, but is revealing growing tensions and contradictions in the fields of both the law and administration, but also in its social relations. The recent surge in refugee and immigrant arrivals on Lampedusa has made the island a focal point for the issue, with the mass media has narrating stories concerning refugees in a way similar to a war bulletin, portraying the invasion of the island, and thus the invasion of a part of Fortress Europe. Yet empirical research on the island have shown very different images and stories than the ones illustrated by the Italian news.

Comment [LS27]: Laws and administrative systems being used to manage this change and control social relations.

Comment [LS28]: Concept of national crisis and "the other" defined? Or maybe you have another section for this?

The next section will therefore aim to expose an analysis of the role of the media in the creation of a crisis that originally was not one. It will aim to highlight the essential traits that have stood out during the study phase.

The second section will then turn to the data collected whilst interviewing the local population of Lampedusa in order to understand first whether the picture of the island that has been created by Italian news is a truthful reflection of the reality or just a factious and false portrayal.

Does such portrayal confirm or even feed negative perceptions and prejudices about immigrants? And finally how do the ones living in this hotspot of immigration into Europe and deprived of their personal space, perceive the constant immigration influxes?

## 2. 'The Black Lady' – the destructive role of the Italian Mass Media in the construction of social perceptions

'One need only glance at the mainstream press in most European societies to realise that, both in terms of the movement of labour and with respect to 'moral panics' over refugees and asylum seekers, migration is firmly in the political agenda.'<sup>74</sup>

This section will examine the relationship between the Italian mass media and immigration. The detrimental effect the former has on the lives and perceptions of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers has long been its major trait

This chapter will first look at the main characteristics that shape the mass media in Italy, especially in relation to immigration, both legal and illegal.

The following information used was taken from various reports written in and from interviews and discussions with Riccardo Noury, the press officer for Amnesty International Italy.

Comment [LS29]: Just put these in footnotes, and only introduce mr noury?

A study realized by the CORIS<sup>75</sup> has shown that four in five persons in Italy overestimate the number of migrants present on the national territory, 20% of the interviewees estimating the

Comment [LS30]: Who are these dudes??

<sup>72</sup> According to statistics registered by the Research blog Fortress Europe <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/p/reportage.html>

<sup>73</sup> The Guardian, "Sarkozy and Berlusconi to call for return of border controls in Europe" 25 April 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/25/sarkozy-berlusconi-border-controls-europe>

<sup>74</sup> Dale & Cole 1999

numbers to be around 16-20% of the whole population, and 30% estimating it to be higher than 20%<sup>76</sup>. The real percentage of immigrants in Italy is however less than 5%. Even though tracing a direct relation between the world of the media and the perception of the public of the migratory trend is a difficult task, it is undeniable that many of the diffused opinions are found in the mass media. Therefore the erroneous ideas about the vast numbers of immigrants present in the country, derive from the predominantly negative and alarmist nature of the language of the news that portray the theme of immigration. The immigration image the current Italian mass media presents appears to almost be frozen and deeply anchored to the type of narratives and stereotypes that have been around for 30 years. And accordingly it shows a reality that is dominated by a "naturally" problematic vision of immigration.

#### a. Cronaca Nera

The Italian mass media are characterized by the overwhelming presence of *cronaca nera*, crime columns. Studies from 2009 show that crime news represented in major news coverage in national newspapers, reached to almost 60% in news broadcast. In 76% of the cases immigrants are presented as the authors of crimes, unsurprisingly the portrayal of the immigrant in the media is not the most flattering or balanced. In over 80% of cases a criminal's whole personality is informed solely by ethnicity, which is often part of the headline introducing the news.<sup>77</sup>

Riccardo Noury, the press officer for Amnesty International Italy, a key speaker of one of the lectures held in Lampedusa, has further emphasised the root of the problem of immigration perceptions in Italy as a created predominantly by the media.

Noury started his lecture off by writing a few words on a large white sheet. The lines read: "Emergenza clandestini, nuovi sbarchi nella notte, Lampedusa in collasso" ("Immigration crisis; New landings during the night: Lampedusa on the verge of collapsing."). For those used to reading or watching Italian news, words like these did not sound new; it is one of the many examples of recurrent alarming headlines that have appeared in the news over the last few months; it is also a clear indicator of the narrative used by the Italian media to depict the arrival of the thousands of migrants and refugees that have landed on Lampedusa in the months of March and April 2011.

<sup>75</sup> CORIS: the Department of Communication and Social Research of the University *La Sapienza* published a report entitled *FuoriLuogo. L'immigrazione e i media italiani* in 2004 as part of the national initiative 'Etnequal Social Communication' organized by the Ministry of Employment and Social Politics, a project aimed at exposing the intolerance and prejudice immigrants in Italy were exposed to within the means of mainstream communication.

<sup>76</sup> cf *supra* 2004:17

<sup>77</sup> The majority of the information as well as the numbers used for the section on the Italian media can be found the 2009 report *Ricerca nazionale su immigrazione e asilo nei media italiani* (National research report on the representation of immigration as asylum in the Italian Media). The report was realized by researchers from the University *La Sapienza* in Rome and provides detailed information on the detrimental effect the Italian media has had on immigrants and their social position within the Italian society. [http://www.sosrazzismo.it/joomla/images/stories/contenuti/Sito/Ricerca\\_Imm.pdf](http://www.sosrazzismo.it/joomla/images/stories/contenuti/Sito/Ricerca_Imm.pdf)

**Comment [LS31]:** Not including refugees?

**Comment [LS32]:** Do you have a sociologist or anthropologist who has proven that mass media influences people's opinion of things? Damien Short's article on the national crisis in Australia and the erroneous opinion of white Australians as found in surveys- these paired with the mass media hysteria. OOOOOH, WHAT ABOUT THE VERY NOTICIBLE RACISM DISPLAYED AT ITALIAN FOOTBALL MATCHES, WHEN THERE ARE "FOREIGNERS" ON THE TEAM??

**Comment [LS33]:** Why 30 years, example of 1980's rhetoric that has resurfaced??

**Comment [LS34]:** Incredible stat

**Comment [LS35]:** What is the difference between the % of immigrants committing crimes and

**Comment [LS36]:** Lecture title and who for?

**Comment [LS37]:** Does the UNHCR talk about it as a crisis, Italy's UPR- is it a crisis there, or just in the press?

**Comment [LS38]:** The arrivals are only a crisis if they country is not capable or willing to provide the procedures as agreed in their international treaties. Crisis is when half a million Rwandans fled into the tiny state of Burundi, GDP and resources not high enough to cope with such numbers and demands.

The data collected during the research phase showed that such headlines portray a false reality/depiction of the situation on the island, altering it from a peaceful and popular tourist destination into a perilous and unstable place that finds itself in the middle of a unique crisis; a place that should be avoided. In fact, the island has never stopped to be peaceful. This statement will however be further elaborated in the next section.

**Comment [LS39]:** Crime stats from island?

Noury explained that in recent years the Italian media has specialized in the construction of fear, Italians get taught to always distrust the Other as their foreign neighbour might be the next-door killer.<sup>78</sup> According to Noury, the reasons as to why such headlines as the one presented previous paragraph are detrimental toward immigrants and toward reality, are four-fold:

**Comment [LS40]:** That their foreign neighbours are not really neighbours at all.

1. The word "*clandestini*" (illegal aliens) reduces very diverse clusters of people that come from a variety of places, to a stereotype. The word induces fear. It emphasizes that the borders are being trespassed illegally and thus it follows that Italians must protect the borders from such invasion rather than protecting the threat posing refugees or migrants.

2. The word "*sbarchi*" (landings) has a military connotation. It alerts people as if the enemy has invaded/landed on the shores. Thus the shores, the country, need protection from a hostile force.

3. The word "*notte*" (night) induces a sense of fright, in the same way it is used in stories and tales: it is the enemy that comes at night.

4. "*In collasso*" (on the verge of a collapse) indicates a situation that is uncontrollable, degrading, falling apart and hence generates a state of anxiety and alarm.

**Comment [LS41]:** I love all these definitions!

## b. Security

Currently Italian society is facing a future headed by economic and welfare uncertainty, but the attention of Italians, the mass-media and the current government is firmly set on public security, criminality and its hypothetical relationship between the economy and immigration. Riccardo Noury states that in the last 14-15 years the production of anxiety and insecurity has become a major phenomenon in Italy, with a crucial role played by the media. The reason behind this trend is very simple and straightforward: the protection of the Italian security space from its invasion by foreigners is an imperative and credibility-enhancing factor for Italian politicians and government representatives. Silvio Berlusconi's administration needs to show that even though the country is going through a series of economic and political instabilities<sup>79</sup>, it is still capable of ensuring a sense of security in its territory; emphasizing at the same time that it is the only entity

**Comment [LS42]:** This is repeated in the Silvio sentence.

**Comment [LS43]:** Previously you talked about the last 30 years.

<sup>78</sup> Riccardo Noury was one of the guest speakers of the Amnesty International field trip that took place in Lampedusa between the 23-31 July 2011. The information gathered for the sake of this paper was collected during interviews and informal discussions that took place during the field research period.

<sup>79</sup> CNN World "Why is Italy now at the center of Europe's debt crisis?" 4<sup>th</sup> August 2011  
[http://articles.cnn.com/2011-08-04/world/italy.economy.explainer\\_1\\_italy-finance-minister-giulio-tremonti-prime-minister-silvio-berlusconi?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-08-04/world/italy.economy.explainer_1_italy-finance-minister-giulio-tremonti-prime-minister-silvio-berlusconi?_s=PM:WORLD)

capable of protecting and defending that space.

Moreover immigration is rarely treated as a theme that needs to be elaborated on, and the few times it does, it is associated with dimensions of security and criminality. For instance, the 2009 report indicates that of the 5684 news broadcasts that were aired during the research period, only 26 tackle the theme of immigration without linking it to crime news or the argument of security.<sup>80</sup>

Noury expresses his own views: 'The Italian media handle the immigration phenomenon even without binding it necessarily to a crime: the point is that this is done almost exclusively by using the theme of security and not immigration per se. On the contrary, it happens a lot more frequently that it is exactly security and not crime news (even if an immigrant is the main protagonist of that crime) that starts off an in depth examination on about the migration trend.'<sup>81</sup>

It is hard to say whether it is then the media who strengthens political decisions or the other way around. Here one has to take into account a crucial factor about the Italian context: 'what to do about Silvio Berlusconi's twin roles as politician and media mogul?'<sup>82</sup> Since the 1980s Berlusconi has controlled a huge media empire, including the 3 top Italian commercial TV channels. Moreover, according to *The Economist*, when he was in power in 2001-2006 he was able to directly influence 90% of Italian terrestrial television. Even though in 1987 the Italian Supreme Court ruled his commercial monopoly as unconstitutional, no concrete action or steps have been put forward to change this.<sup>83</sup> Whether such facts are detrimental to the social conditions of immigrants can be answered simply by looking at Berlusconi and his administration's political stance on migration, which has always been at the forefront of anti-immigration policies, as was emphasised earlier in Chapter IV. Alternatively one of his latest statements reiterates this stance: 'The left's idea is of a multi-ethnic Italy. That's not our idea, ours is to welcome only those who meet the conditions for political asylum.'<sup>84</sup> Consequently the press and other mass communication forms can be considered an instrumental control tool that has the power to push and steer the public opinion in a certain direction; a tool that is constructed with attributes of fear and threat, the invasion of the national security. The security and protection of nationals comes before the protection of foreigners and immigrants, considered the cause of the threat to security; leaving ideas of human rights pushed into the corner.

### c. Provincial Information

A third characteristic is the reality that Italian television depicts, this is largely what Noury calls "provincial information". The cameras only show the arrival of immigrants, but they never show their leaving<sup>85</sup>. By doing so, Italian mass media spreads the idea that all the immigrants that arrive in Italy do not leave anymore, generating a sense that the country is overcharged and is not

**Comment [LS44]:** Woop! Nice punchy stuff!

**Comment [LS45]:** Which report?

**Comment [LS46]:** Ah, this is where the 30 years comes from, the blissful Berlusconi years...

**Comment [LS47]:** I was born then!!! Bet Rai Uno never reported that, pah!

**Comment [LS48]:** Public sympathy and support for such policies was rallied throughout this period through the politically controlled mass media, leading consequentially to a media, parliament and people who had a seemingly negative and fearful stance towards immigration; which successfully classed refugees within the same resented category as immigrants.

**Comment [LS49]:** So even if you are a political asylum seeker, you must join a homogenous not multi ethnic society.

**Comment [LS50]:** Really interesting point

<sup>80</sup> Sapienza report 2009: 18

<sup>81</sup> Riccardo Noury interview, 30.07.2011

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.economist.com/node/7912736>

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/16/italians-berlusconi-control-media>

<sup>84</sup> <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2009/05/10/uk-italy-immigration-idUKTRE5491CC20090510>

<sup>85</sup> Cf *supra* note 8

able to cope with the large influxes.

The term provincial information is coined to highlight a somewhat Italian -centred attitude, creating a sense that Italians want information on events that affect them directly, and not other nations or people. Unquestionably this highlights the fact that when the subject is immigration, the foremost concern for Italians is the answer to the question: how is the country going to deal with such large influxes? The circumstances and reasons that lay behind the peoples' decision to leave, whether they have fled conflict-torn countries, as is the case for the Libyans who have been arriving since the beginning of the upheavals in the country, or whether they are fleeing poverty stricken Darfur or Somalia, or political repression in Uganda. This is secondary information, and does not come with the same level of important, and puts again a negative spin on migrants: they might have good reasons why they have to leave their country, but they cannot put a strain us as well.

**Comment [LS51]:** The amount of news time given to international news stories? Then people do not know the context of how or why people are fleeing their homes. Could condense next sentence if short of space

### 3. Empirical Facts: perceptions, views and attitudes of Lampedusians

This following section will expose and analyse data that was collected from interviews and discussions with Lampedusians. The interviews were composed of questions that aimed to understand the islanders' thoughts on immigration and the economy of the island, their feelings about the government and where Lampedusa stands now

About 15 official interviews were conducted for the sake of this research paper, half of them in the city centre, around *Via Roma*, and the other half at the port, as the second-highest income activity for the islanders, after the tourism industry, is fishing. Relatively more information was collected through informal discussions and meetings, but also through the medium of the Amnesty International camp.

**Comment [LS52]:** More description of what this is...

A few leitmotifs and recurrent answers were used as key information initiators for this section, and more importantly to provide answers for the debate set out for this paper: how do Lampedusian views concur with current immigration perceptions or do they challenge them?

#### a. Theme I: “Journalists have destroyed the island” - The Role of mass media

The role of the Italian mass media and its various characteristics has already been presented in the previous section. This first point however aims to expose the view of the islanders on the subject, in order to describe their views- an aspect that has been left aside too often in the most recent debates on the subject and in news footage of the Island- but it also intends to additionally support the statements stated in the Italian mass media section.

The sentence 'The Journalists have destroyed the island' (in slight variations)<sup>86</sup> and 'they are ruining the image of Lampedusa' has been the most repeated sentence and can be tracked down in both formal and informal discussion.

Almost like a silent litany, this one sentence seems to point towards a collective Lampedusian trauma where they feel that their local identity has been tarnished by misrepresentation that serves wider political aims. Their statement unconsciously attracts the outsiders attention towards the "real danger", the culprit responsible for the creation of an emergency; that according to Lampedusians<sup>87</sup> is not one.

Besides immigrants, Lampedusians also saw large waves of journalists arrive to the island. Rosina A., a local resident expresses her feeling vehemently:

'We much prefer immigrants. Journalists have merely brought us problems. They have completely ignored the needs of the inhabitants of the island and have depicted a completely false image of Lampedusa. And now we are going to struggle a lot to get through the winter.'<sup>88</sup>

Economically Lampedusa is completely dependent on the tourism industry. According to Claudio Melchiorre, member of the Institute for Consumer Research, 2011 has registered 80% less tourism than its forerunners<sup>89</sup> the years before. Many islanders talk about the crisis of the tourism industry. They say that until last summer, there were about 18-20 daily flights to Lampedusa. This year, they have been reduced to 6 or 7.<sup>90</sup> The recent headlines- whose language is characterised by an increasingly dramatic language, mix elements of emergency, anxiety and insecurity- and has had a significantly detrimental effect on the tourism industry, creating 'an unprecedented crisis and staining, perhaps irreversibly the image of the island'.<sup>91</sup> Vincenzo M., a 65-year old 3<sup>rd</sup> generation fisherman born on the island, states that:

Comment [LS53]: Omg that's a lot!

'The mass media have spoken too much and not enough about what was happening on Lampedusa. Too much about the chaos, the disorder, the overcrowding [over 15000 migrants were present on the island between March and April<sup>92</sup>]; and too little about the real problems the island is facing and what many Lampedusians have done to help the migrants.'<sup>93</sup>

The views most local inhabitants have about journalists is epitomised by a banner that was put in 2006, next to the main port, where the landings take place. The banner, part of an awareness-

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<sup>86</sup> Interviews 1-15. Variation of answers include 'Journalist are detrimental for Lampedusa.', 'Journalists are lying and because of them we have no more tourists.' Etc.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews 1,2,4,7,9

<sup>88</sup> Interview 3

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/08/07/lampedusa-aziende-e-residenti-dellisola-pronti-a-chiedere-i-danni-al-governo/150393/>

<sup>90</sup> Interview 7, 8

<sup>91</sup> cf *supra* note 8 (translated by the author)

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/21/lampedusa-migrant-italy>

<sup>93</sup> interview 7

raising campaign called *and* launched by the local Lampedusian association *Alternativa Giovani*, shows a weeping little black girl with the headline 'A smile for the press'<sup>94</sup>. The text reads:

'Whilst migrants are still being saved at sea, Lampedusa risks to serve the consequences of language characterised by anxiety and emergency, composed by often false, simplistic and incoherent information by the media, that portray the arrival of immigrants similar to an aggression, a siege (an attack) and a threat to be feared, without any respect for those who arrive in inhumane conditions (and have gone through a lot of suffering). At the same time, they are destroying the difficultly achieved touristic and economical position of the island. Stop the reality show.'

**Comment [LS54]:** Asks the press to people's misery and vulnerability when they arrive at Lampedusa with some dignity and respect. A child is a more innocent picture of the immigrants, especially a girl.

**Comment [LS55]:** How does this go against the media position?

The portrayal of immigrants as aggressive, fearsome and that constitute a threat is not a new concept. They are represented in the Italian media more frequently than Italian nationals; 59,7% for the former as opposed to 46,3% in news broadcast and 35,7% in newspapers for Italians. However, it is the opposite for when looking at news about judicial procedures whereby immigrants appear in 16.5% of news broadcasts and 14,2% of newspaper articles as opposed to Italians who appear in almost a third of national broadcasts (27,3%) and over a third of newspaper articles (30,4%).<sup>95</sup> However, more than being a first sign pointing towards a different treatment of information on the basis of ethnicity and nationality, such results can have a detrimental impact on the formation of social perceptions on immigrants.

For instance, immigrants are mostly portrayed whilst committing an offense, a situation exaggerated in the unsettling and dramatic language that characterises criminal news, whereas immigrants tend to disappear in the moment when justice steps in; that is to say that 'they are absent in the crucial moment where not only the facts of what has happened can be exposed, but also where we can see some human characteristics, personality, their difficulties and their voices – even through the medium of lawyers.'<sup>96</sup>

Consequently 'the crimes committed by immigrants in Italy become crimes with no motive or consequences. They are bits of news with no story, no humanity and no penal repercussions.'<sup>97</sup> Thus such episodes will exclusively be remembered for 2 communal traits: violence and immigration.

**Comment [LS56]:** How long are people considered immigrants> regardless of whether they have Italian citizenship, this constant xenophobia means they will never be seen as Italian nationals.

A similar narrative can be applied to another phenomenon: the abduction of children by Roma people. Based on the alleged abduction in 2008 of an Italian child by a 16 year old Roma girl in Ponticelli, Naples, the incident has sparked violent reprisals by Italians living in the area, ending in the eventual burning down of the nearby Roma camp. The stigma of Roma heritage and identity and racism in general is very high within the Italian collective and similar episodes reoccur in the Italian media.

The case was presented as a single episode, highlighted by dramatic criminal news language and the apparent brutality of Roma people. Yet here again the judicial processes failed to show an

<sup>94</sup> The campaign was launched in 2006 and called 'A smile for the press- Put a Stop to the Reality show'. Its aim was to raise awareness for the language and images used by the mass media to portray the problem of illegal immigration. <http://www.alternativagiovani.it/590-Iniziative.html>

<sup>95</sup> Morcellini *et al*, 2009:10

<sup>96</sup> *id supra*, note 3 (translated by the author)

<sup>97</sup> *id supra*, note 3 (translated by author)

evolution of the case, in order to verify or drop the accusations, thereby possibly confirm a stereotype or prejudice.

**b. Theme 2: “A crisis created by the government.” – The role of the Berlusconi administration in the manufacturing of a humanitarian crisis.**

The idea that the humanitarian crisis is a crisis created by the Italian government is another recurring leitmotif that appears during the field research period.<sup>98</sup> For many the *emergenza clandestina* has been wanted and generated on purpose; and has become a reason for anger and disappointment towards 'a government that has always forgotten about Lampedusa and that has always left it alone.'<sup>99</sup> They further insist that someone only needs to take a walk around the streets and see how calm and peaceful it is, and that it is true that there are some landings, they usually happen at night and the people on board are usually moved to Sicily or other parts of the mainland straight away.

The major part of the interviews took place on the streets surrounding the city centre and *Via Roma*, and in the small cafés (*bars*) near the port. This is due to the fact that the islanders, especially the older generations, uphold the very much southern Italian tradition of sitting outside their houses late afternoon (due to the high temperatures between 11-4pm, shop, people stay in their houses) ; they chat with neighbours or play cards with friends. And it is whilst chatting with people and being part of the social life of the island that one cannot but notice the very high amount of governmental police and military present on the island. Moreover, due to the relatively low tourism incidence , the streets in Lampedusa were generally very empty; yet the high presence of military and other police corps gave the impression of a military base rather than a (former) famous tourist destination.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2011, after the arrival of almost 4000 immigrants in 4 nights to Lampedusa, the Berlusconi administration declared a state of emergency, turning to the national civil defence to help handle the situation.<sup>100</sup>

A few young soldiers currently present on Lampedusa state that they were told to handle the situation in the same way they would handle any other humanitarian crisis<sup>101</sup>. The military is not the governmental presence on the island; also police men, civil defence guards, the coast guard and *guardia di finanza*, a special military corps dealing with customs, excise and tax crimes. However, after 10 days on the island there was not one immigrant sighting which confirms the idea that the immigration crisis on Lampedusa was created by the choices made by the government. Because of its strategic position, the island has always been an important entry point for immigration influxes coming from the northern African Coast, but also from the Balkans. But Lampedusa has always just been a transitory stop, before transferring people onto

<sup>98</sup> interviews 1,4,5,6, 11, 13, 14, 15

<sup>99</sup> Interview 6

<sup>100</sup>

[http://tg24.sky.it/tg24/cronaca/2011/02/12/lampedusa\\_sbarchi\\_immigrati\\_fuga\\_tunisia\\_maroni\\_frattini\\_e\\_mergenza\\_umanitaria\\_cpe.html](http://tg24.sky.it/tg24/cronaca/2011/02/12/lampedusa_sbarchi_immigrati_fuga_tunisia_maroni_frattini_e_mergenza_umanitaria_cpe.html)

<sup>101</sup> informal discussion took place on July, 28<sup>th</sup> 2011

the Sicily or the mainland. Therefore locals and many NGOs that have visited the place assure that it is a one-off situation that was purposely created by the Berlusconi administration. Giusy D'Alconzo, Director of Communication for Amnesty International Italy, highlights that the crisis was provoked by the choices the government has made. "The migrants present during the crucial months of February and March were stranded on the island because the transfers had been blocked by the Italian government. It was a very conscious choice."<sup>102</sup> Vessels from the African continent rarely aim for Lampedusa, but rather attempt to get to Sicily. Landings on the island usually occur after the crafts have been intercepted at Sea by the coastguard. Nevertheless, migrants never stay for more than a night, and are usually transferred to the reception centres in greater Sicily. Charlotte Phillips, another member of the AI delegation, echoed the words of the local population:

'Lampedusa cannot receive and accommodate the numbers of people arriving from Libya and Tunisia. It has to be purely a transit centre. People need to be taken onto the mainland so that they can be treated with dignity and have access to asylum procedures for example, access to adequate accommodation and have their cases properly processed. That can never happen on Lampedusa. This is a humanitarian crisis that was of the Italian government's own making. It is a crisis that could and should have been avoided.'<sup>103</sup>

A point even more highlighted by a discussion with 3 members of the *guardia di finanza*, who kindly agreed to answer a few questions. I asked how long they were staying on the island for. The answer came quickly: they usually only stay for two months, 'after all, we cannot be too grabby, as our colleagues in Rome, Milan and Bologna are waiting for their turn to come to Lampedusa. Everyone deserves a vacation.'<sup>104</sup>  
If only there for a few months, they have very limited local knowledge.

As mentioned before, one of the essential findings that were discovered whilst on Lampedusa was the virtually non-existing presence or arrivals of refugees and asylum seekers. The field research phase was 12 days long, and I properly witnessed one landing<sup>105</sup>. In fact, according to some islanders, most landings happen during the night and usually the people are usually transferred to the reception centres on the mainland that same night.

Only a few hours later, a second landing took place. The increasing number of soldiers, policemen, and others were gathering at the port, giving out the impression that it was going to be a large landing, similar to the one the night before. However, it was nothing of the sort as it a very small craft appeared at port entrance, carrying at the very most 30 people, but followed by 2 impressing coastguard ships.

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<sup>102</sup> Giusy d'Alconzo was a member of the Amnesty International delegation that went to Lampedusa in March 2011. The interview took place over the phone on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011.

<sup>103</sup> Charlotte Phillips was also part of the Amnesty International delegation that went to the island. The entire press conference can be found online. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BapatSONgck>

<sup>104</sup> informal interview 3

<sup>105</sup> A night landing was also partially witnessed during the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> July. The very small vessel craft carried about 288 Libyans, 25 of whom had died on the journey due to asphyxia.<sup>105</sup> The discovery of the arrival was made the next morning through the news, and when I arrived at the port, the survivors had already been moved and soldiers were placing the caskets of those who had died on a lorry.

Only then one ambulance arrived. The amount of governmental force present at the scene somewhat insinuated that Lampedusa was preparing to fight at war or at the very least, to be attacked. A handful of interviewees expressed their feelings as follows:

'If Lampedusa is collapsing, it's because the government wants it to. But nobody blames the Italian government. People only blame the governments of the countries these people come from. And they blame the immigrants themselves as if they are coming here with the intention of destroying Lampedusa'.<sup>106</sup>

The reasons behind such a reality are manifold. Some blame it on be the constant worsening of the Italian economy with a public debt of 118.1% of its GDP<sup>107</sup> and an external one over of over €790 billion (\$1.1 trillion). This result is so high that 'dwarfs the total for foreign-held bonds issued by countries like Ireland, Portugal, Greece and even Spain'.<sup>108</sup> The Italian government has asked for the assistance of the European Union whilst launching a few measures that contradict some of the promises it made once it got elected, the most notorious one being the statement that it would never touch the taxpayers' money. Others insist that immigration talk linked with the theme of security is part of the political agendas of all the parties in Italy. And by creating false links between immigrants and criminality, some politicians and government representatives have fuelled a climate of tension and xenophobia.<sup>109</sup> For instance, when the Italian government declared a crisis on Lampedusa, the Italian minister for the interior Roberto Maroni stated that the immigration fluxes brought with them the high risk of terrorists entering the country and Europe.<sup>110</sup>

Undeniably 'the old xenophobia still has the power to win votes in election contests between parties'.<sup>111</sup>

Lampedusians do not think highly of the current administration<sup>112</sup>, they feel abandoned and when the situation was at its worst, they were left alone to deal with it. A handful stated that politicians and government representatives come to the island when landings take place; 'they take a few pictures for the press. Then they leave and never come back'.<sup>113</sup>

There seems however to be no similar resentment or anger towards immigrants and they are not looked at as the cause of the problem.

<sup>106</sup> Interview 8, 9, 12, 15

<sup>107</sup> The information is accurate as of July, 15 2011. [http://www.indexmundi.com/italy/public\\_debt.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/italy/public_debt.html)

<sup>108</sup> The full picture on the current situation of the Italian economy can be found in the article *Even Italy's politicians are scared*, on the webpage of 'The Economist'.

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2011/07/italys-economy>

<sup>109</sup> Amnesty International 2011 report: 482.

<sup>110</sup> <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/02/11/immigrazione-maroni-emergenza-umanitaria-da-maghreb/91437/>

<sup>111</sup> Harris 2002:4

<sup>112</sup> Interviews 1-15

<sup>113</sup> Interviews 1-6, 9,10,11 and especially 12-15 for the second part of the statement.

Comment [LS57]: Move top of page 6

Almost all interviewees insisted that the media and the government stained both the image of the island and the social status of the people arriving, most of them in very bad conditions, with no shoes or other personal belongings.

The next section will therefore examine the islanders' views and perceptions of the ones that are perceived by the Italian government, and perhaps as will be seen in the following paragraph, by the wider Italian community as a problem or threat.

### c. Theme 3 :solidarity over racism

Chapter II set out the meaning of and what some popular beliefs about immigration entail. This section explores if the people who live in the zone defined as the main gateway for illegal immigration into Europe<sup>114</sup> adhere to such perceptions or if they have developed different visions and what the possible causes behind it might be.

**Comment [am58]:** I would put this in a separate sentence

There have been references to Lampedusa receiving a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize due to the extreme humanity, patience and dignity with which the islanders have handled such a delicate situation.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, the islanders will receive the *Santu Baddaru 2011-2012* Prize, a regional Sicilian award that recognizes Lampedusians who 'have distinguished themselves for the generosity and solidarity they have shown through the welcome and help for the thousands of immigrants and their painful exodus.'<sup>116</sup> Indeed, the way in which the Lampedusian population has dealt with the dramatic situation on the island deserves to be praised and emphasized considerably more than it has been.

The stories of solidarity of the local populations towards immigrants are numerous and the interview phase has identified it as third recurrent theme and as the strongest counter argument for anti-immigration stereotypes and prejudices, such as the examples set out in Chapter III.

**Comment [am59]:** This is worded a bit confusing to me - maybe rephrase?

National and international news have neglected to talk about how the locals gathered together to cook large amounts of pasta bakes for the migrants, how clothing and shoes were brought down to the port on an almost daily basis, how football games between islanders and migrants were organized, among other examples. Almost daily there were acts of solidarity by people whose own economical situation are worsening, and have them wondering how they will manage to get through the winter<sup>117</sup>.

But

Janino Menino, president of the local NGO *Alternativa Giovani* and Lampedusian citizen explains that:

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<sup>114</sup> Cf *supra* note 1

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12903771>

<sup>116</sup> <http://www.dailyblog.it/immigrati-premio-di-solidarieta-a-popolo-lampedusa-e-adnkronos/31/08/2011/>

<sup>117</sup> Interview 14

It was a serious situation but that has also emphasized something important: the islanders' capacity to adapt. And in the current Italy, which is characterised by an increasing fear of immigrants, this seems almost like a miracle. It's never easy to live in a place where the population density doubles but the people from Lampedusa have not only faced the difficulties with extreme dignity but have also shown a lot of solidarity towards the immigrants.<sup>118</sup>

It was not only practical solidarity. A handful of older ladies explain that one day, 'all the "mothers of the island" cooked couscous for everyone to show their solidarity. These are all generous gestures, especially in a society that appears to be more and more anti-immigration. These acts need to be emphasized more by the media in order to reflect the various viewpoints that exist regarding immigration

Another aspect that arose from the data collection is the acknowledgment that when confronted with daily misery, expressing solidarity is a normal reaction. Quite a few older Lampedusians seemed to agree with this sentiment that 'Italians living in cities or other people cannot empathize because they only see it through the eyes of the news. But they don't see it for themselves. We see them arrive in the worst conditions and you cannot simply ignore such pain.'<sup>119</sup> Richard Rorty puts it differently by saying that 'what we mean by 'human solidarity' is to say that there is something within each of us – our essential humanity- which resonates to the presence of this same thing in other human beings.<sup>120</sup>

Some however disagree with such views. When looking at the case of Bosnia, for instance, Michael Ignatieff suggests that the failure of Western Europe to respond to the atrocities that were happening not far away from home reflect 'the lack of solidarity between "us" and "them"'.<sup>121</sup> He states that

'If the cause of Bosnia failed to arouse the universal outrage and anguish that the atrocity footage on our television screens led one to expect, it was not because those watching such images in the comfort of their living rooms lack a conscience or humanitarian impulse. The charitable response was quite strong. The real impediment to sustained solidarity ran deeper: in some nearly incorrigible feeling that their security and ours are indeed divisible; that their fate and ours are indeed severed, by history, fortune and good luck; and that if we owe them our pity, we do not share their fate.'<sup>122</sup>

In a few words "we" feel compassion and possess a sense of common human conscience, but this type of solidarity is not going to let those who suffer become one of "us", and as Wheeler states, 'the fact is that "we" remain very selective in how we express our sense of solidarity with the defenceless and the oppressed.'<sup>123</sup> Responding to the needs of those who put their lives at risk to knock at the gates of Fortress Europe is a similar issue and proven right by the European

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<sup>118</sup> Interview 9

<sup>119</sup> Interviews 5,6,9

<sup>120</sup> Rorty, 1989 in Wheeler 1997

<sup>121</sup> Wheeler 1997:13

<sup>122</sup> Ignatieff 1996 in Wheeler 1997:21

<sup>123</sup> Cf *supra* 1996:22

**Comment [am60]:** Make sure that you are consistent throughout your paper that footnotes either go before or after the period.

governments brawling over residence permits and visas or the latest Italian decree that allows the detention of undocumented immigrants to up to 18 months (even if no crime has been committed). Thus the idea of solidarity being a “normal” or “human” reaction is an illusion. Whether other Western societies would react similarly if faced with such a tragedy, cannot be confirmed or barred. But what has to be appreciated and supported considerably more by other nation states (and maybe even by some Lampedusians themselves) are the solidarity and the human commitment shown by the Lampedusian community.

The national Maltese newspaper emphasises this further, expressing that the immigration waves that are heading our way, do not call ‘a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of the people concerned. On the contrary, it should be a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the good of all and of each individual, whoever the individual is and comes from, because we are all really responsible for one another. (...) Solidarity must mean seeing the “other”, whether a person, people or nation’<sup>124</sup>

There have been some protests. On the 28<sup>th</sup> March, local Lampedusians were protesting at the port against the arrival of new tents and other basic humanitarian material, with many small fishing boats preventing the ferry from **ARRANCARE**.<sup>125</sup> It was a statement of reality: Lampedusa could not accommodate so many people and, as expressed by a few young Lampedusians, was an action ‘to stop Lampedusa becoming a refugee camp and an open-air prison’.<sup>126</sup> One cannot naively hope that on an island that is even too small to have its own hospital, it is normal to find persons who feel “invaded” and who do not sympathise with their cause as other islanders. However, a number of of the protesters also expressed that it was not an action made out of anger or disrespect towards the thousands of stranded Tunisians, Libyans and others.

When then asked if there were ever any problems between migrants and Lampedusians, interviewees clearly state that though in February and March the thousands of asylum-seekers come to the island, there have never been any issues between locals and foreigners.<sup>127</sup> Don Stefano, the local priest, insists that there have never been any acts of violence, no acts of vandalism or conflicts. ‘How nothing has happened is something that only Lampedusians and the migrants that have cohabited with them in March know.’ There weren’t any lacks of provocations either and there are also quite a few that sustain that the migrants had no right to leave their country to “invade Lampedusa”<sup>128</sup>. There is no absolute truth and all researches that can be made are partial and individual truths that Lampedusians keep for themselves. And if some islanders did feel invaded, the actions undertaken by others overshadows such facts.

A Lampedusian mother expressed her feelings clearly:

“Truthfully when people first arrived I saw them as the enemy: they were taking away all the things that I had realised; they were putting in danger my life and my work...That's normal I

<sup>124</sup> <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20110415/editorial/Human-suffering-and-the-value-of-solidarity.360321>

<sup>125</sup> <http://www.freeitalianpress.org/2011/03/20/lampedusa-altissima-tensione-tra-cittadini-e-forze-dell'ordine/>

<sup>126</sup> Interviews 12, 15

<sup>127</sup> Interviews 1-15

<sup>128</sup> As mentioned by Don Stefano in his interview (interview 11)

**Comment [am61]:** Is this meant to be capitalized?

**Comment [am62]:** Has this been checked with any news articles or other sources other than interviews?

think. But then I've forced myself to stop for a minute and to look them in the eyes, and that made me understand that in the middle of all these crowds, there are people like you, individuals with projects, ideals, thoughts that they would like to express; and if I had been in their situation.<sup>129</sup>

As is the case in all societies and communities, there is no one homogeneous opinion in Lampedusa either. It is up to each individual to build its own opinion, or to decide whether we share a common human solidarity or if humanity is what we make of it. But Lampedusians have displayed a rare degree of solidarity that is yet to be appreciated well enough by other nations. More importantly they have handled a very complicated and harsh situation with dignity and respect towards those arriving, without putting blame or supporting common negative perceptions; a reality that is symbolised by *La Porta d'Europa* (The gate to Europe), a monument on the hill next to the entrance of the port. It is a memorial that seeks to remember all those immigrants who tragically died trying to cross the Sea. According to the Observatory for the victims of Immigration *Fortress Europe* about 10,376 have perished between 1998 and 2007, with 1,510 who have died in the first months of 2011.<sup>130</sup> But the monument also serves as a reminder that Lampedusa is not an island of desperation, but of welcome and solidarity that plays an important role towards human rights.

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<sup>129</sup> Interview 9

<sup>130</sup> According to statistics registered by *Fortress Europe*  
[http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/2006/02/immigrants-dead-at-frontiers-of-europe\\_16.html](http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/2006/02/immigrants-dead-at-frontiers-of-europe_16.html)

## VII. CONCLUSION

People arrive in Lampedusa for many reasons: some for economical reasons, as did the Italians after World War II; others need to escape war-torn countries and famine, or political or religious persecution. However, the ones that knock on the door of the fortress in the hope of finding what they were denied in their homeland, do not ask for it formally, but do so instinctively and in the most dramatic and urgent of ways, abandoning their country, family, friends and home, travelling by dangerous and precarious means, hiding in trucks or bus-booths. And every year thousands of them die during this attempt.

**Comment [LS63]:** this concept needs to be fully introduced, source?

People knocking at the gates of a Europe that has and can do everything, are the ones that do not have and cannot do anything. Italians have migrated to America at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; most western societies have had waves of emigration as well, when they were riddled by poverty and with no prospects. And we would not hesitate to do it again if the situation were to demand it.

**Comment [LS64]:** I'd save this for later on when you have evidence to support, more of a conclusion statement, it is a BOOM statement, best to ease the reader into it. It is also polemical, the reader needs to warm up first before they are persuaded.

And even though stereotypes and false ideas people have about immigrants, such as the idea of them representing a threat to employment sectors or to national identity and unity, have been verified as wrong, anti-immigration perceptions remain engraved in our social consciousness. More importantly these perceptions are also supported and even spread by states and governments. As seen with Italian case, the government has a long record of political anti-immigration discourse and has passed many strong-headed laws and policies against irregular immigrants. The deterioration of national policies as well as Berlusconi arguing in 2010 that "a reduction in [the numbers of] foreigners in Italy means fewer people to swell the ranks of criminals"<sup>131</sup> are a testimony for the presence of prejudices against migrants at all levels of society.

**Comment [LS65]:** Bit vague, unless you have a clear historical example- Italian immigrants to America in early to mid 1900s. Immigrants particularly from Sicily arriving on East Coast with nothing.

And whilst immigration towards Europe has always been a regular phenomenon, the revolutions in the Arab world and continuous wars on other parts of the African continent have generated an important increase of it and a greater non-cooperation by the European states.

Yet the attitudes of the people living main entrance of illegal immigrants into Europe have proven to see things differently and even though suffering greatly economically by the presence of thousands of stranded immigrants, Lampedusians have not put blame on those arriving; they have blamed the government for having purposely created an immigration crisis on the island, and the media, for having depicted Lampedusa as an island at the verge of a collapse, and without showing any respect for often appalling conditions of those who landed on the island. Those who were on the island during the crucial weeks of March and April were able to witness the numerous gestures and acts of solidarity and compassion, which have defied all negative attitudes.

<sup>131</sup> <http://gypsyinfo.com/racism-and-xenophobia-in-italy.htm>

And whilst Italy and other governments were busy brawling about permits, interpretations of the Treaty of Schengen, etc; portraying an egotistical and self-centered approach of the European Union faced with the events in the Southern cone, Lampedusa gave a lesson to Europe and the World.

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