



Destaque Semanal

## Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism refers to the conviction that all Africans and descendants of Africans in the diaspora share a common history, common interests and, ultimately, a common fate which thus(...)

**Jihan El-Tahri**

## Lampedusa

Gaia Giuliani

Publicado em 2019-04-01

Lampedusa is a rocky island located in the Sicilian Channel and closer to Tunisia than Italy. A beautiful cluster of white-sanded shores skimmed by light-blue warm Mediterranean waters, and inhabited by a population mostly involved in the fish industry, Lampedusa has been mostly neglected by Italian central government until very recently. As included in the Meridione (the South of Italy that corresponds all provinces, lands, and islands located “below Rome”, Sardinia included), as much as the whole South (although with important differences), the island was represented by the institutional discourse as *discontinuous and dangerous*: it was too territorially distant and located too South, and as such imagined and actually treated as inhabited by unmastered ‘barbarians’. In the common imaginary, it was always ‘a problem to solve’, a periphery to colonise, and, after WW2, an unredeemable cluster of poor, illiterate, and *mafioso* attitudes.

In post-Fascist Italy, Southerners have been seen for decades as abject, risky bodies whose emigration (during the last 50 years Lampedusians migrated to inland Italy in their numbers) towards the industrial triangle was read as loaded with a sinister omen of barbarity and decay. This abjection was experienced by Lampedusians, occupying the particular position of the South of the South of the South (Southern to Sicily which is already considered the South of the South).

More recently, in the discourse on mass illegal immigration, Lampedusa figures again as a spot inhabited by uncivilized ‘poor’ people barely able to profit from the island’s beauties (the tourism sector has been only very recently developed) and to cope with the ‘emergency’ of illegal boatpeople landings (labelled so after the Arab Spring inaugurated in 2010).

In reality, if re-read, the most recent representations of Lampedusa within the frame of the mass landings of migrants and refugees through the Mediterranean “Middle passage” and within the “frames of War” on Terror and its discourses, we can clearly see as it constructs the island as a ‘proscenium’ where a complicated set of power relations, imaginaries, and stories (individual and collective) are continuously rehearsed and modified – like in a work-in-progress *mise en scène* of the European/Italian Self and its/their Others.

Lampedusa as a proscenium is the locus where a multiple border is performed and spectacularized. In the ‘borderization’ of Lampedusa dwell both processes: the first process corresponds to the one that still distances mainland Italy from the South (its internal ‘colonized’ barbarity), keeping it safe from a reading of geography that in the past had included it as a whole in the space beyond the ‘gate’ (I am thinking about the orientalist view that Europe forged of Italy as a whole and as the “Meridione of Europe”) and had viewed it as culturally, socially, politically and racially inferior to the ‘whiter/more civilized’ Europe. The other is the one that aims to distance Italy from Africa and the Mediterranean, where the post-colonial effects of colonial violence and depauperation results in thousands of boats and hundreds of drownings.

These constructions – as a proscenium and as a border – necessarily imply also a representation of Lampedusa as a ‘gate’ between past, present and future – for memories of colonial violences to come back, for potential/future postcolonial violence to enter the space of the Self. The discourse around Lampedusa reveals the persistence of the foreclosed memories of colonial conceptions of the global space.

The triple feature of Lampedusa as a proscenium, a performed border, and a gateway produces Lampedusa itself as at once a joint and a fault that, facing fears of ‘invasion’ and ‘collapse of European/national identity’, both reinstates its same identity and reveals so-called European society as everything but homogenous. Again, it leaves ‘the door open’ to the *crisis* both confirming the symbolic power and revealing the ‘fictionality’ of the representations of the space of Europe as politically coalesced and culturally homogenous. It reveals Europe as divided – as confirmed by the recent European nations’ disagreements on military interventions in the Middle East (1990-2010s), on the ‘European Constitution’ and its principles, on anti-crisis measures after 2008 and, more importantly here, on a common European approach to both the Arab crisis and the Syrian refugees’ quest for asylum.

Besides Europe’s internal political divisions, it reveals also, through the same *mise en scène* of the ‘gate’, the continuation of those faults (in terms of class, colour and gender lines) that persist nation-wide since the very formation of the nation. In brief, although Lampedusa’s ‘borderization’ is meant to reinstate the dichotomy between here and there, the frontier of Lampedusa – an offshore and distanced one – allows this shift and reproduces the Other side of the ‘gate’ (Africa and the Middle East) and the ‘gate’ itself (Lampedusa) as Others.

### References and further readings:

- Bigo, Didier (2002), “Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease”, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 27(1): pp. 63-93.
- Butler, Judith (2009), *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*. New York: Verso.
- Cuttitta, Paolo (2014), “‘Borderizing’ the Island Setting and Narratives of the Lampedusa ‘Border Play’”, *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, Vol. 13(2): pp. 196-219.
- Giuliani, Gaia. 2016. “The colour(s) of Lampedusa”, in Gabriele Proglino and Laura Odasso (eds.), *Fortress Europe, Border Lampedusa. Migrations across the Mediterranean sea in cultural and comparative perspective*. London: Palgrave.

**Gaia Giuliani**, PhD, is a researcher at CES, University of Coimbra (PT), associate professor in Political philosophy (ASN 2017, Italy), principal investigator of the project “(De)OTHERING” – funded by FEDER, POCI and FCT, and founding member of InterGRace - Interdisciplinary Research Group on Race and Racisms (Italia)

### Como citar

Giuliani, Gaia (2019), "Lampedusa", *Dicionário Alice*. Consultado a 27.05.19, em [https://alice.ces.uc.pt/dictionary/?id=23838&pag=23918&id\\_lingua=1&entry=24312](https://alice.ces.uc.pt/dictionary/?id=23838&pag=23918&id_lingua=1&entry=24312). ISBN: 978-989-8847-08-9

7