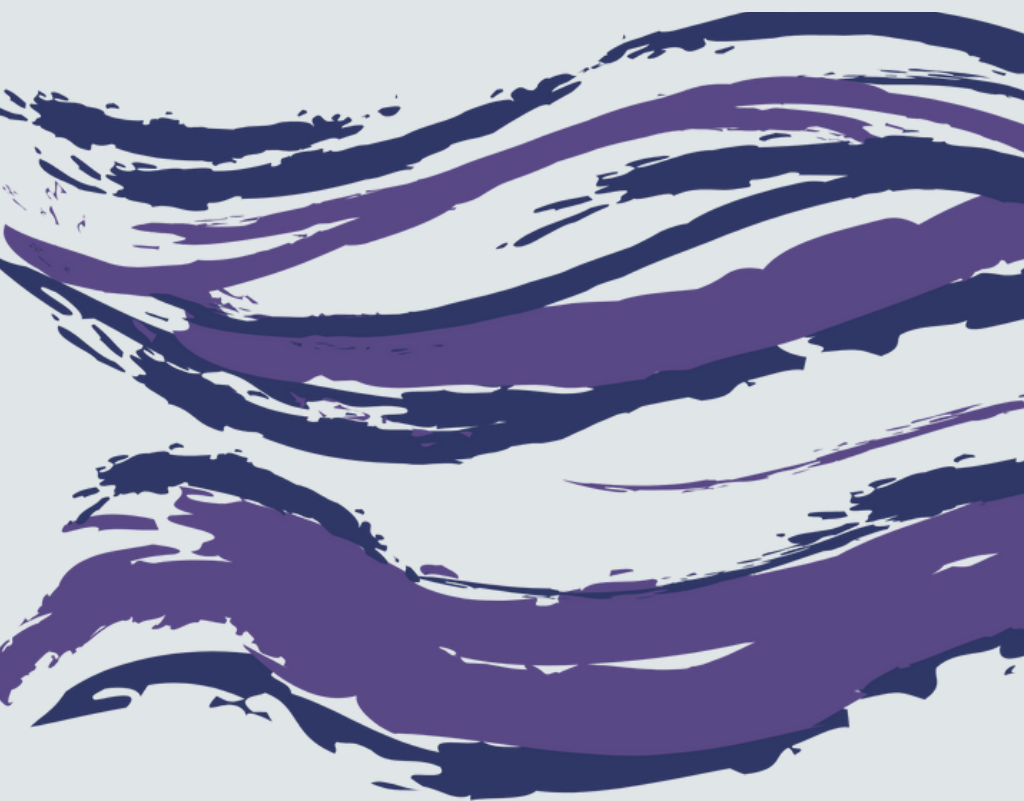


# BUILDING BRIDGES, BURNING BORDERS



**MALDUSA**  
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

**MALDUSA  
ONE YEAR BOOKLET**



**MALDUSA**  
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

## 'BURNING BORDERS'

We dedicate this slogan to the daily struggles of people, who in North-Africa are called Harraga - "border-burners" - while crossing the border without visa and burning their ID-documents afterwards not to be deported.



The Maldusa Project is supported by:





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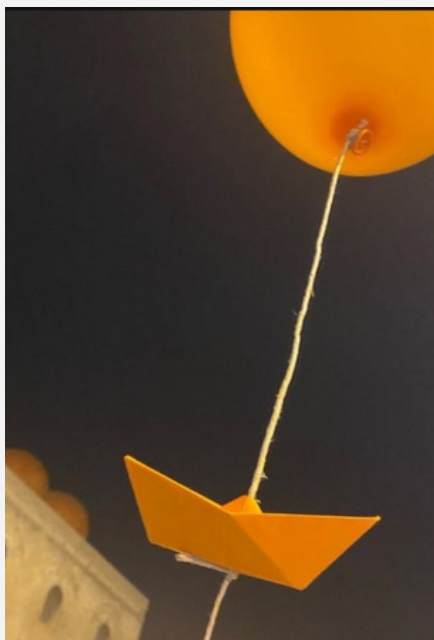
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# Facilitate Freedom of Movement

# What is Maldusa

Once upon a time, somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, there was a boat that had departed from Libya, making its way North. After several hours at sea, the people on the boat had lost their orientation and decided to phone Watch the Med - Alarm Phone to ask for support in their journey. The person who picked up the phone asked the people on board where they were traveling to, what was their destination. The person on the boat answered that they were directed towards 'Maldusa'. Confused, the Alarm Phone member asked once more whether they wished to reach Malta, or Lampedusa. "Maldusa, Maldusa! We are going to Maldusa!" repeated the person on the boat, this time very clearly and full of enthusiasm.



Maldusa: an imaginary nowhere and anywhere land in the Mediterranean Sea, an imagined destination of hope and freedom, a space that, every day, we try to build and to make real through our struggles, hand in hand with people on the move.

Maldusa is a cultural association aimed at facilitating freedom of movement, supporting existing infrastructures for migrant solidarity, as well as researching and documenting border violence, on land and at sea, on the Mediterranean routes.

The association is composed of activists involved in Search and Rescue, migrant solidarity and transnational struggles. Maldusa follows a horizontal and collaborative approach. It seeks to bring together various experiences and expertise to build bridges and collaborations between the North and South of the Mediterranean Sea, as well as between European and African realities, people on the move and with a migratory experience.

Whilst documenting and denouncing the continuum of border violence, Maldusa's research seeks to contextualise it within a broader and more nuanced imaginary/scenario: on the one hand challenging the narrative of "emergency", on the other working towards the construction of collective webs and networks of grassroots resistance all along migratory routes.

Maldusa wants to deconstruct the image of the Mediterranean Sea merely as a deadly space, as a space of violence, pushbacks, non-assistance and selective visibility, in order to foreground the complexity of imaginaries and practices related to solidarity, mutual aid and resistance.

Connecting apparently isolated events and understanding borders as contested spaces/relations, Maldusa places attention to processes, struggles and histories of places, actors and communities that converge at the border.

Maldusa constituted two stations in Palermo and in Lampedusa, to carry out critical research work and facilitate the encounter of local and transnational realities. In the two stations, Maldusa focuses on a qualitative research and documentation approach, in collaboration with activists, people on the move, and existing organisations in the North and South of the Mediterranean Sea.

In **Palermo**, the Maldusa cultural association seeks to bridge a multitude of local and transnational realities that derive from anti-racist struggles, migrant activism and solidarity, as well as building bridges between communities on the move and their places of departure...

Maldusa's **presence at sea** aims at intervening for changing the political context in which 'emergency' at sea takes place, putting pressure to mobilise authorities' rescue as well as denouncing violations and violences. For doing so, Maldusa seeks to counter-map and counter-monitor what happens at the border by listening to those who experienced the crossing, by supporting them in telling their stories, amplifying their voices and their demands.

# One year on...

With 112 landings and more than 5000 people on the move reaching Lampedusa in one single day, the 12th of September 2023 marked a new level of breaking through the Central Mediterranean borders. In the months before the refugee and migration movement had literally overrun the hotspot system and forced the Italian authorities to keep the situation calm with rapid transfers to Sicily. Then in September the dynamics reached another peak point, when the hotspot system fully collapsed and "... Lampedusa becomes a space for enriching encounters and spontaneous acts of solidarity between locals and newly arrived people. Trays of fish ravioli, arancini, pasta, rice and couscous enter the small room next to the church, where volunteers try to guarantee as many meals as possible to people who, taken to the hotspot after disembarkation, had been unable to access food and water for three days. These scenes were unthinkable only a few days before..."



Exactly one year before, in September 2022, we had set up our "Maldusa Station" in Lampedusa. Since then, we have been permanently present there and have started our monitoring and local networking. At the time, we could not imagine that Maldusa would get into the middle of an impressive cycle of struggle for freedom of movement in the central Mediterranean. It remembered - not in its dimension but in its moments and spirit - the summer of migration in the Aegean Sea and on the Balkan route in 2015: a volatile situation of, on the one hand, humanitarian crises, border violence, and deaths at sea, and on the other hand, the powerful struggle for freedom of movement with thousands of people overcoming the violent and racist border regime and with solidarity in the streets.

In April 2023 the „Maldusa Station“ in Palermo opened its doors to the public. Since then, the space has hosted a multitude of events, initiatives and assemblies. Over the past months it became a vivid social center, a meeting- and a co-working place for several organisations, groups, and individuals. Central to the organisation, running and use of the space is the Baye Fall community, a selforganisation of migrants mainly coming from Senegal and Gambia. They organise dinners, music events and workshops and they support people on the move who had recently arrived in Palermo from Lampedusa. In collaboration with the Feminist Autonomous Centre of Research and with other local actors the Maldusa social center is also a space for „cross over“ events, trying to interconnect initiatives for migrants rights with other social and political struggles.

Maldusa also bought a small fast boat with a limited range and capacity, but with the idea of being stand by for monitoring around the island of Lampedusa. This boat should become operational in 2024. With its presence at sea, Maldusa seeks to support people who might encounter difficulties in their journeys, and to facilitate their passage in face of authorities' attempts to obstruct their arrivals. Rescue will be deployed when needed, but the first aim is to support existing forms of self-organisation and the autonomies of migration.

One station in Lampedusa, a second station in Palermo, a boat at sea. Three modules for monitoring and reporting, for supporting and escorting. Maldusa stands for practical solidarity on a key route of flight and migration. For a welcoming network in a contested space.



INTERVIEW WITH MALDUSA,  
FIRST PUBLISHED ON MELTING POT IN ITALIAN (1)

# Connecting informal realities

**Every day Maldusa come up against the structural limitations and contradictions of the border system. How do you support people on the move?**

In 2021 there was a meeting of No Border realities in Palermo. We asked ourselves what existing struggle alongside people on the move needed most. We agreed on the need for a base in Lampedusa, because we lacked an insight and a counter-narrative about what is happening in on the island. For instance, members of the Alarm Phone, found ourselves talking on the phone on a daily basis with people who would see Lampedusa from the boat they were calling from but then contact would be lost soon after. In those cases, there was no way of knowing whether the people had arrived in Lampedusa, also because the coast guard does not release any kind of information about it.

**The coast guard cannot release information or refuses to release information?**

Years ago the coast guard used to cooperate with civil society organisations, but things have rapidly changed. Over the past years, when we attempted to contact the coast guard in Lampedusa, we were always referred back to the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Rome (MRCC), which regularly replied that they could not release any information.

It became important to have a critical eye on Lampedusa to also understand what the politics were on the island. All border islands are microcosms: there are the border guard, UNHCR, collectives and solidarity organizations, each with their own dynamics.

(1) <https://www.meltingpot.org/2023/10/il-progetto-maldusa-come-connettore-tra-le-realta-informali/>



Most of our movements were complete outsiders to this landscape, and we felt it was essential to insert ourselves critically into these dynamics by building a base there, from which to weave deeper relationships with the key actors involved in search and rescue, both institutional and grassroots.



Alongside this, the need of a fast monitoring ship based in Lampedusa emerged. From the perspective of search and rescue operations, the Mediterranean is a difficult sea. Most NGO ships have capacities to rescue hundreds of people, but they are often very slow. The greatest difficulties occur in contested waters such as those between Malta and Italy, which in such cases bounce responsibility for intervention off each other, and the people in distress are left to die. We decided to integrate our presence on the island with a fast ship that, on call, could leave from Lampedusa and quickly get to the sites of distress, not so much to do the rescues, but to pressure authorities to intervene, as well as to monitor what would otherwise be a black hole of information on the sea around Italy.

### How do you go beyond search and rescue work?

What we try to do is to build bridges between the north and south of the Mediterranean, to strengthen the link and collaboration between realities that already exist. Maldusa's goal was not to replace existing realities, but to connect these realities, to strengthen the so-called "underground railroads." The imaginary of underground railroads, linked to the informal networks of enslaved African American people was fundamental in envisioning Maldusa's work. It is in light of this imaginary that Palermo and Lampedusa are referred to as "stations": they are bases, to strengthen structures and channels that foster freedom of movement throughout Europe.

Infrastructures of border violence, refoulement and repression are closely linked to the humanitarian industry of reception: a repressive, dehumanizing infrastructure that often causes further violence and vulnerability. Maldusa's effort is to build alternatives not only to explicitly violent institutions, but also to those forms of institutional humanitarianism that reproduce the same forms of control and repression towards people. These ways of managing the so-called "humanitarian emergency" go against our principles of freedom of movement and self-determination of people on the move. We also disassociate ourselves from the very definition of the issue in terms of "emergency."

**In developing practices of struggle and infrastructure for freedom of movement you need the perspective of the people themselves who suffer the border. Why?**

The paths from Lampedusa to France or from Greece to Slovenia were not created by NGOs, the Red Cross, or no-border realities. They are the work of the people themselves who are traveling, and who, in their journeys have slowly built networks of mutual aid, according to their own needs and capacities. Of course, solidarity groups are important, but the junctions, the channels, the crossroads along the routes have been created by migrants themselves in self-organized realities, perhaps without the No Border slogans, but often moving along lines of solidarity and mutual aid against and despite borders.

There is a lot of attention on NGOs being criminalized, but the people who end up in prison on trafficking charges are migrant people who facilitate each other journeys and who provide services, sometimes for a fee. They are criminalised as "traffickers", to facilitate, in a positive sense, people's freedom of movement there where everything tries to impede it. We also cooperate with the Captain Support Network, a network in support of people criminalised for driving boats across the Mediterranean Sea. These people are migrants themselves, convicted to years in prison just for driving the boat across the sea.





# The Lampedusa Station



# LAMPEDUSA BETWEEN ARRIVALS AND TRANSFERS - LAST WEEK AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS -2 JULY 2023

Last week thousands of people passed through Lampedusa, forced to transit the island hotspot. On Wednesday 28th of June, on 24 different boats, more than 1200 people arrived; on Thursday 29th of June, with 46 boats, more than 2000 people entered the hotspot.

With a maximum capacity of 389 places, during the nights of Thursday and Friday, the hotspot came to accommodate more than 4000 people despite the continuous and consistent transfers to other centres in Sicily.

Since the Italian Red Cross took over the management of the facility, it has been evident that more adequate means of transporting people have been made available: buses to replace the 9-seater vehicles in which up to three times as many people were loaded and, above all, military ships for the transfer to Sicily. In addition to patrol boats of the Coast Guard and the Guardia di Finanza, the Navy patrol boat "Cassiopea" was deployed several times during the week, managing to transfer around 1,200 people in a single day. In the last week, transfers even took place within 24 hours after arrival in Lampedusa and, on the days between 28 and 30, some people were transferred directly to Sicily, without going through pre-identification in the Lampedusa facility.



## TAKE IT FORWARD: THE ARRIVALS IN LAMPEDUSA, THE RACIST VIOLENCE OF THE TUNISIA-EU MEMORANDUM - 19 JULY 2023



These are the words of a young man who has just disembarked on Lampedusa, and they subvert all the violence of having to flee from a city where one has lived for so many years, tearing apart social relations and acquaintances. Those who arrive in these days on Lampedusa not only have on their bodies the fatigue and difficulty of the sea voyage in an overcrowded iron barge, but carry with them the countless abuses they have suffered and the essentially racist violence perpetuated by Tunisian civilians and authorities:

*The police arrived with buses and picked people up to take them to the desert, to the border with Libya. One of our brothers was taken to Libya like this [...].*

And that's what happened directly to Rosette and her child, Hamadi who was less than a year old:

*They took us all the way to the border with Libya, there were so many people there: women, some pregnant, young people and men. I managed to escape and get back on the road to Sfax...on foot. No bus or other means of transport wanted to pick us up because we are black...luckily I managed to get a ride to Gabes and then walked to Sfax [...].*

According to AlarmPhone, more than 1,200 people have been deported to the military and desert zone on the border between Libya and Tunisia. Last week the city of Sfax was the epicenter of yet another whirlwind of racist violence. At the beginning of June, xenophobic and populist discourses began to clog social media and public debate. The Tunisian newspaper LaPresse, on 11 June, published an open letter signed by 'a group of academics and journalists' from Sfax in which, amid conspiracy theories and racism, they pointed the finger at the presence of non-white non-Tunisian people to the point of regretting 'the beautiful colonial era'.

## PORTO EMPEDOCLE. MONITORING ON TRANSFERS FROM LAMPEDUSA - 17 AUGUST 2023

A strong tramontana has been blowing on Lampedusa for a couple of days. Ferries to and from the island, crowded of tourists, have been at a standstill ever since: the regular ferry fails to leave Sicily's southern shores.

Cigarettes are missing, supermarket shelves are almost empty. "If the ship doesn't come..." - is the expression sketched as a kind of justification to tourists by Lampedusa merchants; the locals are actually used to, yet exhausted, being often "abandoned" in the middle of the sea due to weather conditions.

Wind and sea not only prevent goods from reaching Lampedusa, but also people on the island from leaving, including migrants. They thus find themselves crammed into the Contrada Imbriacola center.



## CHRIST DIED OF COLD - 29 AUGUST 2023



On Friday 25 and Saturday 26 July, 65 and 53 landings were recorded on Lampedusa respectively, bringing the number of people inside the hotspot to over 4500.

Since midday on Thursday 24, the Favalaro pier has been constantly full of newly-arrived people forced to wait to be taken to the Contrada Imbriacola facility after passing USMAF (office of maritime, air and border health) health screening and CRI (Italian Red Cross) registration. Although these are scenes that have been repeated for some time now in the island's daily routine, the arrivals of the last few days have further jammed up the logistical operation that the Red Cross has been relying on since last June: the buses available are not enough to transport people from the pier to the hotspot and, at the same time, guarantee the transfers from the hotspot to the ships. If you add to this that there is only one small road to access the hotspot for buses, trucks and forklifts, you can imagine, with more clarity, a blocked mechanism.

These days, practice precedes all rhetoric, and what is happening shows that Lampedusa can be a beautiful island in the Mediterranean Sea rather than a border, that its streets can be a place of welcoming and encounter without a closed centre that stifles any space for self-managed solidarity.



The problem is not migration but the mechanism used to manage it.

## YOU CANNOT STOP THE SEA WITH YOUR HANDS: LOCALS' MOBILISATIONS AND MIGRANTS' STRUGGLES LED TO THE RECONFIGURATION OF THE HOTSPOT - 18 SEPTEMBER 2023



In the last few days, people's tenacity and their motivation to get out of the humiliating conditions in which they were forced, totally redefined how the hotspot operated: from identifications to transfers. It was no longer the officers' calls that defined who left and who stayed. Instead those who managed to get on the buses first would be able to leave, at times entailing violent confrontations. That evening, indeed, at the commercial pier there were three groups of people who had organized and arrived there independently. A group of Sudanese, a group of Syrians, and a group of Tunisians were claiming the need to leave, but also denouncing the exclusion and disregard they had suffered over the past few days: 'There is no one among the workers who can speak to us in Arabic and explain what is going on, or to justify why we have been staying here for days while other groups are leaving', reported one of the young men. In the days of the hotspot collapse, associations working in the hotspot could not get in and were not operational either outside or inside.

## THE ARBITRARINESS OF CONTROL AND THE BORDER REGIME - 4 NOVEMBER 2023

"Tunisia, which accepts cooperation, does not accept anything resembling charity."

In an Eurocentric view, journalists, analysts, and activists have interpreted the political decision as a way, of the Tunisian president, to play the classic game of opening and closing the border. Instead, the basis of the Memorandum's rupture is, on the one hand, Kais Saïed's political steadfastness (**repeatedly stressed**) not to play the role of border controller for Europe and, on the other hand, the real intention to control Tunisian territory and any form of organization that escapes state control, whether political (political opponents, activists, NGOs) or economic (smuggling and passeurs networks). Sovereignism - the monopoly of the state in controlling the territory - rather than political opportunism, is the filter through which to read Kais Saïed's political intention at the same time the point of convergence with Giorgia Meloni's political vision and justification for the repressive and dictatorial nature of the political system orchestrated in recent years.



## DYING AS A RESULT OF A TRANSHIPMENT AT SEA - 19 NOVEMBER 2023



In this context, where the approach maneuvers are so complex and dangerous that they have led in some cases to the capsizing of the same boat in distress, might the practice of deploying flotation devices have prevented some deaths?

Would the use of small rhib boats have made it easier to approach the massive CP200, whose high edges, as mentioned, make the asset more suitable for investigation and police operations, rather than rescue?

On Nov 11, a Guardia di Finanza asset was carrying the body of A.A., an Eritrean boy, to Favalaro Pier. The iron boat he was traveling on, which had departed from Sfax, had wrecked, and by the time authorities arrived on the scene, all the people on board were in the water. From the testimony of friends and siblings, A.A. was being sucked into the whirlpool of water that had been created as the boat sank.

Could his death have been avoided if there had been medics on board the GdF rig? Normally, CISOM medical personnel are on board Italian GdF patrol boats, but in recent weeks they were not present due to the non-renewal of the PASSIM3 project agreement. For the same reason, IOM mediators have not been able to board for several weeks either

INTERVIEW WITH TWO STATION COORDINATORS IN  
LAMPEDUSA

# Experiences from the island of transit

**In September 2023 the Maldusa station in Lampedusa existed for one year. You both coordinated the contacts and the work during this time. Can you tell about your main challenges during the first and the last months?**

One year has passed since we arrived here in Lampedusa. This need was coming from the necessity of having a new awareness about what is Lampedusa and what is going on here. Coming from other networks of solidarity with people on the move, we acknowledged that we missed a counter-narration about what happens in Lampedusa to people on the move, against the emergency management and the spectacular instrumentalization of a so-called "invasion". Putting together, crossing and matching information about arrivals, missing and dead people, trying to create a contact with them and amplifying their claims and voices, we tried to understand how to move in a very contested place as Lampedusa.



How to merge people on the move's struggles with the locals' ones, knowing that border regimes shape both of them and trying to see common paths, avoiding to spectacularize the phenomenon. In doing so, we mixed different kind of experiences, valorizing the importance of the Baye Fall community in Maldusa, the knowledges in search and rescue of some of us, the connections with Tunisia of others, trying to create a network linking the north and the south.

**"The local population in Lampedusa is tired of the migration spectacle". We heard this sentence again and again. How would you interpret it? What are its consequences for a new initiative that wants to support people on the move at sea and on land?**

Lampedusa has been used as a base for the management of migration for years, as the States look at it. During the time passed here we had the possibility of meeting local people on different occasions and we noticed a kind of tiredness of looking at Lampedusa only with the filter of migration. Going around in the little streets of Lampedusa, behind the first seven historical buildings, through the doors of the houses, you can glimpse the effects of infrastructural problems; first of all the health system.

After years of emergency, Lampedusa still lacks a proper hospital; people need to go in Sicily for treatments, even for giving birth. No proper social assistance is provided for situations that need it. From this point of view, when state actors, NGOs and associations address their energies only in the direction of "migration" the perception is that each one is doing their own interest regardless of the territory and of the social realities living here. Being based in Lampedusa helps to close the structural gaps that stand between associations as Maldusa, aimed at supporting freedom of movement, and local actors in so far as there is the intention and the willingness to create networks with local realities.

**People, who visit Lampedusa for the first time are surprised about the separated co-existence of the two worlds: the more or less hidden arrivals of migrants on one hand, and tourism on the other. What does it mean? How to deal with it?**

There is a specific and calculated aim of separating migrants from locals and from tourists, and of invisibilizing or instrumentalizing their presence in a way in which they are always represented as "others". From the disembarkation, to the bus, to the hotspot, to the ferry, to Sicily, people are always surveilled and forced in delimited spaces - even though, of course, there are always "scapegoats". Their presence, according to the mainstream discourse, would disturb the holiday postcard of beautiful white beaches and crowded bars.

"The only place where migrants and locals seem to cohabit is the cemetery" says the *Mediterranean Hope* team (MH is a FCEI project on the island, and among other things they tend a memorial path in the cemetery). However, the rare moments in which people on the move, locals and tourists have cohabited, have shown how the vicinity might build a much better scenario of sharing and solidarity. To open moments and spaces to inhabit together becomes a key priority. Maldusa is trying to do so through daily struggles, with invisible and visible practices, with the apparently impalpable virtual support via phone, creating contacts with lawyers, organizations, and solidarity networks.



The 12th of September 2023 and the days after marked a new situation and a strong (re-)activation of solidarity with people on the move in Lampedusa. Were you expecting it? And how did you experience the local dynamics?

As reported on our web site, what happened the days following the arrivals of almost 10.000 people in Lampedusa and the collapsing of the Hotspot system demonstrated that Lampedusa can be an island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea without being a border device. During that week in September local people were participating in demonstrations asking the government to stop using Lampedusa as a key border device - as it has been during the last years. At the same time, the same people participating at these protests were actively involved in providing for basic needs and constantly cooking for people. For Lampedusa, the main problems do not concern migration in itself, but the border devices that occupy it and the militarization of the territory as a consequence.

Spontaneously and with strong determination, local people and structures activated a strong network of solidarity that reminded 2011 when, after the fall of Ben Ali and for other political reasons, there were thousands of Tunisians on the island. As Maldusa, together with Baye Fall crew and other activists from other organizations (SeaWatch, Mediterranean Hope and individual actors) we put energy into building up a self-organized kitchen in support of the local solidarity network.

A few weeks after the 12th of September - with much less people arriving from Tunisia - the old hotspot system seems to be reorganized. What has remained? What might be its future? Do you think that more attempts are needed to break the re-normalisation of the hotspot system and the increasing repression?

A few weeks after the collapse of the hotspot system, practices of segregation came back into force; for the people that just arrived via sea on the island it is not possible to exit the Hotspot, even when it is incredibly crowded. For civil society actors it is not possible to meet who arrives. Most of the time, people are locked inside the center over the 48h enforced by law. This has been demonstrated by the interventions of ASGI lawyer in October 2023 when A.A., a person who just arrived in Lampedusa, was detained in the Hotspot against the order from the Questura to free him. "He is free, but cannot go out!" said the police chief responsible for the hotspot, underlining the arbitrariness of power in such a place.

The Hotspot is a place where, in the last few months, different people have been detained with the accusation of smuggling because they drove their towards Lampedusa; others have been stopped with the use of anti-terrorism tools and all Palestinians people - even those coming from Syria, have been affected by those controls after the 7th October.





**For most people on the move, Lampedusa is a short transit station. How to look at Sicily as the main transfer station? How the monitoring between Lampedusa and Sicily could be interconnected?**

Lampedusa has been built as a tool to filter, scan, detain, and select those who “deserve” to stay in Europe. However, the tenacity and autonomy of migration is challenging this structure every day. At the moment, the governmental attempt seems to be prolonging the containing and filtering tunnel from Lampedusa to Sicily, enlarging the “border zones” even very far from actual borders. New centers are being created in Sicily and in other areas of Italy, in which similar procedures to the ones of the hotspot of Lampedusa will be put in place. This means isolation, arbitrary decisions, difficulty to access basic services.

The link and continuum between the Hotspot center and the Agrigento prison is undeniable. Developing practices of solidarity with people facing criminalization is a cornerstone to create cracks into the functioning of the hotspot system. In this sense, as Maldusa, we keep contact with people arrested this year and we facilitated communications with their families. The activities of independent monitoring on the Hotspots around Italy, as also the CEDU claimed, is fundamental to understand the real functioning of the system.

Within this framework, it becomes even more important to build and reinforce networks of solidarity, sharing the experiences built in Lampedusa, and creating teams able to monitor these new spaces in Sicily, where people are transferred just a few hours after Lampedusa. Lawyers, operators and mediators can arrange strategies already in place to fit with the new scenarios, to denounce arbitrary measures of detention and segregation and support the movement of people!

7TH TO 12TH OF OCTOBER 2023 IN LAMPEDUSA -

# Building Bridges: the Maldusa Camp



Maldusa had invited about 60 activists from various solidarity projects in the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. On the one hand, the network internal meeting intended to further consolidate cooperation and practices between actors at sea and on land that has been developing in recent years.

On the other hand, several public events and a commemorative action were planned to address the local population and possibly also some of the many workers and tourists on the island, and to strengthen the impressive practices that took place on the island a few weeks ago: solidarity with the "People on the Move" who disembark in Lampedusa.

The first internal workshop on **“Solidarity at sea”** focussed on the contested spaces in the Mediterranean Sea, in Europe and North Africa: we discussed the new waves of racism and escalating border violence, as well as how, in 2023, migrant communities and networks have been asserting themselves in face of obstacles and hostility. A key question, related to our daily struggle, was also how to intensify the operational collaborations at sea amongst the civil fleet around Lampedusa. In the following session on „Solidarity on land“, various infrastructures for freedom of movement presented their struggles, and exchanged on how we can learn from each other’s tools and strategies, on how to improve our communication, and on how to better involve migrant communities and people on the move.

An analysis of the growing camp/hotspot and detention system in southern Italy has been the main topic of another round of exchange, followed by a workshop where the need of continuous monitoring in Sicily was discussed - mainly in order to amplify the protests of people detained.



What are adequate tools for organising **CommemorActions**? How to give more visibility - without creating spectacles - to the victims of the border regime? What are the challenges of the transnational network of families and survivors? Along these questions two parallel workshops took place, one dedicated to the preparation of the 11.10.2013 commemorAction in Lampedusa.

Several participants of the camp are involved in research of missing people and in projects for the identification of bodies, with the aim to develop a more dignified and accessible approach towards families and communities of the missing. In a rich exchange on practices and demands in various contexts, an appointment was made for a common mapping to foster future collaborations.

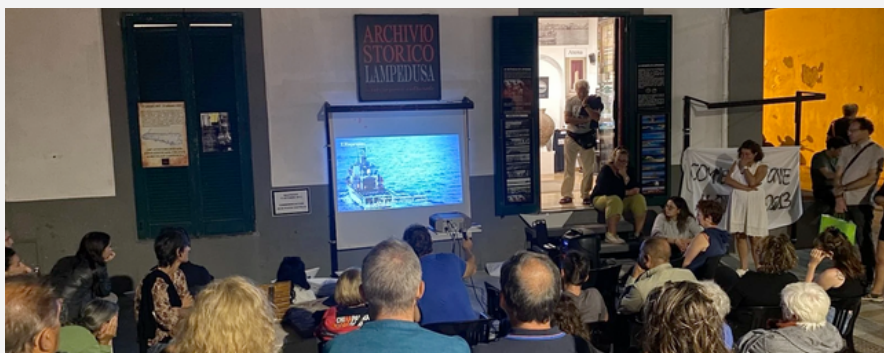
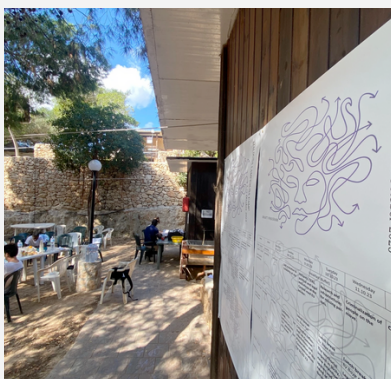


On the final day, in a workshop on **criminalization** participants reported about their experiences of imprisonment for boat-driving, and about solidarity campaigns against the criminalisation of facilitation in various countries. Over the past years the network grew on a transnational level, with practices of mutual support and mutual learning, and the impact of both political changes and of our strategies of resistance - both at the practical and discursive level - was evaluated.

**Strategic litigation** was the topic of a last workshop, in which examples of successful legal struggles were shared, combined with a discussion on what kind of interventions would help to block border violence and what would bring at least a bit of justice for victims, survivors and relatives.







During the first public event, in front of the association **"Archivio Storico di Lampedusa"**, we all sat on and around the impressive patchwork of the carpet of Yusuf. Local actors presented the initiative they founded in 2020, after the death of a 5 years old boy during a terrible shipwreck of a boat that had departed from Libya, and developed in close cooperation with his mother, who survived the shipwreck and buried the child in the Lampedusa cemetery.

Members of the local **Forum Solidale di Lampedusa** explained their approach when meeting people arriving at the pier: „We were the ones with nothing on our faces. Without masks, without uniforms, nothing on our faces, just our smile. People meeting people. We wanted to do something to keep dignity and humanity. Because the dehumanisation of migrant people is the first thing that happens when they disembark at the dock.

In the 2nd public event, guests from **Alarm Phone Sahara** and from **Refugees in Libya** presented their self-organized struggles on the background of the brutal consequences of EU border externalisation in North and West-Africa. In Niger, the project was established in 2017 with a hotline and whistleblowers along the desert routes to support people who try to cross, or who were deported back to South. In Libya, a cycle of powerful protests in front of the UNHCR office in Tripoli started in October 2021, and it continues in Europe with the key demand of evacuations.

In 2023 Tunisia has been a central place for departures to Europe and to Lampedusa and, for this reasons, most of the informations that circulates about Tunisia are in relations of borders and borders control. With **activists from Tunisia** we tried to have a deeper picture of the country touching the latest political development, the structural economic problems linked to imperialists powers and the rise of racist violence. We had the possibilities to speak about the important mobilizations of **Zarzis 18/18** that is still asking for truth and justice and a photo exposition of these protests was available in Piazza Castello. An important space has been dedicated to the racist speech that the tunisian president made in the end of February and its devastating consequences in terms of segregation, precarization and violence. We stand with the latest words that closed the event: "we lived under the era of Ben Ali and we know, now, how important is freedom".

In the evening of **11 October 2023**, more than 130 people - locals, tourists, transnational activists - followed our invitation and participated in the **CommemorAction** for the victims of the horrible shipwreck that took place off Lampedusa exactly ten years ago. It was an impressive and intense CommemorAction, where we shared tears and anger as well as hope for a world where death at the border belongs to the past.



# The Palermo Station

# A Social Centre in Palermo

The Maldusa Palermo Station opened its doors to the public in April 2023. Since then, the space has hosted a multitude of events, groups, initiatives and assemblies. Over the past months it became a meeting centre and a co-working space for several organisations, groups, and individuals, that use the space in different ways and at different times.



People on the move who had recently arrived in Palermo from Lampedusa were often re-directed to the space, where they could find support in the Baye Fall community. The Baye Fall have also recently supported people on the move during the 'fall' of the Lampedusa hotspot, joining our Maldusa Lampedusa team from Palermo, and supporting in the preparation of meals, distributing information at disembarkation and creating connections with some of the 7000 people recently arrived on the island. Once a month, the Bay Fall organise fundraising get-togethers, to apply for projects/funding to support the payment of the schooling and professional training of people mostly from the Senegalese and Gambian community.



Central to the organisation, running and use of the space is the **Baye Fall** community, that regularly inhabits the space, organises dinners, music events and workshops with children and students.





We also created a steady collaboration with the **Feminist Autonomous Centre of Research** (based in Athens), with whom we are currently building a feminist anti-racist library within the Maldusa Palermo Station. The library includes titles on border abolition, prison abolition, transformative justice and migrant justice from transfeminist and anti-racist perspectives, centring the voices of Black Women authors. Together with the Feminist Autonomous Centre of Research we co-organised several events related to current social and political struggles, including – amongst other things - an event with activists of the Sudan Uprising collective, the presentation of a feminist magazine and the annual Feminist No Border Summer School. The Summer School brought to Maldusa activists and scholars from all over the world, from Japan to Mexico, and it allowed us to connect our struggles against and across borders from a feminist perspective. Another group active within the space is the **Captain Support Network**, also connected to the Baye Fall community, which brings solidarity to people criminalised for driving boats across the Mediterranean Sea.

Together, we have been organising several events to bring different narratives around 'smuggling', and we invited researchers and activists to be in conversation with several groups in Palermo to challenge the criminalisation of people on the move. In September, we organised an international gathering of the Captain Support Network

Besides political events and gatherings, over the past months the space has functioned as a co-working space and meeting space where people from various groups could work together on their own projects or create connections between them, including members of Borderline Europe, Mem\_Med, Mediterranea, Watch the Med Alarm Phone and others. The convergence of these realities in the space allowed us to create spontaneous gatherings, and to be present together in public events outside of Maldusa, including the Gay Pride, Abolish Frontex and demonstrations against gender violence, and to prepare fliers or banners together that would highlight the intersectionalities of our struggles.



Weekly 'bar-nights' with aperitivo and the DIY stencil and screen-printing workshops allowed people to get together in more informal ways, to create things together like a printed bag or t-shirt, to think together about slogans, and to create a shared community around this work, regardless of age (children loved it) and language barriers. The space has also been crossed both by members of NGO rescue ships that came to Palermo on their way to SAR rotations, or during the CM-All meeting, as well as researchers, journalists and artists.

For the future, we would like to continue most of the work we started this year, to expand our feminist anti-racist library, to create more space for children and children-oriented education, as well as to invite more people from the Global South to exchange on our struggles and to deepen bridges with the other side of the Mediterranean Sea.



INTERVIEW WITH:

# The Baye Fall Community

**On 13 September, members of the Baye Fall community of Palermo went to Lampedusa. What was the reason for your visit and what was your aim?**

Our aim was to contribute to improving the conditions of those in situations of forced movement and precariousness, addressing systematic suffering and global injustices. We prepared food with the resources at our disposal and shared our constant commitment to humanity, trying to always be present and supportive. Our solidarity does not end in the material, but translates into concrete actions in favor of justice. The people we have helped are our brothers and sisters, and our mission Baye Fall is constantly serving the betterment of humanity. Our goal is to honor the preciousness of human life.

**Can you briefly describe the background of Baye Fall in Senegambia and the main practices of Baye Fall in Palermo?**

The main practices of Baye Fall in Palermo include preparing meals during Ramadan and the Tabaski festival, as well as during social events such as the weekly aperitif at Maldusa Station in Palermo. Moreover, we always try to help our brothers and sisters by addressing their problems and meeting their needs to the extent we can. We collaborate with Maldusa to facilitate our mission of honoring the preciousness of the human being, focusing primarily on promoting the freedom of movement of our brothers and sisters. Our practices are always permeated by human humility, enriched by tuba coffee and Baye Fall rituals. We visit our brothers in prison, we organize and participate in demonstrations against all forms of injustice, and we collaborate with associations and organizations in Palermo to improve the living conditions of people in the area and beyond.









### **What is your relationship/collaboration with other migrant communities in Palermo and Sicily?**

We consider ourselves a united community of brothers and sisters. Our social bonds are based on mutual care grounded in our social, political and economic conditions, as well as shared visions of contributing to the well-being of humanity. As members of the same family, we share significant moments in life, both joyful and difficult. We feel strong when we are together. Our solidarity is unconditional, as we believe that every life is precious without distinction. We collaborate with our brothers and sisters who work in different fields, such as agriculture, catering, hospitality and meal preparation during Ramadan and events, even during the pandemic.

**In 2023, a record of more than 150,000 people, many from West Africa, defied the border regime by reaching Italy via boat. What is the background to this situation? How do the Baye Fall feel connected to these dynamics?**

The background to this lies partly in the responsibility of Europe and partly in our African leaders. We young Africans must and can take on the responsibility of taking care of our continent, without waiting for Western political interventions in Africa. It is our duty, as members of Baye Fall, to help ensure the dignity of our brothers and sisters wherever they are.

For our Baye Fall philosophy, migration is a more than normal and represents an intrinsic expression of human life. However, although migration is a natural, it has often been politically governed with injustice and oppression. People have always migrated, as knowledge and opportunities are attainable through the process of migration. However, human conditions in many parts of Africa, colonized economically and politically, complicate people's lives, forcing them to undertake painful journeys for lack of real alternatives. We consider ourselves a united community of brothers and sisters, with social bonds, affection and connections based on the social, political and economic conditions here in Palermo, in Sicily, in the Italy, in Europe and in Africa.

**How would you describe communication and cooperation between migrant communities and solidarity networks for migrant rights in Sicily? What is missing, what should be improved, how to improve?**

Communication and cooperation between migrant communities and solidarity networks exist, but there is a need for greater convergence of those who feel distant. Without effective communication, we cannot build sustainable bonds. Understanding the conditions of our brothers and sisters is crucial, especially considering the challenges that often limit their participation.

To improve our communication, it is essential to listen carefully to our brothers and sisters, understanding their needs first. Many of them demand improved housing conditions, the right to a home, mobility documents, decent work and access to education and healthcare. We cannot understand their problems if we do not listen to them with compassion and love. We believe that to build social and political ties between them, it is crucial to understand the disparities that exist. To this end, local organizations must facilitate connection and collaboration between migrant communities on the territory.

**Why did you join Maldusa and what are your main objectives, focus, desires and perspectives in this project?**

We joined Maldusa because, since the presentation of the project, it was promised to create a welcoming space for all realities, allowing participation in various initiatives. The Maldusa project aims to be an initiative and a space where Africans can also work on search and rescue, offering their contribution to our brothers and sisters. We immediately embraced this proposal as we believe in the Maldusa project, and we embrace the idea that weapons do not heal wounds, but that through information we can win against war. Even if we are far from being able to offer more tangible help at the moment, as Baye Fall we believe and work for revolutionary change in terms of justice.

Although many of us have been criminalised here in Italy, we are not smugglers; we are fighting against injustice and those who harm our communities. Currently, Europe seems not to try to help those who save lives, but rather perpetuates violence and causes deaths.

As Baye Fall, we believe it is essential to have access to prisons, health, documents, and to have a help-desk and funds to carry out our projects aimed at assisting our brothers and sisters. For example, with adequate funds, we can take care of and provide assistance to homeless precarious workers or access to schools, training and education generally inaccessible due to lack of documents.

Find out more on our website:  
<https://ragazzibayefall.webnode.it/>



**BAYE  
FALL  
NIGHT**

**DJEMBE & DANCEHALL**

**SABATO  
h: 21:00**

**MALDUSA  
PALERMO**



**Assemblea  
aperta ore  
18.00**

**MALDUSA**  
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

20. Giugno

**Aboliamo le frontiere**

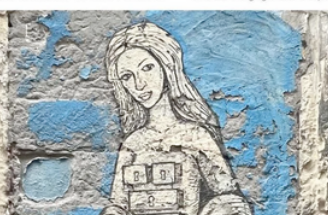
ore 17-20  
Piazza Verdi

con dibattiti  
e performance

**ABOLISH  
FRONTIER**

**SCORCI**

giornata siciliana di varia umanità anno 121 n. 5 giugno 2023 € 10,00



PRESENTA

**GIOVEDÌ 5 OTTOBRE H:19:00**

INCONTRO CON

**WHW**

women help women

**COLLETTIVO TRANSFEMMINISTA  
PER L'ABORTO AUTOGESTITO**

**@MALDUSA PALERMO - VIA DEGLI SCHIOPPETTIERI 23**

**SCORCI**

FEMMINISMI E RELAZIONI DI  
GENERE.  
OLTRE I CONFORMISMI

**MERCOLEDÌ 12 LUGLIO  
H18:00**

**GUERRA E  
RESISTENZA IN SUDAN  
INCONTRO CON  
SUDANUPRISING  
GERMANY**

14-18 GIUGNO 2023

**FEMINIST NO BORDERS  
SUMMER SCHOOL**

FEMINIST  
AUTONOMOUS  
CENTRE FOR  
RESEARCH

SESTA EDIZIONE



لا تخم العسكر  
O TO MILITARY DICTATORSHIP  
STOP THE WARS IN SUDAN  
العوادان

**GIOVEDÌ 29 GIUGNO 18:30**

@ MALDUSA  
VIA DEGLI SCHIOPPETTIERI 23

**FEMINIST AUTONOMOUS CENTRE  
FOR RESEARCH**

**CURA ABOLIZIONISTA**

ATENE BERLINO LISBONA NEW DELHI NOVI SAD PALERMO

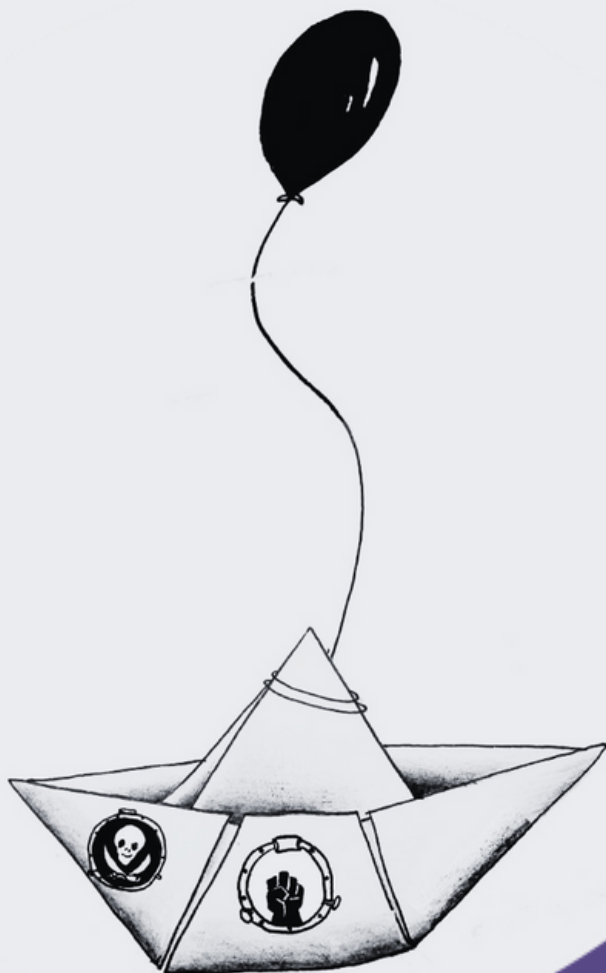
**BE CAREFUL  
WITH EACH OTHER,  
SO WE CAN  
BE DANGEROUS  
TOGETHER**



**FAC**  
research

IL BANDO PER LA PARTECIPAZIONE È APERTO FINO  
AL 24 MARZO 2023! [FEMINISTRESEARCH.ORG/SUMMER-SCHOOL](https://feministresearch.org/summer-school)





# Presence at Sea

# The boat to come...

The Mediterranean Sea is a contested space, inhabited by a variety of actors who struggle for and against freedom of movement. Every day, people who cross the sea, authorities who surveil and abandon them, NGOs who search and rescue, fishermen and merchant vessels crews, either attempt to defy borders or, willingly or not, reinforce them. Most of what happens in the Mediterranean Sea is invisible to the most, except for authorities' aerial controls. Not only multiple forms of violence and violations are kept invisible, but also the fate of too many people who departed from African shores and went missing will remain unknown.

Thanks to the efforts and courage of people who survive border violence as well as of civil society organisations, there are points of visibility of the systematic non-assistance by EU authorities as well as on illegitimate actions of the so-called coastguards of different countries - as Libya or Tunisia - who do not rescue people but illegally push them back to where they escaped from.

This border externalization and control project, which also involves the direct supply and training of patrol boats and coastal personnel, is financed directly by the European Union and facilitated through Frontex operations. At the centre of the attention there are not only acts of violence, including death at sea, capture by authorities, abandonment, but also acts of solidarity and rescue by the civil fleet.

This visibility is crucial for denouncing and eventually dismantling the border regime. It is also necessary for contesting the opposite view that those who cross borders are dangerous people rather than people in danger. But often this is not enough, as there is the risk of seeing people on the move only through the lenses of vulnerability, as powerless, at times lifeless, victims waiting to be saved, and whose fate (or: life and death) is in the hands of either European authorities or civil saviors.

People who cross borders do not start existing when they are in danger, when they are dying, when they need rescue or when they are being rescued.



This victimisation fails to acknowledge people's capacity to act and to exist outside the white gaze of European actors, and can be as dehumanising as portraying people on the move as dangerous criminals.

These narratives also keep speaking the language of emergency and crisis that portray death at sea and human rights violations as accidental and exceptional. This depoliticises the systemic nature of border management violence, which is chosen and designed by authorities every single day. Little is known and said about the everyday practices of migrant-to-migrant solidarity, self-organised arrivals, and people's capacity to cross borders despite authorities' repression, but also autonomously from European rescue.



How to centre the autonomy of people who cross, transgress, and defy borders every day? How to bring a different imaginary and an alternative language that does not focus on victimhood and emergency?

Of course there is no right answer or straightforward solution to these questions.

One of the ways Maldusa will collaborate with other organisations and self-organised migrant groups to propose alternative imaginaries, also combining the presence at sea with the presence on land, on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. This will help to place the act of crossings, the moment of distress, the arrival or rescue within a broader political framework, as well as to contextualise it within people's life histories and trajectories on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea and beyond.

With its presence at sea, Maldusa seeks to support people who might encounter difficulties in their journeys, and to facilitate their passage in face of authorities' attempts to obstruct their arrivals. Rescue will be deployed when needed, but the first aim is to support existing forms of self-organisation and solidarity among communities on the move at land and at sea.

Moreover, Maldusa's presence at sea aims at intervening for changing the political context in which 'emergency' at sea takes place, putting pressure to mobilise authorities' rescue as well as denouncing violations and violences.

For doing so, Maldusa seeks to counter-map and counter-monitor what happens at the border by listening to those who experienced the crossing, by supporting them in telling their stories, amplifying their voices and their demands.

In doing so, Maldusa seeks to facilitate freedom of movement.



# PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

A JOURNEY OF HOPE AND PERSEVERANCE

# From Tunisia to Europe

It was a typical day in Marseille's Noaille neighborhood, a hub known for its migrant community and ongoing struggles against police action and gentrification. I was sipping my tea at a local café when a Tunisian gentleman approached, asking if he could join me as it was the only free seat available. Welcoming his company, I nodded in agreement. He began to express his longing for Tunisian makroud and tea with mint, sparking a conversation between us. Curious, I asked about his arrival in Marseille. He revealed with a hint of pride that he was a "Harraga," a term used to describe those who migrate by sea, bypassing traditional routes. Sensing a shared connection, I mentioned my active involvement with several migrant networks, reassuring him that it was safe to share his story. With a smile, he agreed, reflecting on his recent journey from Tunisia, and his quest to find a piece of his homeland here in Europe.

**When did you decide to try to reach Europe by boat and the route from Sfax to Lampedusa? You decided with friends? Where did you receive main information? Did you check the weather before the start and think about a satellite phone? Could you find useful information on safety at sea and about the Alarm Phone hotline? Did you know where to go in Europe? You had friends or relatives in Europe?**

This year, Tunisia faced significant financial challenges. The economic crisis was so severe that basic necessities like bread and sugar were scarce. We even went weeks without coffee, and finding items like Coca-Cola was nearly impossible. Despite having money, purchasing everyday items became a struggle. The deteriorating economic situation, coupled with escalating police violence where they seemed to operate without constraints, convinced me by spring that leaving Tunisia was necessary. I discussed this with some friends and a cousin studying car mechanics, who shared my frustration with our situation.

In Tunisia, planning our departure via social media wasn't an option due to the risk of police surveillance and their use of fake accounts. Instead, we formed a group with trusted friends and relatives, including some with fishing experience, we were meeting daily to plan and to get contacts with people to buy engines and also the right boats from trustful people.

Ideas were clear to leave from Sfax as the Tunisian coast guard was overwhelmed and did not have capacities to stop departures. They showed some pictures to Europe to get money but they failed to stop departure. We relied mainly on information shared by Tunisian TikTokers who had firsthand experience with the conditions at the Lampedusa hotspot.

Their insights on what to expect and how to behave were invaluable and were shared in concise formats for our benefit. I believe in people who share experience. They also organise live sessions where you can ask them any kind of questions. I learned so much from them.

We meticulously checked the weather before our departure, using multiple applications to monitor conditions and wave heights. My cousin, skilled in mechanics, serviced and upgraded two engines, asserting that they were strong enough to reach Spain, not just Lampedusa. We didn't consider satellite phones due to their complexity but had a GPS.

Some of us could interpret Italian numerals, so our strategy involved reaching international or Italian waters and then seeking help from Italian authorities.

For safety at sea, we equipped ourselves with life jackets and inner tubes. We also packed bananas, milk, and dates for sustenance. Essential contact numbers were written on impermeable paper to ensure their durability in wet conditions. I wasn't aware of the Alarmphone. It seems many organizations focus more on Sub-Saharan migrants, often overlooking Tunisians.



I have cousins in Paris, and I plan to join them. The journey from Marseille to Paris's Gare de Lyon by train should take about eight hours. I'm lucky as I have childhood friends in Paris, so while I will miss my family, I won't be alone. Even Europeans struggle with loneliness so I'm really lucky.



**What was the biggest challenge of the journey? Did you start together with other boats? Any problems with the Tunisian Police or Navy? How long was your trip in the boat? Did you know in advance how long the crossing will last? Looking back, did you have enough information? What should people know, if they try and risk the crossing? What would you advice to the next people who want to cross?**

The biggest challenges during our journey were mental. There was a constant state of panic, and I often found myself grappling with the fear of dying in a shipwreck, unknown to my family. I chose not to inform them of my departure, adding to my anxiety. As we started our journey, we were extremely cautious, avoiding even smoking cigarettes to not alert the Tunisian coast guard. We were always on high alert, listening for any signs of pursuit.

At one point, when we saw lights, we initially thought it was the Tunisian coast guard and hid. It turned out to be a fisherman's boat. We were initially wary, fearing they might take our engines, and were prepared to defend them. However, they simply inquired if we had enough water. Interestingly, one of our group members, driven by his religious beliefs, insisted on carrying extra water to aid any thirsty people we might encounter at sea. The fishermen confirmed we were heading in the right direction towards Lampedusa.

Our group was entirely Tunisian. We planned for 15, but ended up being 17 as someone brought their orphaned brothers. My concern was heightened for my cousin who has diabetes, requiring me to give him a biscuit hourly to manage his blood sugar. The journey, expected to take 10 to 13 hours, stretched to 17, each hour feeling like a year.

Despite the hardships, I felt well-prepared, perhaps even over-prepared, but this extra information was comforting. Mental preparation is crucial to avoid panic. Trustworthy individuals who can maintain and enhance the engine are vital. Travelling with friends was beneficial as well; we shared many unforgettable moments that lightened the mood and helped us avoid conflicts.

I recommend having someone who can read coordinates and communicate in Italian is essential. We noticed that Italian authorities are less receptive to French speakers, they get angry if you speak to them in French and often respond better to even broken Italian.

Engines are incredibly valuable at sea, so one must be prepared to defend them if necessary. Our readiness to protect our engines was a critical aspect of ensuring our safety and the success of our journey.



**Have you been rescued or you arrived on the island by yourself? How were you treated? How long you have been in the hotspot and what are your experiences there? Did you get information about your rights and apply for asylum? Did you receive any document and were your fingerprints taken?**

When we arrived in Italian waters, our attempts to call the Italian Coast Guard were initially met with silence, despite our ability to speak Italian and having phone credit. Our situation changed when a wealthy fisherman or tourist, I am really not sure, out for leisure, approached. We explained that our engine had stopped and we needed assistance from the Coast Guard. He kindly offered to call them, and after several hours, they arrived.

The Coast Guard's arrival was marked by rapid and aggressive maneuvers, creating an atmosphere of panic among us. Their hostility was palpable; one officer, who spoke broken Arabic, was particularly aggressive. This treatment stripped us of our dignity and left us in a state of distress. During their operations, the Coast Guard rescued two other distressed boats. The individuals on these boats, visibly fatigued, were met with the same rude treatment. Once their boat was filled to capacity, we headed towards Lampedusa. The chaos at Lampedusa was as I had anticipated from videos I had seen. The provision of water was adequate, but the food was inedible.

Efforts to seek information from Arabic speakers among the Coast Guard were futile; their only response was a dismissive "you will know". Amidst these harsh conditions, my greatest fear was the potential COVID test, which, fortunately, was not administered. Some members of the Red Cross, who I refer to as doctors, showed genuine kindness, a stark contrast to the poor communication from the mediators. We spent approximately 10 to 14 hours before being transferred to a large ferry, a process that felt akin to being in a prison, with a long queue of exhausted people all uncertain of their fate. As a Tunisian, my concern was heightened by the possibility of being deported directly to Tabarka from Palermo. Upon disembarkation, we were provided with extensive information about seeking asylum by individuals, presumably from the UN. However, I am well aware of the slim chances of Tunisians to get asylum, you know even for the LGBTQ community who, despite support from European NGOs, often fail to obtain asylum. Imagine me, unknown and without any support. Before boarding the bus, some people offered us water and snacks, a small gesture of compassion amidst the overwhelming fear and uncertainty. The hotspots' extremely slow Wi-Fi made communication a challenge. Thankfully, I had roaming enabled, allowing me to maintain contact with my family, who continued to support me by adding credit to my phone. This journey has starkly highlighted that in moments of real risk, one faces the challenges alone.

**How long did it take for the transfer to Sicily? What happened in Sicily? Were you in a camp, and if so open or closed? Were you threatened with detention? Do you know of other Tunisians who were detained or quickly deported? How could you leave the camp and had a plan of where to go? Could you find any support in Sicily? Which information were missing in this situation?**

Actually, I'm really confused, but I think it was around two days, and I was in Sicily. I'm sorry, but I traveled through different cities in a very short time and can't recall the name of this particular place. After we arrived, there was a new identification process, and we were fingerprinted again. Some people were released immediately, but I only stayed for one day before receiving a "foglio di via." Most of us were released, except for one friend who is passionate about camping. The authorities became paranoid about terrorism when they found a lot of pictures of tents and camping gear, but eventually, they realized it was just camping and he was released. I also met someone who really came to Europe to undergo a medical operation, and he expressed his hope that they would let him pass to get the operation done and then he would return to Tunisia by himself. His story really touched most of us. There was no direct threat of deportation, but there were others in different sections who were visited by representatives of the Tunisian embassy, and it was clear they would be deported.

Tunisian officers are dreadful; they don't even offer you a cigarette and treat people like criminals. What is our crime if we just want to move?

But for them, we are only a source of money. After the new memorandum, the Tunisian government lets people leave and agrees to deport them in inhumane conditions for money. Some people were asking for medicine but never received any. We heard them screaming from different sections, but we couldn't do anything. Maybe if you protest, they would take us there too.

In my interview, I insisted that I was Algerian. That was my plan, as Algerians don't get deported; Algeria refuses to take people back. Anyway, then a friend of my cousin who lives in Torino came to pick me up, and we drove from Palermo to Genova. I was completely exhausted, so I slept most of the time and didn't even want to eat. I think we drove for two days, with another friend doing shifts. They were crazy. We would stop at an Autogrill, eat, go to the toilet, and then continue driving. When we reached Genova, my cousin came with his wife, who is French. I asked my cousin if I could take a shower, so I used a public shower. They got me new clothes, and I even went to a barber. But even with all of this, I was still afraid of the deportation risk. It was always on my mind, and whenever I saw police in the street, I panicked, thinking they would take me.

**Did you plan to go to France from the beginning? Did you know from friends or social media, of others who succeeded the route from Sfax to Marseille? Did you know about the Dublin system, the fingerprints and the risk to be deported back to Italy, or did you know that this regulation is not working anymore? What information about France or other places would have been important for you to know in advance? What kind of support is missing?**

Yes, my plan was always to go to France due to the new law of Darmanin. I have cousins in Paris, so I had a place to stay. Also, as a welder, I knew that in France my skills are in demand. The idea was to work for three years and, with proof of employment, get regulated with the new migration law in France, there are a lot of videos about it. Regarding the route from Sfax to Marseille, I was quite informed, as many people I know have managed the journey. Genova and Ventimiglia are common entry points, and we have relatives and neighbors who lived in Marseille. People there often pick you up by car, which is easier since authorities tend to focus more on public transport like Flixbus or large buses, rather than private cars. The private cars, if checked, are usually searched for drugs, not migrants. Also, I heard of many who trekked through mountains, but I knew the trains were the most dangerous. The French police are especially aggressive there, with videos showing them with dogs and heavy weapons, treating people like terrorists.

I was aware of the Dublin system, primarily through TikTok. I knew that Italy was struggling to accommodate more people and not accept deported people. I saw several testimonies also on Facebook. For me, having my cousin in France meant that I didn't need much information. But I think it's important for others to know where to find showers, what to do if they are beaten by the police, and places to get new clothes. Appearance matters a lot; well-dressed people tend to attract less attention from the police. Preparation is key. Watching videos about the hotspot conditions, understanding the interview process, and even pretending to be from a different nationality (like I did with Algerian) can make a difference. I had prepared well, almost like it was my PhD, by watching numerous videos and mentally preparing myself for the journey and the interviews. I don't know what support might be missing for others since my family in Europe, especially my cousins, were instrumental in helping me travel from Sicily to France. Now even in Marseille, their contacts are a great help. For those planning this journey, it's crucial to prepare well. Ask people, watch lots of videos, and mentally brace yourself. Leaving your family and facing the uncertainty at sea, where you might perish without anyone knowing, is daunting. Then there's the anxiety of what happens upon arrival – potential deportation or the chance to reach your destination. Having contact with a lawyer who is responsive, even at odd hours like 2 AM, can be incredibly helpful.

FROM SUDAN TO GERMANY, VIA SFAX AND LAMPEDUSA

# “We urgently have to invent new safe routes...”

**A Talk with a friend from Sudan, who made it via Sfax and Lampedusa to Braunschweig.**

We met in a cafe at the train station in Braunschweig - a city in Lower Saxony in Germany - on a rainy day in November 2023. A first reception center for asylum seekers is located a bit outside the city, and one of the main groups sent to this camp by authorities are Sudanese refugees. The friend, here named Ahmed, with whom we came into contact in Lampedusa via phone, arrived only a few weeks ago in Germany. He made it through a six months long journey through North Africa and Europe, while he had to risk his life several times.

Ahmed was active in a human rights organisation in Khartoum, Sudan, when he was imprisoned in October 2022 because of his engagement. After six months he managed to escape from prison.

After crossing the desert in a risky trip, in May 2023 he arrived in Libya. In Tripolis he tried to register with the UNHCR, but he realized that the waiting time would be at least three months. Knowing from other Sudanese friends the risks of detention and capture for refugees in Libya, and reading some messages about successful crossings from Sfax to Italy, Ahmed decided to travel further to the border to Tunisia.

They were a group of five friends, when they tried to cross the border. But three of them were apprehended by border guards and - as Ahmed learned later - imprisoned in Libya. Ahmed and a friend could hide and make it. They could only walk during the nights but reached Ben Gardane and later Medenine. They tried to get registered with the UNHCR, but again it did not work. As there were no options to use a bus or a taxi for refugees in Tunisia, again they had to walk for several days and nights to finally reach Sfax.

When they arrived in July in Sfax, the police had already started doing raids. Ahmed found a house to sleep in, but the police were informed and arrested him. He was taken to court and sentenced for two months imprisonment with the accusation of illegal entry. The police also confiscated his phone and his money and he never received it back after being released in September.

They all had at least a bed with a mattress, they were the first to use the toilets and showers, they were the first to eat from the generally bad food. Black refugees like Ahmed had to sleep on the bare ground, they had to wait and be the last to use the toilets, and they received only the food leftovers. Under the poorest conditions a racist hierarchy was established,



When they arrived in July in Sfax, the police had already started doing raids. Ahmed found a house to sleep in, but the police were informed and arrested him. He was taken to court and sentenced for two months imprisonment with the accusation of illegal entry. The police also confiscated his phone and his money and he never received it back after being released in September

The situation in the prison was terrible and characterized by daily racism. In his cell there were about 100 prisoners, a majority of Tunisian citizens, who were sentenced for different crimes.

Ahmed had no choice but to try to survive these two months of incarceration with lack of sleep, hunger and violence, although he never committed any crime.

When Ahmed reached back to Sfax after his release, the police did not tolerate any black refugees anymore in the city. He, like hundreds others in the same situation, had to move North from Sfax - again by foot - to live and sleep in the fields under olive trees till he reached the small city of El Amra. Here they also had no chance to find a house, and they had to camp in a forest with a small brook.



They lived in a makeshift camp with about 800 people from different nationalities constantly coming and going. Everyone tried to find an option to leave by boat to Italy, but the police made many controls on the streets and beaches. If the navy intercepted someone at sea, they deported them back to the border to Libya.

In October, Ahmed finally could find a middleman for a boat journey. They departed from the coast when it got dark in the evening. It was an iron boat and they were 43 people from four nationalities. As the middlemen had promised that they would reach Italian waters within some hours and then would be rescued, there wasn't any food and not enough drinking water on the boat. The promise was far from being true. After several hours at sea the waves became higher and higher and water came into the boat. A few people panicked and wanted to call the authorities to be rescued back to Tunisia. But a majority vetoed with the hint that they all would be arrested and deported back to prisons in Libya. They would have preferred to die at sea instead of dying in Libya.

Ahmed could never imagine such a dangerous journey, and he retrospectively cannot understand how he survived the horrible situation. They spent two days at sea. They could not sleep, as they were permanently busy to scoop out the sea-water from the boat.

Ahmed and all passengers were continuously in fear of death. They had no life vests and only a few tubes. They had a GPS tracker, which was their only hope. They already could see the island of Lampedusa, when they were rescued by the Italian authorities. Ahmed was clear that the crossing of the sea in such a boat had been the most horrible part of his route to Europe. He said: "If I knew before these conditions, I would not go. **We urgently have to invent new safe routes**"

Ahmed spent only six hours in Lampedusa, then he was transferred to Catania and stayed there for two days. As he has a brother in Germany, he had decided from the very beginning of his journey not to stay in Italy. He collected information from his community and found out that the next route to undertake would be to cross the Alps into France. With 35 people divided into small groups, he managed to reach Marseille, then he went by bus to Paris and later on to Cologne. When he registered for an asylum application in Germany, he was sent to the camp in Braunschweig. It's also not a very comfortable place, but he feels safer and he can at least sleep in peace.

He knows that it will need time and patience for the asylum procedure in Germany. But he is convinced that he will manage, and then will try to help others who have to escape and are still on the move to find other, more secure, passages to safety.

INTERVIEW TO MJ FROM MALDUSA

FIRST PUBLISHED IN ITALIAN BY ALESSIA CANDITO ON LA REPUBBLICA (1)

# Me, Captain for real

Me, a captain in real life. "I hope the film makes people understand that real smugglers don't need to cross the sea". MJ faced a seven-year trial because he was forced to drive the small boat on which he arrived in Italy in 2016. He saw Matteo Garrone's film 'Me Captain' at the cinema. "It feels like being back on that boat." But about Libya "the story is sweetened, no one imagines what it really means to live there"

"People must understand that anyone who drives a boat is not a trafficker. Traffickers have no need to risk their lives at sea, they are comfortable in Libya earning from those who do it. They don't need Europe. After this film I hope people understand this." MJ was a captain. But his life is not a film and for him, neither awards nor honors have arrived, as they did for the young actor Seydou Sarr, protagonist of Matteo Garrone's latest film.

Upon arrival in Italy in 2016, for MJ there were seven years of trials, accusations and a period in prison. Exactly like Fofana, the boy who inspired "Me, Captain" and who, despite his sixteen years of age, was locked up for two months in a penal institution for adults.

"You can't even imagine what it means to end up in prison for a person who has just arrived in Italy, who dreams of having rights, of knowing freedom and instead ends up in handcuffs - explains MJ - they cannot understand what's happening to them, they do not speak the language, and have no one outside who can even get them clean clothes."

The solitude is absolute. It was hard for him. Just as it was hard to see again the journey, the crossing and Libya as told by Garrone on the big screen.

(1)[https://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2023/10/20/news/io\\_capitano\\_film\\_sc\\_afisti\\_storia\\_migrante-418316034/](https://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2023/10/20/news/io_capitano_film_sc_afisti_storia_migrante-418316034/)

Everything I experienced came back to me, I felt like I was on that boat again. I also drove a boat and I had never done it before. But no, I wasn't afraid. I had decided that I would reach Europe or die at sea. Remaining in Libya was not an option."

The one told by "Io Capitano" is a very watered down version. "You can't even imagine what could happen there – says MJ – I saw people beaten, tortured, killed. Your life there is worth nothing. In Libya you don't live, you survive and every day you die a little". This is why leaving is not a choice, but just a way to save yourself. "The crossing is not easy, we know that you can die, but when you are there you have no alternatives."

His departure dates back to seven years ago. "And people still die at sea. The number of victims we know of are perhaps only half of the real ones because nothing is known about most of the voyages."

Together with Alarm Phone activists, MJ tries to lend a hand to the castaways. He collects their calls, relaunches their requests for help. "It's difficult, you feel all the terror of those who are risking their lives at that moment, they don't know what to do, they have to look for the coordinates to report their position and sometimes they don't even succeed. We have a duty to help them, we have to be there for our brothers".

However, that is not a job, "it is something that I feel the need and duty to do". And it's the same when he, together with the others from the Baye Fall community, visits people in prison branded as smugglers and abandoned there. Confused, perplexed, alone. A network, contacts, relationships are what save you when, as a foreigner in a country you don't know, you also find yourself fighting with bureaucracy.

"Probably - he explains - you don't even imagine that there are people who wait up to six or seven years before having the documents and without them you can't do anything. Or maybe that they are delivered to you six or more months late from when they were issued".

MJ found her path. A welder's course as soon as he finished his detention gave him a different job from that of a soldier that he has always done in Senegal. For years he worked, he put money aside, now he is a professional diver and lives off that. "When I'm deep in the sea I never think about those who remained at the bottom of the sea. Crossing it is a very difficult thing and it's something you can't forget. But you have to overcome it, move forward, go beyond." Even in those abysses that could have been a tomb for him and today are for thousands of people.



# Political Context

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN ITALY  
IN 2023

# Border Controls and Migrants Movements

Since its conception, the Maldusa Project has identified the island of Lampedusa as its focal point. This is for a series of historical reasons that have made the island the “gateway to Europe” since the late 1990s, that is - materially and even more symbolically - the entry point for people moving from North Africa along the central Mediterranean route. In all these years Lampedusa has been and has meant many things: the place of large and small shipwrecks, unspeakable tragedies that have marked the death and lives of thousands of people, including victims and survivors; the landing place for hope in a better future for so many others; the space of a laborious and hard-fought affirmation of the universal right to mobility and full freedom of movement, but also the space of first impact with institutional control and disciplining devices, starting with the “hot-spot” system; the risk of being subjected to these devices, but also the possibility of bypassing them or blowing them up.

This is why Lampedusa has also been, and still is, a permanent laboratory of Italian and European border management policies and, at the same time, a “theatrical stage” on which the most diverse representations of the migratory phenomenon and the State policies that attempt to deal with it are staged, in a continuous oscillation between invisibility and spectacle, pragmatism and instrumentalisation. Last but not least, Lampedusa is also a local community, a microcosm with its own history and internal and external relations, its interests and passions, projected from the isolation of fishermen's lives to a political economy in which the global phenomena of mass tourism and immigration contradictory coexist. And the latter has eventually also brought hundreds of “outsiders” to the island, whether policemen or military, humanitarian workers or activists, journalists or politicians, in unusual relationships with the island and its permanent residents.



Here, the first year of Maldusa Project's life coincided with significant new facts: since the autumn of 2022, there has been an increase in departures from Libya and Tunisia in particular, which will result in almost 160,000 landings in Italy by the end of 2023, of which at least 95,000 from Tunisia and 45,000 from Libya. The causes are well known: in a global scenario characterised by multiple crises - climatic, food and economic, political and social - and widespread situations of civil war, both internal and external, the situation of daily abuse and violence, torture and rape, within a framework of forced labour and permanent economic blackmail, which constitute the reality of the migrants' condition in Libya; and the increasing number of racist attacks and violent police raids on people from sub-Saharan Africa in Tunisia, stand out in particular.

Similar numbers in fact had not been recorded since 2016. The difference is that while in that year only nine thousand people had landed on Lampedusa, this year more than one hundred thousand people arrived on the island. This is because since 2018, following the borders' externalization strategy of all governments since then and the end of Eunavformed operation Sophia, the Italian Coast Guard and Navy have stopped carrying out rescues on the high seas, off the coasts of Libya and Tunisia, with big ships capable of transporting people immediately to Sicily and the Continent.

Only small military patrol boats with a limited range for rescue activities are deployed around the island and even the number of migrants' boat able to land autonomously has increased, thus Lampedusa has become a real "funnel", an ever narrower bottleneck. This situation is aggravated by the crisis of the reception system at national level: since 2018 - with Salvini's "Security Decrees" - the resources for reception facilities have been heavily cut and the conditions of access to the system further restricted by the most recent (March 2023) "Cutro Decree." The result is that, despite thousands of people trying to leave Italy quickly by crossing the Alps to central and northern Europe, the number of arrivals cannot be absorbed in a timely manner, a result partly suffered and partly constructed by the Government which, in this way, can continue to show the "theatre of invasion."

The second relevant fact that MALDUSA Project had to deal with from the outset is, as of September 2022, the seizure of political power in Italy by the Meloni government, expression of the most right-wing coalition in Italian history since the end of the fascist regime in 1945. A year of right-wing government has resulted in paradoxical situations that we try to define with the image of "Italian schizophrenia."

It is in fact clear that, since Fall 2022 but especially after the Cutro massacre in February 2023, the Italian government must try to avoid the death at sea of people on the move, because politically it would risk paying too high a price in terms of consensus in the public opinion. This explains why politicians' orders cannot prevent the Italian Coast Guard from operating massively with rescues inside and, often, outside the SAR zone of competence. As we have experienced with direct activity along the route from Tunisia to south-west of Lampedusa or on the route from eastern Libya (Cyrenaica).

Of course, strategically their policy does not change. On the contrary. On land as well as at sea. The violent externalization of the management of the European borders remains the guiding star for the Italian government, the governments of the other Member States and the EU institutions. A frenetic diplomatic and police activity is underway to strengthen and extend to Eastern Libya and Tunisia the business model, already applied from 2017 onwards with the militias connected with the Tripoli's government: support, funding and cooperation with local authorities, aimed at preventing departures; more interception and capture at sea; deportation back in detention camps. And, recently, the Italian government is trying to experiment a new stage of externalization with the involvement of Albania too.

In the same moment, against the ships of the Civil Fleet they are trying all kinds of hindrances: assignment of increasingly distant ports for disembarkation, administrative detentions of ships in the case of real or presumed disobedience to the Authorities' orders following the "Piantedosi Decree Law" (January 2023). These attempts to harass and criminalise the Civil Fleet is not reducing the arrivals. Meloni and her Interior minister know very well that only five to seven percent of arrivals are made by civil rescue ships; the vast majority are picked up by the Italian Coast Guard a few nautical miles off Lampedusa or they land on the coast entirely autonomously. But on the one hand, it is obviously a matter of pretending to one's own voters that they are capable of acting, at least in the confrontation with the NGOs. And on the other hand, it is a matter of weakening the important function of monitoring and publicly documenting permanent human rights violations at sea.



Particularly serious are the grounds on which Sea-Watch's fast boat *Aurora*, *Mediterranea's* ship *Mare Jonio* and *Sea-Eye 4* were detained for 20 days August to November 2023: for their refusal to submit to Tunisian or Libyan authorities coordination and/or to disembark people rescued in Tunisian or even Libyan ports. As has happened since 2017, Italian governments seek to construct a "*fait accompli*" and then turn it into a formal involution of International law: in this case, also thanks to the ambiguities of UN organisations, they want to arrive at the recognition of Tunisia as a safe landing place, despite racist violence and proven violations of fundamental rights. As well as they dream to do even with Libya.



Similarly, with the shameful "*Cutro Decree*" they would like to operate on land: introducing new forms of criminalization, dramatically reducing the granting of residence permits in Italy for "*special protection*", spreading the hot-spot model, multiplying the administrative detention centers (CPR) with the aim of one in every Italian region, and incentivising and organising

more repatriations and deportations to so-called "*safe countries*".

But even here the contradiction is still at work: with the declaration of the "*migration state of emergency*" (April 11th, 2023), once again, they want to affirm the character of exceptionality in the management of immigration as an "*invasion*" and a problem of public order, and to equip themselves with more authoritarian instruments to deal with it. But, at the same time, with the measures announced and the concrete involvement of the Civil Protection Department and the Red Cross to manage arrivals on Lampedusa, the demands of the MALDUSA Project and other non-institutional actors operating on the island for a more dignified reception and rapid transfers to the continent have sometime become reality.

This accumulation of contradictions – and Lampedusa as the focal point and sometimes center of explosion of these contradictions – seems to describe a schizophrenic scenario. For it is under the most right-wing government in the history of the Republic, led by (post)fascist exponents, champions of "*ethnic replacement*" propaganda, that a significant number of arrivals are being recorded on Italian shores. We believe that the ambivalence of the current scenario in the central Mediterranean can instead be explained without having to refer to psychiatry.



The global context of war and multiple crises (climate and energy, economic, food and social) nourish autonomy and endurance of the people on the move, an articulate and multiiform collective intelligence capable of continually challenging the border regime, as in an ungovernable cat-and-mouse contest.

In connection with this, the bottom-up construction of social infrastructures for the freedom of movement has developed and is developing a growing capacity for monitoring and observation, increasingly able of timely intervention in pointing out rights violations by States and governments.

Every single life saved is fundamental, but in this sense the action of the Civil Fleet shows its crucial effectiveness not so much in the statistics of people rescued directly at sea, but in its permanent capacity to denounce and continuously put pressure on the institutional authorities, as a sort of dynamic "counter-power".

Finally the multiplicity of solidarity voices - from very different cultural and religious, social and political backgrounds - builds that "welcoming public opinion" that functions as a veritable watchdog of government policies.

**It is then at the heart of these contradictions that, at sea as on land, a new grassroots migration policy can counter the terrible burden of suffering and death that European States and governments would like to continue to impose. Maldusa Project wants to make its small contribution - on land as well as at sea - to the construction of these utopian and realistic, possible alternatives for the freedom of movement.**

LEGAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ARRIVING IN SICILY.

# Cracks in the Continuum of Border Violence

In January 2023, after the election of the far-right wing government in Italy led by Giorgia Meloni – the “stop the sea arrivals” slogan returned to be at the core of public discourse. Despite several governmental attempts to introduce new and more restrictive measures about migration and asylum – and simultaneously strengthening EU border management cooperation with countries such as Libya and Tunisia – almost 150.000 people made it to Italy over the year (end of November 2023).

During the summer of 2023 - at least until September - the authorities were not able to stop the movement of people fleeing the North of Africa. The initial attempt to implement quick transfers from Lampedusa to the mainland stopped working soon, causing the simultaneous presence on the island of 7,000 people in the second week of September 2023. Over these months, we observed several protests by people who were kept in detention and deprived of their freedom of movement.

Protests took place in Caltanissetta detention center in March, July, and again in September at the first reception center, where people were held in undignified reception conditions. Similar protests took place in Lampedusa around the 13 of September, both on the pier – where newly arrived people were kept for several hours without water and food – as well as at the Hotspot, which was not equipped to host thousands of people. During those days, people managed to temporarily “break” the Hotspot fences, and to reach the city – where civil society was trying to fill the gap left by the state, by providing food and other first necessity items, in solidarity with the people on the move.

At the end of September 2023, five months after the entry into force of the law n. 50/23 converting the so-called Cutro decree, the Italian state began to implement the new border procedures regarding people arriving in Italy by sea and coming from countries on the list of safe countries of origin.



In addition to introducing the possibility for migrants to avoid detention through the payment of 4938 euros as a "financial guarantee", among the innovations provided for in Law 50/23 was the possibility of detaining asylum seekers in "dedicated" facilities, subject to court validation. To this purpose, the government started planning a multiplication of - formal and informal - detention infrastructures in Sicily, southern Italy and beyond.

Between the end of September and mid-October 2023, several judges of the specialized sections of the Sicilian courts, have issued decisions of non-validation of such detentions, mainly ordered against Tunisian citizens detained at the new Pozzallo facility.

Among the reasons given by the Specialized Section on Immigration of the Catania court were reflections on the impossibility of considering Tunisia a safe country, but also on the illegitimacy of detention based solely on the status of asylum seekers from a safe country of origin. In particular, based on Articles 3 and 10 of the Constitution and European Union law, the decisions recalled that "an applicant for international protection cannot be detained solely on the grounds that he or she is unable to attend to his or her own needs," as enshrined by the EU Court of Justice and the same 2013 EU directive mentioned in the decree.

In the weeks following the failures to validate the detention orders, the Italian government championed smear campaigns against the judges who had issued the decisions. Thirteen "non-validation" decisions were issued by Judge Iolanda Apostolico, tenured at the Catania court between 29 September and 11 October 2023.

On October 5, a video was published in the press portraying the judge in the act of taking part in the 2018 demonstration in Catania, following the ban on disembarkation imposed on the Italian Coast Guard ship Diciotti by then-Interior Minister Salvini. The process of obtaining the video - aimed at discrediting the judge's impartiality - and identifying the judge within it through the use of facial recognition software, raised not a few doubts of legitimacy. In fact, according to Italian law, access to this type of archival material and the analysis of it through recognition software is granted for specific investigative purposes within the framework of trials against organized crime. While the Catania police headquarters made it known that the published video "did not appear among the acts of office," regarding the event and that the service report did not mention the presence of the judge, the Rome prosecutor's office began investigating the possible violation of official secrecy by a public official. It also raised the issue of possible illegitimate "dossier" activities by police authorities against citizens holding the right to demonstrate.

Moreover, the public discourse promoted by the government, regarding decisions not to validate the detentions of Tunisian citizens seeking international protection, appeared extremely problematic in its intent to manifest the necessary "submission" of the judiciary to the executive and legislative branches. While Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said she was "appalled" at the acts issued by the apostolic judge that allowed herself to "defy" the government and its laws. While Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said she was "appalled" by the decisions issued by the Apostolico – as attempts to "challenge" the government and its laws – the Northern League called for the judge's resignation.

And again, in the face of the illegitimacy of the so-called Cutro Decree noted by the courts, Salvini proposed reforming the specialized immigration sections, with the intention of "replacing judges" who were "facilitating illegal immigration".

The defamation against magistrates who had dared to challenge the government proceeded hand in hand, and the old discourse of "red togas" reappeared in the media, aimed at discrediting the work of magistrates by attributing to them a particular political affiliation.

In response to this attack, several complaints were lodged against government officials, and the first commission of the Italian higher judicial council (CSM) opened a file to protect Dr. Apostolico from defamation.

Once again - as has been the case for years in the context of policies to criminalize mobility and those who facilitate it, from land borders to the open sea - the battle shifted to legal terrain. In continuity with the past, key stakes are access to international protection - as the last bulwark in the face of border management policies increasingly geared toward preventing departures, letting people die at sea as a deterrent to movement, channeling them into detention pathways aimed at repatriation in a continuum of border violence.

The so-called Cutro decree, was nothing more than yet another attempt to hollow out the right to asylum, subjugating it to the application of the safe country of origin criterion, in defiance of its true nature as a right untethered from nationality; a further attempt to harness people on the move in violent and hostile bureaucratic procedures, making their having risked their lives at sea in vain by forced repatriation.

This is where decisions not to validate detentions by Sicilian judges represented a breakthrough. They destabilized government plans to obstruct any path to the realization of their wishes, and the choice of countries in which to start living again. They breathed new life into the right to asylum, challenging the concept of a safe country and reaffirming the illegitimacy of the measures introduced by the so-called Cutro Decree.



This rupture was so troublesome that it caused a violent and anti-democratic government reaction aimed at intimidating judges, threatening their autonomy, and silencing them. And again, faced with the multiplication of "subversive" decisions, there was therefore talk of replacing them, with the intention of erasing all forms of critical legal thought.

At a time when we are witnessing an ever-increasing conflict between the principles established by human rights law, right of asylum and right of the sea, and policies designed to undermine the right to flee, and freedom of movement, we feel it is important to continue to critically observe and report about the new and old infrastructures of the border regime, not only made of political decisions, laws and procedures but also of physical spaces of containment and detention.

On 9th October, a delegation by Tavolo Asilo - visiting Pozzallo and Cifali hotspots and the new detention center for asylum seekers in Modica - confirmed the serious violations on the rights of incoming people: unlawful deprivation of liberty, totally inadequate material conditions and promiscuity, long-term stays, lack of child protection, social and legal isolation, insufficient health care.

Moreover, it seems fundamental to keep systematizing the interlocution between civil society and people who are kept in these new and old spaces of containment and flight, in order to amplify their voices, as well as to document the - often invisible - struggles waged on a multiplicity of grounds, including the legal battlegrounds.



Support Us

# How you can support

Maldusa is a sea and land project, and you can support us in various ways:

- Visit us at the Palermo Station, Via degli Schioppettieri, 23, 90133 Palermo PA, you can help us in our activities! (language schools, workshops, organizing events, book presentations and projections).
- If you share our political positioning and want to come on board send an email to: [crewing@maldusa.org](mailto:crewing@maldusa.org)
- Spread the word! Let's build together networks of solidarity, critical knowledge and facilitation practices for freedom of movement!
- If you are part of a project that could connect to Maldusa, by sea or land, North or South of the Mediterranean, and would like to propose a collaboration, please send us an email to: [info@maldusa.org](mailto:info@maldusa.org)
- If you want to support us, you can make a donation:
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# Maldusa

## FACILITATE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

*Once upon a time, somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, there was a boat that had departed from Libya, making its way North. After several hours at sea, the people on the boat had lost their orientation and decided to phone Watch the Med - Alarm Phone to ask for support in their journey. The person who picked up the phone asked the people on board where they were traveling to, what was their destination. The person on the boat answered that they were directed towards 'Maldusa'. Confused, the Alarm Phone member asked once more whether they wished to reach Malta, or Lampedusa. "Maldusa, Maldusa! We are going to Maldusa!" repeated the person on the boat, this time very clearly and full of enthusiasm.*

Maldusa: an imaginary nowhere and anywhere land in the Mediterranean Sea, an imagined destination of hope and freedom, a space that, every day, we try to build and to make real through our struggles, hand in hand with people on the move.

