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**Becoming Border. Dynamics and Effects of the Building of the European External
Border in a Recently Accessed EU Member State: the Malta Case Study.**

Giacomo Orsini and Silvia Schiavon¹

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Abstract: At the very core of the development and harmonization of EU migration and asylum policies resides the construction of the Schengen space of free movement of people. To the dismantling of EU internal borders corresponds the construction of a European external boundary progressively broadening with the enlarging of the EU. In this frame Malta, as a recently accessed EU member state, turned out to be part of this widening European external boundary. As one of the most visible and locally sensitive consequences, since 2004 the island-state became the destiny of thousands of boat-migrants coming from the coasts of north-Africa. Following EU directives and policies the national response to such unexpected phenomena has been articulated mainly through the opening of numerous detention centres and the creation of diverse legal statuses for migrants. As a direct effect of such implementation and interpretation of EU migration and asylum policies - in particular the Dublin Regulation - a quickly growing population of migrants and refugees get stuck in the small island for years facing very difficult life conditions, generating tensions with the local population and becoming the main locally debated political issue. Thus, as a result of a three months field study carried out in Malta in 2009, this article describes how EU migration and asylum policy have been locally implemented since the 2004 European accession of the country, underlining some of main related dynamics and impacts characterising the newly established European external border.

¹ **Giacomo Orsini:** PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Essex, Room 5A.309, Wivenhoe Park CO4 3SQ Colchester, UK; gorsin@essex.ac.uk; Tel.: +44(0)7466800204; Skype: orsozster.

Silvia Schiavon: Office and Research Assistant, IFOAM EU Group, Rue du Commerce 124, BE - 1000 Brussels, BE; silvia.schiavon@ifoam-eu.org; Tel.: +32(0)22806844; Fax: +32(0)27357381; Skype: ifoameusilvia.

1. Introduction

Since the 2004 accession of the country to the EU, Malta became the second smallest European member state: an archipelago composed by three islands - Malta, Comino and Gozo - covering an area of a bit less than four-hundreds square kilometres for an overall population of few more than four-hundreds-thousands inhabitants. An important geographic feature of this small EU member state - central for the purposes of this paper - is its location in the middle of the Mediterranean, only eighty kilometres south of Sicily and three-hundreds north from the coasts of Tunisia and Libya (M. Vanhove, 2007). Accordingly, with the incorporation of the former British colony, the European territory expanded southward, converting Malta from one day to another into part of the external boundary of what it is very often referred as Fortress Europe (A. Ryan, 2008; B. Gebrewold, 2007; E. Grabbe, 2000). As underlined by the Italian scholar Alessandra Sciarba (2007; 2009) - who collaborated with us for this research - the combination of Malta's geographical position and its recent EU membership made of the country a privileged location from where to look at the nature, the working and the impact of the EU external border management regime. This, in a frame where most of the academic literature on European border management does not question - in fact, it reiterates - the main assumption that European external border management policies are primarily addressed to the control of illegal migration (V. Tsianos and S. Karakayali, 2010). However, a close look to the reality of Malta suggested us to see the European external border management not as a strategy aiming to a complete closure of the European space but rather as complex set of interrelated policies funnelling migrations to create then a localized 'system of barriers' (S. Mezzadra, 2007: 183) producing different degrees of clandestinity - as opposite to citizenry.

Demonstrating the centrality of this isolated and marginal EU territory to understand the nature of the EU migration and asylum policies - including obviously the management of the European external border - the Maltese European membership corresponded with the beginning of an unexpected phenomenon in the islands. Indeed, as certified by countless documents and reports, since 2004 Malta experiences a new vulnerability represented by the disembarking of thousands of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers crossing the sea dividing the country from the coasts of north Africa. To understand the dimension of this phenomenon, it is enough to consider as only throughout 2005 and 2006 almost four-thousands boat-migrants and asylum seekers reached the Maltese shores. By not constituting a complete novelty for the islands, the arrivals surely became all of a sudden something of an unprecedented scale (G. Baldacchino, 2009). As it happens in other similar isolated and marginal European territories such as the Italian island of Lampedusa, the Spanish archipelago of the Canary Islands, Cyprus and so like, also for Malta one of the most unexpected and impacting consequences of the EU membership has been the beginning of these arrivals (S. Buckel and J. Wissel, 2010). Landings that, especially due to the reduced size of the archipelago combined with an extensive media coverage, turned into a local socio-political emergency. A permanent crisis that certainly does not benefit the condition of boat-migrants and asylum seekers forced to live years - at least the one and a half of the detention - into a sort of geographical and legal limbo with proved violations of some of their more basic and fundamental rights (C. Sammut, 2007; MSF, 2009). Given this situation, according to the official records the majority of boat-migrants who legally leave Malta are those included in the IOM assisted return programmes and so they are those who decide to return to their countries of origin. However, without considering as voluntary return schemes are not really so voluntary since the vast majority only opt for them when any other option fails (D. Thiel

and K. Gillan, 2010), these official figures represent only a small minority of the overall population of illegal or semi-legal boat-migrants living in the island. In reality, what the majority of boat-migrants do is to wait until they succeed leaving Malta illegally once again to reach the coasts of Sicily by boat. This, in a frame where due to the Dublin II convention, even refugees who received asylum in Malta and that get finger-printed in any other EU member state after having left the islands-state, are sent straight back to Malta again (S. Kleep, 2010). Thus, it is clear as, in this recently established spot of the European external border, a growing population of semi- or non-citizens gets stuck for different periods of time during which they are eventually employed in the local growing informal labour market.

Hence, with the aim of assessing the local impact of the construction of the European external boundary while trying to understand the most relevant mechanisms characterizing the working of this apparently impervious frontier, this paper will focus on the condition of boat-migrants reaching the shores of Malta. To do this, we decided to structure the article somehow following migrants and asylum seekers journey and their encounter with the European external border in the small Mediterranean islands. In other words, after a brief necessary introduction over those characteristics of the European border regime that we consider as central in determining what happen in Malta, we will describe and discuss the numerous stages that boat-migrants have to pass through since the beginning of their stay in the islands. Empirically, the paper draws upon the results of a three months field study in the Mediterranean islands-state. Ten interviews have been conducted and official document accessed. In particular, stakeholders at both the institutional and the civil society levels have been interviewed: national agencies involved in the management of the European external border and the assistance to migrants and asylum seekers, representatives of the local worker unions, the director of the local IOM mission, representatives of other international and local

NGOs as well as local journalists. Through semi-structured interviews, interviewees have been asked over the main impacts of the 2004 EU accession of the country, especially in terms of undocumented immigration. Moreover, this series of interviews has been conducted alongside a daily observation of those places where migrants live and numerous informal talks with migrants themselves - where the choice of not interviewing migrants was mainly due to time limits and the fact that we wanted mainly to focus the complex functioning of the European external border in institutional terms.

2. Dismantling borders, making border. Building and working of the European external border.

As clarified in the introduction, before to move to the specific case of Malta we consider necessary a preliminary overview of those features of the European external border regime that we understand as central to comprehend what happens in Malta. In this frame, the Schengen agreement of 1985 works as the corner stone structuring the management of borders and migration inside and outside the EU. Indeed, within the frame of this international agreement, the construction of a European people bounded inside a borderless territory begun. Curiously, through a process of progressive abolition of the internal borders, it was the EU itself who became a territorial unit defined by a clear external boundary (W. Walters and J. H. Haahr, 2005; M. Tesfahuney, 1998; H. Leitner, 1997). In practice, if on the one hand EU national borders disappeared, on the other side the European external border management was structured as a complex, flexible and extended system of territorial as well as non-territorial borders administrated by institutional - national and European - as well as non-institutional actors. This produced a delocalization, fragmentation and multiplication of territorial

boundaries with the aim of regulating the access of non-EU citizens to the Schengen space (P. Cuttitta, 2007; S. Mezzadra, 2004; D. Bigo and E. Guild, 2003; R. Andrijasevic, 2010).

Thus, as it stands today, the Schengen legislative aquis represents an essential part of the communitarian body of law that each candidate country must incorporate to access the EU. This communitarian border regime can be defined in terms of a multileveled integrated system of control involving national as well as supranational actors and agencies, third countries and the private sector (E. Giuld, 2001). Manifestations of this recently established system of boundaries are detectable inside as well as outside the territory of the EU constituting a complex configuration of barriers of diverse kinds aiming to govern mobility by temporarily block - or at least drive - migrants in their attempts to reach Europe (P. Cuttitta, 2007; S. Buckel and J. Wissel, 2010). Besides, in this multi-layered frame, the EU action has been consistently concentrated also around the consolidation of the traditional national territorial borders when coinciding with the external edge of the EU (A. Geddes, 2005). This is the case for instance of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla located inside the Moroccan territory and that, since the EU membership of Spain, have been fortified with the construction of a triple six meters high fence dividing the two Spanish cities from their bordering Moroccan provinces (E. Blanchard and A. S. Wender, 2007; G. Orsini and S. Schiavon, 2009).

As underlined by Sergio Carrera (2007), such an apparently impenetrable complex frontier has been organized in order to be perceived as a threatening obstacle capable to discourage any attempt to illegally cross it. One of the reasons at the basis of such a choice, seems to be directly related to the very nature of the Schengen space of free movement of people: in fact, once a third-country national gains the right to reside even in the most detached and marginal spot of this area, she/he is automatically granted the right to reside in

the whole area - a part from asylum seekers that, because of the Dublin Convention of 1990 are forced instead to reside exclusively in the first EU country they enter (R. Black, 1996). Therefore, big part of the work that was before managed along the borders of every Schengen member state, is transferred to the external European boundary: in other words, central countries such as Germany for instance, expect more peripheral ones as Italy, Spain, Greece, Poland and - most important for this study - Malta, to carry out border controls also on their behalf. At the same time, these peripheral spots of the European territory become somehow central for migrants trajectories to enter Europe: being the closer secure EU lands, they are transformed into proper gates to access the entire Schengen territory (G. Orsini and S. Schiavon, 2009).

This ambivalent situation needs to be combined with the broad range of diverse projects that the EU and its member states finance or directly organize in bordering third countries - Morocco, Lybia, Tunisia, Belarus, Russia and so like - to improve the control of migratory trajectories as well as the repression of them trying to stop unauthorised migration. Besides, it has been inside the frame of the Schengen aquis that touristic as well as work VISA requirements have been hardened for by each EU country, leaving migrants with few and unsecure trajectories to reach Europe. In other words, a limited number of possibilities are left to those attempting to reach the EU either for economic or humanitarian reasons. In a way, as a direct outcome of this articulated system of control of the access to the EU, unauthorised migration begun to be concentrated and canalized mainly in certain areas. It is in fact the mixture of these complementary dimensions of the European external border management that needs to be understood as one of the core causes generating the already mentioned thousands of arrivals of undocumented boat migrants and asylum seekers in Malta - as well as in other similar European peripheral regions (J. Carling and M. H. Carretero, 2011). Arrivals

that would not represent anything of extraordinary if related to the entire population of the Schengen space of free movement of people but that, in isolated and small islands, generate a sort of permanent state of emergency, a situation that often leads to the violation of migrants' rights (G. Agamben, 2003). This, in a context where the intense media coverage of boat-migrants landings tend to exacerbate the situation (H. de Haas, 2008; R. Andrijasevic, 2009).

According to EU directives, the countermeasures to this phenomenon have been mainly articulated in a militarization of the external border on the one side - through military border patrolling missions coordinated by the European Warsaw based agency FRONTEX - combined with the opening of numerous detention centres outside as well as inside the territory of the EU, and especially along its external boundary on the other (G. Giorgi and K. Pinkus, 2006; R. Z. Barrero and N. de Witte, 2007; E. Paoletti, 2011). All of this, alongside increased political pressures - and financial as well as logistical assistance - addressed to bordering non-EU countries to take a part in trying to stop departures from their coasts (T. Spijkerboer, 2007; S. Carrera, 2007).

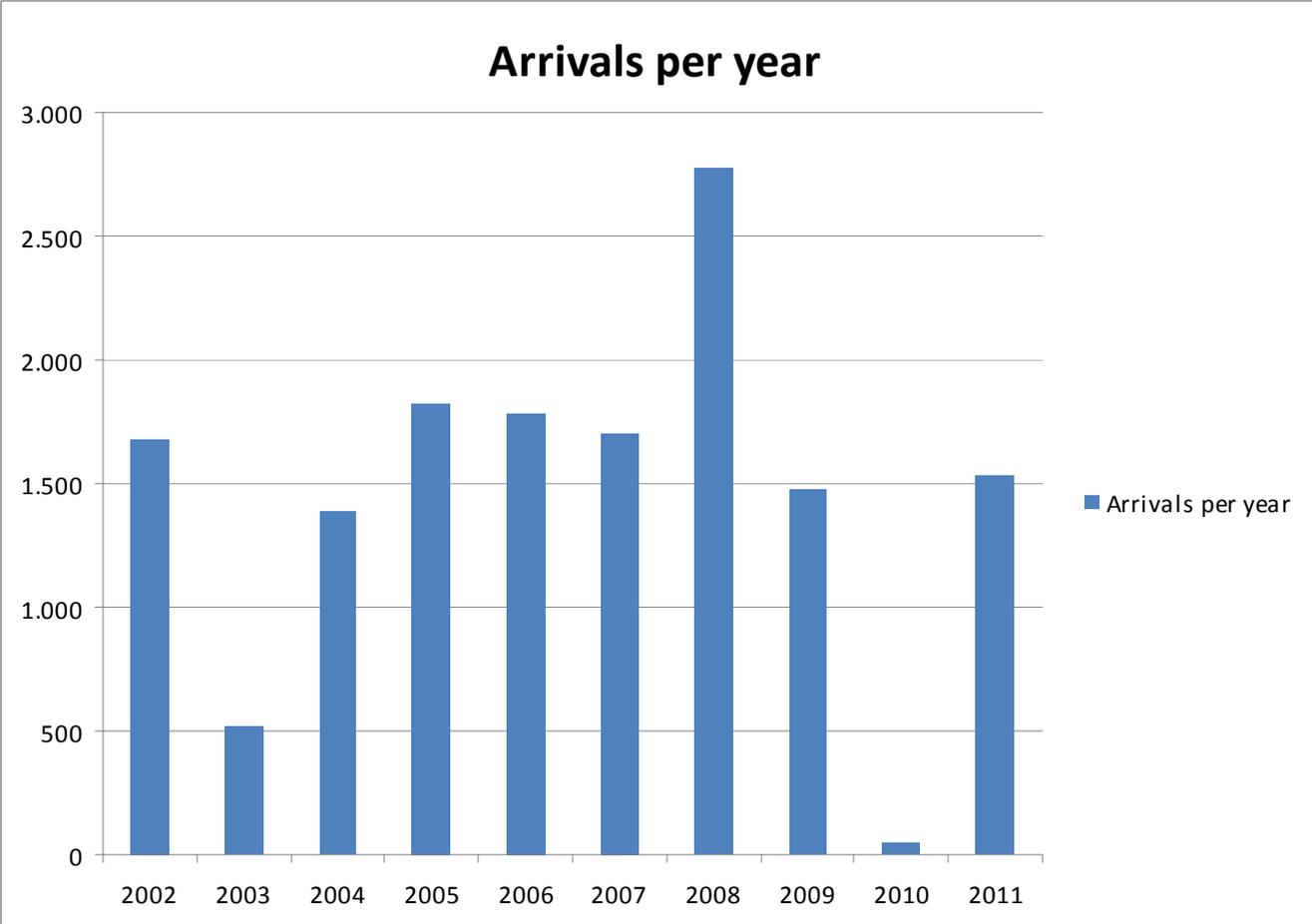
3. The forced stop. Undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and the European external border in Malta.

As already specified, following this very brief overview over the working and impacting of the European external border regime, what we will try to do in the next pages is to discuss it in more concrete terms with reference to the Malta case study. In practice, it is our intention to bring the reader throughout some of the main stages migrants and asylum seekers are obliged to undertake in order to access Europe, passing through Malta.

The margin at the centre

The arrival of migrants in Malta mirrors a larger trend in global migration flows. There, thousands of Asian and African nationals are attempting to gain access to Europe finding themselves trapped in isolated small sites, forced to live with their freedom of movement negated in a substantial long-term statelessness (A. Favell, 2009; W. B. Wood, 1994). According to the National Statistic Office of the small Mediterranean state in 2008, two-thousands-seven-hundreds-seventy-five undocumented migrants and asylum seekers reached the Maltese shores (NSO, 2008). In total, from 2002 to 2011, more than fourteen-thousands of boat-migrants entered the Maltese waters and so were rescued by the local coast guard (UNHCR, 2012). As certified by the statistics provided by the Maltese Governmental Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers - AWAS - coming from almost fifty nations including Burma, Jamaica, Lebanon, Turkey and South Africa, the vast majority of boat-migrants comes from sub-Saharan African countries - especially Somalia and Eritrea - with also relevant number of people coming from Asian nations such as Bangladesh and India (M. Vassallo, 2011). However, despite these diverse countries of origin, all these people reached the Maltese national waters and shores, leaving the coasts of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt by boat.

As we will see, although these arrivals did not represented a complete novelty for the islands-state, it is in correspondence to the final phases of the Maltese accession to the EU in 2002 - when then Malta had to demonstrate its capability of managing the European external border - that the phenomenon took a completely different and bigger dimension - graphic 1.



Graphic 1: source AWAS, Malta 2011

Such a new local situation is effectively summarized by Terry Gosden, the specialist in third country nationals of the Maltese General Workers’ Union - GWU:

When Malta joined Europe, it inherited the 2002 treaty where it was stated as any sub-Saharan African - or other asylum seeker - who came here by boat, was meant to be under the responsibility of this country. From that moment, we started to implement the humanitarian law about those immigrants stopped in Malta.

Before, when similar arrivals happened, we use to buy them a flight ticket to go to Europe: it was a problem of someone else. Suddenly it became impossible and so we started recording each and every arrival.

In other words, if on the one hand arrivals dramatically increased, on the other since the last steps of the negotiations to enter the EU Malta had to start managing the issue according to the Communitarian normative provisions.

Post-Arrival Immobility: detention in Malta

As it stands today, only around four-thousands of those boat-migrants who reached the Maltese shores between 2002 and 2011 decided to remain living in Malta: by representing the 1% of the overall Maltese population, they are less than one third of the total arrivals (UNHCR, 2012). This relatively small number reveals as the vast majority of boat-migrants and asylum seekers ending out in Malta do not want to settle on the islands, being at the same time forced to remain there for a variable and hardly determinable amount of time.

As confirmed by Maria Pisani, the Malta IOM Office Coordinator and Project Manager,

following European directives, once they land in Malta, undocumented migrants are immediately detained for a maximum period of eighteen months under the responsibility of Maltese police and armed forces.

The Maltese Immigration Act affirms in fact that any person caught on Maltese territory without the right to entry, transit or reside, is considered a prohibited migrant and is detained until his/her deportation. When irregular immigrants enter Malta's search and rescue sea area, and thus when it is learnt that their boat is in distress, they are given assistance by the Maltese

Army and coast Guard. As soon as they reach the coasts of Malta, undocumented immigrants are taken to a detention centre. Accordingly and in line with this internal legislation as well as with EU directives, four detention centres of different sizes were opened in Malta since 2004 - table 1.

Detention Centre Location	Detention Centre Reception Capacity
Hal-Safi (Directly managed by the Army)	374 people
Lyster Barracks (Directly managed by the Army)	452 people
Floriana Police Headquarters (Directly managed by police)	116 people
Ta-Kandja (Directly managed by police)	75 people

Table 1: source LIBE, 2006.

According to the official data then, the overall capacity of the detention centres opened in Malta does not exceed the maximum number of one-thousand-seventeen detained migrants: a much lower number of available places respect to how many boat-migrant arrive in the islands-state every year. Thus, the reality sees the centres always overcrowded with over-quota migrants and asylum seekers constantly accommodated in provisional tents. This, in a context where none of these detention centers have been built to serve for this specific purpose: rather, they are rearrangement of military areas or police stations located in remote places, and almost impossible to access without any official permit. According to the totality of our interviewees as well as to the big majority of the existing reports, in every center detainees of any gender and age are obliged to live together in small rooms or in proper containers, extremely cold in winter and hot in summer. As it was in 2009 when we

conducted our fieldwork, the Jesuit Refugee Service - JRS - was the only humanitarian organization allowed to provide legal assistance to detainee migrants and asylum seekers inside the four detention centers of the islands. This made of the members of the organization the only non-institutional actors enabled to daily monitor the conditions of the detained migrants. In particular, Celine Warnier legal advisors of the organization, described migrants detention in Malta as follows:

Migrants, indistinctly minors, pregnant women, elderly and so on, have fixed times to go out, eating and showering. They have two hours of sunshine a week, children included. Often, people with HIV are putted in very humid and horrible isolated rooms as something like a punishment, rather than being helped with a doctor or any possible form of medical and psychological assistance. In general, sick people worsen their conditions because of the terrible environment. On the other hand, people who arrive healthy got sick because of the detention. Moreover migrants are subjected to a strong psychological stress and often, at the end of the detention period, they become crazy.

This, in a situation where detention can last until eighteen months - in line with EU directives - and no difference is made between undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, being them men, women or minors. As established in the fifth section of the Maltese Immigration Act in fact, during the detention detainees without exceptions are considered as prohibited immigrants until their status is verified by the authorities.

From detention to a timeless limbo.

In more practical terms, once in detention migrants have two weeks to apply for asylum. After the applications will be submitted, they will be evaluated by the Refugee Commission of the

Maltese Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs. It will be then this governmental commission the one entitled to decide whether there are the conditions to proceed with further interviews and, eventually, with the concession of asylum status. As a direct effect of the upgrade of European standards in Malta, if before 2004 three months used to pass between the boat-migrants' arrival in Malta and their first interviews, after the EU accession of the country the average time needed became longer, averagely going from five to ten months (A. Callus, 2009). While waiting, applicants remain in detention. If the candidate request is refused, he or she has the rights to appeal within two weeks. However, if even the second application is rejected, the person become an illegal immigrant not anymore allowed to remain in Malta. In this case, by law there are basically two options. On the one hand, the illegal immigrant should be deported to his or her own country of origin if any international agreement on this matter has been signed between Malta and the country of origin of the migrant. Alternatively and, again, only in presence of an international agreement, illegal immigrants should be deported to the last non-EU country where they have eventually passed through. However, the reality tells another story. Indeed, due to the very reduced number of strict diplomatic relationships that a small country as Malta can establish, a really tiny number of international agreements of this kind have been ever signed by the Mediterranean country. Once again, Terry Godsen of the GWU has been clear over this point:

Malta does not have any power of negotiation when trying to sign this kind of agreement with third countries. This is not the case of states such as Italy or England for instance: it is clear that they have a lot of influence in Africa and so they are able to negotiate these kind of international agreement that are never welcomed by African and Asian countries of emigration. It is enough to think to the relations between Italy and Somalia or Lybia. Malta have not the same power

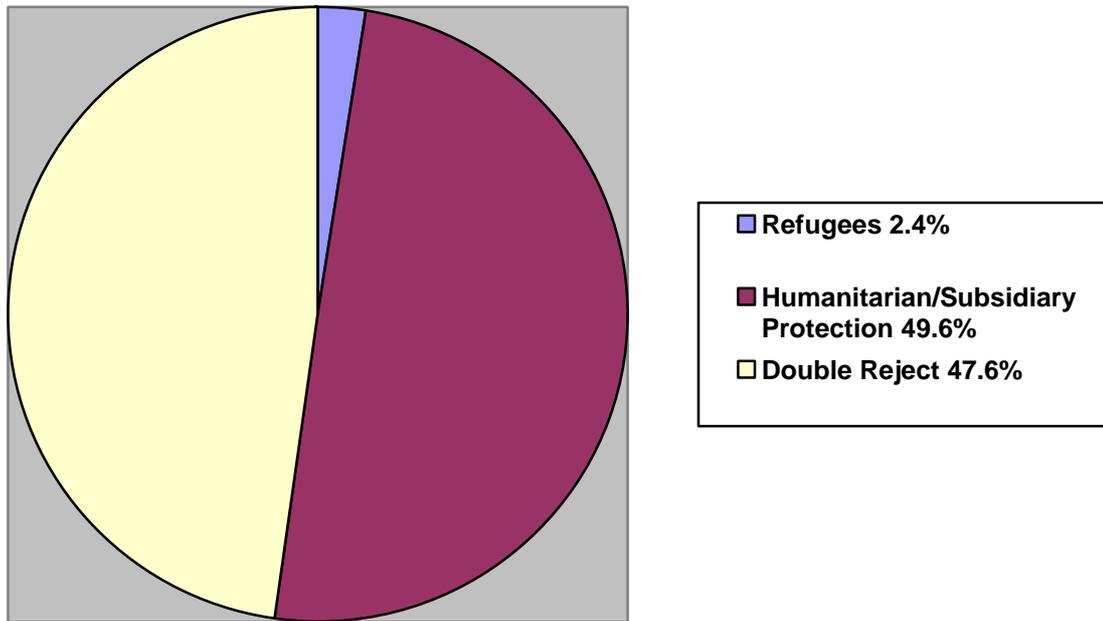
and influence and so there are actually almost no agreements concerning the return of undocumented migrants signed or implemented by Malta.

Given these contingent conditions, those with rejected asylum applications represent nowadays the second-largest group of immigrants living in the islands waiting - often for years - for an unlikely to happen deportation. This procedure creates a precarious situation that is making of Malta a land of deadlock for angry people that cannot move from there, being forced to live in a place where just a few rights are recognized to them, being not even enabled to access the formal local labour market. The statistics produced by the Maltese office of the UNHCR show as between 2002 and 2010 the political refugee status has been granted only to less than three hundreds boat-migrants. Many more boat-migrants instead were entitled with the status of humanitarian protection - converted in 2008 into the Subsidiary Protection Status (M. Vassallo, 2011) - with the vast majority of them being either Somali or Eritrean. This alternative legal status guarantees a much smaller number of rights if compared to those automatically granted to refugees. However, by being entitled with this kind of protection, migrants gain the rights: to legally access the local job-market, to freely move in the island, to have proper identification documents, to access the local health care services, to be financially assisted with a subsidy of around sixty-five Euros every two weeks, while they cannot be deported. Nevertheless, no citizenship can be granted and no direct right to access the rest of the Schengen space of free movement of people is given (UNHCR, 2010). In fact, in order to temporarily access any other EU member state, those under humanitarian/subsidiary protection must apply for a short term VISA - maximum ninety days - being obliged to return to Malta once it expires. Otherwise, if tracked by any EU member state police with an expired VISA, she or he can be immediately deported back to Malta. When interviewed by us, Andre Callus of the Maltese NGOs Graffiti presented this

increasingly intricate and fragmented normative apparatus defining the legal status of boat-migrants, as it was in 2009:

Boat-migrants are detained for at least six to ten months: during this time, interviews to determine their legal statuses are carried on by the government. Through this process it is decided who can be entitled of humanitarian/subsidiary protection or who is instead recognized as a refugee. In this second case, migrants are entitled to immediately leave the detention centres. Those who obtain humanitarian protection can leave the centre after a maximum of nine months - but in reality they do so later since the procedure usually takes more time. For those whose status is difficult to define, the detention can be extended to a maximum of one year. In case no protection is recognized - rejected applications - detention reaches the total of eighteen months.

Local figures reveal that, if on the one hand almost fifty percent of boat-migrants reaching Malta goes under humanitarian/subsidiary protection, the other half of them sees their applications for asylum rejected twice so that they spent eighteen months in detention to be later obliged to stay in the small island state until their eventual deportation - graphic 1.



Graphic 1: Malta Refugee Commission Workload
1 of January 2002 to 30 April 2011 (M. Vassallo, 2011)

However, no matter their legal statuses, once the period of detention ends almost the totality of boat-migrants in Malta enter in one of the four open centres created in Malta after 2004. These centres ran either by the Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity, the Catholic Church and local NGOs, have been mostly opened after 2004 to face the growing emergency and to guarantee minimum life conditions to those migrants that begun to be stuck in the small islands-state. Being less isolated and hidden than the detention centres, with an overall capacity to host few more than one-thousand people, also these facilities are constantly overcrowded and, as we could see with our own eyes, life conditions inside are precarious - table 2.

Open Centre Location	Open Centre Reception Capacity
Marsa (only men)	500 people
Hal Far	289 people
Belzan (families)	106 people
Birkirkara (unaccompanied minors)	90 people

Table 2: source LIBE 2006

Despite there is no legal provision obliging migrants to enter the open centres, almost everyone exiting detention, apply for a place in the open centre. This was confirmed us also by Alex Tortel, the director of OIWAS - the Maltese governmental Organization for the Integration and Welfare of the Asylum Seekers - that we interviewed the eighteenth of August of 2009. As e told us in fact,

once migrants and asylum seekers end their time in detention, they have the permission either to enter the open centres, or to stay somewhere else: to relatives, friends, etc. However, in reality almost everyone apply for the open centres even if there is not any legal obligation to go there [...] On the other hand, since they are in fact open centres, migrants can definitely leave them whenever they want by communicating that to the police.

Thus, as we have seen until now it is clear as the European external border in Malta works as a complex system of diverse detention as well as open centres. This, framed into a progressive multiplication of migrants legal statuses consequent to the European pressures on the one side, and the contingent situation of the small islands-state on the other.

Stretching the limbo. The unwanted endless stop: inside of Europe, but outside of it.

What happens after the time limit to stay in the open centres ends, does not differ from what happened before. Rather, many times migrants just keep living in these facilities. Once again, the regulation over this aspect is fragmented and it does not reflect the real local situation. Andre Callus of the Graffiti NGOs effectively presented us how, in 2009, life outside the open centres was for boat-migrants:

Due to the Dublin regulation refugees as well as those under humanitarian/subsidiary protection can leave the country, but exclusively for short periods not exceeding ninety days: if caught in any other EU member state after this period, they would be deported back to Malta. As for those with their applications rejected, they have to be ready to be deported at any time, while of course they are not allowed to leave the country for any reason. What generally happen however is that while waiting for their deportation - sometimes for more than three years - they leave the island to reach the coasts of Sicily, one again illegally and by boat. While remaining in the islands, not too many options remain: migrants with double rejection are basically obliged to live a right-less and precarious life in the island for an undefined period of time. In this frame, it has to be said, few of them then enter the voluntary return programme of the IOM and so they are financially assisted to return to their countries of origin. In conclusion, Malta became migrants temporary open-air prison or camp.

On a local scale, this means that once you are given protection in Malta, the Maltese government become responsible for you and to leave the islands becomes a very complicated - although very often practiced - option. This, we have seen, is even more true for refugees that, according to the Dublin Convention are granted protection and then the right to reside exclusively in the small Mediterranean islands-state. Moreover, locals find themselves somehow obliged to bear the burden of assisting thousands migrants for whom it results

almost impossible to find a job in the formal market of such a little country – even though a rather large informal employment where no rights are granted for workers, is developing in the island-state. This very last point was stressed also by Ahmed Bugri - the director Marsa Open Centre - during our long interview:

to the refugee or beneficiary of humanitarian/subsidiary protection is given a document that basically gives them the right to reside and work in Malta. Besides, a small unemployment subsidy of three Euros per day is provided by the government. However, this is only the official face. The reality is that it is almost impossible for these people to find a job and therefore to find a place to live. For those having their applications for asylum rejected twice, life conditions are even worst. Indeed, they have no documents to regularly access the formal labour market and, in any case, they live suspended in an endless limbo waiting to be deported at any time.

Terry Godsen of the Maltese General Workers Union was even more explicit with regards to life conditions of immigrants with rejected asylum applications:

immigrants with double rejection are not entitled, in any circumstances, to access health care facilities or any sort of social services. Besides, by not having any document allowing them to work regularly while at the same time having a desperate need to gain some money, they are extremely vulnerable: they are abused, they can be abused, and they will be abused.

Thus, it is clear as it is actually very hard for the vast majority of boat-migrants living in Malta to find any decent place to live, outside the open centres. This, in a context where part of the local society shows the symptoms of a growing hostility towards migrants. This is why, very often, even people who could start a process of integration in the community feel

safer living in the open centres. There, refugees as well as those under humanitarian/subsidiary protection and all those migrants who never applied for asylum or who have seen refused their applications, live together into the same buildings, to a great extent separated by the rest of local society. In other words, once migrants leave the detention centers, the open ones become their residence for years, no matter which legal status has been granted for them. The result is a visible ghettoization of immigrants and refugees, combined with an increasing overpopulation of these places that generates a progressive worsening of migrants' living conditions. Besides, as confirmed by most of our interviewees, such a spatial exclusion somehow dehumanizes migrants, further fuelling resentment and racism by locals. All of this, it needs to be remembered, in a context where no migrant planned to reach Malta or to make a living there. Indeed, as Ahmed Burgi remembered us:

Malta is never the desired final destination for migrants. With the exception of Somali and Eritrean who know that here they can easily obtain the humanitarian protection, immigrants arrive here for accident and what they want is to reach the continent where they might have some relative or friend or where in any case they think that they will have better opportunities.

Thus, it is possible to say that the European external border in Malta is crossed by migrants numerous times as a fragmented and somehow always present boundary, dividing them from their desired destination. A boundary that enormously stretches the length of migrants' journey in terms of time, while not concretely stopping it outside of Europe. Moreover, it is a matter of fact that since boat-migrants leave the coasts of north-Africa to cross the Mediterranean - a very dangerous journey that only in 2006 claimed over six-thousands lives (Statewatch, 2006) - they have already dealt with the European external border numerous times. In fact, as showed by several academic as well as non-academic

studies, the choice of entering the EU illegally can be understood as a direct consequence of the post-Schengen European migration and asylum policies (T. Jaulin, 2010). Mainly, the first factor motivating such a risky and expansive choice, is the increased difficulty of getting a VISA to enter the EU regularly deriving from member states' incorporation of the Schengen legal requirements (M. Tesfahunecy, 1998). Thus, the interaction between many aspects of the EU migration and asylum policies - which we have said include the external border management ones - and their implementation inside as well as outside the territory of the EU, creates the conditions for thousands of migrants and asylum seekers to be forced to undertake these journeys by sea. Then, once they reach Malta, the presence of the border became even more concretely visible along the walls and fences of the detention centres. All of this, in an EU territory somehow thought as a spatial limbo where migrants' rights are temporarily suspended.

4. Conclusion.

Throughout this paper it has been possible to see as a closer look to Europe's margins can reveal their centrality in order to understand the nature of EU policies. Using Sandro Mezzadra's (2004) words, 'what happens on the border of Europe is far from being of marginal importance', covering rather a core function in explaining the functioning of European policies. The border then, has been used here as a sort of lens allowing us to see EU policies somehow stretched and more visibly impacting local reality. The border then works 'as a *point d'entrée* [...] to better understand the nature of the entity - the European Union itself - that the internal and external border delineate' (Warwick, 2008: 4-5): European policies thought and designed for the whole borderless space of the EU are expected to have a major impact exactly where this flat borderless space ends. This allowed us to clearly focus one main paradox characterizing the local reality of Malta. Despite the overall hostile relation existing between the local population on one side, and the migrants one on the other, both of them want the same: the departure of the latter from the islands. However, the Communitarian regulation over immigration as well as the national Maltese law impedes migrants to leave the islands in order to reach mainland Europe. Rather, as a direct effect of the implementation of these normative frames, a *limbo* of frustration, conflict and unhappiness for all the actors involved is created. This, in a situation that numerically - in terms of local population and resources - and geographically - in terms of isolation - does not leave enough space for the implementation of any effective integration policy. It is undeniable in fact as for the Maltese archipelago - the smallest EU front-line state - to manage the high number of undocumented immigrants reaching its territory is a very difficult challenge. A challenge that would instead be easily managed in relation to the overall population of the Schengen space. This, in a situation where the majority of migrants residing within the European external boundary have in

reality entered legally with a valid VISA to become undocumented once it expires (Ryan 2008; Andrijasevic 2009).

Besides, if we consider that Malta is in fact part of the European territory, it becomes clear as the European external border does not work as an impenetrable barrier, but rather as complex system of porous obstacles: a classifying and sorting mechanism. Series of barriers that makes time - and not anymore space - the main dimension of migrants' voyages. Thus, the condition for an endless and right-less wait that very often affects migrants' psychological health conditions are created. As confirmed by Celine Amber of the Jesuit Refugee Service,

In the island there are many cases of more and less young migrants who develop mental problems. It is evident how all of them are extremely stressed and so some times they became aggressive or just crazy: can you imagine how it is to live for years, being a 20 or 30 years old man or woman, detained in a island, segregated from the main society, waking up without knowing what to do with your day and what will happen to you? Believe me, this is extremely frustrating, especially since you have not committed any crime.

If on the one hand the making of the European external border is gaining centrality inside the frame of the development of EU migration and asylum policies, on the other hand the condition of migrants as well as of the European citizens living along this external boundary seem to become increasingly marginal to the EU agenda.

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