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Witnessing the Transition: Moments in the Long Summer of Migration



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I Europe, Migration and Racialization

Looking for Neverland

The experience of the group Lampedusa in Berlin and the refugee protest of Oranienplatz

Elena Fontanari

Introduction

This article aims to contribute to the understanding of the so-called ›migration/refugees crisis‹ that the European Union experiences at present, which came to the fore in summer 2015. The recent continuous attempts to crossing the national borders within Europe enacted by migrant subjects, asylum seekers and refugees on the move have tackled the Schengen and Dublin systems and unmasked their limitations, contradictions and instabilities. In particular, the Dublin system experienced a *de facto* break-down caused by the everyday practices of migrant subjects that decided to not stop in the first arrival European country – where they should remain under the Dublin Convention – and move further although they were not allowed.

Europe emerges as a space of negotiation practices where different actors are involved in the redefinition of borders: national states, European Union, international actors such as UNHCR and IOM, migrant subjects, and pro-migrants NGOs and activists.

Germany has assumed a crucial role in this complex scenario both as country towards which a big number of migrant subjects and refugees move, and as a central actor within the European Union in shaping the guide-lines of the asylum and migration management. The decision of the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, to suspend the Dublin Regulation just for Syrian people fleeing the war lead to several concerns within the European Union. With this decision the German government took note of the fact that the Dublin system and its mobility limitation devices that confined the asylum seekers and refugees to the first arrival EU country had imploded. Nevertheless, the decision to temporarily ›open the door‹ to the Syrian refugees entailed a reinforcement of the national borders within Europe, supported by an increasing



Collective draw of Oranienplatz protest by Oumar Assoumane, Giulia Borri, Elena Fontanari, Cosimo Miorelli

racist and xenophobic behaviour of a part of the civil society. The latter has been characterized by a deep division between the new right-wing racist claims and a ›welcome culture‹ from below, which takes shape in the voluntary work supporting the newly arriving asylum-seekers. Since the summer 2015, the concept of ›*Willkommenskultur*‹ (welcome culture) has been developed to point to an heterogeneous set of norms, behaviours and values set in the population and civil society that take shape through the self-organised support for asylum-seekers and refugees. This article will shed light on the experience of a group of temporary refugees who are under Italian humanitarian protection but attempt to live and work in Germany namely in Berlin, although they are not allowed under EU laws. The stories of this particular group of people precede the events of the summer 2015 by two years, and shed light on an experience of ›*Willkommenskultur*‹ before the concept was built. Furthermore, it highlights how the institutional behaviour of ›*Willkommenskultur*‹ applied just for refugees from Syria and that it works through a very selective mechanism that does not include the protagonists of this following story.

A multi-sited case-study: methodological path

The protagonists of this story arrived in Italy in 2011 because of the Libyan war, and have obtained a humanitarian protection in Italy. But no one of them is a Libyan citizen, rather they are all people coming from different countries of the Sub-Sahara region and they lived and worked in Libya. The humanitarian protection obtained in Italy is a temporary and reduced legal status: a one-year renewable document that allows to live and work only in Italy and to move around Europe just for three months. Because of the difficult living conditions – homeless and unemployed – most of the temporary refugees decided to leave Italy heading to Northern Europe although they were not allowed under the Schengen and Dublin agreements. Some of them have moved to Germany, and in the city of Berlin they gave rise to a protest to claim their rights to freely work and move through Europe. They occupied a square – Oranienplatz – where they lived inside tents for almost two years. After the failure of the political negotiation with the local authorities, they decided to live as ›illegal‹ persons in Berlin and move back and forth between Germany and Italy to renew their documents.

This story has been the case-study of my Ph.D. research that aimed to grasp the tension between the structural mechanisms of control and management of migration in Europe, and the crossing-border mobility of refugees with a temporary residence permit that attempt to autonomously build their lives. Referring to social theory, I aimed to grasp the relation between the structure and the subjective agency through a processual and dynamic perspective. I decided to frame the refugee issue through the analytical concepts of mobility and border, referring to the literature of border studies (Hess/Kasperek 2010; Karakayalı/Tsianos 2010; Mezzadra/Neilson 2013; De Genova 2013; Scheel/Squire 2014), critical citizenship studies (Ong 1999; Morris 2003; Rigo 2007; Isin/Nielsen 2008; Lebuhn 2013), and that of ›im-mobility regime‹ (Shamir 2005; Glick Schiller/Salazar 2013). In my research, I focused on the ›secondary movements‹ of temporary refugees within Europe that are treated as ›illegal‹ under the European Union laws. This allowed to shed light on migration as a non-linear and ›not-one-way‹ movement, and to deconstruct the image of a refugee as a victim or object to be integrated through a national state logic. I applied the multi-sited ethnography that allowed me to overcome analysing the refugee issue through the national state logic, grasping instead the European border regime as a space of fragmented and multi-level sovereignty. The research fields were set in the cities of Milan and Berlin not for conventional comparative purposes (Marcus 1995), but

rather as two places through which it was possible to grasp the tensions between the structural constraints of European Union and the crossing-borders mobility enacted by the refugees subjects. During the 20 months of ethnographic research, I had a double role both as an activist supporting refugees subjects and as a researcher. This allowed me to have a continuous exchange with the protagonists of my research referring in part to the militant research tradition.

Displacing Lampedusa: the Oranienplatz protest in Berlin

During the year 2011, in total 55.000 migrant subjects arrived at the Italian coasts because of the so-called Arabic Spring and the subsequent Libyan war. Around 30.000 people landed in Italy escaping the Libyan war and they were all ›Sub-Sahara migrants‹ that were working in Libya and didn't have the plan to come to Europe. The Italian government responded to this ›new‹ migration phenomenon by declaring a state of emergency, and consequently issued legal measures and devices characterized by an overlapping of humanitarian and securitarian guidelines. This emergency program called *Emergenza Nord Africa* (North Africa Emergency) developed a new reception system that worked parallel to the official one. Under this parallel emergency system, new reception centers were opened using old or less frequented hotels run by NGOs or social cooperatives that were dealing for the first time with the asylum issue. In December 2012, the Italian government decided to hand out a one-year humanitarian protection to all the people escaping the Libya war, the reception structures of the emergency program were closed and the temporary refugees were kicked out. Thus, the majority of the people with humanitarian protection found themselves on the street without any home or work, and without knowing where they should go. Furthermore, a part of Italian local authorities omitted to inform temporary refugees about the rights and the restriction of their humanitarian protection; notably, they informally encouraged them to leave Italy because of the economic crisis, omitting the fact that they were not allowed to work in other European countries. Thus, the temporary refugees started to move around Italy building on their social networks and ties they had created during the migration experience, looking for a job and a place to stay. Some of them found a temporary and precarious work in the seasonal agricultural sector, where usually the migrant subjects are illegally employed. The following narration of Essien, a young man from Nigeria, sheds light on this experience:

»I have done the asylum seeker camp in Gavirate. I was working at the restaurant as dish washer, and it was black job. In Italy you can find just black job [he smiles]. Then, once they closed the camp, they sent us away. I went to *Foggia* to work in the fields. I had many friends there, so I called them and asked if I could work with them. They told me that I could go there and find some work. I stayed in *Foggia* six months. I did the grape harvest and also picked peppers and tomatoes. I took a lot of jobs there. But very bad! I slept in the fields, we looked for some cardboard and then wood, and we built a hut. That's where we slept. But with this life you're dead! [he laughs] You work an hour and they pay three Euros. You can spend one year like this, but not a lifetime. Then my residence permit expired and so I came to Milan to renew it and look for work.« (Interview with Essien in Milan, April 2014)

A population of *errant subjects on the move* around Italy emerged that experienced the big cities such as Milan, Turin and Rome as *transitory places* where they could rest for some months and re-orient their life projects and migratory paths. The protagonists of my research traced fragmented circuits that criss-crossed the Italian territory and were stretched throughout the whole of Europe. Indeed, some of them decided to leave Italy and try to build their lives in other European countries, as the following narration of Cheryll, a young man from Mali, explains:

»We are sitting in the train Station, and Essien is playing with his phone. We speak a lot, and Essien starts to tell me about his life [...] At one point, Cheryll comes close to us and starts to tell me his story. »[...] I have a friend with whom we have done the same camp in Italy. Then we got the humanitarian protection, and he decided to go to France. He arrived there, and now he is working there without problem! I visited him in Paris! He has a job and a house. Me too, when I received the humanitarian protection I decided to move to Malta, because my brother is living and working there [...] Also my brother has humanitarian permit from Italy! Like me! He works in this vineyard since one year without problem. He pays also a rent for a house, without problem. So I went there, in order to find a job. My brother helped me to find a job, it was a black job. But once it finished, I didn't find nothing else. And you know, I didn't want to stay with him without doing nothing! I felt so ashamed! So I decided to come back to Italy, and find my way!« (Shadowing with Essien in Milan, March 2014)

The story of Cheryl is just one of the many stories of my research protagonists that left Italy towards other European countries and undertook hence ›secondary movements‹ across Europe. A number of my research protagonists headed to Germany, in particular to Berlin. At the time when they moved, around January 2013, many refugee protests occurred, which were scattered over several German cities and had as focal point the occupation of a square in Berlin: the Oranienplatz.

In short, the Oranienplatz political protest started in autumn 2012 when some refugees and asylum-seekers and a network of supporters and activists built up a protest tent camp in the wake of the global political movement ›Occupy wall street‹. The spark that triggered the self-organised refugee protest was the suicide of Mohammad Rahsepar, a 28 years old asylum-seeker from Iran, committed on 29 January 2012 in the asylum-seeker reception center of Würzburg in the region of Bavaria. Afterwards, self-organised refugee and asylum-seeker protests emerged in several German cities, claiming better life conditions for asylum-seekers and fighting against the restrictive German asylum system, notably the law that limited their movement across national territory (Residenzpflicht). After some months of demonstrations locally supported by activists, NGOs and pro-migrants church organisations, a protest march towards the capital of Germany was organized that ended with the occupation of Oranienplatz in October 2012.

The Oranienplatz protest emerged immediately as the center of the local refugee protests occurring in other German cities. The days after the occupation, several activists and migrant subjects with different legal conditions were reaching Berlin to join the protest. Since the number of people was growing each day, the network of ›O-platz people‹ decided to occupy a former school named *Gerhart-Hauptmann Schule* located close to Oranienplatz.

Since January 2013, the number of migrant subjects with Italian documents arriving in Berlin increased steeply. Some of them were already living in other German or Northern European cities, others arrived directly from Italy. Most of them were people that had experienced the *Emergenza Nord Africa* program, and once they heard through their social contacts about the political protest of refugees, they decided to join it. The temporary refugees with Italian documents gathered in the cities of Hamburg and Berlin, and they built a sub-group within the refugee protest, named ›Lampedusa in Hamburg‹ and ›Lampedusa in Berlin‹. The reference to the small island of Lampedusa was used to characterise themselves as those who arrived in Italy escaping the Libyan war and were successively ›abandoned‹ on the street by the Italian authorities. Moreover, this name aimed to highlight that the European

borders are not just on the island of Lampedusa, instead they are also within the European territory and they appear through the mobility restriction and prohibition of work, referring hence to the Dublin Regulation and the Schengen agreement. For these reasons ›Lampedusa‹, i.e. the EU border, is *in* Hamburg and *in* Berlin.

The following experience of Amal shows us how he got into contact with the Oranienplatz protest:

» The first time I met friends like me in Berlin, they immediately told me about Oranienplatz. I thought ›If I go there, maybe there is some possibility for me to stay there‹. So I was very happy, because I didn't know where to sleep. I had slept in the train station, *Hauptbahnhof* ... I had no place. They brought me to Oranienplatz, and I see the place ... let me say something: in Africa, I have never seen a place like this! In Africa, I never slept in such a bad place! That was the first time, but I had no choice, so I met there some friends, some Africans, but we didn't know each other. So I started to talk with them and we became friends. Then, there was no place to sleep there, the square was full. But one guy told me that they were in the same situation like me, so even if there was no place to sleep for me, we'd found it! He has a place, a very small mattress. We slept together in that small mattress. After some days, I found another mattress and we built a tent for two persons. So I remained there, with all the other people, we stayed there, together. [...] I met the friends of *Lampedusa in Berlin*. The group was already existing. I remained there with them. I found them, and they were in the same situation like me, so I thought ›I have to follow them in everything they do, I have to do like them, I have to get together with them, I have to follow them!‹. So, I remained with them, and I became like them. I became a Lampedusa in Berlin. And we stayed! We found a lot of friends there, they were coming to visit us every day with a lot of supports. We organized a lot of strikes, political meetings. I have done so many demonstrations! [...] I stayed there from the autumn of 2013 until April 2014.« (Interview with Amal in Berlin, October 2014)

In the middle of the square close to the tent camp, an info-point was built where it was possible to get information about the protest, places to sleep and lawyers that could support migrant subjects.

Oranienplatz was not just a place of political protest, but also a sociability place where day by day a feeling of home was built through the continuous

relations between the refugees and the supporters, both daily experiencing the square as a ›space of new possibilities‹. The ›Oranienplatz place‹ developed an ambivalence since its beginning: place of protest and place of accommodation for ›people who are not allowed to stay‹. Indeed, the main slogan of the group *Lampedusa in Berlin* was: »We are here, and we will stay!« facing the prohibition of settling in Germany set by the Dublin Regulation and Schengen Agreement. Together with the political activities, other activities were carried out within the square such as artistic workshops and German classes.

»We started on pieces of paper – from the very first [German] words and sentences caught around the table inside the Info-point tent, without any teaching program – just in the precariousness so hard to be disentangled of that sort of Lampedusa-isle in the middle of Berlin, between the dust of the tent, the cardboard boxes of cloths and books, the thousands of interruptions, questions and discussions, and among the coming and going of many people.« (Borri 2015, 88)

Several concerts, parties and other social events were organized by the supporter network and the migrant subjects active in Oranienplatz. Thus, the political protest activities were alternating with fun activities, hence making the everyday life of Oranienplatz people very busy.

»In *O-platz* you can find everything: friends, home, you can ask if there is some job. If you are looking for something, you go to Oranienplatz. And if you don't find someone there, you go to Kotti Café and you find always someone. And also if you want to give an appointment to friends, it is always in O-platz. Maybe the people don't remember the name of other places and streets, but everyone knows where is O-platz.« (Participant observation with Obasi in Berlin, July 2015)

Spaces of new possibilities: provoking juridical and political fractures

The Oranienplatz protest was treated by local authorities as a problem of public (dis)order, since the main square of a central neighbourhood, Kreuzberg, was filled with loud voices claiming everyday for the rights of movement and right to stay in Germany despite Dublin and Schengen Agreement.

In the summer 2013, there were around 80 people with Italian documents sleeping in Oranienplatz and around 200 people sleeping in the occupied

school. Oranienplatz quickly became a central point also for other protests that were occurring in Berlin at that time, for example the protest of a group of activists from Chad, or the protest against the government in Sudan, the protest against the situation in Nigeria, or protests of older networks of refugees that arrived in Germany several years before. Everyday there was a political meeting, and everyday there were more or less 100 people living on the square, also in order to prevent a possible eviction or police intervention. Indeed, in the first year of the protest the only institutional intervention was an attempt to evict the protest camp issued by the Interior Minister of the Berliner Senate, Frank Henkel (CDU). The complexity of power relations and different interests that intersected with each other in the ›Oranienplatz situation‹ cannot be explained in depth here. Still, it is useful to underline the crucial role of the conflicts within the coalition of the Berlin government that at this time was constituted by the SPD (Social Democrats) and CDU (Christian Democrats). The mayor of the municipality of Kreuzberg, Monika Herman, belongs to the Green Party that was excluded from the government of the city; and at the beginning she was fighting against the evictions of the square and school supporting the refugees protest. Moreover, at the beginning the mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, and all the politicians of the SPD hold positions of passive observers, entailing thus an *impasse* that was lengthened over many months. The central contested issue was the claim of the ›Lampedusa group‹ to have the right to remain in Germany and have access to the labour market. The local government felt legitimate to not intervene and even to not start to think about a solution for these people, since the Italian government was said to be the real responsible of that group and their condition. Thus, local authorities sent back the ›Lampedusa claims‹ to the national and European level, i.e. to the Dublin Regulation and Schengen Agreement, which in turn diverted the ›Lampedusa claims‹ back to Italy.

The situation changed after one year, when the Berlin Senate was forced to open a space of political negotiation since the daily noisy presence of the ›Oranienplatz people‹ had become ›not acceptable‹ any more, being daily on the local media that pressured for a solution. The negotiation occurred between January and April 2014, and in April 2014 the ›Oranienplatz Agreement‹ was signed. During the eighteen-month period the Kreuzberg's square experienced a suspension of the EU and national laws, being for a short time a ›small space of possibility‹ for political change. Indeed, during the long time of political protest many Italian humanitarian documents had expired, and hence according to the laws the people should have been treated as ›illegal‹ and thus deported to Italy. Furthermore, some of them had applied for asylum in several German

cities. Thus, by living in Oranienplatz they broke the national law of mobility restriction and also the Dublin Agreement. The temporary suspension of the law was reached by the self-organised protests of the refugees, which managed to temporarily open up an ›*interstice*‹ in the juridical and political system. A ›space of possibility‹ was opened up that aimed at changing the EU asylum and migration law from below, claiming for a new idea of Europe.

I apply here the concept of ›interstice‹ following the urban studies that grasp the ›in-between‹ and blurry space within the city (Brighenti 2013). An *interstice* is a small space that inherently signifies a power issue. It is a rupture and it sometimes implies an opening up enacted by ›interstitial subjects‹, which represent minority populations that often struggle for their right to the city. According to some authors i.e. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2013), an interstice must not be understood as a ›space in between‹, but instead as the ›space in the middle‹ that refers to a space of struggles. Thus, this concept aims to shed light on the active role of the marginal subjects and on the dynamics of the power relations. I understand the Oranienplatz protest as a threefold interstice: it is urban, juridical and political. Indeed, the federal region Berlin was not juridically responsible for the major part of the Oranienplatz people. The asylum seekers who had applied for asylum in Germany had done it in other regions. The refugees with Italian documents were officially under the responsibility of Italy. Thus, a *juridical* problem was supposed to be overcome through a *political* agreement. The informal – but obvious – declaration of Berlin to take a *de facto* juridical responsibility on these ›people cases‹ was stated through the Agreement signed in April 2014. A list was created that should include all the refugees that joined the protest and give them access to the German asylum reception system. The Berlin local authorities insisted to analyse the situation of the people on the list case-by-case to decide individually who should receive access to the German system and who should not. Access for all, a ›collective solution‹ to the problem, was deliberately avoided by the Senate, which feared and therefore strongly opposed the creation of a precedent juridical case. The list was also a management tool useful for the Senate to categorize the very heterogeneous and turbulent *O-platz* migrant population, which was in continuous change as the people were constantly on the move throughout Europe. Although the Senate attempted to categorize the people to manage them within the German asylum system, *de facto* the list was drawn up without clear criteria: people who never participated in the political protest were included, but other, which were part of the Lampedusa group and outside Berlin at the time of the list writing, were excluded. In the end, the limited time in which the list remained open was the

only criteria. Thus, the Oranienplatz list was like a sliding door through which just a restricted number of people – around 462 – got access to the agreement. They should consequently have been given access to the German political and juridical space.

After the agreement, the square was evicted and the *O-platz* people were divided and distributed to several residence centers scattered in Berlin. The following narration of Amal highlights how my research protagonists experienced again what they had experienced in Italy almost two years before: a very fragmented and precarious life, with continuously changing places to sleep.

»When the Senate decided to close Oranienplatz and the school, they gave us another place, and we slept there. But after two months, they told us that we had to do the interview at the *Ausländerbehörde*. We asked why, and they told us that we had to apply for asylum. But a lot of people already had an Italian document, Italy is a European country, isn't it?! So we wanted the right to work here in Germany with the Italian document. Moreover, if you do the interview again, after six months they deport you back to Italy. So, we disagreed. They told us ›Ok, who doesn't want to do the interview has to leave the house'. The houses were in Osloer Straße and Frankfurter Allee: Caritas houses. Those who disagreed to do the interview, they kicked them out! [...] Yes, me too! They told me some time before: I had the appointment for the interview, and they told me that if I wouldn't do it, I'd had to go out from that house. You know, if you do the interview they send you back to Italy ... they even take your Italian document! So, I said no! Some of my friends went to do the interview, and after two months they told them: ›you have done the asylum application in Italy, so you have to go back to Italy«. Like this! I stayed with the supporters, in the *Solizimmer*. First time, just one night. Then, I went to another place and also there three or four days. And then, again, to another place for two weeks. Some of us are living like this, today here, tomorrow there, three days like this, two days like that, some of us live like this. What else you can do? After some time, I lost some contacts with friends ... I think they left Berlin, some of them came back to Italy, others further to France or to Belgium. Many got the deportation letter to Italy. I don't know where they are. But a lot of people remain in Berlin.« (Interview with Amal in Berlin, October 2014)

Amal's narration introduces what happened after the agreement. The people who accepted to go to the *Ausländerbehörde* and made the interview received the deportation letter to Italy after some months. The letter stated that this person was holding an Italian document, and thus did not have the right to stay in Germany and would be forced to go back to Italy. Exactly this juridical problem was the starting point of the political negotiation that should have been resolved with a political solution. Thus, after these months it became clear that *de facto* the Oranienplatz Agreement was fake, since every person who went to *Ausländerbehörde* received the deportation letter. The refugees holding an expired Italian document were accused of their ›illegal‹ stay in Germany; those who held a regular Italian document were accused of ›illegally‹ crossing the borders, according to the renewal date on their document; and those who had to renew their Italian document soon were rejected with the reason that they first should renew their document. Thus, for several technical bureaucratic reasons all the migrant subjects obtained a deportation letter to Italy. Furthermore, at the beginning of September 2014, senator Frank Henkel declared the ›Oranienplatz Agreement‹ not valid because he had not personally signed it.

The behaviour of the local institutions of Berlin entailed these two consequences for the *O-platz* refugees: on the one side, it produced the invisibilization of their presence, on the other side it lengthened the temporariness condition that strengthened their ›transit experience‹. The political and juridical invisibility was ensured by the border of the legal status. Through the bureaucratic practices of the *Ausländerbehörde* that were justified by the technical application of the laws, the political ›Oranienplatz Agreement‹ was *de facto* cancelled. The protagonists of the Oranienplatz protests became hence again ›illegal‹ according to the institutions. Although the protagonists of Oranienplatz protest experienced the same condition as the undocumented migrants, their juridical situation was different. It was an in-between blurred position: they were ›documented migrants‹, but not authorised to stay within German territory, and hence ›illegal‹ – but just outside Italy. As usual for undocumented migrants, also in Berlin the presence of the ›unauthorized‹ subjects has been tolerated on the condition that they remain *invisible* and *silent* (Ambrosini 2015). This abandonment policy has been accompanied by the policy of control: the Lampedusa group was split and many subgroups were built based on the lists: the occupied school list, the O-platz list, and several lists related to some internships organized by supporters. Who remained outside these lists was again treated as an ›illegal‹ person to be deported and detained. The lists worked as internal borders that filtered and fragmented the O-platz people.

Indeed, some of these people, who fell by chance through the filtering net, were detained and deported to Italy or to their country of origin, which they left many years ago and to which they often did not have a relation any more.

The policy of abandonment and control issued by the Berlin Senate sheds light on the wider global tendency of managing migration and in particular ›refugees‹ through »humanitarian reasons« (Fassin 2011) that interconnect compassionate concerns with securitarian devices. The refusal of responsibility for this group of people enacted by Italy first, and Germany thereafter, strengthened these refugees' hypermobility across Europe, which has to be understood as half-voluntary and half-forced. In the months after the ›O-platz Agreement‹ the responsibility of the ›Lampedusa people‹ living on the street progressively fell back to the supporter networks, which would provide the basic needs for these »errant orphans« on the move.

Which place for errant orphans? Kreuzberg as the autonomous island

To understand why the protest of Oranienplatz resisted for so long, it is important to give a brief historical context on Kreuzberg, the neighbourhood in which the protest was embedded. Indeed, this neighbourhood has an old tradition of left-wing political fights and house squatting movements, which started in the middle of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Moreover, migration and ethnic issues and the consequent discriminating and racism phenomena are embedded in that neighbourhood. Indeed, the expression »Ghetto Kreuzberg« emerged in the 1970s and was usually compared to US ghettos such as Harlem neighbourhood in New York (Stehle 2006). Thus, this Berlin neighbourhood has been treated for long as different from the rest of the city, a separate place with its status of a ›special island‹ as the main characteristic for different reasons in different epochs. Since the post-war time, the neighbourhood has been considered the main place in Berlin with dynamic subcultural activities. In the 1960s it was considered the alternative cultural neighbourhood, dwelled by a Bohemian population and the similarity with the neighbourhood Montmartre in Paris was often underlined. During the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s the alternative culture turned towards a more radical left-wing political culture through several social struggles and squatting movements. During the 1980s the Punks culture emerged that saw Kreuzberg as an ›Utopic island‹ isolated from the rest of Germany and the world. The ›myth of Kreuzberg‹ has been built in that time, when the image of a free and separate world was rising: »freie Republik« and »freies Land im

unfreien Staat« were the mottoes that characterized Kreuzberg at that time (Lang 1998). Kreuzberg has therefore long been seen in the city's imaginary as ›external world‹ and lived by its inhabitants as a separate place criss-crossed by alternative subcultures and political fights – anyhow the global economic forces and political transformation penetrated also in the canals of this Utopic island through processes of gentrification.

The tradition of political fights in Kreuzberg played a role in the decision for Oranienplatz as the place where to build the refugees protest camp. Moreover, also the more recent political struggles in Berlin occurred in that neighbourhood: two protest camps were built close to the square in 2012. A refugees and asylum-seekers protest camp existed on Heinrichplatz following the protest that started in Würzburg, and a second one was created at Kottbusser Tor: the *Gecekondu* built by the initiative *Kotti&Co*. The Oranienplatz protest camp existed for almost two years: thanks to the ›integration‹ attitude typical of the activists and neighbours of Kreuzberg, the O-platz refugees built a feeling of home linked to this neighbourhood that led them to decide to remain in Berlin despite being ›unwanted‹ and ›illegal'. Some of them started ›commute movements‹ from Berlin to Italy in order to renew their Italian document (Borri/ Fontanari 2015). Afterwards, they decided to go back to Berlin despite their ›irregular‹ condition within German territory. Obasi, a protagonist of my research, explains to us why he chose Berlin as the place to stay although he could be ›legal‹ in Italy:

»Berlin for me is really better! Here there are a lot of things to do! I have many projects with the supporters and artists, I meet so many people and associations. But they don't pay so much, eh!« he laughs and keeps speaking: »In Italy they were paying me more than here in Berlin! But there I have worked just six months and then they told me that I couldn't stay there any more because of the crisis.« (Interview with Obasi in Berlin, November 2014)

The words of Obasi shed light on the process of building a feeling of home, which emerged through the protest of Oranienplatz and was embedded in the Kreuzberg neighbourhood. Indeed, the occupation of Oranienplatz should not be seen only as a re-appropriation practice enacted by subjects with political awareness, it is a more complex and ambivalent phenomenon. Oranienplatz presented an ambivalent nature as social place, being both a private space of derived domesticity and a public-political space of right claiming. The public visibility and the collective character, which usually refers to the work- and

cultural-political sphere (Duyvendak 2011), was here related also to the private space of domesticity, with Oranienplatz being also a ›home‹ for many migrant subjects. Furthermore, many activities were organised by the supporter network in order to break the structural restriction that limited access for the ›Lampedusa people‹ to German society – above all to a place for sleep and the labour market. Different artistic projects and political meetings occurred in the everyday life in Berlin, aiming to interconnect the ›Lampedusa people‹ with the local inhabitants and to find a way to earn some money beyond the national borders. Moreover, some theatre groups were built thanks to the active role of several theatres such as *Gorki* theatre, *Volksbühne*, *Grips* theatre, *HAU* theatre, *Zentrum für Politische Schönheit* and *Ballhaus Naunynstrasse* in Kreuzberg. The social relations and the feeling of being welcomed in Kreuzberg entailed the decision to remain in Berlin, despite the strong awareness of the limitations because of the legal status.

»For me it was the first time that I do demonstration and political activity. But I met a lot of supporters and I saw day by day that they were really good people and they wanted to help us and support us. So we started to stay together many time, we have done all the things together! A lot of demonstration, political meeting, many many things together with the supporters ... they are great! Also they bring us food, sometimes clothes, like this I like it here.« (Interview with Amal in Berlin, October 2014)

»Here in Berlin I met many different people, from different countries, and they do many things: a lot of political meetings, political things, many! Instead, in Italy I was thinking just to work, to job, there are no political activities, you go to work, you work, and then you go back home and sleep. It is a pity, because also speaking with many people that have done many different experiences ... also this means learning and studying! The world is big, there are many things to get know and many things that we don't know, so it is great to meet people. I sleep 4 hours in Berlin! Yes! I have many many things to do!« (Interview with Obasi in Berlin, November 2014)

The role of the supporter network was fundamental in the long term: it was a relationship net that avoided the ›fall‹ of ›O-platz migrant subjects‹ through the holes of the border control mesh that individualizes every single story and person. Indeed, the fact that the supporters together with the active kernel of

›*O-platz* refugees‹ were always active in finding places to sleep, artistic projects and lawyers once there was a police arrest allowed the migrant subjects to not feel individualized and alone when confronted with the control and management mechanisms.

The eviction of Oranienplatz was a way to disperse and invisibilize the noisy collective voices of refugees, and the local institutions aimed to communicate that the dream of that small Lampedusa-island in the middle of Kreuzberg was shipwrecked. Nevertheless, the public space of Kreuzberg continued to be experienced as ›home‹, and several places were daily frequented by the *O-platz* migrant subjects for encounter, conversation and exchange of information. New places of sociability emerged in the neighbourhood, such as Görlitzer Park and, above all, the crossroad Kottbusser Tor. The following narration of Amal sheds light on that:

»Now that Oranienplatz doesn't exist any more, we have other places where we meet and make political reunions. [...] The most of the time, we are hanging out at Kotti [abbreviation of Kottbusser Tor, the crossroad in Kreuzberg close to Oranienplatz]. Yes, in Kotti Cafè, but also outside, when it is not cold. But we are also in several streets in Kreuzberg ... yes, also Görlitzer Park, but I am not going there so often, but other friends are always there. I am always in Kotti, also because we are watching the football matches there! [...] Let's say that the place in Berlin where I feel at home ... yes, is the neighbourhood Kreuzberg. In Kreuzberg there are many many places to go, where we hung out during the refugees‹ protest in *O-platz* ... there the people know us very well, we can stay there, in Kreuzberg! There are some restaurants and bars where we can go, they know us. This is our neighbourhood!« (Interview with Amal in Berlin, October 2014)

Feeling at home in Kreuzberg should not obscure the fact that my research protagonists still experience a very precarious and fragmented life after almost five years since their arrival in Europe. Oranienplatz was a space of possibility, where the ›*O-platz* population‹ attempted to open up interstices within the restrictive juridical meshes of European and national law. The sort of small Lampedusa-island in the middle of Berlin resisted for almost two years, and right in that neighbourhood which has always been considered the ›utopic island‹ of the German capital. The local institutions and the national states, namely Italy and Germany, interconnected policies of abandonment – on the streets – and control – treating them as ›illegal‹ – pushing the *errant orphans*

– or ›Lost Boys‹ – to look for their ›Neverland‹ somewhere else. Cities as the place where »[...] all the secret ambitions and all the suppressed desires find somewhere an expression [...] [the place] in which to discover the secrets of human hearts«, Berlin was for almost two years the place of all places in which to discover the desires and aspirations of a group of non-citizen attempting to experience Europe as a single big city (Park 1952, 87).

Conclusion and outlooks: EU-rope as interstitial archipelago

The story I told here allows to shed light on the complexity of the European border regime as a space of negotiating practices, and on migration and asylum issues as battlegrounds on which the borders are continuously negotiated and redefined. This story can also help to better understand today's events in Europe, which are at present only (and falsely) discussed within the limited scope of a ›migration/refugee crisis‹ directly associated with border control and asylum and immigration law enforcements. I showed through the experiences of the ›Lampedusa people‹ how the crisis can be understood as a crisis of European identity or a crisis of the European Union structures, whose contradictions and limitations emerge under the pressure of the migration phenomenon and its heterogeneity and complexity.

My research protagonists could be provocatively seen as *pioneers* of the breakdown of the Schengen and Dublin systems that we are witnessing since the summer 2015. Their cross-border movements and their attempts to build their life in the narrow structural meshes of EU law have produced frictions and tensions within the EU-rope. I understand these frictions as a consequence of power relations, in which my research protagonists opened up interstices of autonomy. Oranienplatz was a threefold interstice, being an *urban* place ›in the middle‹ of the city, it opened up a *political* and *juridical* possibilities through the struggles of a marginal group. A different geography of EU-rope emerges, which is built from below by the contested trajectories of refugees on the move that create and live on interstitial islands within the turbulent sea of the European border regime. The supporter networks and groups are the only safe harbours through which refugees are transiting and on which they base their mobility. Now, in 2016, the ›open doors‹ for Syrian refugees issued by the German institutions at the end of the year 2015 are barred for the ›lost boys‹ that survived the Oranienplatz struggles. Although it was this early group of refugee protesters that laid the path to the breakdown of the Dublin regime, they are still stuck in transit across Europe, navigating towards ›Neverland‹.



Illustration of Cosimo Miorelli, part of the multimedia live story telling project Storm•i, <http://www.cosimomiorelli.com/stormi/>

»When a man rides a long time through wild regions he feels the desire for a city. Finally he comes to Isidora, a city where the buildings have spiral staircases encrusted with spiral seashells, where perfect telescopes and violins are made, where the foreigner hesitating between two women always encounters a third, where cockfights degenerate into bloody brawls among the bettors. He was thinking of all these things when he desired a city. Isidora, therefore, is the city of his dreams: with one difference. The dreamed-of city contained him as a young man; he arrives at Isidora in his old age. In the square there is the wall where the old men sit and watch the young go by; he is seated in a row with them. Desires are already memories.« (Calvino 1972, 8)

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