RESEARCH ARTICLE

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

The presence of abandonment: Left to live at the borderland of Lampedusa

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Abstract

Drawing from the extensive literature on the anthropology of borders and border death in and beyond Europe, this article ethnographically explores the processes through which irregular migrants and locals at the borderland of Lampedusa (south of Sicily, Italy) are left to live and die in abandonment. In the process, we highlight the distinct and antagonistic yet shared sense of neglect that both migrants and locals experience in their everyday lives on the island and explore the relationship between abandonment, the everyday, and the law, showing how these are interwoven. By including both irregular migrants and locals in Lampedusa in our analysis, the article importantly establishes how abandonment occurs not in the absence but in the inde-terminacy of the law and highlights a chronic failure of the law toward life (deemed as legal and illegal). It moves beyond traditional anthropological critiques on state presence and absence, showing how abandonment pervades everyday life within and beyond borders.

KEYWORDS
abandonment, borders, death, Lampedusa, life

Resumen

A partir de la extensa bibliografía de la antropología de las fronteras y la frontera de la muerte en Europa, este artículo explora etnográficamente los procesos a través de los cuales los migrantes irregulares y residentes locales de la zona fronteriza de Lampe-dusa (Sur de Sicilia, Italia) son dejados para vivir y morir en abandono. En el proceso, enfatizamos el distintivo y antagonista pero compartido sentido de negligencia que tanto los migrantes como los residentes locales experimentan en sus vidas diarias en la isla, y exploramos la relación entre el abandono, lo cotidiano y la ley mostrando cómo estos se entrelazan. Al incluir tanto migrantes irregulares como residentes locales en Lampedusa en nuestro análisis, el artículo importantemente establece cómo el aban-dono ocurre no en nuestro análisis, pero en lo indeterminado de la ley y enfatiza una falla crónica de la ley hacia la vida (estimada como legal o ilegal). Se mueve más allá de

las critica antropológicas sobre la presencia y la ausencia del estado, mostrando cómo el abandono permea la vida cotidiana [fronteras, abandono, vida, muerte, Lampedusa]

সারাংশ

ইউরোপের সীমান্ত এবং সীমান্তের মৃত্যুর নৃতত্ত্বের উপর বিস্তারিত সাহিত্য থেকে আঁকা, এই নিবন্ধটি নৃতাত্ত্বিকভাবে প্রক্রিয়াগুলি অন্বেষণ করে যার মাধ্যমে ল্যাম্পেদুসার সীমান্তভূমিতে (সিসিলির দক্ষিণে, ইতালি) অনিয়মিত অভিবাসী এবং স্থানীয়দের পরিত্যক্ত অবস্থায় বেঁচে থাকা এবং মারা যাওয়ার জন্য রেখে দেওয়া হয়। এই প্রক্রিয়ায়, আমরা দ্বীপের অভিবাসী এবং স্থানীয়—উভয়েরই দৈনন্দিন জীবনে যে স্বতন্ত্র এবং বিরোধী অথচ অংশীদারি অবহেলা অনুভব করে তা তুলে ধরেছি এবং পরিত্যাগ, দৈনন্দিন এবং আইনের মধ্যে সম্পর্কের অন্বেষণ করেছি, যা দেখায় যে কীভাবে এগুলি সম্পৃক্ত ভাবে বোনা। আমাদের বিশ্লেষণে ল্যাম্পেদুসায় অনিয়মিত অভিবাসী এবং স্থানীয় উভয়কেই অন্তর্ভুক্ত করে, নিবন্ধটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণভাবে প্রতিষ্ঠা করে যে কীভাবে বিসর্জন অনুপস্থিতিতে নয় বরং আইনের অনির্দিষ্টতায় ঘটে এবং জীবনের প্রতি আইনের দীর্ঘস্থায়ী ব্যর্থতা তুলে ধরে (আইনি এবং অবৈধ হিসাবে বিবেচিত)। এটি রাষ্ট্রীয় উপস্থিতি এবং অনুপস্থিতি সম্পর্কে প্রচলিত নৃতাত্ত্বিক সমালোচনার বাইরে চলে যায়, দেখায় যে বিসর্জন কীভাবে সীমানার ভিতরে এবং বাইরে দৈনন্দিন জীবনকে ব্যাপ্ত করে।[সীমানা, বিসর্জন, জীবন, মৃত্যু, ল্যাম্পেদুসা]

Riassunto

In conversazione con un'ampia letteratura che si è occupata di antropologia del confine e della morte alle frontiere d'Europa, l'articolo adotta un approccio etnografico per esplorare i processi tramite cui migranti irregolari e abitanti dell'isola di Lampedusa (frontiera più a sud dell'Italia) vengono lasciati vivere o morire in abbandono. Attraverso il discorso argomentativo, si evidenzia il distinto e antagonistico (seppur condiviso) senso di negligenza di cui i migranti e gli abitanti della frontiera fanno esperienza nel loro vissuto giornaliero, esplorando il rapporto tra l'abbandono, il quotidiano e la legge, e così mostrando come queste dimensioni si intreccino inevitabilmente l'una con l'altra. Nel riferimento ai migranti e agli abitanti di Lampedusa all'interno della nostra analisi, l'articolo stabilisce come l'abbandono non sia semplicemente il frutto dell'assenza della legge, ma piuttosto la conseguenza della sua indeterminatezza. Tale aspetto evidenzia il fallimento cronico dello stato verso la vita (considerata a seconda delle categorie della legalità e dell'illegalità). Il testo si spinge oltre le critiche sulla presenza e l'assenza dello stato mosse dall' antropologia tradizionale, mostrando come l'abbandono pervada la vita entro e oltre i confini. [confini, abbandono, vita, morte, Lampedusa].

INTRODUCTION

On a windy afternoon at the end of November 2021, in the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, the Libeccio (southwesterly wind) blows strong and enters the old port through high waves. It breaks the rope that anchors a migrant vessel to the Favaloro pier, which in turn crushes one local fishing boat, causing minor damages to some others and leaving hundreds of migrant belongings, which had been left inside the vessel, scattered on the beach. An agent from the coast guard later explained the migrant vessel was illegal property confiscated by customs and left at sea for months, anchored at the dock. It should have been removed a long time before, but authorizations had not been given yet.[1] The next day, a line of rubbish covers the bay all the way to the football pitch (Figure 1). Among the remains of the migrant vessel, one can observe life jackets, milk boxes and water bottles with Arabic names, heavy backpacks, coats filled by the sand, and trousers. These remains belong to the migrants[2] who traveled on board the vessel some months before. The state of neglect that emerges from this scene at the dock of Lampedusa and the migrant remains left on the shore for days indicate a widespread attitude of abandonment.

No outsider at this scene would describe this event and its aftermaths as the quintessence of state abandonment. That is especially because this apparently minor accident took place at one of the deadliest frontiers in the Mediterranean, where for years scholars, journalists, and activists have
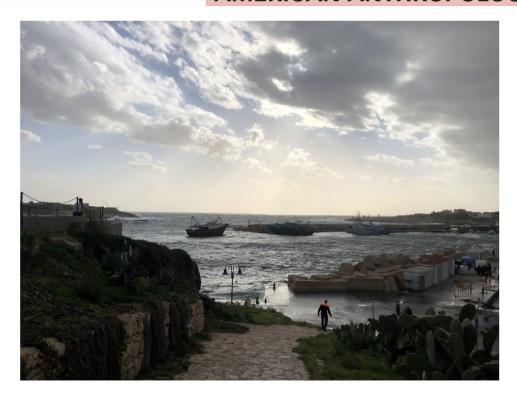
FIGURE 1   Favaloro Pier before during the storm. (Photograph by Alessandro Corso). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

documented and critiqued the state of abandonment suffered by the migrants who keep dying during sea crossings to Europe and under the surveillance of state and supranational actors (Albahari, 2015; Cuttitta & Paleologo, 2006; Delle Donne, 2004; Tazzioli, 2015). While this contradiction of state presence and absence has been widely discussed in the anthropology of borders, migration, and surveillance (Albahari, 2015; Andersson, 2014a; Cuttitta & Last, 2020; Heller & Pezzani, 2017; M'charek, 2023; Tazzioli, 2017), scholarly research has rarely focused on the various forms of shared abandonment which are inherent to everyday life at the borderland. In ordinary contexts, abandonment can take other forms, less sensational, less spectacular, almost entirely invisible to most (Das, 2021; Navaro-Yashin, 2009, 2020), and yet deeply important for the inhabitants of these borderlands—in the specific case of this paper: the migrants and the local Lampedusans.

By this point, I had been doing fieldwork in Lampedusa for several years.[3] I had come there to explore how forms of indifference and love could emerge in a context of ongoing emergency (Corso, forthcoming). Given the fame of Lampedusa as the island of "emergency," I expected to be caught in spirals of tragic events and be thrown into a space of disorder—a crisis which after decades of efforts from bordering states and the European Union (EU) had never ended. What I found instead was a quiet place, heavily militarized, filled by tourists in the warm season, and where occasionally one could meet small groups of migrants (from a few people to a dozen) randomly wandering around. As months went by, I learned that this appearance of calm and protection was only a façade.

In fact, when the wind is too strong in Lampedusa, the desalination engines are turned off. In winter, when tourism is nearly absent, there is less water, and if a pipe breaks, fixing it takes a long time. Holes on the roads, blown up by heavy rain, are left unrepaired. Stray dogs walk around the island looking for shelter and at times try to get some attention at the very few cafes open in wintertime. At the cemetery, mass graves of migrants retrieved at sea since early 1990s, without a name or identification, alternate with rich Lampedusans' tombstones. Alongside, tombstones of the less affluent stand ruined by time and poor management. The rescue helicopter crosses the sky of Lampedusa, at times to transfer someone who is urgently in need of medical treatment after a rescue operation at sea, other times to save the life of an inhabitant who needs immediate assistance. "If one gets sick and doesn't have the money to leave," said the old cemetery gatekeeper, Vincenzo, "we are left here to die. We are abandoned."

With the intention of taking seriously the words of Vincenzo, one telling character with whom I shared a lot during fieldwork and afterwards (Corso, 2022a, forthcoming), in this article we explore abandonment as intertwined with the presence of the state. Moreover, we suggest this reading of abandonment and presence together takes a particular value in Lampedusa. Here the state increasingly justifies its military and humanitarian presence with the claim of responding to a state of (ongoing and normalized) emergency while in fact neglecting not only the needs of the migrants but also those of the very citizens it promises to safeguard. This article describes ordinary life in zones of abandonment, where the entanglement of violence and indifference, control, and neglect emerge as inherent elements of state governance. In the case of Lampedusa, abandonment appears as an observable and multiform dimension which affects the "undesirables" (Agier, 2011) and the locals who inhabit the margins of Europe through

shared practices of state negligence (Calavita, 2005; Lucht, 2011). Being attentive to ordinary life as it unfolds in various spaces across the island for temporary residents in Lampedusa (detained migrants and locals) reveals something important: It shows us how everyday practices of abandonment are embedded in contemporary state governance and take place at the margins, often unvoiced or unnoticed.

THE PRESENCE OF ABANDONMENT IN ANTHROPOLOGY

The presence of abandonment in anthropology originates at the very inception of the discipline, born out of a scientific passion and curiosity for the social life of the most remote sites in the world where almost unknown communities lived in isolation from what was considered to be the "civilized" world. Anthropologists developed their ethnographic studies at the margins, turning their attention to vulnerable communities who were excluded from viable access to resources, abused for the wealth extracted from their knowledge and territories, or left to die because they were considered problematic and unproductive to society. This pattern has come to construct and maintain a narrative of exclusion between "us" and "them"—a separational myth which scholars have learned to examine through the interconnections that exist between sites where the presence of governments and the state is made manifest and remote areas or zones of abandonment. While abandonment has rarely been formulated as the object of anthropological inquiry in traditional anthropology, the concept has gained particular interest in recent decades and is widely used as a theoretical lens through which the relationship between the state and the life conditions it generates can be examined (see Navaro-Yashin, 2020).

Take, for example, one of the most vivid anthropological descriptions of abandonment in the 21st century: *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*, where anthropologist João Biehl (2013, 1) describes the ordinary existential struggles of Caterina, one of the patients of an institution for "the mentally ill and the sick, the unemployed and the homeless," who "waited with death" in Porto Alegre, Brazil. "Zones of social abandonment" are for Biehl (2013, 4) "visible realities that exist through and beyond formal governance and that determine the life course of an increasing number of poor people who are not part of mapped populations." For Biehl (2013, 24), this "humanity caught between visibility and invisibility and between life and death," is "traceable to specific constellations of forces" (14; see also Beckett, 2020).

Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) would find the root causes of such forms of abandonment in neoliberalism, as she argues in her celebrated book, *Economies of Abandonment.* She theorizes the almost silent and at times invisible practices through which the state manages life and may be held responsible for what it does or fails to do, claiming that "When the state does kill it often does so through sacred detention centers outside the reach of the habeas corpus" (2011, 134). Povinelli's (2011, 145) examination of "late liberal modes of making die, letting die, and making live" suggests that what exists "in the gray zone between the legal and the illegal… is never anything huge" but rather is distant from the spotlights. For Povinelli (2011, 149), "This new expression of sovereignty does not show itself in public spectacles of drawn and quartered bodies or inflamed racist rhetoric" but "it is tucked away in distant detention centers." In other words, the conditions that determine abandonment in the plural forms we witness in contemporary society are the outcome of tactics of governmentality whose everyday practices tend to be hidden by much more sensational "tragedies" which attract the public attention (Vaughan-Williams, 2015). This theory of governance is applicable to a myriad of phenomena, including state management of undesirable groups/individuals/populations, "illegalized" migration, and the "management" of undocumented or irregular people across the borders across and between the Global South and the Global North.

In fact, border policies in the past decades have increasingly exposed the figure of the *clandestine migrant* through a *regime* of control which ultimately lets people live in inhumane conditions or die through the process of crossing borders or while waiting in detention centers, camps, or prisons (Davies et al., 2017). This is true for the Mediterranean, the US-Mexico border, and Australia (Boochani, 2019; De Leon, 2015). However, while we are accustomed to scenes of men, women, and children without a defined identity, a name, or voice climbing electrified walls and attempting to cross deserts and seas fighting for life, these extraordinary yet quite normalized events are the outcomes—and often spectacularized representations—of the everyday practices of governance exercised by states (Andersson, 2014b). These "border spectacles," as anthropologist Nicholas De Genova (2017, 6) refers to them, are crucial to maintain "tactics of bordering" that "are central to and mutually constitutive of the agonistic, if not antagonistic, drama that repeatedly manifests itself as the pervasive crisis of what is finally an effectively global border regime." What the state presents as an emergency or a crisis to be immediately and urgently contrasted is only the tip of the iceberg (Cuttitta, 2012; Green, 2010). In Povinelli's words, we are instructed to turn our gaze to the "ordinary" and the "everyday" and search for abandonment "everywhere" and in "everything," (2011, 144) especially where the state acts as clandestine. Here, we can appreciate how the notion of abandonment includes the responsibility of the state but at the same time emerges as most striking precisely in those liminal spaces where both the state and public attention are absent.

These studies of the concept of abandonment suggest "zones of abandonment" evolve through the absence of the state, which may be held responsible for the practices of governance that led to the production and maintenance of such situations, but whose presence is somehow temporary, long gone, or almost invisible (Dzenovska, 2020; Lucht, 2011; Pinelli, 2013). Nevertheless, the active representations of a portion of the world's violence through extraordinary scenes of suffering and human rights violation are in fact functional to justifying "politics of military and humanitarian interventions" that "are inscribed in a temporality of emergency, which may become perennial through successive plans and missions, confirming the impossibility of reestablishing normal order" (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010, 16). What this means is that zones of abandonment are not only produced but also maintained by the state's ongoing and pluralized (often normalized) forms of presence.

In the case of Lampedusa, this presence occurs through the gaze of protection. However, if one observes how the state shows its presence on an ordinary basis, it will be evident that the emergency invoked has become an excuse for the state to keep postponing its responsibilities toward everyday administration at its frontiers (Grotti et al., 2019). The negligence toward the walls, the streets, the water system, the conditions of the migrants in detention, and the needs of many locals, is noticeable and rather unjustifiable. This form of state presence, as we will see in the following section, comes from a long history of abandonment.

A HISTORY OF ABANDONMENT

After being sold by Prince Tomasi to Ferdinand II in 1845, and unified with Italy in 1860, Lampedusa suffered from extreme conditions of poverty. Following the "repopulation" of the island under the Bourbons with a colony of Sicilians (which replaced the Maltese who used to live there), the inhabitants experienced a struggle for survival which reporters observed through the second half of the 19th century (Surico, 2020). A study of Lampedusa from scholar and politician Emerico Amari, born in Palermo in 1810, reported that the island of Lampedusa could be turned into a productive land, but this would require a "master of agronomy" in the lead (Surico, 2020, 100).

The Bourbons instead decided to send an official of the Royal Navy to administer the island, which led to its chronic underdevelopment. The poor conditions of the water system, the agronomy, as well as the educational and medical sectors were evident until 1964, when for the first time Lampedusans united in protest and refused to vote during the elections. The outcomes were positive for the island, and between 1965 and 1975, the inhabitants obtained schools, paved roads, one aid center, telephones, the first television channel, a desalination plant, and an airport.

During those years, tourism first began in Lampedusa. While in the 1960s, most of the newcomers were young adventurers and lovers of the sea and a very small number of rich people, the island soon became popular. Singers, actors, politicians, and all sorts of celebrities came to visit and built vacation homes. This economic growth transformed the island, leading to the fast development of hotels, restaurants, and vacation rentals. However, some of the old problems for the inhabitants never ceased. Everything grew around the needs of tourists and a serious plan for the well-being of locals during the rest of the year was not conceived. As journalist Sergio Buonadonna wrote on September 13, 1977, in *L'Ora di Palermo*, "Lampedusa is invaded by more than 10,000 tourists, more than twice its population" (Surico, 2020, 225). This impressive growth in the number of tourists did not transform the health clinic established in 1973 into a hospital. Women continue to pay high sums of money to give birth, as they did in the 1970s, because access to appropriate medical facilities is absent on the island (Quagliariello, 2021).

The history of Lampedusa is part of the broader history of the "southern question" in Italy (Gramsci, 1991). Since the inception of the Italian state to the present time, it has not been uncommon for southern and marginal areas to suffer the consequences of severe and prolonged state negligence (Calavita, 2005). These zones of abandonment often became the ideal areas to relocate certain undesirable groups or individuals. This happened in Lampedusa as early as 1870s and later during the fascist period, when the island became one of the sites identified by the government to detain political opponents and intellectuals, as well as homosexuals, criminals, and "deviants." Present forms of detention used for criminalized illegal migrants thus have a long history. Similar are other places of *confino politico* (political confinement) like Ustica, Ventottene, Levanzo, and Eboli, the famous village where Italian and writer and painter Carlo Levi (1902–1975) lived for 1 year. In *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, a book based on his 1-year period of confinement in a village of Basilicata (Southern Italy) in 1935–1936, Levi describes the almost unbearable conditions in which the inhabitants lived: extreme poverty, unhygienic conditions, lack of infrastructure and education, and most importantly, access to healthcare and medical assistance. Lampedusa was in very similar conditions until the first half of the 20th century.

"Here once was hunger, the real hunger" said Giuseppe, a Lampedusan fisherman in his mid-eighties who remembers his childhood as a time of great struggle, where people hoped to flee from Lampedusa and find a better future elsewhere. "There was no bread" and "we were forgotten by God. When I went to Turin for the military service in the 1960s, people did not know where Lampedusa was. The map we had hanging on the wall did not even report it," added Antonio, a retired carpenter, and an artist in his early eighties. These conditions of abandonment were possible because of state policies and long-standing attitudes of negligence towards the margins and the most marginalized territories and individuals. In other words, abandonment was the outcome of the state's almost absolute absence, of its invisibility—a kind of "emptiness" to use Dzenovska's (2020) term.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that during the past three decades, Lampedusa has become less and less marginal both in the Italian context and across the world. Its geographical position and the government's decisions inevitably turned it into one of the "doorsteps to Europe" (Cabot, 2014), a much-debated frontier under the spotlight. Since the late 1990s, the island's military agents representing both the Italian state and the EU (Frontex agents) were sent to the island in significant numbers.

The presence of the state has grown through a long list of visits from European and Italian politicians, and it has become tangible in multiple forms. The military forces have installed eight radars, the last being a Fixed Air Defense Radar (FADR) celebrated on May 2, 2019, by the air force and some of the political figures of the Italian security and defense apparatus. If radars are only visible in remote areas of the island, the armored cars patrolling the streets are more visible, along with the thousands of agents from the Carabinieri, Polizia, Finanza, coast guard, air force, and the army. Moreover, there are three military zones which made part of the island inaccessible to the inhabitants, with the justification of maintaining security and protecting the frontiers.

This new form of "colonization" as activists from the local collective Askavusa used to call it—"a militarization of the island"—led to a significant shift from an economy based on fishing and tourism to one that depends on the "industry" of irregular migration. This industry introduced a new population of military agents and humanitarian workers who live on the island for the whole year. To understand what this heavy state presence generates at the level of everyday life, and how it succeeds in protecting the life of the inhabitants (temporary and permanent) of this frontier, it is necessary to turn our attention toward their most ordinary gestures and preoccupations.

CIRCLES OF ORDINARY ABANDONMENT

On a sunny day in April 2016, the main road of Lampedusa was crowded with elderly people, migration workers, and a small group of sub-Saharan African men. With most of their belongings and garments left behind across the Sahara's desert, in detention camps in Libya or on dinghy boats used for the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea, migrants now wore flip flops and sneakers, whichever fit them best. As local migration worker Gino once told me, the stock provided at the Centro di Primo Soccorso ed Accoglienza (CPSA) "is poor and does not meet the parameters agreed by the European Union."

Regardless of the season, one could often observe migrants walking barefoot, or with only one shoe. By law, they could only be temporarily detained (for a maximum of 72 h) for health and security reasons inside the CPSA. Exit was not officially permitted. Yet, as military vehicles drove around the island and the law manifested its presence through constant practices of surveillance, migrants wore inappropriate clothing and footwear as they walked around the island.

Important insights came from Aleua, a migrant originally from the Gambia who had landed in Lampedusa a few weeks earlier. "We jump from the back, yes. But not everyone gets out. No," Aleua said. "Why not?" I asked. "Because they do not have feelings [they do not feel like] going out and walk." His expression changed. Many migrants feared uniforms, because they had experienced a "bad time" with soldiers and corrupt military forces during their illegalized journeys. "Well, I hear you," I said. "Yes," he smiled again. "But here it is ok. They let you go and walk." Behind the CPSA, near the dormitories, there was a hole through the high fences of the metal net that was left there and never repaired. According to most people on the island, the hole allowed the detained migrants to get out of the CPSA and come back in freely.

During the following months in Lampedusa, I learned that the hole in the fence was a stratagem deployed by the armed forces and the cooperative which managed the CPSA (Misericordie di Capo Rizzuto at that time) to overcome the shortcomings of a poor managerial system. Inside the CPSA, migration workers and migrants declared that beds were overcrowded, and sanitary conditions were poor, leading to infections and further work for the medical staff. Furthermore, prolonged periods of detention were justified by the lack of availability in secondary stay centers where migrants had to be transferred. As I extensively explained elsewhere, on top of that, there were other logistical issues and reasons, which remained unknown to the "guests" and sentenced them to undetermined detention inside the CPSA (Corso, 2022b, 2023, forthcoming). This indeterminacy was structural (Davies et al., 2017), and it profoundly affected migrants' lives (their fears, hopes, and frustrations) during detention in Lampedusa. The hole in the fence pointed to important issues around the nature of abandonment in Lampedusa's migration system. As Elbek (2021) shows in his ethnography of carcerality and neglect in Lampedusa, abandonment does not occur in the absence of the law but in the indetermined relationship between its official presence and its unofficial absence. This contradiction was observable, but it became more visible as one approached the migrants during their long visits outside the CPSA.

Take for example Atta,[4] a Ghanaian man in his mid-twenties who waited 3 months for the day of his departure. He had three children and a wife who still lived in Ghana. Atta missed his family very much, and he could not bear the fact that he was trapped in Lampedusa without any possibility of communicating with his wife and family members. All the people who reached Lampedusa on the day he landed had been transferred to Sicily. As transfers occurred and time passed, Atta began showing a growing sense of impatience, waiting for a departure without certain dates. He was realizing that he was trapped again, after Libya, without knowing the terms and conditions for the detention. Three months had passed, and sitting on the rocks at the Guitgia beach, ignored by most tourists, locals, and the Carabinieri agents whose residence was opposite to the beach where he spent most afternoons, he said: "Oh my brother, it is far too long. But I don't know what to do."

Atta had written a letter to the police guards a month earlier, with the help of a young Sicilian boy who used to visit Lampedusa almost every year with his family. The letter said: "Atta is my name. I arrived in Lampedusa on the 6th of May, and I have been here for one month and two weeks. I do not think I have done anything [wrong], but if I did, I ask to know what. My number is [xxxx] [migrants were identified by a number given at their arrival to the CPSA], and I please ask to have some answers to my questions and be able to leave Lampedusa. I beg you to answer." The text then shifted to Italian. "Per favore, aiutatemi, grazie" (Please, help me, thank you). Three months following his arrival to Lampedusa, Atta learned that the police suspected him being the witness to a shipwreck which he declared he knew nothing about. "Our boat had no problems. We all arrived here safe. They think I am someone else, and they want something from me. But I have always said the truth, and I don't want to lie... It is frustrating." Atta was overwhelmed by the situation. "Police officers keep saying to be patient, patient. Ohhh! I have had enough of patience. I don't need patience. I need to leave this place, that's what I need." Atta was, as many others were in Lampedusa and across the Afro-European Mediterranean illegalized routes, (left) abandoned in a loop of unanswered questions (see Andersson, 2014a).

Atta did not know that he would finally leave the island after almost 4 months of unjustified detention. Neither did the police and humanitarian agents know how he would respond to this time of frustration. He could have committed self-harm or suicide, like Alì, the Tunisian migrant who hanged himself in 2018 after being identified as a fragile subject in need of urgent transfer and psychological treatment. He could have lost patience and succumbed under the pressure of a normalized yet "exceptional" system of prolonged detention which has led many migrants to carry out violent acts against themselves (Ravenda, 2012).

Migrants were not only vulnerable to psychological frustration and self-harm but also to the potential risks they encountered as they exited the CPSA. The path they had to walk through as they exited the hole in the fence at the back of the CPSA was a patch of wild grass where pieces of barbed wire and rusty metal were left abandoned. Sometimes, migrants got hurt by these wires and metal by accident. Being barefoot did not help. Stray dogs had at times assaulted groups of migrants. When groups of African migrants met with North Africans outside the CPSA, fights occurred, and people got severely injured. These minor, almost invisible, and mostly unnoted accidents occur daily in Lampedusa and signal an almost illogical discrepancy between the heavy presence of the state and its inefficacy in responding to the needs of the migrants. One could wonder how to understand the coexistence of the state and the suspension of certain basic rights which the state itself should guarantee and is there (at least formally) to implement.

Based on the work of Carl Schmitt, philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2003) argues that it is precisely because of the evidence of an emergency that the state of exception can be invoked with the subsequent suspension of the law. Sites like Lampedusa, similar to Lesbos in Greece, Melilla and Ceuta in Morocco, Manus Island in the Australian context, or Gaza and the West Bank in Palestine, demonstrate what happens when the invocation of the emergency is extended for an indeterminate period. In these "border zones," we witness a muscular state approach which claims to protect the borders through technologies of surveillance and military justified by the problematic notion of emergency (Calhoun, 2010). Ultimately, these growing apparatuses of surveillance—hypertech radars, rescue boats, detention centers, a heavy presence of military and humanitarian forces—come along with ongoing deaths, cases of abuse, suspension of the law, human rights violations, and the call for new emergencies to be solved (Albahari, 2015; Bellu, 2004; Ben-Yehoyada, 2015; Grotti et al., 2019; Mcmahon & Sigona, 2020; Tazzioli, 2015). These emergencies exceed the extraordinary events which are most of the time associated with these frontiers and permeate everyday life (Albahari, 2009, 2015), often taking the paradoxical form of "casualties of care": the tragic outcome of a dysfunctional apparatus of support which exists both at the margins of Europe and within its center (Ticktin, 2011).

Moreover, as I describe at greater length elsewhere (Corso, 2022b) and below, the lack of care for life inherent in tactics of bordering that criminalize nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or spontaneous rescue and provoke situations where migrants are more likely to die, is not unique to the crossing. This attitude belongs to everyday practices of abandonment—in life and after death—that are observable on land (Aime, 2018; Andrijasevic, 2006; Cuttitta & Last, 2020; Grotti and Brightman, 2021; Rozakou, 2017; Zagaria, 2019). Though these practices may appear as secondary, marginal, or unimportant, as opposed to extraordinary moments of suffering and death across the land and maritime Euro-African borderlands, they constitute the premises of the most extreme forms of abandonment. They alert us to reframe abandonment in relation to the physical and material presence (and not the absence) of the state.

Scholars in the social sciences have demonstrated that the entanglement of control and abandonment through the interplay of state presence and institutional indifference toward targeted groups deemed dangerous and problematic is not the unexpected evolution of modern state but the structural characteristic of nation states (Gatta, 2012; Mbembe, 2003; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2014; Mookherjee, 2011; Muehlebach, 2012; Stierl, 2021; Tazzioli & Garelli, 2018). In the Italian context, medical anthropologists have examined the practices (ordinary and extraordinary) through which the state detains, surveils, controls, and produces the extreme forms of suffering, frustration, and pain which lead in turn to acts of self-harm and unbearable conditions of life (Pizza, 2012).

Jonathan Xavier Inda (2006, 127) defines such practices with the term "anti-citizenship technology… that seeks to shape human conduct and achieve specific ends not through the empowerment of individuals but through their incapacitation and containment." Inda continues by arguing that such "technology is bent on disempowerment: on the abjection (that is, casting out) and exclusion of particularly troublesome individuals and populations" (127). "Border policing," he concludes, "is an anti-citizenship technology in the sense that it brings together an array of practical and intellectual mechanisms in an effort to affect the conduct of illegal immigrants" (127). This is clear from a daily walk around the island of Lampedusa.

This attitude of abandonment manifested by the state does not strictly concern the most vulnerable and marginalized population in this context (the migrants). State abandonment takes different forms and goes beyond the "target" of the migrants, including a larger group of individuals.

CAUGHT IN ABANDONMENT

On a late April day of 2016, Vincenzo showed me with great concern the abandoned space right in front of his house, where a broken scooter stood on a corner. Weeds grew all over the place. He complained about the rats and the dirt that was left there, surrounding a small piece of land he had fenced himself, to tend to his own little garden, with tomatoes, eggplants, and some prickly pears. "The *comune* [municipality] should take care of this space, at least, a bit of tidiness, cleaning up sometimes. We keep paying taxes, but what for?" Vincenzo introduced me to his wife Anna. She

FIGURE 2   Migrant boat and migrants' belongings washed ashore after the storm. (Photograph by Alessandro Corso). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

explained that life in Lampedusa was not easy for many people. "When we need to be cured, we must pay for the plane, find a place to stay for the time needed" she said. "These expenses are all on us. Those who cannot afford it, will die."

In Lampedusa there was a *poliambulatorio* (health clinic), but people had to move to Sicily when they needed hospital treatment. Not everyone could afford paying for accommodation and traveling expenses. Some asked for help from relatives who lived in Sicily or other parts of Italy, borrowing money, or sleeping at their place for the time needed, as Vincenzo's sister used to do during her treatment for cancer. Some people gave up on medical treatments and kept living on the island. Francesco was one of them. He decided to stop medications for his cancer because he could not afford them. Traveling was frustrating, and he wanted to live the rest of his life on the island, surrounded by friends and people who loved him. He died in 2016.

Whereas people die in Lampedusa, for many decades no one was born on the island (excluding the urgent cases of pregnant migrant women who landed in Lampedusa just before giving birth). As the local artist and activist Giacomo Sferlazzo explains in his theatre piece entitled *Lampemusa*, "children were once born on the island with the help of the midwife, but nowadays this cannot happen. In the past thirty years, mothers moved to Sicily in order to give birth to their babies." During our conversations back in 2017, Giovanni Fragapane, a historian and mayor of Lampedusa during 1980s and 1990s, referred to this institutional insufficiency as "a purely anthropological fact, a major problem" for the Lampedusans, who perceived it as a fundamental form of abandonment by institutions (Quagliariello, 2021).

State abandonment continued to impact the decline of the lives of the inhabitants of Lampedusa. Fifty-nine-year-old Michele contracted polio as a baby. When his parents realized he could not walk well at the age of one, he was transferred to a hospital in Campania, because "in Agrigento [Sicily], everything was full," he explained, standing slightly bent on one side, with his walking stick, and a touring device for the minute left leg. Michele now lives with a small disability support pension for his condition. He spends most of his early afternoons sitting with Vincenzo and some friends in via Roma, wherever they can find a comfortable spot. In the colder months, the strong wind and the rain prevents them from meeting, although they at times find shelter inside the tobacconist. During summer, when the island is filled by thousands of tourists, Michele, Vincenzo, and their fellows, rest at the very end of via Roma, on a corner, by an olive tree which provides some shade. Temperatures can reach 40°C in summertime, and cafés are busy. There is no space for locals to sit. When the tourist season ends, the island drastically becomes a solitary space where life is often caught in vicious circles of boredom.

Abandonment emerges in these everyday circumstances as a loss, a lack of resources, intervention, and assistance from the state. This lack has been conceptualized in the context of Latvia by Dzenovska (2020, 11) as "emptiness," describing "a process whereby places and communities lose their constitutive elements—jobs, services, schools, infrastructure, people, sociality, and the future—in relation to a particular point of reference posited by residents or, in some cases, observers." In Lampedusa, however, we can observe how emptiness is filled by the heavy presence of the state which constantly surveils everyday life and/or monitors what happens when (occasionally) internal and "minor" emergencies take place on the island.

One explicit and telling example during my fieldwork occurred during a protest in May 2016, when a group of 60 migrants who were detained at the CPSA gathered outside the main church in via Roma and then moved to a nearby playground. A group of freelance Spanish journalists were already in Lampedusa searching for untold stories to sell, joined by four collaborators of Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei, who at that time was working on his documentary project, *The Human Flow*. Most Lampedusans feared that tourism could be seriously compromised by the image of migrants in protest (Franceschelli, 2019). In fact, the main church's square was occupied by migrants who slept on the ground, lying on yellow thermal blankets.[5] Shoes, water bottles, and garments laid on the ground by the trees and the bushes on the sides of the square (Figure 2).

Protests were very rare among the migrants detained in Lampedusa. On extraordinary occasions, groups of migrants set fire to the dormitories inside the CPSA. This famously happened in 2009, and similar events did take place in later years, with one accident in the summer of 2016. Internal riots mostly based on skin color prejudices and racist attitudes also took place relatively frequently inside the detention center. Endurance was the most powerful and often productive form of resistance within the context of detention in Lampedusa. To endure was not to lack a voice, an opinion, or a sense of one's rights. Like their fellows who were detained in Lampedusa, the May protestors had stories they wanted to share. Protestors claimed they had been beaten by police agents who forcefully required them to give their fingerprints. According to the Dublin Regulation, once they had provided obligatory fingerprints, they would not be allowed to seek asylum outside Italy.[6] However, many migrants had family members who lived elsewhere in Europe. Hence migrants wanted to leave Lampedusa and Italy. Lampedusans mostly wanted the same. The police watched but mediation only occurred after several days. The police commandant exchanged a few words with some of the leaders of the protest, warning the "the illegals" that things could only get worse for them if they did not surrender.

After several days of protest, with rumors growing about how migrants were urinating on street corners and dirtying the island (reminiscent of what happened during the disordered arrivals in 2011), some locals shouted at the protestors saying that they did not deserve to be fed at the CPSA. "Lazy Turks," they shouted at them, using a term often deployed by some locals to stereotypically refer to all African migrants who they believed were generally untrustworthy and unwilling to work.

Lampedusans, like many Southerners and Italians more generally, have experienced forced migration for decades from the late 19th century to the second half of the 20th century. Stories of very young men leaving to find fortune and spending most of their lives aboard fishing and mercantile vessels across the world abound among the eldest. They even remember how bad they (or their relatives and friends) felt when locals in the United States, Australia, or Northern Europe, treated them as filthy, uncivilized, and lazy. Despite this shared history of forced migration, marginality, and exclusion, many in Lampedusa felt threatened by the protesting migrants and feared that their presence would attract the attention of the media, thus reducing the number of tourists and generating economic losses for the island.

While some locals and volunteers tried to help, providing food and support, others shouted, "Let them starve!" Verbal violence escalated and frustration grew rapidly. Locals had some fights among themselves, and the situation risked getting out of control. Police kept watching but did not intervene.

On day seven of the protest, May 12, 2016, after the heavy rain of the previous day, and the bitter wind, about half of the protestors were left. The armored vehicle of the police, which had been monitoring the situation for the first 6 days, disappeared. The pregnant woman who was still part of the protest was sick. A doctor was called by Mediterranean Hope's members. Next to her, her husband and some fellow protestors stood preoccupied. When I spoke to them, they insisted that she should proceed with the protest without accepting any medication or food. A cultural mediator who worked for a humanitarian organization inside the CPSA attempted to convince the pregnant woman to accept medication and food, but she refused any help. The protest had to continue with no exception.

After 10 days of an increasingly chaotic and tense atmosphere, where some locals became verbally aggressive and repeatedly declared that migrants should all be sent back to their countries or left to sink in the deep waters of the Mediterranean, the protestors ultimately surrendered. I never learned what happened to them after they were transferred to Sicily. A few volunteers told me that after being in touch with some of the protestors, they declared that they had been beaten during their transport to Sicily and afterwards. They said, "We lost contact with them, and never knew anything more than what they had declared during those conversations."[7]

In this normalized "state of exception" (Agamben, 2003) people can be detained without having committed a crime and left free to wander or protest for their right to move, until they starve or surrender. Locals who live on an island which the state constructed many decades ago as its frontier may be left to handle difficult situations by themselves, becoming the ones who choose whether a group of strangers who suffered from all kinds of atrocities before reaching Europe can or cannot claim their freedom. Locals are left to decide whether to give food, support the cause of the protestors, or be violent to scare them out, while the police watch the scene diligently, waiting for something to happen before intervening.

What the May protest suggests most explicitly and interestingly for our discussion is that the presence of the state and abandonment are not separate but intertwined forces; and we shall look at them as profoundly connected. It is precisely through this paradox—the coexistence of state presence and abandonment—that the state expresses itself.

THE PRESENCE OF ABANDONMENT AND THE VIABLE LIFE

The relationship between the state and abandonment has been of interest for sociologists, philosophers, politicians, anthropologists, and various scholars since the inception of the Italian state and beyond Italy, from Brazil and other Latin American countries to France, Spain, or Greece in Europe, Asia, and Australia.

Lebanese-Australian Anthropologist Ghassan Hage (2019), for instance, has described governmentality as linked to the administration of resources across individuals and groups, thus understanding abandonment as the outcome of ongoing choices—being present in ways which maintain marginality, frustration, anger, or hopelessness. For Hage (81), this state attitude, which is observable in various contexts around the world, develops around "the question of 'viability'… that is the various ways in which people around the world have defined to themselves what

constitutes a 'viable culture' and what constitutes a 'viable life,' a life that is worth living." If many social institutions are conceived as "assemblages concerned with the definition, production, and distribution of the viable life," Hage (81) argues that people can "inherit, or get distributed, more or less 'viability'" and "they can also inherit more or less efficient means of accumulating viability." As a result, while it is common for human beings to struggle for a better life, "some have to struggle more than others and some have the means to struggle better than others" (81). Marginalized borderlands like Lampedusa are those where such struggle for a viable life is often stretched to the limit (Albahari, 2015; Andersson 2014a, 2014b; Cabot, 2014; Jackson, 2013; Lucht, 2011).

For anthropologist Giovanni Pizza (2012,19–20), the state experiments with its everyday practices in "places often considered marginal, territories where the state is (or pretends to be) helpless." Here, as Agamben's work reminds us, the state is not absent, but rather works towards the affirmation of its authority, and it does so through an "exclusive inclusion." In other words, the state produces a "rhetoric of state absence" which is nothing but "a linguistic procedure that contributes to the fabrication of a specific form of this presence" (20). This specific form of presence consists of a growing body of state actors whose function is not to improve the well-being of migrants or locals, but rather to maintain a state of viability which leads to everyday forms of abandonment. This attitude is explored in the work of Johnathan Xavier Inda (2006, 30) on the modern state tactics of governance, where he argues that the "post-social state" should be understood through the lens of ethnopolitics, that is, "a politics of life and how it is to be lived." For Inda, the state is concerned with "how individuals understand themselves and conduct their existence" and its practices are oriented to shape, manage, and control not only the lives of the most "deviant" but also those of citizens whose conduct appears as problematic and incapable of self-management according to the law (30).

Contemporary global practices of governance are concerned not just with life and death, but "also with regulating the distribution of satisfaction, agency, waiting, hope, coping capacities, and indeed, mobility and stasis, agitation and restfulness, etc." (Hage, 2019, 82). This "existential governmentality," as Hage calls it, is not much interested in killing or making die, but it further focuses on producing and maintaining the conditions under which different groups and populations live or perceive to survive miserably:

> If for Agamben's (1995) conception of bio-politics the concentration camp offers the imaginary origins of the neo-liberal concern with the sacrificial 'bare life', for my conception of existential politics it is the prison and the practices of confinements that offer us the origins of the neo-liberal imaginary of the viable life: here rather than 'bare' life the key problematic is that of the 'bearable' life (Hage, 2019, 82).

While Biehl (2013) shows how state practices of marginality and neglect generate forms of abandonment that threaten the life of targeted groups of individuals deemed "useless" or somehow "deviant" and Dzenovska (2020) introduces "emptiness" as a powerful analytical tool to capture the state of living at the edge of dying experienced by Latvians abandoned by the state, what happens in Lampedusa is rather different. On the remote Sicilian island, the state is paradoxically more present than in any many other centralized areas: a *nonparticipant observation.*

Lampedusa's history as a colony, a carceral space, and a land of marginality, produced for keeping the various "undesirables" away (Agier, 2011, 4) contributes to understanding how practices of confinement produce zones of abandonment where viability is threatened. The measures used by the state to detain migrants and control/order their daily lives are stretched to the limit and include practices of neglect and violations of the law which provoke profound psychological and physical damage and suspend their basic human rights (starting from the right of free movement). Forced detention has become the most systematic form of addressing the phenomenon of undocumented or illegalized migration. The suspension of migrants' rights has become a normalized condition for the so-called *people on the move.* As the state monitors this normalized state of neglect, it also leaves in abandonment the citizens it promises to protect. Its negligence toward the primary and everyday needs of the citizens causes difficulties and frustration among many Lampedusans.

Both groups express their diverse yet shared experiences of abandonment by revealing how the state can be present without intervening in their favor. Where the state is physically absent, perhaps they would perceive abandonment as it is most experienced—as the absence of the institutions. But in this case, the physical distance cannot justify the lack of care. The state is present, but in abandonment.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have shown in this article, the category of abandonment has come to take a pervasive form which includes state presence through Lampedusa's extraordinary context of normalized state emergency and its remarkable history of marginality. We have shown that—before and beyond physical death (the ultimate evidence of state failure in administrating and protecting life at the southmost European frontiers)—abandonment manifests itself in the ordinary ways in which migrants and locals are left to live neglectfully.

Although migrants and locals are different subjects whose access to resources and viability are very different in many ways, they all share a deep sense of abandonment that rests on a pervasive presence-absence of the state. In this regard, the anti-citizenship techniques of governance observable at the everyday level in contexts like Lampedusa demonstrate no fixed spatial or categorical boundaries. The façade of presence exercised by the state and institutions as a caring force, produces a layer of abandonment which generates economic, legal, political, and existential difficulties

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which have a significant impact on the well-being of both the migrants held in detention and the local population. The state's presence-cum-absence leads to a sense of malaise that becomes viral: abandonment generates further abandonment.

Our point is not that we should understand the difficulties suffered by the migrants detained on the island of Lampedusa like those experienced by the Lampedusans. What we ought to show instead is that despite struggling for a more viable life under very different conditions, both migrants and Lampedusans are (paradoxically) brought together through everyday interactions with a state which promises to be present while leaving them in a state of ongoing abandonment.

Moreover, this condition, which does not distinguish between those deemed illegitimate and the recognized citizens of the state, causes a shared sense of a hardly bearable life. This tells us something important about the paradoxical paradigm upon which the state keeps operating in situations of normalized emergency—maintaining and generating crises while pretending to fight them (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010). And it is precisely at this level of viability that the state acts and intervenes through tactics that weaken the well-being of both migrants and citizens, demonstrating that contemporary practices of governmentality do not improve the life conditions of border inhabitants but only make them (hardly) bearable (Hage, 2019). As the most recent and past accidents in Lampedusa demonstrate, people's lack of legal rights, resources, and opportunities is legitimized by the present eye of a state that keeps watching while things degenerate. It all occurs under the everyday, pervasive, and neglectful presence of abandonment.

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ENDNOTES

[1] On the very left, at the old port, there is another migrant boat which has been there since before 2016, when I first landed in Lampedusa. Belongings left there by the migrants are still visible. This practice is not an exception in Lampedusa.

[2] With the term "migrant" we will refer to all people who, having no access to free legal movement to Europe, entered Lampedusa Island irregularly (via illegal sea crossings on board of unseaworthy vessels).

[3] While the first author has conducted the fieldwork and analysis of the ethnographic material, the second author has worked together with the first author on the theoretical framing and structuring of the paper. In order to avoid confusion with first person singular and first-person plural interchanging pronouns, the paper uses a first-person singular form throughout, excluding discussion in the introduction and conclusion.

[4] We used pseudonyms when referring to migrants' testimonies to protect their identity while still allowing their narratives to find an expression in the written form of this text.

[5] Authorities provide thermal blankets on rescue ships and during migrant landings to keep the people warm who have been rescued at sea. Mediterranean Hope members keep stocks of thermal blankets which they use during migrant landings when needed. During the May protest, they distributed the blankets to migrants.

[6] The Dublin Regulation states, "where the asylum seeker has irregularly crossed the border into a Member State, that Member State will be responsible for examining the asylum application" (Council Regulation 343/2003).

[7] The May protest is one minor example of several incidents with different degrees of intensity which escalated to verbal and physical violence. The 2011 events following the Arab Spring stand as the most significant and well known in the literature (Albahari, 2015), but similar situations take place intermittently, the most recent being in September 2023 with the "invasion" of several thousands of migrants fleeing from Tunisia who remained on the island for several days, causing frustration, protests, and mostly generating a widespread sense of fear and agitation among the migrants and the local population.

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