Guest Editorial Introduction:

The uses of islands in the production of the southern European migration border

Nathalie Bernardie-Tahir
University of Limoges
& CNRS Research Centre Geolab, France
nathalie.bernardie-tahir@unilim.fr

and

Camille Schmoll
University Paris Diderot, Sorbonne Paris-cité
& CNRS Research Centre Géographie-cités, France
camilleschmoll@yahoo.fr

ABSTRACT: The political uses of islands under the dynamics of EU border production and management are explored in this four-paper collection. Although the island migration model is not unique per se, irregular migration to southern European islands does have some specific features, including the extraordinary media attention it draws. From this perspective, the scientific analyses offered here aim both to show the particular situation that these islands find themselves in within the European policy framework for controlling irregular immigration and, more generally, to illustrate how these island places are like the development of film into photograph, revealing the issues, complexity and stakes particular to undesirable migrations.

Introduction

This special section in *Island Studies Journal* explores the political uses of islands under the dynamics of EU border production and management. European islands have long been places of emigration, points of departure for international migrants that led to the formation of powerful diaspora around the world. Nowadays they have become points of transit and places of settlement for regular and irregular migrants, tourists, returnees, workers and asylum seekers. This migration shift is certainly not specific to islands; it is part of a broader "South European migration model" that has been extensively described (e.g. Baldwin-Edwards, 1997; King & Thomson, 2008). Similarly, irregular migration is not unique to southern European islands, as most irregular migrants enter the EU through other entry points, such as airports.

Although the insular migration model is not unique *per se*, irregular migration to southern European islands does have some specific features, first and foremost the extraordinary media attention it draws. Irregular migrations to southern European islands are characterized by the importance of arrivals by sea aboard makeshift boats, a practice that helps explain their prominent visibility in media and political discourse. This kind of arrival comes

in waves: it is much more related to external political shocks (civil wars, the Arab Spring) than migration by air, and their flow changes constantly, following the shifting geography of border controls. European islands indeed tend to be periodic pathways for transit, or even destinations in their own right, as the case may be. This is how the Canary archipelago, most Mediterranean islands, including Malta, Lampedusa, and Cyprus, and the islands of the Aegean each in turn came to find themselves places of more or less temporary passage for migrants initially aspiring to gain the European continent (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014b). Islands are also places where the humanitarian urgency associated with migration is made visible. The tragic nature of maritime entry, so often associated with the drowning of other passengers and the sinking of other boats, re-enforces the social construction of migration as a dramatic and unpredictable event, although maritime immigration to southern European islands as we know it today has only existed since the 1990s, when Schengen-area Europe gave itself many costly means for re-enforcing its external borders.

The maritime migrants we speak of here archetypically incarnate "undesirables," people whose point in common is being "unwanted" and scorned by the authorities and European public opinion (Agier, 2011; Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014a, 2014b), even if some of them, because of their right to request exile, may legitimately aspire to settle down in regularity in Europe. In the context of a Europe that continually re-enforces its borders, southern European islands have become sentinels, places of dissuasion and "performing" the border, to use Paolo Cuttitta's term (2012). European authorities enjoin islands, located at the European Union's periphery but all (except for Cyprus) part of Schengen area, to play the role of border guard blocking immigrants' paths to Europe. They have thus become paradigmatic places in the success or failure of the control of these flows.

In this particular context, hereafter obliged to assume this new role, islands have become a sort of laboratory for European migratory issues and policies, although they are not genuinely exceptional territories in terms of reception and flow management. This is because their insularity and peripheral nature, re-enforced by their relative smallness, contribute to making islands into places where migratory issues are condensed, or, to put it another way, places where the reality and implications of irregular migration assume exacerbated forms:

> - Because the maritime crossing may be long or dangerous to reach the islands that are relatively distant from continental coasts, the territory's afferent waters have become dark zones of mortality at sea from the high number of drowning deaths;
>
> - The holding centres that have multiplied on islands over recent years contribute to a dual process, one of incarceration – in the camp – on one hand, and one of geographical relegation – on the island – on the other;
>
> - The insular dimension refers to the geographical notion of extraterritoriality that is widely mobilized in speeches, locally as well as at the European level, much like the political regime of exceptionality.

Ultimately, the island lens seems to allow a finer and sharper elucidation of the paradoxes and issues of irregular immigration in Europe and of its governance. The studies presented in this issue come from many disciplines. They share a common central interest in the reconstruction of sovereignty and policy through the lens of the island (Baldacchino, 2010). More

specifically, they mix contributions from the new political geography (Gill, 2010; Mountz, 2013) and "critical border studies" to examine implications for a critical renewal of the field of migration studies. These essays are, then, attentive to a scalar vision of political reconstruction in action, to the fluid character of power today, and to its many sites and locations (Mountz & Loyd, this issue). They also consider the gradual character of the granting of sovereignty to states, island states in particular, and how the border, understood as processual and fluid, ceaselessly re-territorializes itself (Berg & Ehin, 2006; Clochard, 2012; Cuttita, 2012).

From this angle, the scientific analyses offered here aim both to demonstrate islands' particular situation in the European policy framework for controlling irregular immigration and, more generally, to show how these island places are like the development of film into photos, exposing the issues, complexity and stakes particular to undesirable migrations.

As mentioned earlier, islands play a crucial role in constructing new European and Mediterranean *limes* by becoming sentinels. As such, they are key actors in the European bordering regime (Cuttita, 2012), even if islands implement European border policies differently, according to their political status (e.g. microstate, island at the periphery of a centralized state, part of a semi-autonomous archipelago.) and their relative negotiating power. Drawing on the cases of four islands/archipelagos, **Triandafyllidou** uses the island lens to look at the general framework for externalising European migration and asylum policies. The author distinguishes different types and dimensions of externalization and considers the symbolic and concrete role played by the Canary Islands, Lampedusa and Linosa, Malta and the Aegean islands as outposts of such a multi-layered externalization framework. Another level of externalization also takes place within the EU: countries farther north and west externalize migration and asylum policies to islands in the south, notably through the Dublin II Regulation and the implementation of the 'first safe country' principle.

Loyd and Mountz offer a wide view on the nexus between islands and contemporary crises of sovereignty. They use approaches from feminist theory and political geography to show the importance of multi-scalar forms of political power relying on violence and detention. Using a range of examples drawn from within and outside Europe, they show how islands become key global sites where both crises of sovereignty and policy re-territorialization occur. Islands emerge as 'archipelagos of enforcement in all the regions where asylum is sought, contested and highly politicized.' In the dialectics of de-territorialization and re-territorialization, the construction of scale is one avenue through which political contests over migration unfold. Focusing in particular on Lampedusa and the Greek Islands, Loyd and Mountz show the significance of different 'nested scales' – the regional, the island/archipelago, and the body – as sites where sovereignty is reconfigured and contested by transnational flows.

Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll also argue for a multi-scalar perspective, showing how various forms of enforcement/control and resilience/resistance exist at different scales (from the human body to the Euro-Mediterranean region). They propose the concept of 'counter-islandness' for rethinking and challenging classic arguments about the nature of islands. They argue that the heuristic potential of the concept of counter-islandness can be realized using two distinct approaches: an articulation of scales (as opposed to isolation) through the observation of complex and trans-scalar logics of control, exclusion, and resilience, and the analysis of movement (as opposed to immobility) showing how migrants' concrete daily experiences consist of multiple circulations, plural social ties, and diverse spatial practices. They show that the issue of migration reaching Maltese shores cannot be treated as a solely national or insular question. Instead, Malta reveals the complexity of migration issues and offers a remarkable

'site of condensation' for Euro-Mediterranean regional ambivalences, where new cartographies of power and resistance can be observed in the making.

Lastly, in a more general paper that goes beyond a strictly European view, **Baldacchino** shows how islands all over the world have been made into laboratories for entrepreneurial political engineering and sites of "creative governance." His paper presents a general framework for understanding the issue of sovereignty in the contemporary world through an 'island studies' lens. Baldacchino argues that islands' geo-physical boundedness and specificity make them appealing for various specialised services. He first develops the case of offshore islands - that is, islands that are physically separated from a mainland State, and whose separation allows them to exercise forms of exceptional power and "unbundle" the State territory (Sidaway, 2006). He argues that States need these spaces to be able to exercise discretion over the free movement of people. He then discusses the specificities of Malta and Cyprus, two unitary States where internal off-island migration is not possible; well, at least not officially. Unlike larger States with small outlying and peripheral island components (like Italy or Spain), they lack the geophysical materiality to be able to offshore their jurisdictional capacities, acting as stepping stones or interstitial spaces. And yet we are also clearly reminded that sovereignty games can be disrupted, and that no total institution has ever proved to be completely escape-proof. For all their symbolic predisposition to act as quintessential prisons, islands still prove porous and permeable to migrants.

References

Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the undesirables*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Baldacchino, G. (2010). *Island enclaves: Offshoring, creative governance and subnational island jurisdictions.* Montreal QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Baldwin-Edwards, M. (1997). The emerging European immigration regime: reflections on implications for Southern Europe', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *35*(4), pp. 497-519.

Bernardie-Tahir, N., & Schmoll, C. (2014a). Opening up the island: a "counter-insularity" approach to migration in Malta. *Island Studies Journal 9*(1), pp. 43-56.

Bernardie-Tahir, N., & Schmoll, C. (2014b). Editorial introduction: irregular migration to south European Islands. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, *12*(2), forthcoming.

Clochard, O., & Migreurop (2012). *Atlas des migrants en Europe*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Cuttita, P. (2012). *Lo spettacolo del confine: Lampedusa tra produzione e messa in scena della frontiera*. Milan, Italy: Mimesis.

Berg, E., & Ehin, P. (2006). What kind of border regime is in the making? Towards a differentiated and uneven border strategy. *Cooperation and Conflict*, *41*(1), pp. 53-71.

Gill, N. (2010). New state-theoretic approaches to asylum and refugee geographies. *Progress in Human Geography*, *34*(5), pp. 626-645

King, R., & Thomson, M. (2008). The Southern European model of immigration: do the cases of Malta, Cyprus and Slovenia fit? *Journal of Southern Europe & the Balkans*, *10*(3), pp. 265-291.

Mountz, A. (2013). Political geography I: reconfiguring geographies of sovereignty. *Progress in Human Geography 37*(6), pp. 829-841.

Sidaway, J. D. (2006). On the nature of the beast: re-charting political geographies of the European Union. *Geografiska Annaler*, *88B*(1), pp. 1–14.