Ex Aqua

The Mediterranean Basin, Africans on the Move and the Politics of Policing

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Abstract: Within the annals of black studies, analyses of state power begin with a well-trod premise that policing is not a response to criminal behaviour; nor is it an extension of a criminal justice apparatus whose operations can be accounted for by political economy alone. Rather, the police power is foremost a cultural phenomenon irreducible to materialist conceptions of social control in a capitalist world system. More to the point, policing is a methodology for social organisation premised on antiblack sexual violence. We consider several recent events of state power in the Mediterranean basin – as in the Lampedusa boat victims – in order to ascertain the erotic authority governing the police power of state and civil society. By using the Lampedusa case and others, we highlight that police power in the Mediterranean is more than the interpersonal and the event, but instead manifests as a methodology of violence by the state and its regimes, as history, as legacy. The policing and murder of hundreds of Africans in the Mediterranean we contend are not single and episodic events or moments in time, but are situated in the accumulated violence against black people globally. Without an analysis of antiblackness in relation to policing as methodology, events such as Lampedusa can be seen and understood as moments of exception (i.e. bad FRONTEX policy) rather than a practice that fully follows racial slavery. Without understanding policing from this standpoint, the political reaction to Lampedusa and other events has the danger of promoting 'reform' and 'revision' rather than a more radical vision: a future where black lives matter.

Keywords: Africans, antiblackness, Lampedusa, migration, policing, slavery

If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.
– Giuseppe Tomasi de Lampedusa

They unpacked a wall of people.
– Navy Captain Paolo Trucco

Europe is indefensible.
– Aime Cesaire

The sea is History.
– Derek Walcott

The Lampedusa Affair

Lampedusa, the largest of the Italian Pelagie Islands in the Mediterranean Sea, is the namesake of the famous Italian writer Giuseppe Tomasi de Lampedusa, descendent of the first Prince of Lampedusa in the seventeenth century. In Tomasi de Lampedusa's classic work *Il Gattopardo* (translated into English as *The Leopard*), the Sicilian aristocracy faces diminishment due to its own indolence, torpidity and decay. The title character, modelled after Tomasi de Lampedusa's own great-grandfather, an earlier Prince of Lampedusa, struggles to navigate the turbulent political upheaval of Italy's *Risorgimento*, and maintain his family's influence and upper-class station amidst impending ruin. In *Il Gattopardo*, the Prince's nephew, Tancredi, unsuccessfully urges his uncle to switch the family's allegiance to Giuseppe Garibaldi and the insurgent unification movement: 'Unless we ourselves take a hand now, they'll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.' By the turn of the twenty-first century, Lampedusa once more has become the nomenclature for Italian decadence and sloth in the midst of an unethical social order and its inevitable historical comeuppance. This time it is Europe itself that is the decadent civilisation making its final stand, the civilisation of Humanism, the global civilisation of *antiblackness* and *white supremacy* – a twilight civilisation that seeks, in its eleventh hour, to remake itself as anti-racist, *not* to transform its house into a home for all human beings, but instead to stave off the inevitable paradigm shift, a revolution in human value, a *black* revolution.

On 3 October 2013 a small vessel carrying more than 500 black people, so-called 'migrants' or 'refugees', from Eritrea and Somalia caught fire within sight of its destination, Lampedusa. The boat capsized and sank, taking more than 366 of its passengers down to a watery grave. As the tragedy was broadcast across the worldwide media, so too were videos of police practice, namely naked asylum seekers being hosed down with disinfectant at the Lampedusa detention centre (*centro di permaneza temporanea*). As horrific as these events of premature and living death are, they are not our concern in this article. Events such as 'the Lampedusa affair', scenes of police violence, or accosting black people with bananas – as happened in 2013 to the Italian minister of integration Cecile Kyenge, the first black-elected government minister in Italy's history – are recorded, circulated and replayed for all manner, purpose and desire (i.e. titillation, entertainment, score-keeping, agitation, evidence, surveillance, organising). These spectacular events simultaneously disable analysis of the banal terror that is contemporary police practice. Our objective is to re-situate these spectacles of death in their proper historical context, and thereby to contextualise policing as the inaugurating, and continually renewing, act of primitive accumulation on which modern society rests. Critical research on policing ends up conspiring with its object of study to reinscribe the essential paradigm in which both policing and its critics rally around a

fraudulent ethics. 'If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change' signifies the discourse of contagion, danger and border management mobilising contemporary policing globally *as well as* the leading critiques of the security state that promote equal treatment, human rights and the rule of law to deal with what they view as the corrupting dynamics of an excessive criminal justice apparatus.

In this article we shine a spotlight on this tacit unethical alignment between the problem and its critics, also the problem. The conformity between policing and its erstwhile reformers leaves us mired in 'a conceptual dead zone' marked as a studious absence of analytical engagement with the protocols of antiblack racism and genocide in Western democracies, and moreover, the resilient disavowal on the part of elite analysts of these historical lines of force as necessary seams of critical thought (James 2010). We suggest that black radical praxis lends an ethical methodology for assessing the dichotomy between ethics proper (read: *white* ethics) and its impotence in the face of police violence. We move, pace Frantz Fanon, to abandon the 'European intellectual game' that brings 'repetition without change' and inhibits our political and ethical imagination (Fanon 1968: 23–5). From the vantage point of black radicalism, 'the Lampedusa affair' illustrates two basic problems with how we theorise policing. First, a political economy analysis of policing is inadequate for grasping the paradigm at work in Lampedusa and other events that stand in relation. Within the annals of black studies, analyses of state power begin with a well-trod premise that policing is not a response to criminal behaviour; nor is it an extension of a criminal justice apparatus whose operations can be accounted for by the needs of capital alone. Rather, the police power is foremost a cultural phenomenon irreducible to materialist conceptions of social control in a capitalist world system. More to the point, policing is a methodology for social organisation premised on antiblack sexual violence. We can apprehend the importance of this point through a critical reading of the responses to 'the Lampedusa affair' and the policing of 'fortress Europe'. Herein lies the second problem with how we theorise policing: both the violence of policing *and* its repudiation resuscitate modern society. Cries against the excessiveness of policing, and the corresponding calls to curb certain police practices, constitute an ontological and axiological community with the very performances of state power that they ostensibly call into question, rhetorical and ideological differences notwithstanding. The Lampedusa affair elicits forms of anti-racism that hold out the promise not of ameliorating black suffering or delivering the flesh into the human family, but rather of intensifying, fortifying and dissimulating violence against black people globally. While the particulars are debated, as if they amounted to an ethical intervention rather than merely its fraudulent suture, the jurisdiction of the police power over the threat posed by black subjectivity within the social body is never called into question.

The Police Power as Cultural Force

Policing in the Mediterranean basin requires both historicisation and contex-
tualisation. Research on policing, at least that which produces critical assess-
ments of police practices, privileges Marxist frameworks of analysis and,
despite the requirements of historical materialism, does not provide adequate
historical depth and contextual fetch. In the Mediterranean basin, as with most
borderlands in the contemporary era of neoliberal globalism, a political eco-
nomic analysis of policing centres around the coercive power of neoliberal
projects. According to this thesis, because neoliberalism's primary concern is
profit on behalf of state and corporate interests, the cultural and social author-
ity of neoliberalism tends to animate police power. Put differently, policing
and related practices of 'securitisation' are facets of the larger mechanics of
capital's neoliberal era (cf. Andersson 2014; De Genova and Puetz 2010; Mez-
zadra and Neilson 2013; Muehlebach 2012; Paoletti 2011; Sassen 2014; Zap-
ata-Barrero and Ferrer-Gallardo 2012). This analysis is an updated feature of
a longstanding application of Marxist thought in which the class struggle of
capitalism is transferred to a contest between the state, tasked with reproduc-
ing the conditions for capitalist production, including the protection of private
property, and the 'dangerous classes', so regarded by the bourgeoisie because
of the presumptive link between poverty and crime. In the current period of
neoliberal globalism, the 'dangerous classes' of most pressing concern to cap-
ital and the metropolitan Western states are the migrants from the global
South, marshalled into global circuits of labour conscription. This is a massive
global movement of labour – indeed, were history not customarily written
from above, we would know the present 'postmodern' era not as the age of
high-tech, finance and global integration, but rather as the greatest epoch of
coerced human migration ever known. Most of this movement is compelled
by the social, economic and political upheaval of the homeland, largely due to
the manner in which former colonised states are integrated into the global
political economy under terms that threaten the very survival of the people.
Structural adjustment, civil war, ecological destruction, famine, HIV/AIDS,
despotism, marketisation, 'free trade', 'humanitarian' missions, border con-
flicts, export processing, import substitution – the lexicon of global neoliber-
alism produces its own varieties of resistance, which in turn necessitates a
general ratcheting up of the scales of coercion as 'security' from the 'danger-
ous classes' encroaching at civilisation's threshold.

A critical Marxist take on this situation notes that the changes wrought in
the political economy of the neoliberal period bring a variety of new tech-
niques of governance (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). The constancy of policing
the 'dangerous classes' transmutes into new forms of security, including, per-
haps most prominently, policing the border of the nation-state. In this way,
policing acts to enforce law as the privileged global signifier of justice and to
secure the legitimacy of the nation-state (Andersson 2014). A political eco-

nomic analysis of the Lampedusa affair, therefore, rightly understands the conditions compelling African migration to Europe; but also goes further to critique the European approach to border policing that results in such grotesque loss of life. With the increasingly effective interventions of postcolonial and decoloniality studies, as well as world-systems theory and dependency theory, the Lampedusa affair also registers as illustration of Europe's difficulty coming to terms with its colonial and imperial past that capital-labour relations in the neoliberal, and neocolonial, period has intensified, and as evidence of the pressure between migrant-generating South and migrant-resisting North (cf. Gilroy 2001; Mignolo and Escobar 2013; Wallerstein 2004).

Nicholas De Genova's (2013) critique of border policing and immigration law enforcement illustrates how to view the Lampedusa affair through the lens of political economy, albeit with the benefit of a cultural studies' flair for the articulation between material practices and discursive formations. To note, De Genova's extensive body of work on this question presents greater complexity than we have the space adequately to represent here (cf. De Genova 2010, 2012), but we cite a theme emergent across his scholarship and those influenced by it in order to pinpoint the intellectual and political occlusion of black interests that take place and therefore subtend, albeit unconsciously, antiblackness. Although De Genova's terms indicate a Foucauldian inflected Marxism, as with concepts such as biopower and governmentality, the framework is still Marxist in that the essential grammar of suffering is alienation and exploitation under the regime of capital. For De Genova, the scene of policing, of border patrol, enacts a spectacular drama of exclusion. The spectacle of 'illegality' that policing creates leads to methods of inclusion geared to secure the immigrant's subordination. De Genova terms this process 'inclusion through exclusion', or the 'obscene of inclusion'. In De Genova's conception, the condition of the immigrant, the object of policing, is one of precariousness not subjection. The continued detention on Lampedusa of the survivors of the shipwreck, even while their deceased comrades were the object of another state spectacle, a public memorial on the Italian mainland to which the surviving family and friends were excluded, appears to reflect the terms of De Genova's analysis. They survived the shipwreck but their continued existence is tenuous at best, a precarious liminality on the margins of Italian society.

For us, the Lampedusa affair, however, also operates at a register qualitatively distinct from what De Genova calls 'the border spectacle' which sets 'the scene – a scene of ostensible exclusion, in which the purported naturalness and putative necessity of exclusion may be demonstrated and verified, validated and legitimated, redundantly' (De Genova 2013: 3). As spectacle, then, policing is performative, and the mise-en-scène of bad police practice, to boot. This analysis fails on two counts. First, the policing of black bodies in the Mediterranean region is about *preclusion*, rather than exclusion. Second, and related to the first, the scene is one of subjection – and more pointedly, an infinite reproduction and refraction of subjection, a mise-en-abyme. The ana-

lytical error revolves around what to make of violence in the modern world. A political economy take on the Lampedusa affair would suggest that the violence that befalls so-called migrants to Europe is an effect of their transgressive act of crossing borders meant to exclude, of breaking the law. Although civil society may deem excessive the price paid for the transgression, the unstated recognition is that one precipitated the other. In this sense, the 366 dead off the coast of Lampedusa, and the average of 1,000 dead annually in the Mediterranean basin, are essentially no different from other border tragedies in this era of global mass migration, such as U.S.–Mexico, or even Palestine–Israel (Coluccello and Massey 2007; Cuttitta 2014).

It is a mistake to view Lampedusa in this manner, as an instance of contingent violence, a punishment for a transgressive act. This error is enabled by confusing the empirical for the structural, a false substitution made possible by first disqualifying the historical context of slavery from our study of the problems of contemporary policing (Woods 2013: 130). Slavery represents *the* neglected idiom of power, *the* paradigm of human objectification, *the* framework through which the modern world took shape. As such, it also represents *the* scandal to Marxism's assumptive logic. This is not to say that *all* forms of power operative in the modern world are reducible to that which slavery installed; but rather that any other explanation of power is inadequate in and of itself if it does not acknowledge the priority of slavery. While our analysis focuses on the Mediterranean as Europe's aquatic threshold to Africa, and on what happens to Africans in motion across this space, it nonetheless remains relevant for all migrant subjects no matter their origins. In other words, we recognise that the Mediterranean region, as with most borderlands and international crossroads, is the scene for a profoundly diverse traffic. Many of the migrants crossing the Mediterranean are not African, and many of these non-Africans also perish under its depths. How the framework of slavery and antiblackness that we employ here applies to these cases of non-African migrants is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say that any discussion of policing today that does not ground itself in the historical context of slavery and colonialism is imagining a world that is not, rather than dealing with the world as it is.

As Frank Wilderson (2003, 2010) has shown, the modern world is constituted first and foremost through the seizure of a black body through direct relations of force, not by approaching the general body of labour through wage relations. This means that the primary grammar of suffering is the accumulation and fungibility of the body of the slave, prior even to the exploitation and alienation of the European worker (Wilderson 2003). It also means that Western humanism's conception of violence as contingent is also belated and particular, rather than primary and universal. The violence that seized Africans, subjected them to the Middle Passage, and in so doing transmogrified their humanity into blackness, was purely gratuitous. It was unconnected to any behaviours or transgressive acts. In the world slavery makes, violence against

the black body is gratuitous, not contingent, instrumental or incidental: it is punishment for *being*. Gratuitous violence is the mark of the sub-human, of objectified human existence *par excellence*. The suffering of the Lampedusa affair, then, cannot be quantified through a political economic analysis; nor can the violence of the Mediterranean borderlands be analogised to the U.S.–Mexico border. The Lampedusa victims are held, in memoriam, in the Mediterranean's abyss of blackness, a plane of non-existence connoting the structural antagonism of blackness, a position of subjection in excess of the empirical registers of exploitation and oppression.

The political economic take on immigration begins with class struggle, and belatedly acknowledges the role of race. Take De Genova again: 'At stake, then, is a larger sociopolitical (and legal) process of inclusion through exclusion. This we may comprehend as the obscene of inclusion. The castigation of "illegals" thereby supplies the rationale for essentializing citizenship inequalities as categorical differences that then may be racialized' (De Genova 2013: 1). In this way, much of the analyses of policing and immigration enforcement are a form of racial analysis that is subservient to a non-racial calculus of class relations. Capitalism splits the body, but paired with white supremacy and antiblackness, the racial body becomes quartered. As Wilderson has observed, there comes a time when one needs to deal with the 'relations of terror as opposed to a relation of hegemony' (Wilderson 2003: 230). This paradigmatic shift is often neglected and/or omitted, intentionally or unintentionally, because many on the Left continue to work within the 'tradition of unraced positionality' (Wilderson 2003: 229). To think of the worker, whether exploited or working for him or herself, as unraced is an ahistorical abstraction. As Charles Mills, has observed, 'If the white workers have been alienated from their product, then people of color, especially black slaves, have been alienated from their personhood' (Mills 2003: xviii). Contra De Genova and the political economy of policing, 'race' is the effect not of a non-racial process, but of a specific act of violence called racism. Those who perished off the Italian coast and those whose lives remain caught in the Lampedusa 'hold' are not racialised after the fact of violence, but rather through a prior racist violence that created Africa as the singular place on the planet where you go to turn human beings into objects.

The role of slavery in constructing the present remains stridently disavowed in contemporary social and political theorising generally, and with respect to policing specifically. The archive of black studies presents a corrective to this omission. We can work backwards towards slavery within the context of European history. While Western culture generally beholds Nazism and fascism as anomalous and singular in its horror, as the most egregious violation of civilised society, the black studies library is replete with the recognition that Europe was simply being engulfed during the Jewish Holocaust with precisely the form of genocidal power it had unleashed on non-European peoples for hundreds of years through slavery and colonialism. Aime Cesaire (2001),

Oliver Cox (2000), W. E. B. DuBois (1994), Frantz Fanon (1968), C. L. R.
James (2013), George Padmore (1972) and Richard Wright (1995) all under-
stood fascism not as a rupture in Western civilisation's march of progress, but
rather as its logical denouement, an extension of a global system rooted in
self-destructive racist ideologies and violence established through the slave
trade. The fascist problem, then, is the impermissible knowledge that Western
civilisation has always and already been constituted as fascist with respect to
non-Western peoples and to black people in particular.

    The plantation societies of the Mediterranean and the Americas are the
clearest exposition of how 'policing' evolved from the basic day-to-day prac-
tices of social reproduction in a slavocracy (cf. Ayala 1999; Robinson 2000).
Slave traders on the high seas and at ports around the Atlantic and the Mediter-
ranean, merchants operating slave markets throughout the Americas, bounty
hunters, overseers, slave patrols – all of these functionaries contributed to
bringing a majority of Western society directly into participation with the
policing of black people. The jurisprudence of slavery, furthermore, reveals
how *all* white people were empowered to discipline, control and punish – to
police – all black people, regardless of who was property, who was an owner,
and who was merely a property-less worker. The prerogative to punish was
translated culturally into the duty to police. Recalling this cultural ethos of
slavery lends a decisive corrective to contemporary mainstream criminological
discourse which suggests that criminalisation is a process that attaches itself
to transgressive behaviour, such as law-breaking or violating social norms.
On the contrary, as the culture of antiblack policing established by slavery
demonstrates, criminalisation is first and foremost a political-symbolic tool,
an expression of the onto-epistemic framework structuring social relations. As
objectified human beings, the law defined slaves as incapable of exercising
free will, and accordingly the law only recognised slave humanity in order to
ascribe criminal culpability. Black self-possession (defending oneself or rela-
tions against attack, fleeing, refusing orders, doing something not instructed
to do, looking a white person in the eye, and so on) was criminalised; granting
absolute dominion over the enslaved ensured white impunity for the violence
of policing; and slave submission must be total and unqualified in order to
ensure the stability of society (cf. Woods 2013).

    The most well-known U.S. court case from this era, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*
(1857), underscores the quality of the power in question in the slavocracy and
explains why it is that this power proceeds unabated despite the demise of
slavery as a formal institution. In addition to the notorious proclamation that
black people are 'so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man
was bound to respect', the Supreme Court made the far more consequential
statement that blacks, 'whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to'
the authority of whites; 'no distinction in this respect was made between the
free [N]egro or mulatto and the slave, but this stigma, of the deepest degrada-
tion, was fixed upon the whole race'.[1] The political squabble over 'free' states

versus slave states was immaterial to the Court; the subjugation of blacks was not a juridical or legal matter, but rather a self-evident case of racial degradation that endures despite changes to how the political economy of the society may organise this racial hierarchy in a given historical moment. The political economy of law is subordinate to the culture of politics; the symbolic economy of antiblackness provides social norms supreme to the law itself.

The failure to apprehend how the law in its very structure is antiblack, rather than merely in its obvious moments of explicit antiblackness, such as in *Dred Scott*, is both a disciplinary problem and a theoretical one. *Dred Scott* is nothing less than a landmark decision in the jurisprudence of the global policing of blackness insofar as it affirms the basic terms of the police power constituting the social. The police power of state and civil society, elaborated in *Dred Scott* and numerous U.S. court decisions, lay out principles of antiblackness at work in the global sphere. Most of this jurisprudence is overlooked in terms of elucidating the police power; rather, they appear in legal history as constitutional cases about federalism. This oversight is produced by a disciplinary blindness that isolates black history from the study of law. In fact, the cases do not tarry on the question of sovereignty; rather, they unequivocally assert the indivisibility of sovereignty in situations where the public is potentially at risk. The danger of the rebellious slave, the uncivilised African, the violent black, need not be explicitly enumerated – it is implied. The courts are asserting that society owes its security to the police power, whose importance is evidenced by its resistance to representation and constraint. From the standpoint of the police power, then, blackness is imperceptible except as the danger it is presumed to pose to public welfare (Wagner 2009: 6-7). Since the law, international or domestic, is rarely studied from the paradigmatic position of blackness, the theoretical importance of the police power is marginalised as incidental to specific cases where race is explicitly addressed. While it is possible to debate the practices to which the power applies – from on-the-street racial profiling to penal policies to border control – the power's existence has *never* been open to discussion. As Bryan Wagner puts it, 'police relates to blackness not as practice but simply as a power' (Wagner 2009: 8). To deliberate or prevaricate over its various practices, then, let alone to worry whether it is containable or susceptible to reform, is both to miss the point and to find oneself caught in the cul-de-sac of a topic defined by its foreclosure to deliberation. The Lampedusa affair, properly contextualised, proceeds according to the conventions of the police power installed through centuries of racial slavery.

The Sea as Death's Void

If we look at the Mediterranean basin in the early fifteenth century, we see the embryonic development of racial slavery, and by extension, the development of an 'imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism' that constitutes the con-

temporary scene in the region (Maldonnado-Torres 2007: 245). The trade in black bodies is the moment of inception of Western modernity, leaving European societies indelibly enmeshed in the world that slavery created. As Walter Rodney has shown, Africa helped to develop Europe in the same proportion that Europe helped to underdevelop Africa (1970: 75). Rodney goes on to note that it was by first controlling the seas that Europe began transforming Africa and Asia into economic satellites – and, we would add, into the outposts of cultural formation at once peripheral and central to Western civilisation. The Mediterranean region became the principle space of cultural formation, economic development and racist violence. Marxist historiography typically looks to the Enclosure Acts in England as marking the dawn of the era of private property and the beginning of the capitalist mode of production. This is a European conceit that contributes to excising slavery from the historical formation of modernity. While the commons were slowly being enclosed in Western Europe, primitive accumulation was happening on human bodies in Africa and the Mediterranean was key to the violent geography that this predation created.

Antiblack violence in the Mediterranean basin has its roots in the earliest racial slave trade in which Italian merchants funded Portuguese raiders across the Mediterranean Sea and down the Atlantic coast of Africa. The wealth built by the Italians from the early slave trade in Africans bankrolled the subsequent 'voyages of discovery' that further established Portuguese and Spanish dominance of the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts. The Europeans were soon purchasing cotton and other commodities in India to exchange for slaves in Africa to mine gold in the Americas, swiftly yoking four continents into one global accumulation regime premised on racial violence. European slavers brought Africans to labour on the Atlantic and Mediterranean islands, including Lampedusa, but Portuguese, Spanish and Italian nobles, clergy and craftsmen bought many more Africans to labour in Europe. Enlightenment thought – a humanism that has relied on the provision of a dehumanised other, the colonial relationship between northern and southern Europe, a spatialised and racialised hierarchy replicated within its border peninsulas (Iberian, Italian, Peloponnese, Balkan), its colonial legacy, as well as in its fascist and imperial worldview are all topographic features of slavery's mapping of human relations. What we are facing today is a new declination of an old and repressed issue that haunts and composes the European project and modernity itself: the 'black Mediterranean' is a constituent unit of analysis for understanding contemporary forms of policing Europe's borders.

Any look at the account books of the Cambini bank would show that Italy received black Africans regularly and in significant numbers from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, to labour, but also to serve as a necessary counter-image in the construction of European whiteness and 'civilisation'. We also get a similar historical image from the halls and iconography of the Aragonese kings of Naples or the ruling houses of Ferrara, Mantua and Milan. Visual depictions of black Africans appear with special frequency and ideological

and aesthetic power during these decades, and play a leading role in European constructions of difference at a highly charged moment when both colonialism and Catholic evangelisation begin to assume more familiarly modern forms (Earle and Lowe 2005). Robin Blackburn notes that Portugal acquired a cultural leadership role due to its newfound wealth from the slave trade and having African retainers soon became the standard of high fashion (Blackburn 2010: 78). In the Mediterranean region, then, the Africa-slavery connection was first secured at the same time that we begin to see blackness emerge in Western culture as more than simply sin, danger and disgust. As Blackburn observes, there would be no tragedy in Shakespeare's *Othello* if there was no nobility in the Moor (Blackburn 2010: 79). Blackness comes to mark power, seriousness and sobriety; Europe's Baroque arts, too, depict the domineering military man, merchant or nobleman in darkened hues. What made the black body repellent and repulsive to Western sensibilities was also what provided the sensations and guilty pleasures of modern life, on the one hand, and on the other, the very idioms of modern power, the codes by which European civilisation (patriarchy, masculinity, whiteness, nation, sexual dominance, social hierarchy, and so forth) gained expression.

To speak in non-racial terms of the policing of the Mediterranean renews the suppression and quarantining of the black presence necessary for modern progress. This silencing is itself a form of policing and is the prerequisite for the racial violence that would come increasingly to be institutionalised under subsequent political economies (post-Emancipation, post-civil rights, post-colonial, post-industrial). Again, the pantheon of black letters speaks the unspeakable. Simon Gikandi writes that the black presence has been buried as if in a crypt, wherein a whole world of unconscious fantasy has been created (2011: x). Gikandi notes that the ghost of the crypt returns periodically to haunt and torment the cemetery guard. The most well-known commentator in this vein, Toni Morrison, teaches us 'invisible things are not necessarily "not-there;" that a void may be empty, but it is not a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighborhoods that are defined by the population held away from them' (Morrison 1998: 11). Sharon Holland expands on this notion of the unspeakable position, suggesting that black presence in Western culture is like the subject of death – almost unspeakable – so that black subjects share the space death occupies (Holland 2000: 6). The scales of black death are literally unrepresentable; attempts to do so founder on the shoals of the abyss. Estimates claim that Africans attempting to reach Europe have been dying at sea at an average rate of over 1,000 per year (by comparison, the average death rate on the U.S.–Mexico border reached a high of 225 in 2010) (Binational Migration Institute 2013; Coluccello and Massey 2007). M. NourbeSe Philip (2008: 197) reminds us that these figures, like the language of the law, imposes an order that seeks to disappear the outrageous disorder of death.

Of Seagulls and Vampires: The Unity of Policing and Its Critics

As the vessel conveying its African cargo caught fire, capsized and sank, people in the vicinity could hear the distress calls coming across the waters; but no one responded (until residents of Lampedusa itself finally organised a rescue party). Some people claimed that they thought they were hearing a gaggle of seagulls, rather than human beings on the precipice of death. We are reminded of John Murillo's observation:

> Waters filled with the black blood of personal and collective trauma – the blood drawn siphoned from black existence to satiate the insatiable and vampiric hunger of the antiblack world – made all the blacker with the darkness of absence – blank spaces, blind spots, refusals (to recognize, write, believe the fact of unimaginable trauma), erasures, and the unspeakable, unnamable black holes around which these words spiral (Murillo 2013).

The refusal to believe and to know, or more so, the desire to misrecognise black suffering, naturalised as so much wildlife. The quality of being objectified as a fungible human surrogate facilitates black suffering to become the conduit for human subjects, non-blacks, understanding their own and others people's oppression and plight. A basic purpose of the police power is not simply to mark the objects of police scrutiny, the threat against which the society must militate; but it also serves as a methodology for producing social cohesion. Solidarity is the product of *not* being policed, *not* being noticed, *not* having one's humanity called into question fundamentally; belonging is nothing less than the prerogative to *ignore* the banal terror of policing (Martinot and Sexton 2003). Civil society knows itself to be 'free' by virtue of who populates the hold of the slave ship, migrant boat, detention centre or police blotter.

The Lampedusa affair, and other related incidents of antiblack violence in Italy recently, also point up the manner in which the social is sustained and resuscitated through black suffering. For instance, the Italian Left has mobilised in order to spread information and put an end to the deaths and deportations of those attempting to cross *il ponte verso l'Europa* (The bridge to Europe). In response to the Lampedusa affair, a group of Italian activists came together to produce 'The Charter of Lampedusa'.[2] This document outlines the principles underlying the struggles taking place against EU border policies and calls for the freedom and autonomy of all peoples regardless of citizenship status or birthplace. The facile replacement of anti-racism for racism (or even fascism) cannot be taken for granted. The violence of empathetic identification that left-liberal Italians experience is similar to the violence Hartman (1997) identifies in the letters of John Rankin. The humanity that Rankin extends to the slaves in his abolitionist letters 'inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery' (Hartman 1997: 19). In other words, the violence in the 'Charter's' identification is as much due to its 'good' anti-racist intentions as it is to the accessibility of the black body. Black

Africans are deployed in order to illustrate the tension between good and bad Italianness and, more broadly, Europeanness. Thus, rather than a problem of antiblackness it becomes a problem of Italianness, of the barbarity of the nation-state's border controls. It becomes a means of elaborating a positive Italian identity, that is to reconstruct a positive, anti-racist Italian identity and, by extension, Italian state; a new multiracial/multicultural Italy. Black African struggle and resistance becomes a tool for psychic transformation, that is to save Italy from itself. Put more concisely, abject black bodies, lost in the abyss of the Mediterranean, serve as the conduits through which a new Italy can be created. The Lampedusa victims are surrogate subjects who only in death enable Italians to re-emerge as civilised subjects, to become whole again (Woods 2013).

Black people are placed in specific affective registers of attachment: fear, disgust, desire, pity and violent aggression. What we are witnessing in Italy, and across Europe, is the elaboration of anti-racist practice and action 'for the monopolization of virtue and a defense mechanism against the loss of self' (Arkel and Ross 1982: 35). The black body, whether symbolic or concrete, becomes the precondition for the coherence of white sociality and embodiment. The history of anti-racism, from the early slavery abolitionists to the immigrant rights movement in the present-day, is replete with this confusion: whose humanity, whose ethical station, is actually being redeemed? The call for humane treatment for Africans in movement across the Mediterranean basin is in fact a self-serving effort to deploy black flesh for white ethical redemption.

Criticisms of the Lampedusa affair and other spectacles of Italian racism reveal the problem with empathy when the extent of the structural antagonism central to the modern world – black/white, non-human/human, gratuitous violence/contingent violence – is misapprehended. One recent Italian commentator compared the public stripping and high-pressure hose washing of African detainees on Lampedusa to the Italian immigrant experience on Ellis Island in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, noting 'although not nearly as demeaning as what the refugees in Lampedusa undergo on a regular basis, we were humiliated by, and decried, the primitive physical examinations intended to discover which infectious diseases we were carrying. Only, at the time, it was easier to be outraged as we were the victims'.[3] This effort to identify with the captive African turns in on itself because rather than feel what it means to be left to drown within sight of the European coast, over and over again, the Italian commentator instead begins to feel for himself, or for his national kin. There is a recognition that this attempt at analogy is delimited by something beyond the grasp of this writer, but the moment remains an awkward extension of Western humanity across the abyss of slavery, for that is where black people were permanently imprisoned while Italians were momentarily detained at Ellis Island. The analogy, followed by the apologetic admission that conditions on Ellis Island were 'not nearly' as bad as that endured by

Africans today, becomes an oblique recognition that exploiting the vulnerabil-ity of the captive body as a medium for the writer's own political agenda and personal feelings ends up confirming the *ongoing* relations of slavery. The ease with which the writer empathises with the African is as much due to the fungibility of blackness as to his good intentions and heartfelt opposition to current European immigration policy (Hartman 1997: 19).

After attempting to reduce the structural antagonism of slavery down to the social conflict of immigration (labour-capital, foreigner-national), the Italian commentator goes on to recall the Holocaust by means of Italy's most prominent survivor, Primo Levi. This next failed effort at historical analogy only underscores civil society's need to speak *for* the black subject, and in so doing to 'reproduce the hyper-embodiness of the powerless' (Hartman 1997: 19). The anti-racist is the policeman: in the attempt to counteract the indiffer-ence of European society to the immigrant's suffering, the putative white body of the Italian nation assumes the position of the black body in order to make the suffering of the Lampedusa affair visible and legible. Again, slavery must remain locked in the crypt of a submerged history. Europe's status as civilised or modern rests less on the cultural capacity to produce a social her-itage (Ellis Island, the Holocaust) and more on black abjection as a nonentity (Holland 2000: 15). On 8 May 2011, reports surfaced of another vessel bound for Lampedusa from Africa that became disabled and drifted in open waters for 16 days. Distress calls from the ship's captain were ignored by the Italian coastguard, a passing French aircraft carrier and a European military heli-copter that dropped water and biscuits but never attempted a rescue. Set adrift like objects among other objects in the sea (driftwood, seaweed, jelly fish), 61 of the 76 passengers died from thirst and starvation before their boat washed ashore near Tripoli (Shenker 2011). This violence against the black body is a litany of horrors, and to actually make black suffering visible arouses a deep anxiety about the place of blackness and the predicament of witnessing the legality of black people's subhuman position in contemporary life. These forms of anti-racism intensify black suffering and comprise a unity with policing itself.

The problem of policing's critics is related to the hitch in the movement against human trafficking. Anti-trafficking activists promote their cause by analogising human trafficking as the 'new slavery', or even, the 'real slavery' (Bales 1999, 2005). At the same time, anti-trafficking discourse reiterates the contention that Africans were in fact as culpable for the transatlantic slave trade as were Europeans (Woods 2013). Both moves, the claim that contem-porary human trafficking is the 'real slavery' and blaming Africans for transat-lantic slavery, parasitically deploys the spectre of black slaves as '"surrogate selves" through which to meditate on the ongoing problems of human freedom global capitalism still presents, and it does so in highly eroticised ways that in fact erase both the erotic struggle for black liberation and the sexual violence intrinsic to empire generally, and to antiblackness in particular' (Woods 2013:

120). Likewise, the responsibility of North African traffickers and labour agents in the Mediterranean basin is overplayed and results in a similar double manoeuvre (cf. Ciabarri 2014). First, this responsibility eases the burden on Italy and the European Union. Second, it positions Europeans as modern-day abolitionists. In both cases, the advocates of the anti-trafficking and anti-slavery movement and the critics of European immigration law enforcement become proxies for black suffering; they demonstrate how such pain can only be acknowledged by means of white interdiction and identification; and in this manner of self-augmentation, non-black subjects recuperate their ethical station as European humanists committed to fair play and equal treatment, inadvertently denying black sentience and effacing the capacity of blacks to experience pain and anguish. What left-liberals in Italy and elsewhere fail to realise is that given the structural coordinates of living in an antiblack world, 'the very notion of justice … produces or requires black exclusion and death as normative' (Vargas and James 2012: 193). For this reason, doing policing differently does not carve out a corner of justice within an intrinsically unjust paradigm: for instance, stepping up patrols of the Mediterranean in order to limit the loss of life does not recalibrate the station of blackness within the Western imaginary; on the contrary, it facilitates greater surveillance and control over black bodies, as each prior period of abolitionism has done. Our point is that what the police *do* is merely symptomatic of a police power constitutive to the cultural formation of Western society.

Coda: Ex Aqua, Death Speak

While discussing the boat tragedy, Mayor Giusi Nicolini of Lampedusa told the BBC, 'These bodies are all speaking' (Stillman 2013). Indeed – what, then, are they saying? The voices from the subaqua crypt are noting that border policing is really about 'the politics of black migration-*as*-immobilization, of black movement-*as*-captivity' (Woods 2013: 132 emphasis in original). From the vantage of the policed, the Mediterranean is a deathscape, a zone of disposability, not one of simple risk (cf. Beck 2009). When we re-situate policing as an idiom of power, rather than simply institutional practices or state technologies, then it becomes evident that policing is a central methodology for organising the social globally. As with the slave patrols of the antebellum plantation, border management and the preclusion of unruly black bodies in the Mediterranean unfolds in a manner calibrated towards self-justification and the constituent need for policing. In an antiblack world, the black body, pace Lewis Gordon (2012), is always up to something.

Re-situated as part of the ongoing slave relations constituting the modern world, Lampedusa presents an opportunity to reconceptualise policing. Lampedusa has the potential to make an intervention into the mainstream common sense about policing, law and global criminal justice. Black 'move-

ment-as-captivity' is an expression of the underlying matrix of violence. Patrice Douglass and Frank Wilderson explain: 'Violence is assumed as the constitution of a singular, refracted and nameable predominating force, the state and its extension, and is blind to considerations of violence located at the constitution of being itself and present prior to the arrival of the state' (Douglass and Wilderson 2013: 119). In this vein, we can understand how notions of international law or human rights doctrine are nothing more than European law, applied within the same matrix of violence from which Western policing issues. In other words, since policing is first and foremost a cultural phenomenon of violence routinised prior to the emergence of modern legal regime, we face the crucial observation that policing precedes law, not the other way around (Woods forthcoming). International law decrees that any vessel in the vicinity is obligated to respond to maritime distress calls. Rather than stain the numerous parties who ignore distress calls in the Mediterranean with the deviant status of 'illegality', such identity is reserved, always and already, for the black body. This is because criminalisation is not a contingent violence, but rather a gratuitous feature of blackness; the criminality of blackness is presupposed, prior to any action or non-action. The Africans left to die from hunger and thirst in the middle of the Mediterranean, or to drown within reach of Europe's shores, underscores the fallacious analysis of the relationship between crime and punishment governing mainstream criminological and legal discourse and, consequently, theorising on the police; and it furthermore reiterates the essential nonentity of black subjects. When slave traders ran short of provisions or sought to escape approaching naval vessels after the prohibition of the transatlantic trade, they merely tossed the shackled Africans overboard. Such actions, while amply chronicled in the historical record, do not constitute the early precedent for criminal law; indeed, such actions were dealt with according to the conventions of the police power, which was to immunise white violence against black people from any manner of constraint or constriction. The authority of the master must be total and the vulnerability of the enslaved absolute in order to preserve social stability.

The murder of Africans in the Middle Passage, while not registered in terms of criminal law, does play an instrumental role in the formation of modern financial capital. Ian Baucom's study of the 1783 British case of *Gregson v. Gilbert*, regarding the 133 Africans jettisoned from the slave ship *Zong* in order for the ship's owners to file an insurance claim for their lost cargo, explains how the slave trade was the terrain for the dawn of speculative finance (Baucom 2005). Transatlantic slavery was part of an economic cycle of capital accumulation that remains squarely in place to this day in an intensified form. Murder, in other words, is a constituent element of finance capitalism. Baucom's thesis is not simply that the slave trade was central to the development of global capital; he also posits a theory of history in which the violence of slavery is not past but present within the very terms, processes and structures of modern society, an argument long levied from within black studies. In this

regard, the African bodies bound for Lampedusa are disempowered precisely by the racial economy of value that undergirds the global economy, puts their bodies into motion under terms of violent erasure, and dispenses with them into the abyss of the sea with the same efficient, murderous logic of an earlier era. Lampedusa, and other spectacles of black suffering in the present post-colonial, post-Emancipation period, however, function more insidiously because black hands appear to be the cause today of black death, not white ones. Black death seems to be an intramural affair, rather than the extension of an externally driven antiblack violence. As George Rawick (2010) once observed, however, the last stage of genocide looks like suicide.

Gikandi regards slavery as a 'caesura, a point of division in the narrative of modernity, not a break from it' (2011: xvi). This rupture is the character of modern ethics and makes possible the social and moral boundaries essential to modern culture. Policing, criminal justice, international law and border enforcement are merely part of the current lexicon and institutionality for this founding caesura. The voices of the dead speak to describe the world as it is, rather than as Western culture would purport it to be. On the other hand, the dead speak on a level that barely registers within the prevailing onto-epistemic framework that required their death and their silence in the first place. Lampedusa is also the threat of black social movement. Here we have Fanon's 'zone of occult instability', the space where the colonised or the enslaved reject the notions of order imposed by Western legal regime (Fanon 1968: 227). Lampedusa is the teeming, uncontrollable, undisciplined space of black flexibility, fluctuation and futurity. Given the matrix of violence imposed on blackness, there is a visibility and potentiality to black death that does not attach to black life. As Barbara Browning notes, 'thousands die each year, but word only reaches the [West] when they die en masse' (Browning 1998: 2). The renewed African Diaspora occasions a more virulent and hostile reaction than in earlier periods, even given the long history of Western constructions of Africans as dangerous. Western culture views black global movement in terms of conta-gion, a pathogen in the social body, as the blackening of the HIV/AIDS pan-demic illustrates. Lampedusa is controversial precisely because black approaches on fortress Europe register as the outbreak of a pandemic. The fall of a decadent civilisation is not far behind.

Sharon Holland poses a pointed question that we turn to in closing: how do you account for people's willingness to die for imaginative fantasies (Holland 2000: 26)? As stated at the outset of this article, our concern is not with the spectacular events of black death, the repetitive drownings of Africans on the maritime borders of Europe, a veritable fence ringed in jettisoned black bodies. Instead, we are concerned with the culture of the police power and its elabora-tion in southern Europe's border with Africa. Accordingly, we turn Holland's question not to the indomitable black social movement that continues to sur-vive and map alternatives to the terror of the present, but rather to Europe and Western civilisation itself. Are you willing to die to preserve the decadence of

a society constituted in black murder? One of the constituent elements of slavery as outlined by Orlando Patterson in his comparative study *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) is that the slave is ensnared in an idiom of power that strips all knowledge and legitimacy of social relations. He terms this 'natal alienation' and genealogical isolation – alienated from all social generations, ascending and descending, the slave is isolated from human history, a captive object that exists *for* the captor, with no culture or status outside what the master endows. Given what we have noted about the co-imbrication of Europe and Africa, represented in the small island of Lampedusa located closer to Africa than to Europe, we suggest that Patterson's recognition of social death must also be applied in a larger historical sense to the European as well. The paternity disavowed, the fruits of conquest quarantined, excised and repressed – but they return and remain, nonetheless. As with the decaying House of Lampedusa, Western society faces its own self-destruction in the image it created, a blackened self-image.

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Notes

1. *Dred Scott v. Sandford* 60 U.S. 393 (1857), http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=29&page=transcript.
2. See http://www.lacartadilampedusa.org/index.html.
3. See http://alternativepoliticalnews.blogspot.com/2014/06/lampedusa-our-collective-atrocity.html.

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