CHAPTER 3

Welcome to the Island

Island of Kos, April 2016

To see the Turkish coast, you don't even need to squint. Bodrum is right in front of us, less than four kilometres away. Yet, in this tiny stretch of sea, dozens, perhaps hundreds of people have died in the last two years. Among these, just over six months ago, was little Alan Kurdi, the two-year-old Syrian Kurdish child, originally from Kobane. He lost his life here, together with his brother and mother, and his lifeless body was photographed lying on a beach near Bodrum, becoming a global symbol of the so-called 'European refugee crisis' of 2015. This Kurdish family was trying to reach Kos, like tens of thousands of other asylum seekers fleeing the war in Syria, who, once in Turkey, are forced to cross the sea in lifeboats and dinghies, often without life jackets.

Kos is one of the Dodecanese islands, the archipelago in the Aegean Sea that until recently was mainly known for the ancient myths of classical Greece, and the beaches and whitewashed houses in the fishing villages that for decades have attracted large numbers of tourists, mainly from central and northern Europe. Today, however, along with the islands of Samos, Chios and Lesvos a little further north, Kos has become a landing place for the largest and most dramatic flows of immigration in the eastern Mediterranean. These islands are stages for one of the most dangerous migratory routes in the world today.

Yet, seen in this strange spring, Kos seems just one of those many seaside resorts that in the quiet low season seem to simply wait for the summer and the arrival of the tourists. Last year's emergency seems somehow a thing of the past. All the attention has shifted to the northern Aegean, and in particular to Lesvos, where the arrival of migrants continues unabated.

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The refugee camp of Moria becomes increasingly larger and more terrible, and now particularly with the Pope's visit, has attracted journalists from all over the world. Here in Kos, on the other hand, the solidarity industry is being demobilized. Behind the port, just a few steps from Hippocrates' Platanus, the most tourist-friendly place on the island, lie the remains of the first reception camp set up by the UNHCR in the most difficult months of 2015. The white tents with the United Nations Refugee Agency emblem pop up like mushrooms in the park that has also housed the Gazi Hassan Pasha Mosque, the nearby *hammam* and the Orthodox church of Agios Georgios for centuries. At the area's entrance, a map announces: WELCOME TO GREECE. The map shows the centre of the city of Kos and indicates, in Arabic and English, the location of a series of services for newcomers, with the alienating effect of resembling a tourist guide: *Port*, *Registration 1st Step*, *Distribution Point*, *Toilets*, *Shelter*, *Registration 2nd Step*, *Hospital*, *Information*. A box shows Kos's position related to the rest of Greece, Turkey and Europe. An arrow pointing at the island indicates: YOU ARE HERE.

The few tourists currently present on the island are right next to what remains of the camp for migrants, in little streets full of souvenir shops, bars and tavernas. They are mostly old people from northern Europe, who come here in search of a mild winter, tranquillity and good food.

On the door of the Tourist Office there is a sheet with a statement made by the mayor of Kos, Georgios Kyritsis, which was released some time ago to the international press:

> Lately, Kos has welcomed refugees and migrants seeking refuge in Europe via Greece. The issue of the control and management of the migration flow is a European problem and exceeds the capabilities of a small island like Kos. However, with the concerted efforts of the local authorities, citizens, local entrepreneurs, to name but a few, we have managed for seven months to provide assistance and support to immigrants. Simultaneously, we have strived to combine tourism and local solidarity without upsetting the overall experience of visitors to our island. . . . A small group of refugees, eager for their identification papers to be released in order to leave the island and continue their journey to other European countries, sparked fleeting and minor discord. After order was restored with police intervention, the identification process continued to proceed as swiftly as possible. . . . It is worth noting that the aforementioned incident, which received considerable publicity, was an isolated occurrence, and was confined to the area in which the stadium is located. The specific area in which the isolated incident arose is far removed from the thousands of tourists who safely enjoy their summer holidays on Kos and continue to experience our exceptional hospitality. The identification of refugees and migrants takes place in a restricted area and does not under any circumstance disturb the regularity of local life. Kos is and remains the fourth most popular tourist destination in Greece and continues to await the welcome arrival of its guests. Kos is a favoured tourist destination, and the island of solidarity!

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FIGURE 3.1. The UNHCR temporary camp in Kos town centre, 2016. © Francesco Vietti

Nissology and Mobilities: An Archipelago of Studies

Reading the text of this speech, which I transcribed into my fieldnotes in that spring of 2016, a few years later, I am particularly struck by some words and expressions: '*The issue of management and control of migration*', '*exceeds the capabilities of a small island*', '*combine tourism and local solidarity*', '*without upsetting*', '*isolated incident*', '*restricted area*', '*enjoy summer holidays*', '*exceptional hospitality*', '*island of solidarity*'. . . All lined up, I think they exemplify the complex ambivalences of the links between migration and tourism, hospitality and exclusion, visibility and invisibility, and humanitarian and security approaches that distinguish the boundaries of 'Fortress Europe' which will be central to Part II of this volume. In this third chapter, I will begin by outlining the importance of the islands for the flows of tourist and migratory mobility in the Mediterranean, reflecting on the peculiarities of research contexts which are 'isolated'. I will then focus on the specific case of the Greek Aegean islands, to which Kos also belongs, focusing on the emblematic case of Lesvos, which was at the centre of the so-called 'European refugee crisis' in 2015. In Chapter 4, I will examine the context of Lampedusa, an Italian island in the central Mediterranean which for over twenty years has been the 'gateway to Europe' for the migratory routes from North Africa.

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The borders of the Mediterranean are essentially liquid, made of water and currents. The sea, however, far from being free and uniform, is actually subdivided by the limits of the territorial waters which not only play a fundamental role in the exploitation of marine resources and fisheries, but, as we have seen all too often in recent years, have led to recurrent tragedies related to migration. Rescue actions, as well as military and police patrols, respond rather to who possesses a particular portion of the Mediterranean Sea, which should imply a bond of responsibility for protecting the lives of the people who cross it. The partitioning of the sea into so-called SAR (Search and Rescue) areas on a national basis gives substance to the commitments set out in the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue adopted in Hamburg in 1979 and the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea. However, as has too often been seen, for example, in the accusations and reprimands over responsibility between Italy and Malta, or between Italy and Libya, any real commitment to saving lives and then welcoming migrants to the safe harbour closest to the place of rescue has often been subordinated to the economic interests and xenophobic political rhetoric of the various countries in the region.

In this panorama, the islands are crucial points in the articulation of the Mediterranean borders. The extent and configuration of territorial waters often depend specifically on the location of these lands in the middle of the sea: sometimes large, sometimes simple uninhabited rocks. In some cases, the islands are also the places where border management structures are crowded in. Coast guards and military ships are in charge of patrolling the sea dock in their ports, together with the boats of non-governmental organizations who monitor and launch rescue missions. On the islands, you can find the first reception centres for migrants, which often turn into detention centres in which the people who are saved are then imprisoned and wait in limbo for lengthy periods while their asylum applications are evaluated, without knowing if or when they will be transferred elsewhere, whether they will be granted refugee status or be rejected, expelled and repatriated. For all these reasons, to use the current terminology in migration policies, we can truly say that the islands are 'hotspots', but in a much broader sense than reception centres for the detention and sorting of migrants; the islands are key points of (im)mobility in the Mediterranean.

Excluding the continents, which could be considered gigantic islands, the islands themselves constitute 7 percent of the earth's surface and host 10 percent of the world's population (more than 600 million people). A quarter of all sovereign states worldwide are islands and archipelagos. In the Mediterranean alone, there are as many as 10,000 islands, islets and rocks. Of these, 250 are inhabited islands and 157 have an area of more than 10 square kilometres. Altogether, the Mediterranean islands cover an area of more

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than 100,000 sq. km and host a population of about 12 million inhabitants. In terms of size and population, we can identify two major islands, Sicily and Sardinia (each with an area of around 25,000 sq. km, and with populations of 5 and 1.6 million residents respectively); three big islands, Cyprus, Corsica and Crete (each with an area of 8–9,000 sq. km and widely varying populations, from 300,000 inhabitants on Corsica, 600,000 on Crete and up to 1.2 million inhabitants on Cyprus); four middle-size islands (Evia, Majorca, Lesvos and Rhodes, with areas between 1,400 and 3,600 sq. km and populations ranging from 90,000 inhabitants on Lesvos to 850,000 on Majorca). The remaining islands are all smaller (40 have an area between 1,000 and 100 sq. km and about 100 islands have an area between 100 and 10 sq. km, some of which are uninhabited). Of all the Mediterranean islands, two are island states (Malta and Cyprus) and the others belong to Albania, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Montenegro, Syria, Spain, Tunisia or Turkey.

These figures make it easy to grasp how impossible it is to overlook the importance of the islands both regionally and globally. Yet the island as a concept has had a peculiar place in the history of Western thought. For a very long time it has been at the centre of the sphere of symbolic and imaginary representations, but it has taken a long time to become established as an object of scientific research, and only very recently has it become the central category of a specific interdisciplinary field, '*island studies*'.

We can say that the island, beyond or even before its existence as a physical place, has emerged as a place of the spirit and a materialization of the greatest desires and the most terrible fears of human beings. Similar to other natural spaces (such as forests or valleys), the island has established itself through the discourses of art, poetry, literature and philosophy as the ideal setting to give shape to utopias and dystopias with the fantasies of control and knowledge of the mysterious wild. Whether in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Verne's *The Mysterious Island* or Huxley's *Island*, the island appears perennially suspended between the allegory of paradise and hell, domination and being dominated. In some cases, like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the tiny Lilliput and the flying island of Laputa transcend their own identity as islands, to become a metaphor for *otherworlds*, with perspectives, scales and temporalities that subvert and interrogate us.

What has inspired many such narratives is probably the immediacy with which the island appears as a 'totality'. Clearly limited by its coasts, it has an individual identity separating it from other lands by the nothingness of the sea. The island seems to give shape to the ambition of every man to be able to climb a hill and embrace the whole object of his curiosity, his knowledge or his possession. Unlike the endless continents, whose boundaries are lost

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beyond the horizon and are therefore invisible, the island is considered a whole, circumscribable, or rather circumnavigable, by thought. For this reason, it is not surprising that islands have also become the ideal 'laboratory' for social sciences, especially a discipline like anthropology. We have found it easier and more interesting to use our gaze to grasp the totality of the social, economic, political and cultural functioning of island communities.

Just as the Galapagos Islands were the place that provided Charles Darwin with the ideal context of observation to outline the theory of evolution, other islands allowed the birth and consolidation of ethnography as an essential tool of investigation and reflection for social anthropology. Radcliffe Brown (1922) on the Andaman Islands of the Bay of Bengal, Malinowski on the Trobriand Islands of Melanesian New Guinea (1922), Mead on Samoa (1928) and Firth (1936) on Tikopia among the Solomon Islands are the best known, and many other anthropologists found islands to be their preferred place of research. Although they did not identify insularity as a specific theme of research, these authors developed their own studies of social structures, economic and political models, the life cycle and the overall functioning of communities that were effectively united by the fact that they were essentially made up of islanders, women and men, children and elderly.

Even in the second part of the twentieth century, anthropologists often found the social reality of the islands to be a particularly rich and stimulating field, capable of clarifying dynamics and processes that have an overall general analytical value. To focus on the Mediterranean, just think of how between the 1960s and 1970s Malta and Sicily enabled the Dutch anthropologist Jeremy Boissevain (1974) to refine the study of social networks, making these islands an ideal context for the practice of network analysis.

The emergence of a study of islands themselves (similar to what had happened to the city decades before, in the separation of studies *in* or *of* the city) can be seen in the late twentieth century. This was part of a growing movement attempting to achieve international coordination between scholars and activists who wanted a space for discussion and comparison of the challenges and problems of the islands in different parts of the globe. The anthropologist Grant McCall proposed the category of 'nissology' (from the Greek *nisos*, 'island') to define 'the study of islands on their own terms; the open and free inquiry into island-ness; and the promotion of international cooperation and networking among islands' (McCall 1994: 2). McCall's formulation, while underlining the idea of 'on their own terms', was the reflection of a position that we could define as 'decolonial'. This position was shared by other scholars who laid the foundations of island studies in sharp contrast to the rhetoric and 'developmental' practices of the 1980s and 1990s, which seemed to offer another logic of colonization, which many islands had been through and which still partly distinguishes them, through

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new keywords related to the problems of marginality, poverty and the need to be integrated into the economic system of global capitalism. In this sense, we must also read Epeli Hau'ofa, a Tongan and Fijian anthropologist who emphasized the difference between thinking of the Pacific as 'islands in a far sea' rather than as 'a sea of islands'. If the first conceptualization tends to describe the ocean as an empty surface away from power and appearing small and remote, the second is, in contrast, able to restore the centrality and complexity of this space of relations and exchanges from the point of view of those who live there and study it 'from within' (Hau'ofa 1993: 152–53).

This line of thought has predominated among other scholars since the early twenty-first century and has continued to build a field of study that is also a collection of research and a platform for activating strategies of collaboration and commitment for those islands that the former secretary of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, defined as the 'front line' of the most challenging environmental, social and political challenges of our time. Among these, the Maltese-Canadian sociologist Godfrey Baldacchino played a significant role as the founding editor of the *Island Studies Journal* in 2006. Baldacchino used his own life story as a scholar who was originally from an island to take up McCall and Hau'ofa's approach by emphasizing that the horizon of island studies presupposes a decolonial commitment. This was due to the political, military and economic colonization that the islands had undergone and still partially know (perhaps defined in other terms, but most of the colonies that still exist today as 'overseas possessions' of the old colonial powers are in fact islands), matched by a cultural hegemony of 'continental' intellectuals and researchers on the islands. Thus, island studies have now also become a tool through which islanders can represent themselves, making their own requests. Islanders are the subject of curiosity and research and are positioned as producers and architects of knowledge, experiments and, to paraphrase the well-known formula that the anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff (2012) have coined for the global South, of 'theories from the islands'. This is a turning point made even more necessary by the new wave of 'civilizing missions' which the islands now experience in relation to the paradigm of 'sustainability' and their condition of 'vulnerability'. In recent decades, experts, scientists, journalists and professionals from diverse disciplines have, in fact, discovered or rediscovered the islands in light of the new interest from international institutions and organizations in natural and social ecosystems. They are treated as 'laboratories' which clearly show and anticipate the problems and challenges that the rest of the planet will face (and is already largely facing) with the climate crisis, pollution and overpopulation. Baldacchino therefore recommends, firstly, abandoning the category of 'insularity', which is full of colonialist legacies for islands as being inevitably remote and marginal, and instead considering

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'islandness' as 'an intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways' (Baldacchino 2004: 278). From this point of view, islands emerge as places which are above all characterized by a peculiar trade-off between opening and closing, location and mobility, the internal and the external. In other words, these are eminently relational spaces. As the geographer Jonathan Pugh (2018) has clearly illustrated, outlining the relevance of a real 'relational turn' in this field of study, thanks to the work of Baldacchino and other researchers, the 'static' representation of the island today leads to the most complex and dynamic reality of the archipelago, woven from different relational mobilities, networks, constellations, exchanges, assemblages and island movements. To abandon an 'atomistic' vision of the island and instead embrace a holistic vision, which can hold together the terrestrial and marine dimensions of island life, and focusing on their mutual interactions, Philip Hayward (2012) introduced the concept of 'aquapelago'. The objective here is to introduce the theme of connectivity (between land and sea, between islands, and between archipelagos and continents), underlining the importance of connections (one of our fundamental coordinates that I discussed in the Introduction). This inevitably means thinking of the sea no longer as an obstacle, or even as an empty space, but as a connector. The 'aquapelagic' society will therefore be understood as:

> a social unit existing in a location in which the aquatic spaces between and around a group of islands are utilised and navigated in a manner that is fundamentally interconnected with and essential to the social group's habitation of land and their senses of identity and belonging. (Hayward 2012: 5)

As Pugh (2018) and Hayward (2018) themselves have lucidly argued, it is necessary to recognize the centrality of islands and archi/aquapelagos in the challenges posed by the era that we have now learned to call Anthropocene. Climate change and global warming, the interaction between human and non-human life forms, and the subjectivity of the natural environment and its ability to act, show us how being an islander today means living in the flows (and studying the islands essentially means studying the flows) of the powerful and multidimensional forces of a rapidly changing planet.

In this context, some lines of research within island studies seem to me to be particularly relevant in relation to the discourse that will develop in this second part of the book. The line that connects island studies to urban studies allows me to explain the relationship between the second and third parts of the book (which will be dedicated to cities) and to underline the fact that the Mediterranean islands on which I conducted my research (Malta, Cyprus, Lesvos, Lampedusa and others) are islands that have undergone varying degrees of major urbanization. In recent decades, migration and

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tourism have been powerful forces increasingly capable of transforming islands into cities. This is often obscured by the prevailing imagination linked to the 'naturalness' of the islands and tourist rhetoric of the 'wild' and 'uncontaminated' nature of island tourist paradises. What 'urban island studies' instead explores are the connections and overlaps between islands and cities. Adam Grydehøj, an influential scholar with extensive research experience mainly in Greenland and the other islands of the 'cold waters' (greater in number and size, but for a long time less studied than those of the Mediterranean and tropical 'hot waters'), noted how the urban-insular link is immediately evident in our contemporary world, and also in historical perspective. Today, of the ten most populous cities in the world, half are on islands (Tokyo, Guangzhou, Jakarta, Manila, Mumbai), along with many of the most important urban centres on every continent (from New York to Hong Kong, from Lagos to London, from Amsterdam to Singapore, from Paris to Sao Paulo). According to Grydehøj (2015), the island appears as a spatio-temporal context favourable to the birth and development of urban centres for three categories of reasons. These are the advantages that isolation offers in territorial, defence and transport terms. The first aspect relates to the fact that many islands have become nuclei of future cities due to being naturally circumscribed territories: politically manageable spaces where the established power can express an absolute authority. For this reason, islands have often been chosen by the ruling elites as places to establish centres of political and religious power (just think of Île de la Cité in Paris, for example). Closely connected to this is the largely symbolic, but pragmatic and strategic consideration that islands offer better defensive possibilities. To defend their power, where there were no natural islands, cities have often created artificial islands through the excavation of ditches and canals. The advantages of these choices have often emerged in Mediterranean history, such as with the 'bastion' of the Knights of the Order of Malta, which allowed the island to resist the long Ottoman siege of 1565. Finally, logistics: for millennia, transport along the waterways (rivers and sea) has remained the fastest, easiest and cheapest system for moving goods and people over long distances, which explains why some of the most important island cities are large centres or intermediate points on the international trade routes of every era, from Rotterdam to Venice, from Rio de Janeiro to Macau and Zanzibar (Grydehøj 2015: 431).

The combination of these various elements, therefore, has meant that some island cities have become centres of political power and strategic hubs for economic and commercial exchanges, seeing their population constantly grow through migratory flows. In the case of some archipelagos of small islands, such as the Maldives with their capital city-island of Malé, these processes have faced the spatial impossibility of extending the growing

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urban centre beyond the physical boundaries of the territory of the island, causing major problems of overcrowding, pollution and lack of environmental sustainability, together with the need to regulate the influx of people and internal migration between the different islands (or in this case atolls). Nevertheless, Malé, with its 253,000 inhabitants in an area of just eight sq. km (so over 27,000 inhabitants per sq. km), remains one of the most densely populated urban centres on the planet, like many of the other island cities mentioned earlier (Malatesta et al. 2021).

Recognizing that islands are central to globalization processes means developing a fully historical reading of their economic, social, cultural and political transformations. Although idealized as 'tourist paradises' out of time, even the smallest and apparently most remote islands have always been part of history, and players in hybridization processes. As Marshall Sahlins, a true connoisseur of the Pacific islands, has masterfully shown us, the time of the islands has never been *different* from that of the colonial powers, but rather it has been *contemporary*. The well-known case of the killing and divinization of Captain James Cook in Hawaii at the end of the eighteenth century during the expansion of the West in the Pacific becomes a revealing example of how social structures and cultural orders are always inseparable from their histories in Sahlins' analysis (1985). The dichotomies between past and present, system and event, structure and history are to be overcome through a paradigm which can account for how 'the transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction' (Sahlins 1985: 138).

This approach ultimately puts the cultural creativity of the islands at the forefront. The Italian anthropologist Adriano Favole (2010) has been moving in this direction for several years now. In those same Pacific islands, he encountered innovative and alternative ways to think about the relationship between local and global, between identity and otherness and to enter into a relationship with the powerful forces that impact those island societies. These range from the market economy to the ideologies and practices of democracy, from Christianity to the Western notion of heritage, to international environmental and development policies. Carrying out his research between New Caledonia and the Polynesian islands, Favole found precious antidotes to the 'identity obsession' (Remotti 2010) in Europe. This has seen the prevalence of tense dichotomous logics, placing 'us' and 'others' in opposition to each other through references to 'cultural roots' and an 'authentic past' that cements internal cohesion and invents homogeneous local identities which exclude everything and everyone that falls into the category of 'foreign'. Cobbling together disparate and contradictory elements, being open to change and admitting the foreign origin of one's own habits and traditions, and rethinking one's society through relations with the outside world, are all variations of the same ability to make cul-

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tural 'synthesis', rather than giving in to the predominance of antithesis. A collective creative capacity that Favole evokes uses the famous formula of the activist, politician and Kanak anthropologist Jean-Marie Tjibaou: 'Identity is in front of us, never behind us' (quoted in Favole 2010: 99). This is the challenge that the islanders of the Mediterranean have faced in these decades of (un)expected encounters with migrants and tourists: imagining oneself in the future, rather than in the past. I will illustrate this in the following pages.

Beaches, Hotels, Selfies, Relics, Graves (and Summer Schools)

After our detour into nissology, which took us from Kos to the Pacific islands, we can now return to the Mediterranean. Here I would like to focus on the social reality of those islands (or rather archi/aquapelagos) on which, in recent years, I have had the opportunity to see intersections between migration and tourism in different forms. In the following pages, I discuss several analytical points that are particularly relevant to the ethnographic exploration of Lesvos (in the last part of this chapter) and Lampedusa (in Chapter 4).

Talking about tourism and migration in the Mediterranean islands inevitably means encountering contradictions, ambivalences and disturbing juxtapositions, as mentioned in the Introduction. As the title highlights, this section deals with how the increasing number of Mediterranean contexts offers a variety of disparate and conflicting subjects, elements, objects, practices and processes that occur at the same time and in the same places, causing confusion and raising ethical and political questions that are difficult to find answers to. For this reason, this section has a title that unfolds by virtue of accumulation, suspending for now any attempt to harmonize its constituent terms.

Before investigating every possible reflection on how migrants, tourists and locals interact and meet on Lesvos or on Lampedusa, it is necessary to reiterate a firm point, still underestimated in the European public debate. Over the last thirty years or so, the Mediterranean has become a sea in which a massacre of terrible dimensions is being perpetrated, whose victims and perpetuators are well known. Every day, people die trying to cross the sea to reach the European coasts, embarking in makeshift boats from African countries bordering the Mediterranean. Counting the number of victims is not easy, but it is not impossible. The Italian journalist Gabriele Del Grande, first alone and then in collaboration with an ever-growing network of activists, created a database many years ago to collect all the confirmed information about people who have died attempting to cross the sea and who

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have transformed the Mediterranean into a real cemetery (https://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/). Thanks to this valuable documentation work, we are certain that between 1998 and 2016 at least 27,382 people died trying to cross the borders of 'Fortress Europe', including more than 4,000 victims in 2015 alone, the year of the so-called 'European refugee crisis', which focused attention on the tragedy that was taking place in the waters between Turkey and the Greek Aegean islands. Reading the reports that Del Grande published daily in the months immediately preceding my first research period on Kos still leaves me outraged today.

> 22/01/16: Shipwreck off the island of Kalolymnos. Only 26 of the 100 people on board rescued by the port police. 34 bodies are recovered from the sea. The other 30 passengers are dispersed.
> 22/01/16: A boat with 49 passengers on board is shipwrecked at night on the rocks of Farmakonissi. 40 manage to reach land, a child is saved at sea, but another 6 children and 2 women drown.
> 22/01/16: The Turkish Coast Guard rescues six shipwrecked people in the waters of Dydyma and fishes 3 dead bodies from the sea.
> 21/01/16: Shipwreck off the Turkish coast on the route between Izmir and Kos. 28 survivors rescued, the Turkish Coast Guard recovers 12 dead, approximately another 10 still missing.

This book could be filled with news like this, collected over the years by Del Grande. In the Conclusion, we will also see how the history of the family of Ibrahim, the Syrian refugee mentioned in the Introduction, is intertwined with one of the many shipwrecks that occurred on Kos. Yet, as I mentioned in the ethnographic sketch at the beginning of this chapter, daily life on Kos was still normal during that period, with a habituation similar to that of 2022, with its count of victims of the war in Ukraine. In fact, what is continuing to happen in the waters of the Mediterranean is equivalent to a bloody war. International organizations also provide data that confirms and actually aggravates what activists such as Del Grande have collected with great difficulty and dedication. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), has, since 2014, launched the 'Missing Migrants Projects' on a global scale (https://missingmigrants.iom.int/), with the aim of keeping track of all the people who have gone missing worldwide in the act of crossing a border to attempt international migration. From 2014 to 2022, at least 51,000 migrants died. Of these, to showcase the dramatic centrality of the Mediterranean in contemporary migratory routes, about 25,000 would have lost their lives in this region. Within the area, the most lethal is certainly the central Mediterranean, where more than 20,000 victims died, compared to 3,000 in the western Mediterranean and 2,000 in the eastern Mediterranean.

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Each year the IOM presents the number of victims together with the total number of attempts to cross the Mediterranean, noting how in the last five years (2018–2022) the dynamics have remained substantially stable. Every year between 150,000 and 200,000 people try to cross the Mediterranean in an international migration attempt. A percentage of these, between 30 and 40 percent every year, are stopped by the authorities before landing, while between 60 and 70 percent manage to (irregularly) reach Europe.

Beyond the relative reliability of this data, I would like to emphasize that in the analysis of the data provided by the coast guards and government authorities of the various states concerned, and in the simple (and in some ways aesthetically organized) way in which the IOM allows access to this information, the policies and institutions who could be held responsible for this massacre are not mentioned. With wars, it seems easier to be indignant and condemn the perpetuators of violence and crimes, but in the case of migration victims a fatalistic reading of the deaths at sea prevails. The shipwrecks occur 'naturally' due to the difficult conditions at sea. To avoid them it would be necessary to combat more stringently the criminal activities of those who organize the illegal Mediterranean crossings. This seems to be the only fully shared narrative in terms of European migration policies.

However, for many years now, activists and researchers have totally denounced the co-responsibility of European governments for the pathways of migrants in the Mediterranean, stressing how the irregularity of travel and the illegality of entry are a direct consequence of restrictive immigration policies and the now advanced processes of outsourcing control of the borders of the European Union. The (non)access policies implemented by the states generate the irregular and illegal practices involved in migrants seeking security and well-being (Ciabarri 2020). The repeated agreements that European countries have entered into with neighbouring countries to the south and east of the Mediterranean (the most striking of which are perhaps those with Turkey and Libya) are the result of a clear historical-political scenario in which migrations are managed using both security and humanitarian logics (Fassin 2010). To interpret the complex structures that guide state intentions and institutions to carry out rescue operations for people who are in danger due to the policies implemented by those same states and institutions, researchers have often resorted to certain categories of analysis. These include 'biopower', 'bare life' and 'permanent state of exception', based on the work of Michel Foucault and reworked at the end of the twentieth century by thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (Dei 2013: 45).

Foucault's thought (2004) is regarded as a fundamental element in the analysis of the 'biopolitical' dimensions of the current government of migration, where biopolitics refers to an advanced phase of disciplinary power in

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Figure 3.2. Moria camp, Lesvos, 2018. © Francesco Vietti

which the state and its institutions aim to exercise control over those aspects of life that used to be considered 'natural' and were excluded from the scope of politics (primarily, birth and death). Through the mediation of racism, biopolitics then becomes thanatopolitics, which is the sovereign right to let individuals and groups die as part of state policies.

Foucault's analysis of biopower was connected to migration issues through the intuition of the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who showed how Foucault's language allowed us to think about the condition of illegal migrants and *sans papiers* in the context of the growing number of non-citizens living without rights in every part of the world. The concrete and symbolic place into which this portion of humanity is forced is, for Agamben, 'the camp', whose essence lies 'in the materialisation of the state of exception and in the subsequent creation of a space in which bare life and the juridical rule enter into a threshold of indistinction' (Agamben 1998: 174).

The examples of 'camps' suggested some thirty years ago by Agamben are varied, from the Stadio delle Vittorie in Bari where Albanian refugees who arrived on the Apulian coast in the summer of 1991 were locked up before being deported (as mentioned in Chapter 1), to the *zones d'attente* in French airports to temporarily segregate asylum seekers. In the following years, many other cases have been added to this review of spaces marked by 'states of exception', well represented by the constellation of camps dedicated to the reception and permanent residence of people at the end of their sea

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crossings (Declich and Pitzalis 2021). But they are also for the identification and imprisonment of migrants now present throughout Europe, especially on the islands of the Mediterranean, such as Lesvos and Lampedusa.

Here, what Barak Kalir (2019) has effectively defined as *Departheid* materializes. This is a repressive political and bureaucratic regime that labels migrants as 'illegal', and therefore 'deportable', which is structured on a colonial and racializing vision of their otherness:

> The essence of Departheid is an exercise in spatial engineering based on the identification, separation, and differential treatment of illegalised migrants. Departheid's formal goal is to maintain a national territory vacated of illegalised migrants to be achieved by the deployment of legal, psychological, and physical violence at three key sites: first, at the point of entry, states fortify and protect borders to pre-emptively deny entrance to those who, it is suspected, will become illegalised migrants; second, inside their sovereign territory, states segregate and confine illegalised migrants to specially designated 'waiting zones' –neighbourhoods, camps, hot spots, prisons, and detention facilities – from where surveillance and controlled removals can be more easily managed; third, at the point of exit, states oblige illegalised migrants to 'voluntarily leave' or be forcefully deported. (Kalir 2019: 20)

The deportability of unwanted migrants responds to the logic and rhetoric of discourses on safety and decorum, categories structurally connected to the 'humanitarian reason' (Fassin 2010), that does not contradict patrols and rescues at sea, the limbo of reception centres where migrants are forced to remain uncertain about their future, or the securing of urban spaces through the confinement, subjection and control of their bodies.

We will focus on the segmentation regimes of 'closed' cities and the possible struggles for their 'opening up' in Part III of this volume. What I would like to point out for island spaces is that these policies of exclusion and confinement are implemented in places that, for the most part, have been designed and built for tourists. With migrants considered unwanted guests, they find themselves transiting or even staying for a long time (or indefinitely) in structures and portions of territory designed to accommodate the desired guests – tourists – which triggers the dynamics that we can perceive between the lines of communication from the mayor of Kos reported earlier. Negotiations relating to the use of space and resources and overlapping images and imagery relating to the safety and enjoyment of island life are part of a complex management of proximity and distance between the different guests of the local population.

As Jeremy Boissevain and Tom Selwyn (2004) have noted, the environment of the coastal areas of the Mediterranean and its islands has long been a space of negotiation and friction between the different groups that contend for the territory of the coastline. During the second half of the twentieth century, the coast was transformed by the different production and

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consumption needs of the market economy and global capitalism, which intervened by profoundly changing the landscape previously produced by the subsistence economy, which was mainly linked to fishing and the local use of other marine resources. The study by Pons, Rullán and Murray (2014) on the Balearic Islands clearly shows how the construction of accommodation to welcome tourists and the infrastructure to allow their access to the archipelago and their mobility on and between the islands has been the mechanism through which capitalist logic has been imposed on every aspect of the economic, political, social and cultural life of the islanders since the 1950s.

It is in these spaces that migrants end up finding themselves 'out of place'. They land on beaches privatized by bathing establishments, asking bathers for help or trying to disappear between bars and umbrellas. They are hosted, and very often held against their will, in hotels and resorts which are abandoned or hastily converted into 'extraordinary reception centres'. They wait in queues along docks and runways waiting to be transferred elsewhere, sometimes travelling on the same ships and planes as tourists, but segregated in compartments controlled by the police.

The local strategies put in place to manage migrants and tourists often attempt to segment spaces and times to try and limit or completely avoid encounters and interactions between the two groups. Anthropologist Ramona Lenz (2010) conducted an interesting ethnographic observation of these processes on Crete, one of the main Greek tourist destinations, which hosts millions of visitors every year, with about 40 percent of the local population working in the tourism sector. The island is also the destination of a significant seasonal immigration of workers from Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia and other Eastern European countries who find opportunities in tourism. Lenz focused in particular on the case of the 'Hotel Royal', located a few kilometres from the capital Heraklion, where, at the time of research, about 140 people were hosted, who were not allowed to leave the first floor of the building, to which they were confined, and were not allowed to use balconies or other common spaces.

> When we went upstairs we found three men sitting in the corridor playing cards. Two of them were wearing uniforms of the Greek navy. They kept an eye on the guests and made sure that no one escaped from the hotel. The third card player – like the rest of the hotel guests – was a refugee from Egypt or Palestine. The men had left Alexandria heading for the Italian coast. A week before, their ship had almost sunk in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Greek coastguards rescued the passengers and brought them to Crete. . . . [They] were temporarily accommodated in the 'Hotel Royal', which in low seasons serves as a detention camp. The same personnel that in summer had served the tourists now catered for the refugees, with the kitchen staff adjusting the menu to cook without pork. (Lenz 2010: 218)

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As Lenz notes in this case, we are often faced with hybrid, multifunctional structures, whose relative flexibility also provides the opportunity to experiment with radical forms of contestation and subversion for control and coercion by the constituted power, instead making them 'free zones' in which migrants can exercise their right of escape and self-determination. It should, therefore, not be surprising that most urban squatting in European cities gives 'refuge' to migrants and refugees in search of a home by housing them in ex-hotels. One of the most significant of these places is the City Plaza Hotel in the Exarcheia district of Athens. Between 2016 and 2019, it was the best-known place for migrants to squat in Greece to make up for the shortfall in the state reception system during the 'refugee crisis' of 2015. The City Plaza, whose occupants themselves provocatively defined it as 'the best hotel in Europe', hosted over 2,000 migrants for three years, becoming an example of 'infrastructure of solidarity', intertwining its activities with those of other initiatives implemented by social movements in the neighbourhood. The activists' vision was to support migrants in this occupation, and for City Plaza to become part of a broader attempt to challenge the logic of neoliberal capitalism. By hosting migrants in transit, the hotel was also opposed to the policies of gentrification and tourism of the Exarcheia district, which had a long history of anarchist and libertarian struggles, and which recently became the subject of real estate speculation and 'redevelopment' (Raimondi 2019).

Among the different 'guests' of Mediterranean hotels there are therefore not only migrants and tourists. For City Plaza, an important role was played by activists and researchers, such as Valeria Raimondi herself, who became part of the community of residents of the hotel for many months. For Crete, Ramona Lenz pointed out that some of the 'rooms' available on the island were occupied by Greek students off-site and by internationally mobile students thanks to the Erasmus project. This consideration allows me to recall an important methodological element for this part of the book. The reflections that I have proposed so far and the analyses that I will present in the next chapters have matured through the experience of a series of 'summer schools'.

Between 2018 and 2021, I played different roles in several summer programmes: I was a post-doctoral researcher in the VIII edition of the summer school 'Cultures, Migrations, Borders' (MigBord) organized in Lesvos by the University of the Aegean under the direction of the Greek anthropologist Evthimios Papataxiarchis. I collaborated at the VIII School of Higher Education in Sociology of the Territory organized in Lampedusa by the Italian Association of Sociology and the University of Catania. Finally, I co-organized, with my colleague Rachel Radmilli, the first two editions of the summer school 'Mobility and Heritage in the Mediterranean' (Meditherity),

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first in Malta and then in Lampedusa itself, a summer programme of the University of Milan Bicocca and the University of Malta. These allowed me to develop a circularity of knowledge, benefiting from dialogue with scholars with great experience on the subject of mobility in the Mediterranean. Their research was fundamental in outlining my work and then sharing it with young researchers. The results of these analyses have provided the basis for the development of further research projects, such as the case study conducted by Gaspare Messana (2021) on hospitality, migration and tourism in Sardinia.

Together with these colleagues and students, I found myself a temporary guest of Lesvos and Lampedusa, sleeping for a few days in the same hotel facilities where tourists stayed, eating at restaurants and tavernas next to volunteers and operators of humanitarian organizations, and also resting on the beaches and bathing in the same sea where migrants had landed. We were animated by reasons of study and research, and by a common sense of solidarity, but for the locals we were just a special kind of tourist with a special interest in migration issues.

From these brief notes, it is clear to me that Mediterranean mobility scholars cannot, in any way, represent themselves as an external element to their object of study, but as an integral part of the 'ethnoscape' on which they intend to reflect, with all the ethical and epistemological consequences that this implication entails. In my opinion, this also means recognizing the indissolubility of the researching and teaching activities along with the close connection, as we will see in Part III, with the public engagement of the researcher-teacher. In other words, research should always translate into a coherent educational effort, and teaching (in its perennial interweaving of teachings and learnings) poses itself as a research tool and as a form of participatory observation (Mills and Spencer 2011).

In this perspective, participating in a summer school means practising an anthropology of experience or, as Victor Turner's (1986) formulation proposed, understanding anthropology 'as experience'. The influential Scottish anthropologist has rightly argued that anthropology is doubly rooted in experience: that of others and that of the researcher himself, who lives through the observation and ethnographic participation in fieldwork. This is an experience that will have more value, according to Turner, as it will be improved by fully expressing its formative and transformative meaning. The attempt to combine research with a proposal of 'itinerant' teaching, carried out directly in the places of study, in which the participants (whether they are teachers or students) reflect together on the meaning of their experience, therefore seems to translate into practice the link evoked by the ancient Indo-European etymological root of the term 'experience', *per-, from which the Anglo-Saxon form 'to do', that is 'to go, to travel' (Turner 1986:

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35), was also derived. The experience as a journey: a recurring theme in the history of human civilizations and the assumption of any anthropological analysis of the encounters between researchers, migrants and tourists.

Departheid and 'Voluntourism' in Lesvos

Skala Sykamnias is no more than a handful of houses and boats hidden in a picturesque cove on the northern coast of Lesvos. There are fewer than 150 residents in the village and, until a few years ago, they lived on fishing, olive cultivation and tourism. Walking among the restaurants that are concentrated around the marina, you cannot help but notice an apparently dissonant element of the local landscape, but which is actually consistent with what has happened here in recent years. The fishing nets are wrapped in large white tarps marked by the blue symbol of UNHCR. Cats sleep on them and wait patiently for the remains of the tourists' meals, enjoying the summer sun.

This tiny fragment of Lesvos's *refugee-scape* would go unnoticed had one not been informed about the role that this fishing village played during the so-called 'refugee crisis'. In 2015 alone, among the approximately one million people who arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Somalia and other countries, half of them passed through the island of Lesvos, and among these more than 200,000 landed in a year on the small beach of Skala. In addition to asylum seekers, there was an equally significant flow of volunteers, activists, doctors, humanitarian workers, journalists, photographers, politicians, researchers and, consequently, objects and money that had a disruptive effect on the small local community. In the words of Evthimios Papataxiarchis, an anthropologist at the University of the Aegean who, since the 1980s, has chosen Skala as his ethnographic field, 'they changed everything' (Papataxiarchis 2016).

However, it would obviously be a mistake to believe that, before 2015, Skala Sykamnias was a timeless village linked to the centuries-old traditional lifestyles of a community deeply rooted in the territory. On the contrary, today's Skala, as well as the rest of Lesvos and many other islands of the Mediterranean and the rest of the world, is the result of a long history of exchanges and relations on a regional and international scale.

Lesvos is one of the Greek islands of the northern Aegean. With an area of 1,633 sq. km and about 85,000 inhabitants (of which 38,000 are concentrated in the capital Mytilene), it is the third largest Greek island by area and the fifth by population. A sea strait of only 10 km separates it from the east coast of Turkey. Thanks to charter flights to Mytilene airport, since the 1990s

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FIGURE 3.3. UNHCR map of Lesvos. © UNHCR

the island has become a destination for both domestic and international tourism, with around 200–250,000 visitors arriving every year.

As shown by the interesting documents preserved in the Cultural Centre of the village of Plomari, which I visited early on during the summer school of 2018, Lesvos was for centuries part of the network of trade routes that branched out from the large nearby port of Izmir in Turkey. In particular, the island played an important role in the production and sale of soap, whose quality was guaranteed by the oil obtained from the olive groves that covered a large part of Lesvos. This specialization of the island economy was already established around the sixteenth century, but reached its peak at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time, the island grew around ten million olive trees to contribute to Lesvos's production of about 25,000 tons of olives every year, exporting 10,000 tons of oil and 4,000 tons of soap throughout the Mediterranean and Europe. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the village of Plomari alone, there were twelve soap factories and a dozen oil mills. The boom of the island's olive economy was accompanied by the increasingly close relations between Lesvos and the nearby coasts of present-day Turkey. A strong seasonal migration of workers between the island and the continent was established and a series of new urban centres were established on the east coast of Lesvos facing the mainland (Sifneos 2004).

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As Alexis, a local historian and tour guide at the Plomari Soap Museum, told us enthusiastically:

> At that time, the steamships loaded with olive oil and soap sailed continuously from Lesvos and headed both east, towards Istanbul, and west, mainly en route to the port of Marseille. The rich traders of Lesvos made a fortune and you can still see some of their villas here on the island. Their wealth was due to advances in technology that quickly allowed a mechanization and industrialization of both the production and transport process. All of Lesvos transformed into an intensive monoculture of the olive tree and local entrepreneurs showed an extraordinary vitality and ability to make business agreements with the different powers of the area for decades, which essentially succeeded in unifying the western and eastern Mediterranean through the circulation of their products, from France to the Ottoman Empire, up to the Russian ports of the Black Sea.

However, this 'golden age' of commerce was destined to come to a traumatic end in the early twentieth century. The ruins of the soap factories of Plomari today represent a direct trace of the series of crises and wars that destroyed the trade routes that had made Lesvos's fortune. First the so-called Balkan Wars (1912–1913), then the First World War and finally and most importantly the Greek-Turkish War, which began in 1919 and ended with the dramatic and almost total destruction of the port of Izmir in September 1922.

The consequences of this last conflict had a huge impact on Lesvos, shaping its long-term history and laying the foundations for a total reconfiguration of the island society. To understand the meaning of this transformation and its legacy to Lesvos today, let us now return to the small port and beaches of Skala Sykamnias and observe the ancient little church at the entrance to the port. It is in fact a very well-known building, especially among tourists, who come here to admire it for its legend. The local writer Stratis Myrivilis (1892–1969) included it in his novel *The Mermaid Madonna* (Η Παναγία ῃ Γοργόνα) of 1949 (Myrivilis 1959). The story refers to the events of a ship captain who, before disappearing into thin air, leaves a strange painting depicting the Madonna with a fish tail in the church. This is a hybrid creature, which combines Christian iconography and Greek myth, and which the locals begin to venerate as the protector of fishermen. Thanks to the spread of the novel, the Mermaid Madonna has been elevated into the real world and although there is no similar image in the church of Skala, the local souvenir shops sell countless versions of the icon. But there is another important connection between the novel and the village's mobility history to do with the Russian-Turkish War and its subsequent migrations. In fact, Myrivilis's work develops around a crucial event for the island: the dramatic arrival and difficult settlement of the population from Anatolia, transferred from Turkey due to the population exchanges established by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Of the one million

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refugees who then moved from Turkey to Greece, about 300,000 transited from Lesvos, largely continuing to other destinations in Greece, but some stopping to reside permanently on the island (Hirschon 2001). In the fiction imagined by Myrivilis, the Anatolian refugees who arrive in Skala entrust themselves to the Mermaid Madonna by invoking her as their patroness, who would help them on their own path of transformation into islanders.

Although this is a fantastic figure resulting from the imagination of a writer, the vocation of the Mermaid Madonna as protector of fishermen and migrants to help them found a new island community closely recalls the real transformation process of the cult for the Madonna of Porto Salvo (Our Lady of Safe Port) that I will analyse in Chapter 4 by taking into consideration the context of Lampedusa.

In Lesvos, it is interesting to note that the memory of the arrival of the Anatolian refugees in the 1920s resurfaced a century later, when the population of the island was faced with the large migratory flows from Syria and other Asian countries via the Turkish escape route. The place where these two migration phases involving Lesvos symbolically meet is on the opposite side of the island from Skala. On the promenade of the capital Mytilene, where the Muslim population of the city lived before moving to Turkey in 1923, the monument to the Mother from Asia Minor was inaugurated in 1984. The statue depicts a woman with her three children who have just arrived from Anatolia, and is located along the road that leads from the capital to the camp of Moria. It has become the ideal theatre for manifestations that recall its meaning in relation to current migrations. In September 2017, for example, activists from various non-governmental organizations organized a sit-in around the monument to ask for the release of the *Iuventa*, a boat used to rescue migrants at sea, which ended up being seized in Italy under the initiative of the Prosecutor's Office of Trapani, who accused the crew of aiding and favouring illegal immigration. On that occasion, the statue of the Mother and her children was adorned with life jackets like those worn by migrants who today try to reach Lesvos from the coasts of Turkey and who, as we have seen, often lose their lives crossing this short and dangerous stretch of sea.

The memory of the historical migration experience from Asia Minor, and the condition of marginality and alienation experienced by refugees after arriving on the island, also emerges from the testimonies of the 2015 refugees. They have become the most famous inhabitants of Skala Sykamnias and of Lesvos, having become symbols of the 'European refugee crisis' and the hospitality shown by the island populations of the Mediterranean towards migrants. I refer to the so-called 'grandmothers of Lesvos', that is Efstratia Mavrapidou, her cousin Maritsa Mavrapidou and her friend Militsa Kamvisi, three village elders immortalized by the local photographer

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Lefteris Partsalis in an image that portrays them sitting next to each other on a bench nursing a Syrian baby who had just arrived on the island with its young mother. The three women, who were more than eighty years of age, had all lived the family experience of immigration from Asia Minor and in their many interviews have explicitly connected the difficulties experienced by girls with their desire to help, as much as possible, the refugees who landed right outside their homes. In particular, Militsa, who in 2016 was officially nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize to represent the entire island population, recalled how her mother had arrived in Lesvos at the age of seventeen and had met her future husband on the boat in which she landed on the island (Biella 2017).

Partsalis's photograph had an extraordinary impact on the international media for its ability to represent a classic Greek tourist image (the elderly women of the village sitting chatting on a bench, all dressed in black) while evoking at the same time a *topos* of the humanitarian approach to migration: the act of taking care of weak, helpless subjects, who must be saved and nourished, just like a new-born. The sociologist Marxiano Melotti (2018), while examining Lesvos and Lampedusa, wondered about the complex link between the production and circulation of images related to migration and the motivation that drives tourists to go to the places where migration processes take place and leave traces of their dramas. This category reflects both the most tragic aspects (shipwrecks, deaths at sea) and those linked to the values of hospitality, solidarity, heroism and hope. Melotti sees how, to a certain extent, the presence of migrants in island contexts known for being places of pleasure and leisure (and therefore with their bizarre scenery and staging of the typical and characteristic) has the effect of offering tourists a new 'experience of authenticity', reviving the 'initiatory' meaning of the journey as a moment of detachment, change and discovery of otherness. In Melotti's analysis, the connection between the highly symbolic figure of migrant children (who are saved, as in the case of the new-born in the arms of the three elderly women of Lesvos, or victims reduced to lifeless bodies, as in the case of the little Alan Kurdi) and the spatial context of the beach, with its stratified symbolism, assumes a particular importance.

> [Migrants] offer a new pre-postmodern kind of authenticity that helps tourism preserve its function. Cynically and paradoxically, the Bodrum beach where little Alan [Kurdi] was found, the islands of Chios and Lesvos where migrants arrive on inflatable rafts, and the coasts of Sicily and its islands where their corpses are periodically washed up are revitalised tourist spaces where the authenticity of the drama overcomes any staged authenticity. Distress, despair, and death reshape the otherness of the tourist space and experience. . . . In this context, the image of the corpse of Alan marked a turning point. It reaffirmed the strong liminality of the beaches as magical spaces where life and death meet: an ancient view dating to the time of Homer. The

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> child acted as a connector between worlds, according to another idea deeply rooted in ancient Greek culture, where children were regarded as privileged mediators between the world of life and the world of death. . . . The photo rekindled the meaning of the beach as a special experiential space, overcoming its use as a banal tourist spot. In an initiatory view of tourism, the presence of death is important: it defines the temporary detachment from culture and the entrance into the marginal phase of otherness, one that is supposed to provide new knowledge and transform or even create experience. (Melotti 2018: 4)

The beach is in fact a liminal space, which marks the transition between water and land, but also metaphorically between what is unknown and what is known, always acting as a meeting place. In the Greek and Mediterranean epic tradition, one of the most significant episodes linked to the beach is the encounter between Odysseus and Nausicaa. In Book VI of the *Odyssey*, the young girls of the Feaci cohort flee when they see the 'refugee' Odysseus, a victim of a shipwreck, naked and exhausted from the journey. Nausicaa, the daughter of King Alcinoo, does not show any fear for the man whom the gods have brought into her land, and she offers him full hospitality among her people.

In contemporary media representations, similar scenes occur today on the beaches of Lesvos when refugees are taken to safety and welcomed by volunteers and operators of international organizations who, especially between 2015 and 2016, arrived on the island as part of a large international mobilization. In a short period of time, thousands of people, mostly from the countries of central and northern Europe, reached Lesvos to help refugees, some joining campaigns launched on social media by tourists and ex-pats who have lived on the island for a long time, while others were moved by the images broadcast globally by journalists and activists present on the island (Guribye and Mydland 2018). For many of them, the encounter with refugees took place on the beaches of Skala Sykamnias, during one of the many landings that year and later. It is interesting to note that the intersection of gazes between migrants and volunteers has been immortalized in thousands of photographs, not only in images produced by the journalists there, but also by the volunteers and migrants themselves. The moment of landing on the beach in fact marks a crucial moment of the migratory journey and symbolically condenses numerous meanings, both for the migrants themselves, who document the success of their journey and let their circle of contacts know that they are safe, and for the people who assist them at the time of their arrival. In the words of Katja, a Swedish volunteer from a Danish NGO who spent three months in Lesvos in the summer of 2016:

> When the people who had just arrived asked me to take pictures with their mobile phones, it was always a very exciting moment, because I knew that those shots would

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> make their relatives and friends, who were waiting for some news, cry with relief. I am also very proud that some of the migrants asked me to take a selfie together. I keep these images as a precious memory of the experience I have had, as proof that I have really been there and that I have seen and done things that I would never have imagined and that seem almost unreal compared to the everyday life I live at university. I am still in contact with some of the refugees I met via WhatsApp and Facebook and we continue to exchange news and photos. I often use these images to make my friends and social media contacts aware that we must not forget what is still happening in Lesvos and the Mediterranean today.

Through facial expressions and body language, selfies allow refugees to communicate their state of joy and satisfaction in reaching their goal, and thus celebrate being there, right at that moment, in their desired place after so much effort and suffering. Lilie Chouliaraki (2017) has analysed how the international media has made use of these selfies, often reusing and disseminating these forms of self-representation of refugees according to ambivalent ethical and aesthetic logics. On the one hand, the category of 'selfies on the shore' in the area of global communication can 'give a face' to migrants, offering viewers the impression of a possible 'face-to-face' meeting with the protagonists of otherwise anonymous 'migratory flows'. On the other hand, though, leaving the 'horizontal' circulation of social media to enter the 'vertical' circulation of professional journalistic platforms, these images can be reassembled, re-signified and re-moralized to create narratives to induce annoyance and suspicion in viewers. In this kind of discourse, attention is no longer given to what is represented in the selfies, but to the very action of shooting them and therefore to the possession of smartphones by migrants and to them being not only refugees in need of help, but also social media users.

To reflect more deeply on the link between volunteering to help refugees and tourism, the particular experience that has been defined as 'voluntourism', it can be useful to analyse what happened in Molyvos, another town in the north of Lesvos, located thirteen kilometres west of Skala. Molyvos has 2,500 inhabitants and was the first tourist resort in Lesvos; the first hotels were opened there in the 1960s and its historic centre was placed under architectural and cultural protection. Today Molyvos continues to attract domestic and international visitors for its great fortress and for the many hotels and restaurants which are always very crowded. Among these, all the tourist guides point out The Captain's Table as particularly 'characteristic' of a 'typical' taverna that offers all the classics of local fish cuisine. But the peculiarities of the restaurant go far beyond the gastronomic dimension. First of all, the owner of the taverna is Melinda McRostie, a woman of Australian origin, born in Melbourne, who arrived in Lesvos with her mother and sisters at the age of seven. Melinda's mother had come to Europe to change

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her life, and after several stays on the Greek island ended up marrying a local fisherman in 1972. The girls grew up on the island for a few years, then moved to Athens to continue their studies. Melinda began work at a travel agency, accompanying tourists on tours of the Greek islands. Finally, in 1987, she returned to Lesvos to open a restaurant with her mother and to take advantage of the island's growing attraction for tourists. The history of The Captain's Table underwent a decisive turning point in 2015. In the first weeks of the crisis, Melinda and her family offered support to arriving migrants, providing food and making the taverna spaces available. Within a short time, thanks to the owner's proficiency in English, the restaurant became the reference point for the many international volunteers and NGO workers who arrived on the island. Finally, in the autumn of that year, Melinda herself decided to create her own organization, called the Starfish Foundation. Their group of volunteers has a wide network of donors, consisting mainly of tourists who, after eating at the restaurant, decide to support its humanitarian commitment even after having returned home by sending money and material goods (clothes, toys, basic necessities) for refugees. This was true, for example, of Helmuth, a German pensioner from Hamburg, whom I met in Molyvos when he and his wife and local Greek friends were celebrating his fortieth stay in Lesvos:

> I came here for the first time in 1977 and have come back every year, except for two. First alone, then with my wife, then with the children, the grandchildren and now that they are older again only with my wife. It all started because in Hamburg I was the German teacher of Stratos, a man from Skala, who had immigrated to Germany for work. When Stratos came back here to Lesvos and opened his hotel, he invited me to come to the island for a holiday. I followed his advice and . . . I think I liked it, since I'm still here today! In forty years I have seen this place change a lot. At the beginning there was only a hotel and a restaurant, and see now. . . . I will remember the summer of 2015 forever, with all those people who arrived on the beach, every day. My wife and I helped as we could. She, poor thing, couldn't stop crying, and then, once we got back to Germany, we also involved our friends and acquaintances and sent here to Lesvos seventy bags of help, clothes, shoes, everything that could be needed. The following year we did not come, because it did not seem right and we were still too shaken by what we had seen, but then from 2017 we decided to come back because they needed us here . . . I mean the locals who live thanks to tourism and without which tourists cannot carry on.

Reading reviews on TripAdvisor, some tourists consider the commitment of Melinda and her family to refugees to be complementary to the activity of the restaurant, a sort of 'plus' that increases the appreciation and loyalty of customers. For others, however, it generates conflict, arousing criticism of the service provided by the restaurant staff who seem to 'think more of migrants than tourists'.

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In recent years, the Starfish Foundation has contributed to various projects that question the boundary of invisibility that separates tourists and migrants, instead creating opportunities for encounter and exchange that would challenge and transgress this regime of separation of time and space. Among these, the initiative developed by the director Philip Brink and the photographer Marieke van der Velden was particularly interesting. In Molyvos, in collaboration with the Starfish Foundation, they arranged for twelve tourists who were staying in their hotel and twelve migrants who had just arrived on the island to converse on different topics, guaranteeing mutual understanding thanks to the presence of an interpreter. The dialogues were filmed and became a twenty-minute documentary entitled 'The Island of All Together'. On a bench, Otis, a nineteen-year-old student from Rotterdam, and Rashad, a fifty-year-old baker from Damascus, Kea, a twenty-two-year-old German employee, and Mayada, a forty-three-year-old Syrian hairdresser, as well as Archie and Wissam, both six years old, one on holiday on the island with his grandparents and the other fleeing to Europe with his parents, sat side by side. Their conversations focus on disparate topics, touching on numerous questions related to past experiences (Who are you? What did you study? What's your job?), to modalities of travel (How did you get to Lesvos? Who are you travelling with?) and aspirations for the future (Where would you like to be in five years? What would you like to be when you grow up?). Often their agreements are manifested, starting with sharing their opinions and experiences relating to minute aspects of daily life, showing, in the interpretation of the authors, 'what happens when we take time to sit down and talk with each other instead of about each other' (Brink and van der Velden 2016). After finishing their work on the documentary, the authors continued to follow the development of the stories started on the benches of Lesvos. While some couples did not pursue further contact, for others the dialogue continued through social networks even after their departure from the island, and for some friendship was born, favoured by the fact that migrants had obtained refugee status in the same country of residence as the tourists.

In recent years, more than 1,500 volunteers have assisted in carrying out the activities of the Starfish Foundation and it is interesting to note that this reality, to distinguish its work from that of the many NGOs who have been criticized for having arrived on the island 'from outside' without any knowledge of the place, has to present itself as an initiative 'started by locals' and continues today to meet the needs of refugees previously supported 'by international NGOs that have now left the island'. In recent years, the presence of international organizations on the island has, in fact, significantly decreased compared to the two-year period of 2015–2016, when the huge presence of thousands of 'volunteer tourists' also attracted the attention of researchers on this particular phenomenon.

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The scientific literature on forms of 'voluntourism' involving international travel and conducted using holiday time is now very rich. Although these practices have long been considered simply in terms of 'international volunteering', interpreting them while taking into account their tourism component allows a deepening of the analysis, while also contributing to the reflection on the so-called 'moral turn' of tourism, a phenomenon that embraces a whole series of hybrid forms of tourism variously defined as ethical, equitable and responsible, since they also combine leisure with social commitment in favour of local communities, disadvantaged groups and the environment.

Federica Letizia Cavallo and Giovanna Di Matteo (2021), while observing Lesvos, consider it pertinent to adopt 'voluntourism' as an interpretative key since:

> many volunteers openly declare that the time spent in Lesvos corresponds to their holidays. Moreover, during their free time, they tend to explore the island, embracing tourist practices, motivations and destinations (just as happens with more consolidated forms of volunteer tourism). In addition, we found that some volunteers chose Lesvos (and not other European migrant crisis areas, such as Calais, to mention just one) partly because of local touristic pull factors (and a few NGOs used these factors to recruit volunteers). In general, many have remarked upon the attractiveness of the island, referring to natural and cultural heritage prominent in a consolidated tourist imaginary. (Cavallo and Di Matteo 2021: 22)

Estimating how many NGOs and volunteers have worked in Lesvos in recent years is not easy, considering that, especially in the early period of the crisis, many groups did not register with local authorities and acted informally, remaining invisible to statistics. However, several sources agree that from 2015 onwards, over 100 non-governmental organizations and at least 12,000 volunteers have carried out activities on the island. By calculating approximate figures, this data allows us an overall idea of a presence that has been assessed ambivalently over time. A first reading to highlight how voluntourism has been perceived positively could have a formative value for volunteers, enrichment in terms of intercultural contacts for the island community and concrete support for migrants. However, this was quickly accompanied by another critical tone that highlighted that NGOs and volunteers often acted inadequately, lacking professionalism and the ability to collaborate with local interlocutors, reproducing (perhaps unconsciously) a neocolonial type of logic through humanitarian language and contributing to the economic mechanisms of what Anja Franck defined as 'disaster capitalism' (2018). The Swedish geographer noted that in Lesvos, as had already happened in South-East Asia following the tsunami in 2004 and in other contexts marked by social, political, economic or environmental disasters,

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the international humanitarian industry intervened, replacing the informal local solidarity networks with an organizational system that created a sort of spatial and economic 'bubble' in which volunteers and NGO operators found themselves working in a parallel reality to that of the residents. Franck associates this system with a humanitarian 'branding' campaign in which every object, structure and person who arrived on the island carrying the logos and symbols of different humanitarian organizations transformed Lesvos into a kind of 'theme park' for humanitarian emergency relief (Franck 2018: 201). But as Anja Franck herself makes clear, this obviously does not mean to deny the efforts that humanitarian workers and volunteers have made in Lesvos (and in other crisis contexts) in an attempt to save lives and restore a little humanity and dignity to the way in which Europe has handled the so-called 'refugee crisis'. However, it must be acknowledged that such 'solidarity encounters' between volunteers, refugees and islanders are entangled with the 'neo-liberal and predatory logics that underpin the European border regime' (ibid.: 204).

In light of these considerations, it is particularly interesting to conduct a spatial analysis of the presence and places of action and meeting of 'volunteer tourists' in Lesvos. Cavallo and Di Matteo (2021) applied the model of Henry Lefebvre ([1974] 1994) for the methods of production of space in Lesvos, and have mapped the places on the island that have been produced in these years by the relationships and social exchanges of the volunteers who arrived there. In fact, there are many places that volunteers and NGO professionals have built together by carrying out their activities and interacting with each other and with their interlocutors (migrants and inhabitants of the island).

To offer some further ethnographic insights into such spaces, I would now like to move to the south of the island, and in particular to the capital Mytilene. As shown in the UNHCR map reproduced earlier, I retrace the same itineraries as the refugees who landed on the northern coasts of the island but were then forced to travel to the reception facilities located on the opposite side of the island. First on foot, using local public transport or benefiting from passage offered by residents, and later thanks to the transport network organized by NGOs, hundreds of thousands of migrants continued their journey from Molyvos and Skala to what were the two large transit camps (which often turned into an indefinite stay) set up near the island's capital: Kara Tepe (located 2.5 km from Mytilene), managed by the municipality of Lesvos, and above all Moria (7.5 km from the city), the largest field of the so-called European Union 'hotspot' system controlled by the European authorities and the Greek government. An in-depth discussion on the 'Moria Registration and Identification Camp' is beyond the scope of this chapter. The living conditions within this highly militarized refugee camp, surrounded by bars, metal nets and barbed wire, were reminiscent of

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an open-air prison. It was repeatedly defined by human rights organizations as shameful, intolerable and inhumane. Of all the open European hotspots in the Mediterranean area, Moria was undoubtedly the one in which asylum seekers were forced to live in the worst conditions in terms of crowding and with the least access to essential services (Human Rights Watch 2019). Equipped with tents and containers for up to 3,000 people, Moria has hosted over 20,000 migrants, thus expanding beyond its own fences and eventually extending into the surrounding olive groves, now known as the 'Jungle of Moria' due to the similarity with the informal settlement of Calais, in France. As noted by the Greek anthropologist Katerina Rozakou (2019), one of the researchers who negotiated access to the field to observe its operation more closely between 2015 and 2016, Moria has, for years, represented one of the most emblematic pieces of that 'Departheid' regime through which Europe governs migration by implementing measures of oppression and management of the spatial segregation of migrants (Kalir 2019). The camp was further subject to violence and devastation in September 2020 during the pandemic period. Following protests and clashes arising from the even more ferocious conditions of segregation that refugees were subjected to in Moria due to the lockdown, the camp was almost totally destroyed by a serious fire. Rozakou's research experience within the Moria camp, and her daily attendance with officials and operators of humanitarian organizations, is particularly valuable because it allows us to reflect on the complex positioning not only of 'volunteer tourists' but also of 'volunteer ethnographers' who, while explaining their critical stance, through their role as researchers become part of the 'borderscape' they are studying. As Rozakou lucidly writes:

> I was not merely assisting border-crossers to find their way through the Moria maze and reach freedom as soon as possible, but I was undoubtedly exercising sovereign power as a citizen engaged in bordering practices. I was not solely studying the governance of the 'migration crisis', but I had acquired an active role in governing it myself. . . . I am acutely aware of the complicity of my anthropological project and this realisation has made me aware of another risk that even critical border and migration studies carry. This is the burden of epistemological complicity with the very phenomena they seek to scrutinise. (Rozakou 2019: 78)

Very different from the horrible 'walled camp' in Moria, the so-called 'PIKPA Open camp' was created in 2012 on the road from Mytilene to the international airport of Lesvos. Located on a former campsite once used for holidays, PIKPA consisted of about twenty wooden houses with tents and rooms in a brick building. Over 30,000 people were accommodated during the eight years of activity of the 'open camp', mostly migrants in a particular psycho-physical condition of vulnerability, as well as families with

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children. It was a 'bottom-up' initiative, created by a group of citizens of Lesvos with Greek and international volunteers who established the NGO Lesvos Solidarity in 2014. The PIKPA camp was dismantled by Greek police in October 2020, but the same NGO, since 2016, has launched the Mosaik Support Centre in the centre of Mytilene, providing language classes, educational activities for children and legal support for asylum seekers. Also in 2016, the Asklipios Medical Centre was established, providing medical and psychological assistance to both migrants and inhabitants of Mytilene. In order to support its activities and offer work opportunities for refugees who have been in Lesvos for a longer period of time, Lesvos Solidarity has launched several initiatives aimed at visitors to the island: tourists, volunteers, activists, researchers, journalists. With this perspective, they opened the NAN restaurant in Mytilene, which, shortly before the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis, had employed fourteen migrants, mostly women, offering dishes from different culinary traditions.

I would like to briefly focus on the activities of the Safe Passage Workshop, launched in 2017. The aim of the workshop is to recycle some of the thousands of life jackets worn by refugees when landing but which are abandoned on the beaches and then accumulate in landfills, the most famous of which is near Molyvos and has been informally called 'the cemetery of life jackets'. Journalists, researchers and 'volunteers' can visit this site during their tours of the island (Cavallo and Di Matteo 2021). Jackets are used to create bags, backpacks and other items that can be purchased by sending a donation to Lesvos Solidarity. The process of transforming an object so dense with meaning related to the life and death of migrants into everyday objects used in other contexts raises many questions, to which a further significant aspect must be added. It is the refugees themselves who are transforming the life jackets; thanks to their skills as tailors and other skills learnt on special training courses, they are thus able to work during their stay in Lesvos. This is a commitment full of ambivalence, as the words of Azfaar, an Afghan refugee who worked as a tailor at the Mosaik Support Centre, clearly show:

> I came here wearing one of these life jackets. When I cut the straps, sew them together and turn them into something different, I experience mixed feelings. On the one hand, I am happy to have this occupation, and I hope that these objects will help to make other people around the world understand and remember the dangers that I and many others have faced during our travels. On the other hand, I'm sad, because it's like I know who wore these life jackets, I know how many people died in the sea between Turkey and Lesvos.

What happens in the Safe Passage Workshop can be read, in my opinion, within the broader picture of the multiple reconfigurations that objects and traces, which are in some ways the 'relics' of migrants, undergo under the

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Figure 3.4. Life jackets, from the landfill to the workshop, Lesvos, 2018. © Francesco Vietti

pressure of art, the market and musealization: they are forces that often overlap and become confused; suffice it to say that it was from the same landfill that Lesvos Solidarity's recycled life jackets come from that the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei took the iconic orange life jackets for his well-known pieces of art realized in Germany and other European countries, and the traders of Molyvos recovered the raw materials to create the small souvenir boats that they sell as souvenirs to tourists.

The multiple transfigurations of the Lesvos life jackets are an example of the multiple lives that migrant objects washed up from the Mediterranean Sea have known in recent years. As we will see better in Chapter 4, even before the 'refugee crisis' of 2015, in Lampedusa activists, researchers and local administrators debated the fate of migrant objects found on the wrecked boats near the island. It was first considered 'waste' and therefore to be 'disposed of', but by the intuition and will of a group of Lampedusa activists they were partly recovered, with the idea of saving them from destruction and making a testimony to the migrations across the Mediterranean and the lost lives of refugees. The subsequent projects developed in collaboration with researchers and conservative professionals to turn these objects into a real museum, while at the same time initiating the study and restoration of them, were soon interrupted by the impossibility of reaching an agreement

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on the ethical and political meaning of this operation, which would necessarily have required embracing the policies of representation that went beyond the 'bare life' of objects (Gatta 2016).

On the other hand, the issue of the patrimonialization of objects that can express the dimensions of the material culture of migration has touched many other contexts of the Mediterranean. In Zarzis, Tunisia, Mohsen Lihidheb has for years collected objects on the beaches around his city from the boats of emigrants departing for Lampedusa. He transformed his collection into a Museum of the Memory of the Sea. According to this extraordinary former post office employee's testimony, motivated by a strong civil and ecological conscience, walking on the beach every morning to collect clothes, plastic bottles and shoes has become, over time, a kind of pilgrimage and a spiritual ritual to remember those who had left, and who in some cases had lost their lives at sea (Cimoli 2015).

The Zarzis museum is an open-air installation of objects arranged to occupy the internal and external space of the Mohsen Lihidheb house. In this sense, it is an ephemeral memorial, made of monuments and sculptures destined to collapse, erode and be dismantled. It is an educational place, where tourists as well as young people from local schools come to participate in art and ecological activities and workshops. They often resonate with the poems that the curator-artist-activist has written to connect the Museum of the Memories of the Sea with Lampedusa, addressing his verses directly to those who, on the opposite shore of the sea, find themselves in the same condition.

> On the other side of the sea / you bury the bodies of my brothers
> found floating on the waves, / poor Harraga victims.
> I know, I know what you feel / It's hard, it's very hard, my friend,
> to witness this infamy

Migrants' belongings therefore become 'relational objects' in some way, capable of crossing the sea and opening a dialogue between distant people. This ability to connect often transcends the materiality of the objects themselves to embrace a strong spiritual dimension. As the anthropologist Cristiana Giordano (2018) noted for an assembly of objects recovered from a shipwreck and placed by a Tunisian activist and artist on the altar of a deconsecrated church in Syracuse, Sicily:

> The installation consigns to another order of presence the traces of those who survived the crossing or died. It allows lost and unpaired objects to bear witness to those whose stories of life and death are not documented in the state archive, which translates experience into categories of recognition and erases the traces of the shipwrecks. (Giordano 2018: 64)

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In the next chapter, about Lampedusa, I will follow this route to analyse the intersection between migration, tourism and the processes of reconfiguration of the local Marian cult for the Madonna of Porto Salvo (Our Lady of Safe Port), patron saint of the island and of fishermen, who was recently consecrated by Pope Francis as 'protector of migrants'.

Note

A previous reflection about my fieldwork in Lesvos appeared in Italian with the title 'WELCOME TO LESVOS! Incontri di confine tra locali, turisti e migranti nelle isole dell'Egeo settentrionale' in the *Scritture Migranti* journal (Vietti 2020b).

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