

Where does this society
- the world of
capitalist commodity exchange -
begin and end?

Tunisian-Lampedusian Migrants as Commodities

by AMANDA PARMER

Load Displacement uses an array of cultural and theoretical references to show how the psychic and fiscal costs of migration, which migrants typically pay for themselves as they are smuggled across borders, produce migrations as anonymous and self-renewing commodities in the world economy. Key to this equation is the deregulated space of international waters off the Italian island of Lampedusa that offers the promise of hope to migrants, a space of mobility for the pirates smuggling these individuals, and an empathic demand on the coast guards and government who find the boats carrying as many as two hundred people floating into Italy's territorial waters.

Citing the disproportionate number of migrants (6,000) to Italian citizens (5,000) on the island of Lampedusa in 2011, Silvio Berlusconi arranged the "Free Lampedusa" plan with Muammar Gaddafi, sending Tunisian migrants back to their home country with 24 hours notice. Contrary to Berlusconi's aim that this act would send "a strong

that it's not worth taking the risk and then being sent back home," the message did not resonate with Tunisians. Instead, this plan has enforced a microeconomy in which migrants are cast out from North Africa like boomerangs across the sea, regardless of their progress, return, or failure.

Interspersed throughout the piece are moments of pause—images comprised solely of numbers reflecting the Gross Domestic Product of First World countries from richest to poorest. These numbers, arrested without name or qualification, weave the lives bound in the Tunisian-Lampedusian displacement together with the Gross Domestic Product. It is this raw, dehumanizing instrumentalization of people's lives in the service of capitalism's free trade that the interstitial, largely invisible, and deregulated space of the sea makes possible in this instance. In turn, it is the constellation of these components laid out in Rapicavoli's work that stand to evoke an empathetic and humanizing recognition of these individuals wrought as commodities.