

## All the World's a Beach. Staging Global Crises in Anders Lustgarten's *Lampedusa* (2015)

**Abstract:** The paper revolves around Anders Lustgarten's play *Lampedusa*, performed at Soho Theatre, London, in March 2015 and later on the Aldeburgh beach at High Tide Festival in September 2015, when the migration crisis was at its peak together with the rise of xenophobia and populism in Western countries. The play tackles issues such as mass migration and financial crisis in Europe through the interwoven monologues of two characters both representative of local and global contradictions: Stefano, a Sicilian fisherman who lives in Lampedusa, and Denise, a white East Asian woman who collects debts for a payday loan company. The paper offers a close reading of the 'places' and 'spaces' mentioned in the play suggesting how they contribute to map the 'routes' of global crisis provoked by the politics of austerity and financial capitalism. It analyses the structure of the play and the characterization of the two protagonists in order to unveil provocative juxtapositions and frame the political engagement underlying Lustgarten's new millennium theatre. It contextualizes the play within the debates on global inequality and refers to Ashcroft's concept of 'transnation' as an interpretative key to the world of *Lampedusa*.

**Key words:** *Lampedusa*, *Lustgarten*, *global inequality*, *migration*, *political theatre*

### 1. All the World's a Beach

*Lampedusa* by Anders Lustgarten was performed on Aldeburgh beach on the opening night of the High Tide Festival in September 2015. The play tackles issues such as mass migration, economic crisis and globalization, and had debuted at the Soho Theatre in March 2015, during one of the peaks of the recent migrant crisis.<sup>1</sup> When it was staged again at the Festival, the crisis was still raging but a photo widely shared on social networks and in the media had compelled public opinion to partially revise their xenophobic ideas. This was the picture of the body of a three-year-old Syrian child, Alan Kurdi, washed ashore in Bodrum, Turkey. Explicitly inspired by that event, the Artistic Director of the Festival Stephen Atkinson together with Lucy Osborne, the play's stage designer, decided to perform *Lampedusa* in a wooden amphitheatre by the sea. The audience sat on benches, and the play was performed among them. Stephen Atkinson himself described what happened that night: "One audience member stood up mid-show and fainted.... Some audiences cried. Some were motivated to action. Others were affronted by Anders' mode of direct politics".<sup>2</sup> The performance had a profound impact, though it did not exploit sensationalist strategies. It simply, as Atkinson added, "personalized an overwhelming global event where fear clouded ethics and empathy".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lampedusa* was first performed at the Soho Theatre, London, on 8 April 2015 before transferring to the High Tide Festival, Aldeburgh, on 10 September 2015, co-produced by High Tide and the Soho Theatre. It starred Ferdy Roberts as Stefano, and Louise Mai Newberry as Denise. The director was Steven Atkinson, the designer Lucy Osborne, the lighting designer Elliot George and the sound designer Isobel Waller-Bridge.

<sup>2</sup> Anders Lustgarten, *Lampedusa*, in *High Tide Theatre, Plays I: Ditch, Peddling, The Big Well, Lampedusa* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016), xiii. All quotes will be from this edition and pages will be given in parentheses.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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## 2. No man is an island

The play challenges its audience by presenting confessional monologues by two characters representative of the most complex issues of our time – global inequality, mass migration and financial speculation – forcing us to compare the local and global consequences of the crisis and collective and individual responses to it. The first character to appear on stage is Stefano, a fisherman living in Lampedusa who accepted the job no one wanted: to retrieve the bodies of people drowned in the Mediterranean. The other character is Denise, a young British-Chinese woman who collects debts for a payday loan company to help her impoverished mother, also unable to work, and pay her University fees. At the beginning of the play she intends to graduate and to find another job elsewhere, outside Britain. She also despises those unable to respect the contract they have stipulated with the company. For his part, Stefano describes feeling overwhelmed by the experience of gathering dead bodies and only wishes that they would stop coming.

As is apparent from this brief overview, the play mainly belongs to the British tradition of social realism and realistic narratives about ordinary people. *Lampedusa* is a naturalistic play about two individuals and their private lives and everyday choices. It preserves the characters' sociological and psychological credibility, but lacks "the room with three dimensional objects",<sup>4</sup> so typical of bourgeois drama, and dialogue or conversation as the main diegetic engine. The play relies on a double and parallel structure driven by the characters' two monologues. The timing of the two monologues is set by a spotlight, which turns on the character who is speaking and switches off when it is the other character's turn to speak. Only at the end, when both characters have reached a new awareness of human bonds, do their eyes meet. Light is extremely important, as are pauses and sound. A crucial role is played by a "beat" underlining the most touching passages of the characters' speeches, and by an original song called *Lampedusa* by the Malian musicians Toumani Diabaté and his son Sidiki Diabaté.<sup>5</sup> It is played by Modibo, a Malian refugee who has just arrived on the island. Stefano describes the song as follows: "It's meant to be about all the people who've come here seeking a better life. The drowning and the terror. The hopes and the futures. I don't know if I can hear all that in there personally, but it's beautiful" (272).

This frame based on a bare but effective use of light and sound allow the audience to focus on the words of the characters, which increasingly reveal their implicit parallels: the difficulty to find a job due to the economic crisis, the difficulties to cope with people who risk their money or their life for economic reasons (migrants as well as the indebted British working-class). Rather than simply discussing the humanitarian migration crisis and social anxieties represented by private loans<sup>6</sup> – adopting the conversational mode that usually characterizes

<sup>4</sup> Ruby Cohn, *Retreats from Realism in Recent English Drama* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge U.P., 1991), 3.

<sup>5</sup> This moment from the play is highly reminiscent of the most beautiful scene of the recent award-winning documentary *Fuocoammare* (2016) by Francesco Rosi, also set in Lampedusa and dealing with mass migration towards Europe.

<sup>6</sup> To have an idea of the rising fear surrounding the problem of household debt in the UK see this detailed article appeared on *The Guardian* on 18 September 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/sep/18/uk-debt-crisis-credit-cards-car-loans>.

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political plays<sup>7</sup> – the play offers the opportunity to reflect on root causes through the private stories of those personally affected. There is no opposition, but rather a juxtaposition of stories and experiences, which indirectly comment on each other without offering the standard political propaganda. The characters embody two sides of the same coin; they do not have contrasting views, but their stories are compared on stage to highlight geographical and diachronic (or perhaps historical) interconnectedness. Neither chose their job. Stefano was compelled by the economic crisis and environmental conditions in the Mediterranean:

My father was a fisherman. And his father before him. And before and before. I always thought, always knew, I'd make my living at sea.

But the fish are gone. The Med is dead.  
And my job is to fish out a very different harvest.

Three years without work. Three years of pleading and queuing and niggly little bribes to a man who say he can help.

....And finally this. The job no-one else will take. (265)

The local history of impoverishment on the little island of Lampedusa intermingles with the global history of mass migration. At the beginning, Stefano's point of view on the connections between local and global issues is characterized by pessimism and anger towards migrants and their absurd idea of finding a better world in Europe: "And do the migrants not understand Europe is fucked? And Italy is double-fucked? And the South of Italy is triple-fucked?" (267). Migrants hope to reach Europe, while in Europe Stefano is forced to salvage dead bodies, and his brother, who has a degree in biochemistry, works as a chef in London. A similar attitude of despair and closed-mindedness characterizes Denise in her first appearances. She works for a loan company and hates the clients who squander their money on take-away food or massive flat screen TVs, and are then unable to pay back their loans. Through her words, Lustgarten alludes to the World Bank loans to African countries seen from the perspective of neo-liberalism:

The bottom line is: if you can't afford to pay a loan back, don't take one out.  
Don't stand here quoting me figures, 'I only took out this much and you lot want three times as much back'.  
Yes, thank you, Stephen Hawking, I can do maths as well, the interest rate is down there in black and white.

Learn some discipline. If you ant got the money, do without.  
I have. I *do*. (265)

<sup>7</sup> "Within the frame of [the] realistic dramaturgy, a pressing political issue is either discussed by characters and/or embodied by the characters themselves, whose narrative journeys represent different perspective in the issue in question", Sarah Grochala, *The Contemporary Political Play* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), 13. See also Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge U.P., 2003).

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According to Denise, these people should be blamed for the state of the country. “You want to blame anyone for the state of the country, blame people like him – all the lazy bastards – I do, that’s why I voted Tory. But don’t blame migrants” (269). Through the lines of her monologue, we understand that Denise hates her job but needs it to finish her exams and run away from Britain.

I’m going to murder these exams.... And if the results are good enough, I can go anywhere. Australia, America.  
China even. Doing well, ent they? That’d be fucking ironic.

Anywhere but here.

Slam the door on this washed-up country, turn me back, be *free*. I don’t know what free is, where I’ll find it, but that is where am I going and nobody will stop me. (269)

Britain, a dream destination for migrants from Africa and Middle East, is for Denise a place to run away from. The need for money and the hope of a better life somewhere else gives her the strength to face the complaints of female clients that she has violated “some code of ‘solidarity’” (264) and the general implicit accusation that she is a sort of traitor of the working class.

During the play, both Stefano and Denise change their initial attitudes. Stefano is forced to renounce his cynicism about migrants (“I resent them for their hope”, 267) when he reluctantly starts a friendship with Modibo, the Malian migrant who helps him and his colleague Salvatore with their boat. The closer encounter with the point of view of migrants – the latter being no longer a category, but a group of living human beings with individual emotions and motivations – compels Stefano to revise his ideas. At the beginning Stefano wants nothing to do with the survivors: “It’s not part of my job to have to listen to their stories. There’s too many of them” (271). But, on the umpteenth arrival of dead bodies on the island, Modibo answers Stefano’s questions about the motivations of migrants, and Stefano listens:

He turns to me and, very quietly, he says that it’s deliberate. That our glorious leaders *want* the migrants to drown, as a deterrent, a warning to others. They want them to see TV footage of the bloated bodies and the rotted faces of those who trod the watery way of death before them, so they’ll hesitate before they set foot in one of those rickety little deathtraps.

And he says they do see – and they get I anyway. They know what the dangers are, but they keep coming and coming because, in his words, ‘if those men in their offices knew what we were coming from, they’d know we will never, ever stop’. (277)

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Migrants are aware of the dangers. They don't care if "Europe is fucked" because the countries they come from are far more 'fucked'. After this, Stefano is increasingly haunted by nightmares of rotten bodies, and the only friend who understands him is Modibo, who has in the meantime been granted temporary leave to stay. "He understands, not the words sometimes but the gist. They've all *seen* it, been through it, know people who've not survived. They know what's really happening" (280). At the end of his monologue, Stefano recounts how he risked his own life to save a boatload of migrants that was expected to be carrying Modibo's wife Aminata. He tells of Modibo and Aminata's joy at their second wedding on the island of Lampedusa "to celebrate her coming back from the dead" (290). Stefano looks at them and what he says about hope reveals how his encounter with Modibo, the true face and voice of migration, has completely changed his mind not only about the root cause of the phenomenon but also about the value of human bonds:

They don't know what'll happen. If either of them will get to stay long-term. But they're here, in this moment, alive and living. And that is all you can ask for.

I defy you too see the joy in Modibo and Aminata's faces and not feel hope.  
I defy you. (291)

Denise undergoes a similar metamorphosis thanks to an unexpected friendship with one of her clients, a debt-ridden Portuguese single mother. She unexpectedly accepts Carolina's invitation to dinner and then decides to help her to defend her rights against the loan company's proceedings. At the end of the dinner, Carolina drives Denise back to her own mother who is having a heart attack, and discovers the terrible conditions of poverty and neglect in which the old woman lives and Denise once lived: "The grime between the bathroom tiles. The ring of encrusted shit around the toilet. The memories of boredom and terror" (280). The heart attack is probably caused by this fragile woman's scheduled interview with ATOS, the Paris-based multinational to which the British Government's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had delegated the administration of the test designed to determine whether welfare claimants are entitled to sickness benefits.<sup>8</sup> Denise's mother is discharged from the hospital a few days later. Denise has already prepared all the documentation for the interview but her mother dies the night before. Carolina and her son attend the funeral and Denise cries at last, but then she must return to work and is overwhelmed by a sense of "hopelessness and helplessness" (287). Denise's last speech recounts Carolina's proposal that they live together to split the rent. Significantly, her last lines are about the so-called monkey trap generally used to demonstrate the inherent greed of monkeys (and thus of humans). This was the subject of her last exam.

<sup>8</sup> Beginning when Tony Blair was Prime Minister and passing to another company in March 2015.

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I wrote that the monkey trap experiment is fundamentally an indicator of *hope*. It speaks to our ability to walk away from delusions, from traps. To save ourselves from our baser instincts.

Me last line, and I can't believe I actually wrote this hippy shit but fuck it, was, 'Perhaps the ultimate purpose of the experiment is for the monkeys to teach us something'. (290)

Like Stefano's, Denise's last words are about hope. She recognizes the trap she was in, just as Modibo acknowledged the trap of the deliberate drowning of migrants, and Stefano that of cynicism. After these final speeches, the lights stay up on Denise who kneels before the urn holding her mother's ashes. Stefano delivers his speech on Modibo's second wedding and they finally look at each other. Denise empties the box and the play ends. Like the characters, the audience too is invited to judge global issues through their own individual responses to them. However, what they have seen on stage is anybody's right to run away from traps and disappointments, and a representation of their legitimate hope and effort to change things.

### 3. Beyond Lampedusa, Within Great Britain

From several points of view, Stefano and Denise can be considered national subaltern subjects whose precarious work and social status entail an increasing misidentification with the state, or, more precisely, with the policies of the European Union and the British government. Their living conditions – he is an Italian fisherman who can no longer work, she is a white/East Asian student working for a loans company – partially explain the resentment both feel towards the place in which they live and the transformation it has undergone due to globalization and economic crises.

Stefano lives and works in Lampedusa, a small island in the Mediterranean he describes as “a little dusty island you've never ever heard of, left to deal with all this alone” (267). Far from being the utopian or dystopian space of Western tradition, here the island looks like one of Foucault's *contre-espaces* of modernity, that is to say, those spaces “qui s'opposent à tous les autres, qui sont destinés en quelque sorte à les effacer, à les neutraliser ou à les purifier”.<sup>9</sup> For example, it is significant that Stefano compares Lampedusa to Guantanamo, another island highly representative of the global war on terror, because the former is overcrowded with refugee centres just as the latter is with detention camps, thus denouncing the ambiguous status of the migrants detained on the island. Even more significant is the web of old and new geographies overlapping in the little island's history throughout the play. In the very first part of his monologue, which

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *Le Corps utopique, Les Hétérotopies* (Clamecy: Nouvelles Éditions Lignes, 2009), 24.

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opens the play, Stefano evokes the ancient identity of the Mediterranean as the birth-place of the world:

This is where the world began. This was Caesar's highway. Hannibal's road to glory. These were the trading routes of the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, the Ottomans and the Byzantines. If you look carefully, my grandfather used to say, you can still make out the wakes of their ships.... We all come from the seas and back to the sea we will go. The Mediterranean gave birth to the world. (261)

This map of the ancient populations and "trading routes" crossing the Mediterranean is evoked just before Stefano begins his terrible description of the forms of the corpses retrieved during the night. Their bodies, he says, were "twisted into fantastical and disgusting shapes like the curse in that story my grandmother used to tell me" (261), depending on how long they spent in the water, the temperature and the tides. Instantly, the Mediterranean has been transfigured into a tomb, a grave of the Western world, or at least of the values on which its ideal of modernity was founded.<sup>10</sup> The Mediterranean has completely lost its thousand-year-old identity, but it is still a space in which, to quote Said, we can find "overlapping territories, intertwined histories".<sup>11</sup> Now it represents the crucial space, or 'a third space'<sup>12</sup> for the crossings that are reshaping global interconnectedness and calling into question the ideology of globalization, a fact Stefano reveals to be aware of in this quotation from his second monologue:

Syrians are the latest thing. Palestinians last summer when Gaza got bombed. Egyptians and Libyans the past couple of years. We read the papers and we see a disaster, a crackdown, a famine, and we say: 'They'll be here next.' Makes me laugh when people call them 'economic migrant'. It's like an earthquake – you feel the tremors far away and you know the tidal wave is coming. (266)

This is a telling representation of the changing landscape of contemporary globalization. The ancient trade routes have been replaced by the escape routes required by local and global political and economic crises. Yet similar upheavals can also be felt in other, larger islands like Great Britain, as Denise soon remind us. From her 'in-between' point of view – she is British-Chinese though, as she says, "I'm not even a proper one. Don't fit anywhere, me. Mixed and mouthy and poor" (268) – Denise gives us a portrait of Great Britain as the country home to nine out of the ten poorest regions in Northern Europe:

Here's where they are:  
West Wales  
Cornwall  
Tees Valley  
Lincolnshire

<sup>10</sup> See William Vernon Harris, ed., *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford U. P., 2006,) and Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke U. P., 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 48.

<sup>12</sup> This is a well-known concept from Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). See also its re-elaboration by Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994). On postmodern spaces and recent theory developments, see also Bertrand Westphal, *La Géocritique. Réel, fiction, espace* (Paris: Minuit, 2007), and Clément Lévy, *Territoires postmodernes: Géocritique de Calvino, Eco, Pynchon et Ransmayr* (Rennes: PU Rennes, 2014).

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The Independent Republic of South Yorkshire  
Shropshire/Staffordshire  
Lancashire  
Northern Ireland.  
That's the top eight. Ninth is some wankstain in Belgium.  
Tenth is East Yorkshire. (268)

Predictably, Denise also mentions the entry topping the list of the richest areas in Northern Europe: Inner London. The richest area is 'within' the same country as the poorest areas, as Francois Bourguignon has recently said of global inequality.<sup>13</sup> Denise included these statistics in her politics essay at university but it was judged to be 'lacking balance' although these were government figures. She adds, "Do you want the truth or don't yer?" (268). The university here probably stands for the intellectual institutions that refuse to accept or even to see the nefarious effects of globalization within the most advanced countries. It also stands for local governments, which seem to irresponsibly undervalue the danger represented by the huge numbers of private loans reducing the weakest individuals to new forms of poverty and to a feeling of anxiety and rage against "other's poverty". As Billington stressed in his review, "In a short play, Lustgarten has no room to explore the practical question of how European society balances its moral obligation to asylum seekers with its own economic problems".<sup>14</sup> Despite his explicit political engagement, Lustgarten pursues a higher purpose in the play than simply providing (albeit useful) information about global issues through provocative juxtapositions. The key aspect of the play lies in the affective turns and vital 'exit strategy' from cynicism that both characters find in the end, but also in the denunciation of the necessity to overcome national borders and speak out the global responsibilities.

#### 4. What is the Theatre for?

As Michael Billington underlined in his review of the play published in *The Guardian* on 12 April 2015, "What makes Anders Lustgarten exceptional is that he thinks globally",<sup>15</sup> as he had already done in some previous plays quoted by Billington and dealing with Turkey's Roboski massacre (*Shrapnel: 34 Fragments of a Massacre*, Arcola Theatre, London 2015) and post-Mugabe Zimbabwe (*Black Jesus*, Finborough Theatre, 2013). An even stronger connection within Lustgarten's repertoire can be found with a 2013 play that raised questions similar to those of *Lampedusa: If You Don't Let us Dream, then We Won't Let you Sleep* (2013), whose title comes from the slogan of a protest movement beginning in Madrid's Puerta del Sol square. It was first presented at the Royal Court Theatre and its main theme was the economic crisis and the onset of austerity in Europe.<sup>16</sup> Here Lustgarten, who was also involved in the Occupy movement, launched "a fierce attack on free-

<sup>13</sup> "Inequality in standard living *between countries* has started to decline. Twenty years ago, the average standard of living in France or Germany was twenty times higher than in China or India. Today this gap has been cut in half. On the other hand inequality *within countries* has increased, often following several decades of stability", Francois Bourguignon, *The Globalization of Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 2015), 2. For a brief overview of the relationship between globalization and literature, see Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh, eds., *Literature and Globalization. A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2011). See also Dan Rebellato, *Theatre and Globalization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/apr/12/lampedusa-soho-theatre-london-review>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The play was also performed during the week-long season of readings of new plays in translation from the European countries affected by austerity. The season was called "PIIGS" after the acronym used in economics and finance to refer to Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain, considered to be troubled and heavily-indebted countries. The Artistic Director was Vicky Fatherstone.

market capitalism where, despite a mixed critical reception, the sincerity of his critique of austerity is never in question”.<sup>17</sup>

In a sense, both plays contribute to the debates over the effects of globalization, and particularly its responsibility or otherwise for the rise in inequality in the world over the last two decades, especially ‘within’ countries. Lustgarten’s political ideas are clearly expounded in an article appearing in *The Guardian* five days after Billington’s review of *Lampedusa*, with the title “Refugees don’t need our tears. They need us to stop making them refugees”. Here Lustgarten openly blames the European Union’s *de facto* policy “to let migrants drown to stop others coming”<sup>18</sup> after scrapping the important rescue operation, Mare Nostrum, launched by Italy in the aftermath of two terrible incidents in the open sea in October 2013. According to Lustgarten, “Like drones, and derivatives, migration policy allows the powerful to inflict horrors on the powerless without getting their hands dirty”.<sup>19</sup> The mention of drones was intended to evoke the wars fought or funded by Europe in Africa and Middle East, while derivatives are the speculative contracts characteristic of contemporary global financial capitalism that have contributed significantly to creating a separation between the real economy and financial speculation. Both drones and derivatives draw attention to the *causes* of migration and to Western responsibility. “In all the rage about migration, one thing is never discussed: what we do to *cause* it”.<sup>20</sup>

Obviously, mass migration is not a problem affecting only Lampedusa or the Southern Italy, nor a third millennium issue. Migration has been a highly sensitive issue for the British since 1989, a crucial year in European history and also the symbolic date after which immigration and economic stability became overriding discourses in the public sphere. The same remains true today, as the Brexit poll and its antagonism towards European policies on immigration showed in 2016.

In the 1990s Europe discussed and fought over the ‘borders’ of the European Union, reflecting upon the meaning of its identity while conflicts in its Eastern countries provoked a rapid increase in economic migration and people requesting refugee status in Western Europe (rising 481% between 1986 and 1991). This historical circumstance strongly affected the immigration policy of individual countries but also called into question the European Union’s overall ability to cope with such crises while still preserving its members’ prerogatives and defending the shared moral values underpinning its identity.

Whilst the 70s and the government of Margaret Thatcher had already contributed significantly to the politicization of theatre, during the 90s and early 2000s British playwrights “explored and interpreted the challenges faced by post-communist Europe”, setting events “in the countries of the former Eastern bloc and the Balkans”<sup>21</sup> or staging the contradictions of that delicate phase of transition for the new democracies, as we can see in works such as David Edgar’s *Shape of the Table* (1990), David Greig with *Europe* (1994) and Caryl Churchill’s *Mad Forest* (1990), Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995) and Nicholas Kent’s *Srebrenica* (1996), which

<sup>17</sup> Mark O’Thomas, “Translating Austerity: Theatrical Responses to the Financial Crisis”, in Siân Adeshiah and Louise LePage, eds., *Twenty-First Century Drama: What Happens Now* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 138.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/17/refugees-eu-policy-migrants-how-many-deaths>, accessed 6 March 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. According to Lustgarten, the largest share of the blame falls on the World Bank which “massively contributed to the flow of impoverished people across the globe. The single biggest thing we could do to stop migration is to abolish the development Mafia: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development”.

<sup>21</sup> Geoff Willcocks, “Europe in Flux: Exploring Revolution and Migration in British Play of the 1990s”, in Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst, eds., *A Concise Companion to British and Irish Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell 2008), 6. See also Dan Rebellato, “From the State of the Nation to Globalization: Shifting Political Agendas in Contemporary British Playwriting”, in Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst, eds., *A Concise Companion*, 245-262.

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were pervaded by pessimism and a sort of scepticism over the concrete potential to change political reality.

The '90s were also the years in which globalization studies, driven by post-colonial discourse, exacerbated their critique of the nation, which was then considered as an idea to be reformulated, a community to be imagined or a concept to be profoundly re-defined.<sup>22</sup> Generally, it was seen as an exclusionary political formation that was quite irrelevant from a global perspective. As Bill Ashcroft has recently stressed, "this was the case until the global financial crisis of 2008" when "with corporations dissolving and the share market plummeting, it was the nation-state and national governments that were called to the rescue".<sup>23</sup> Whilst the idea of the nation has been rehabilitated as an economic stabilizer, it nonetheless cannot fully account for the complex reality of our time. Therefore, Ashcroft proposed the idea of a 'transnation' "extending beyond the geographical, political, administrative and even imaginative boundaries of the state, both within and beyond the boundaries of the nation".<sup>24</sup> A transnation is a space "in which those boundaries are disrupted, in which national and cultural affiliations are superseded, in which binaries of centre and periphery, national self and other are dissolved".<sup>25</sup> Lustgarten's *Lampedusa* could be read as the theatrical representation of such a place, since its characters – Stefano and Denise – can be interpreted as subjects who "occupy a perpetual in-between space, an in-betweenness that is negotiable and shifting, demonstrating the actual agency of people as they navigate the structure of the state".<sup>26</sup> This idea of the transnation does not merely entail a new awareness of one's individual condition. It is a space from which the public denunciation of the national injustices (unemployment, racism, lack of welfare, among the many) can be articulated and represented.

Among the strengths of this work there is the fact that Lustgarten succeeds in widening the world-picture and the knowledge of his (mostly middle-class white) audience on global issues while compelling the same to become aware of what is happening next door. For example, he exploits the hate towards private loans company to shed the same negative light on World Bank and international finance. He compares the stereotypes on lazy white men stipulating loans they can't afford to the bias against 'economic migrants', who only wants to steal jobs and earn more money. These as many other devices are part of a sophisticated political strategy which does not suggest any solutions (he only talks about 'hope'), but explicitly appeals to actual responsibilities: speculations of the (global and local) finance, institutions denying what is happening as in the case of Denise's university, government relying on multinational corporation for welfare tests (evoked in the play by the Paris-based ATOS), media manipulating information as in the poorly known statistics about inequality in UK. In a recent self-presentation Lustgarten wrote: "I don't write for the usual reasons. I write because mainstream politics is dead: bought and paid for by an insatiable capitalism and motivated by a hateful, vicious brutality".<sup>27</sup> Obviously Lustgarten's theatre cannot replace politics,

<sup>22</sup> It is hardly necessary to mention among the many classics such as Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016); and Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Bill Ashcroft, "Transnation", in Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds., *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium* (London: Routledge, 2010), 73. On the relationship between the financial crisis and globalization, see also Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard U.P., 2014); and Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents revisited. Antiglobalization in the Era of Trump* (London: Penguin, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Ashcroft, *Transnation*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>27</sup> Anders Lustgarten, *Plays: 1* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016), ix. Before this statement, he presents his various nationalities: "I have a British passport, German surname, American parents and Scandinavian first name (though zero connection to Scandinavia).... I worked for a Kurdish human rights organization for a year.... then spent nearly a decade fighting the modern-day imperialism of development banks." (Ibid.)

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but it passionately fosters ideas and reflections, compelling the spectator to measure and negotiate his involvement with the problems affecting the public and private sphere of the contemporary world, and that is what politics should do. But more than merely transfiguring social anxieties through the means of fiction, Lustgarten uses fiction to give an interpretation of the present world based on an 'ethical' engagement. And that is what, at the moment, theatre can do much better than politics.