When There Is No Name

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Abstract

“Scusami, scusami! […] Excuse my interrupting you, but we are concerned about safety, […]! If something happens to one of the kids – who will pay for that? […] Whom do I turn to? I want to know that! – because we don’t have their names … They have no names – none at all!”
ARTE Report (2011) Lampedusa: Stranded in Europe ...

This islander expresses fear and excitement. After the overthrow of the ruler Ben Ali, Lampedusa experiences its first wave of refugees in 2011. Within a few days there are already 5000 young Tunisians stranded on this European outpost; the number of refugees now equals that of the residents. By stating ‘They have no names’, the islander reacts to this massive upheaval. What fuels the anxieties mobilized by such a turn of events?

Drawing on Albert Camus’ *The Outsider*, together with a counter statement presented by the Arab author Kamel Daoud, an arc is spanned from a sociohistorical dimension to the highly individual handling thereof by the protagonists. Fears of annihilation and death wishes are both activated. The tendency to obliterate the stranger, to take his or her name away, becomes just as pronounced as the fear of object loss or even the loss of personal integrity. If the other cannot be identified and placed in a mental context, then one’s own psychic balance can be shaken to its very foundations.