Divided Seas, Parallel Lives <1>

Vicki Squire

Abstract

This photo essay examines the sea as a divided space and as marked by the existence of parallel lives. Images taken during fieldwork on the small Mediterranean island of Lampedusa in 2015 are used to examine the ways in which these divisions are experienced, questioned and problematized by inhabitants of and visitors to the island. Lampedusa emerges here as a site of contested memorials and hospitalities, where lost lives are at best imperfectly recovered. The essay shows how a series of familiar gendered dynamics play into this division of places and lives, yet in multiple, fragmented and contested ways.

As I sit down to write this essay, images of the Royal Caribbean Cruise Ship, <u>Harmony of the Seas</u>, are swimming through my mind. At the end of May 2016 the largest-ever cruise ship, made to carry up to 7000 passengers and a crew of over 2000, is just about to leave for its maiden voyage from Southampton port on the southern coast of the U.K.. <u>Harmony of the Seas</u> will spend the summer in the Mediterranean, before going to the Caribbean as the northern hemisphere turns to the winter season. This huge cruise ship, which if stood on its end would reach higher than the Eiffel Tower, includes robotic cocktail makers, multiple restaurants, and "three fantastic waterslides that twist and turn 10 decks above Central Park" (Royal Carribean 2016).

As a "feel good" news story at the end of the lunchtime news, <u>Harmony of the Seas</u> is introduced by a female newsreader who is left speechless by the comedic style of the male presenter interviewing the male captain of <u>the cruise liner</u>. The gendered dimensions of this interaction are both striking and familiar. While the feminized newsreader remains safely at a distance in the studio, the sea – an unruly entity – becomes the domain of men. In his uniformed masculinity, the captain brings clarity to the situation while the male newsreader is distracted by the ship's horn. Similar distinctions between the lives of those marked by feminine vulnerability and those marked by masculine authority are familiar in the realm of migratory politics. As Lisa Malkki (1996) highlighted two decades ago, refugees are widely represented as "speechless emissaries," and are feminized as such, while (male) actors are empowered with the task of rescue. In the current case, the hero is the male captain, who comes to the aid of a helpless female presenter as she grapples with a male interviewer who increasingly appears to be as unruly as the sea.

As I watch, I wonder if any other viewers are thinking about the significance of such a ship being sailed across waters that are also populated – and not simply in my imagination – with navy ships and inflatable boats. Relations of authority and vulnerability replay here,

since military and private actors are integral to the humanitarian rescue of people who, despite the unruliness of the sea, cross the sea in inflatable boats (Pallister-Wilkins 2015a, 2015b). Having recently read many transcripts of migratory journeys and experiences of crossing the Mediterranean Sea in such boats <2>, and having discussed this journey with many who have undertaken it, the perversity of Harmony of the Seas is what perplexes me. How can such a ship be sailed for pleasure across waters marked by thousands of border deaths? And how can it be named as "harmonious" when it reflects the lives of the "haves" but not the "have-nots"? Will Harmony of the Seas ever rescue people as their rubber boats capsize, I wonder?

For me, Harmony of the Seas highlights the wider perversities of a world of divided seas and parallel lives. This is not a new phenomenon but has become increasingly visible across sites such as the Mediterranean Sea over recent years. In this photo essay I explore how these perversities are manifest, yet also contested, across and around the small Mediterranean island of Lampedusa. Lampedusa lies around 70 miles from Tunisia and nearly 130 miles from the Italian island of Sicily. It forms the largest of the Pelagie Islands, with around 6000 inhabitants, and is part of the Sicilian province of Agrigento. At about 100 miles west of Malta, Lampedusa has become known over recent decades for people migrating from North Africa.

In the midst of a so-called "European migration crisis" in 2015-2016, it is worth noting that Lampedusa already has an established history of "crises" as a living memory. Most notably, Lampedusa hit the headlines in 2011 when thousands fled civil unrest in Libya and Tunisia, with the island becoming notorious as a place of new arrivals at this time. Images of young male migrants in combat frequented the news stories about Lampedusa in 2011. Frustrated about the conditions they experienced on the island as well as the impending threat of deportation, it was the violence of migrants from Tunisia – not of the authorities –

that became the focus of media debate <3>. This reflects another gendered representation familiar to migratory politics: that of unruly young men who come to Europe and pose a threat to "native" residents. Such gendered dynamics are not only familiar; they are also integral to the division of seas and the rendering of lives parallel, because they involve dynamics that separate people between the "haves" and the "have nots," between the worthy and the unworthy, between those to be rescued and those performing rescue.

Yet despite these familiar representations, the photos depicted here also go some way in highlighting the multiple and fragmented gendered dynamics as these are manifest across and around the island of Lampedusa. The photos that I present are partial and limited, and by no means unproblematic. The silences and exclusions that the images invoke, as well as the perspective from which the representational gaze is directed precisely emphasize some of the relations of privilege that the essay seeks to question (see Squire 2015). I hope to mobilize these images, as well as some of their gaps, in order to emphasize the significance of complex gendered dynamics to the creation of divided seas and parallel lives.

Visiting Lampedusa

I first visited Lampedusa from 24 September – 5 October 2015 to begin fieldwork for my project, Human Dignity and Biophysical Violence: Migrant Deaths across the Mediterranean Sea.<4> This project examines the ways in which the sea itself becomes implicated in the violence of contemporary border management, and considers how border deaths are differently tolerated and contested through interventions across and around the island. During my first fieldwork trip I spontaneously took photos on my phone, in order to document the complexities of migratory politics on the island. This essay presents these images to consider how a world of divided seas and parallel lives is experienced, as well as questioned or problematized, by inhabitants of and visitors to the island.

[Insert image 1. here]

Lampedusa is a stunning island and a popular tourist destination, particularly for more wealthy Italian holiday makers. Every Saturday morning during the tourist season the whole island shakes to the arrival and departure of several charter planes. These dwarf the island runway, as well as the small jet planes that come in and out of the island from Sicily on a more regular basis throughout the year. The island is an excellent place to scuba dive, making it a further pull for young and more active holiday makers. My friend Giuseppe owns a diving shop overlooking the old port. He works 12 hours a day, 7 days per week, from March through to November. Many people fall in love with the island and come back regularly. Some stay several months of the year. For example, a pilates trainee whom I met during my visit told me that the island is now a place for her yearly retreat from a busy city life. This is the Lampedusa of the (more-or-less) privileged tourist.

[Insert image 2 here]

The flat that I stayed in during my visit overlooked the old port. Each morning when I went for breakfast, my host would ask me: "Rabbit Beach, Rabbit Beach – have you been to Rabbit Beach?!" Eventually she gave up asking, perplexed that as a visitor to the island the beach was not the first place that I went. When I later mentioned to her that I was doing research on migration, there was an awkward silence. Though not a local islander, as a Sicilian living on Lampedusa and working for a local family she clearly recognized that migration is a tense issue best not discussed with tourists. Later in my visit she told me that she was attending an annual memorial for people who died off the coast in 2013. Beyond her

flagging up this tribute of respect for the dead, our discussion of migration went no further. When I finally told her several days before my departure that I had been to Rabbit Beach, she appeared both relieved and amused. Finally, I was acting as a visitor should.

[Insert image 3 here]

When I eventually made it to Rabbit Beach I was struck both by the beauty and the horror of this site. I recalled a conversation I had had with a friend who shared with me how wonderful the beach is, and how distant she feels from the spectre of dead bodies when she goes to snorkel here in the mornings. For me, it was a less comfortable experience. Perhaps I needed more time to experience some distance from my research. The usual reasons for my beach discomfort were less pressing than usual. Sure, I was the pale British visitor, coming to the beach alone, who people clearly perceived as misplaced. Cultural norms and pressures surrounding the female body on European beaches nearly always provoke anger in me even though I love to swim and float in the sea. Yet despite my experience of beaches as a battle site in this regard, my usual concerns paled in comparison to the perversity of swimming in waters that appear perfect, yet mask death.

Female bodies merge in this sea with those of men and children, all of whom can be seen as vulnerable to the violence of abandonment at sea. Indeed, bodies become unrecognisable – even de-gendered – in the face of an unruly sea in which some lives are beyond the pale of protection. Even rescue has been abandoned here. It may have been voted the world's best beach in 2013, but Rabbit Beach is also a huge liquid graveyard for the bodies of people who are never found. Indeed, the beach lies just a few kilometres from the site of a horrific shipwreck that took place in October 2013.

Memorial

On 3 October 2013, over 500 people were travelling on a fishing boat from Libya to Europe, when it sank just off the island of Lampedusa. The boat included people traveling from Eritrea and Somalia. The shipwreck happened during the night and early hours of the morning. Engine problems and a fire on board left many calling for the attention of locals who were sailing nearby The locals called the <u>Guardia Costiera</u> (Italian Coastguard), which allegedly took a long time to arrive at the scene. Meantime, people on board the fishing boat were compelled to jump off board to escape the fire.

While locals rescued some of those overboard, they could not accommodate all of those in danger. Many of the young men who were rescued on this day now call their older male rescuers "father." Vulnerabilty and authority replay here, yet as part of a gendered dynamics of protection that go beyond a divide between women and men. The call to "father" represents a generational rendering of a familiar gender dynamic between men of different generations, which is replayed under conditions where inequalities are less to do with age and experience and more to do with having – and not-having – the capacity to master an unruly sea. One of the locals involved in rescuing people from the sea owns what my friend Matteo describes as the best ice cream shop in town. Traumatized by the event and tired of journalists hunting him for his story, the owner, I was told during my visit, prefers not to talk about the shipwreck any more.

[Insert image 4 here]

Given that many people making the journey across the Mediterranean Sea are unable to swim, this shipwreck and the delayed arrival of the rescue authorities represented a tragedy on a large scale. Though reported numbers have differed, over 366 people were eventually

reported dead and 155 as rescued. Since the tragedy happened, a "politics of pity" (Aradau 2008) has been evident in gendered terms, yet without being reduced to women. For example, media reports describe women as sometimes subject to rape prior to boarding the boat, while some men have experienced torture (BBC 2013). Here, vulnerability is employed as a tool of pity that enforces unequal relations of care (Aradau 2008).

Indeed, the tragedy of 3 October 2013 has been highly visible with respect to the symbolic mourning of border deaths at both the national and European levels. The Italian government initially proposed awarding posthumous citizenship to those who had died on the 3 October shipwreck. Perversely, survivors of the shipwreck were meanwhile subject to detention for having entering Italy without authorization (de Haas 2013). Though citizenship was not granted to the dead in the end, Italy nevertheless held a day of mourning following the tragedy, and 3 October is now a national day of commemoration each year.

In 2014 there were high publicity visits from national and European politicians to the island. Subsequently, there have been regular memorials held in Lampedusa on 3 October each year, which have been attended by state officials as well as by survivors. During my first visit to the island - two years on from the tragedy in 2015 - the memorial was held over three days and involved workshops for children, various cultural installations, and an official commemoration event. These activities were supported by various international organizations, religious groups and constituencies, and organized by Comitato Tre Ottobre (Third of October Committee) <5>.

[Insert image 5 here]

Comitato Tre Ottobre is headed by Father Mussie Zerai, a priest orginating from Eritrea, and includes survivors of the shipwreck as well as family members of those lost in

the tragedy. The image above shows members of the committee – all men – who are holding a private service at a memorial garden overlooking the sea in 2015. By contrast to this memorial, which I happened to stumble upon on my way back from Rabbit Beach, the official proceedings were a much more spectacular affair. Tracked by journalists, hundreds of children gathered outside the mayor's residence in the morning ready for a ceremonial march towards the official memorial event. Following this, survivors were transported by boat along with Italian politicians, representatives of international organizations, and journalists and researchers to the site of the shipwreck.

The image below shows the boats traveling out to sea, where survivors lay a white wreath in the water, in memory of those who died. These official memorial events clearly required a lot of resources and security efforts. Local residents were often critical of this, and during my visit there were various independent memorial events that serve as alternatives. For example, an independent inter-faith ceremony "between sea and sky" was organized by the Italian Evangelist Church group, Mediterranean Hope, at the Santuario della Madonna di Porto Salvo. In addition, the activist group Askavusa <6>, a collective critical of processes of border militarization, organised a protest against the official memorial and showed a film documenting the failed rescue of people on the October 3 shipwreck in parallel to the official program of events. These different interventions reflect tensions across and around the island in relation to migratory politics, as well as in relation to the tragedy of border deaths themselves.

[Insert image 6 here]

The events of and around 3 October shed light on the divided seas and parallel lives to which this essay points, which dwell within familiar gendered dynamics yet also exceed and

complicate these. The events also point to how complex and contested migratory politics are across and around Lampedusa. During my visit I spoke to a teacher who was compelled to join the ceremonial march with the class she teaches in a local school, but who was vehemently opposed to what she described as the state's failure to support the island effectively in dealing with the migration issue. My host refused to speak about migration all week, yet she dressed up formally in black to attend the official memorial ceremony. I attended the UNHCR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) showing of a film called Torn, yet saw Askavusa activists handing out flyers for their alternative film showing to be held the next evening in the next square up the road. I spoke to survivors who found it both empowering and traumatic to return to the island that family members, friends, or acquaintances did not make it to alive.

Moreover, as a researcher I was myself torn in documenting the various events and multiple constituencies that were suddenly present on the small island, while also wanting to respect people's privacy. These tensions were compounded by deeper-rooted tensions that often arose in the discussions I had with local islanders – namely tensions in relation to an ethos of hospitality, which are so often haunted by hostility and bound up with gendered norms of vulnerability and authority.

Hospitality

While Lampedusa is frequently referred to as an island of hospitality, the so-called "European migration crisis" has posed a challenge to this ethos. Locals have become increasingly concerned about the effects of migration on the island's tourist industry following a series of "crises" that the island has experienced, most notably the arrival of thousands from Libya and Tunisia in 2011. Later that year, clashes were broadcast across Europe between police and young Tunisian men resisting forced return, as discussed earlier.

Far from a place of hospitality, Lampedusa at this time appeared as a hostile environment for people on the move.

While footage of the islanders from 2011 shows women and men marching in solidarity with new arrivals, by the time of my visit in 2015, responses to migration seemed much more strained. During the height of the tourist season, refugees and migrants were nowhere to be seen other than in their occasional – and decidedly swift – transportation from the port to the local center. As we will see, this is one of the absences or mechanisms of silencing that this photo essay seeks to bring to the fore, in particular by documenting alternative interventions that contest the familiar gendered dynamics we have already seen at play.

[Insert image 7]

When people arrive to Lampedusa in Guardia Costiera (Italian Coastguard) or Guardia di Finanza (Italian Customs) boats, they are taken by a Misericordia coach to the first aid and reception center on the island. This was the first place to operate as a reception and identification center as part of the European "hotspot" approach in the autumn of 2015. The stated aim of the hotspot approach is to facilitate the coordination of intelligence and monitoring in order to ensure the effective management of what EU agencies refer to as "mixed migratory flows" (i.e. people migrating for various reasons, usually with reference to economic and political causes). This means that the Lampedusa center began to host a range of European Agencies – including some that are far from welcoming to refugees and migrants, such as Frontex (then the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) <7>, EASO (the European Asylum Support Office), and EUROPOL (the European Police Office).

The Lampedusa center is effectively invisible, despite the small size of the island. Located inland and down an unmarked road, it is set in a valley and several kilometers from the main town, and can easily be missed. Like many reception and detention centers across Europe, the Lampedusa center thus isolates its temporary residents and separates them from local residents and tourists.

[Insert image 8 here]

In 2011 part of the Lampedusa center was set on fire during the Tunisian protests against deportations, which has been primarily represented in terms of masculinized threat. The center was also a site of various protests during my visit – first by activists from the radical Akavusa group and subsequently by people in the center who did not want to be fingerprinted by authorities. My first port of call when I arrived on the island was the Askavusa-organised LampedusaInFestival, which is a small festival of community, migration, struggles, and responsible tourism that has been running since 2009. Set up with the slogan of "encountering the other," in 2015 this had developed from a film festival marked by a competition that is funded by various institutions to a trans-European activist network involving direct action as well as film showings and other cultural activities.

As part of the 2015 gathering, activists from across Europe staged a protest outside the center, shouting "freedom, sisters" and asking about conditions in the center. Engendering a relation of solidarity, the call-out to "sisters" here highlights that women – not just the men – are located in the center. The call to sisters also stands in juxtaposition to the unequal relation of rescuer-rescued discussed earlier, whereby the rescued call out to the rescuer as "father". Holding a banner "NO WAR-NO HOTSPOTS," activists sang the anti-fascist resistance movement song Bella Ciao with a guitar accompaniment. Less than a week later

and with the initiation of the center as a formal hotspot, people within it were directly protesting against being fingerprinted by the authorities.

[Insert image 9 here]

The limits or problems associated with hospitality are also evident at the Lampedusa turtle sanctuary. This currently only plays host to turtles, but in 2011 also hosted people seeking sanctuary. The founder and director of the project explained to me how approximately 600 people were directly living amongst the turtles following the Arab Spring uprisings. She expressed anger that the Italian government did not provide greater support at that time and explained how difficult it was to rebuild the sanctuary without financial support after so many people had left.

Now, the sanctuary is a hub for international volunteers. Some of them speak to people who have been taken by the Misericordia bus from the center, as they wait to be put on the Siremar ferry prior to being transported to larger centers in Sicily or on the mainland. Meanwhile, tourists come to see the injured turtles that have been rescued when they become caught in the hooks of local fishermen. Here, I again experienced the tensions that emerge in engaging with locals who do not wish to discuss migration with visitors to the island. Yet feelings clearly run strong: "Look how small the space is for the turtle's brain," the founder and director of the project pointed out on a turtle skeleton. "Still, we have a lot to learn from the turtle: that there are no frontiers and the sea is for us all." The division of the seas is contested here, even while the scope of hospitality is questioned.

Recovery

It is not only in the turtle sanctuary that the sea was presented to me as a place of radical equality. A similar appreciation of the non-discrimination to which the sea as a space gives rise was evident in my discussions with volunteers of the Sea-Watch project. Sea-Watch is a volunteer rescue service originating in Germany, which serves as "the eye of the sea" by seeking to protect those at risk in high seas. It includes a ship donated by a German business man and his friends, as well as rotating crews comprised of voluntary medics and engineers/seafarers. The Sea-Watch boat and crew spends the summer months patrolling the Mediterranean Sea as well as the Aegean when necessary. The project was described to me by its male founder as important in light of a history of division and persecution that many Germans feel compelled to reject. An experienced seafarer returning from his journey volunteering with Sea-Watch told me how, at sea, if people are in distress it doesn't matter who they are or where they come from. A person in distress is a person in distress, and it is on the grounds of humanity that rescue or recovery is necessary. Divided seas and parallel lives here are, again, not accepted.

[Insert image 10 here]

The recovery of people at sea is not always practiced with radical equality at the core, of course. Between 10 a.m. and midday on 28 September 2015, approximately 220 people disembarked from two Guardia di Finanza boats at the secure military harbour in Lampedusa. They were met by a range of authorities and NGOs, as well as by solidarity activists who were given authorization to hand out tea and biscuits. Some of the activists involved in this operation later described to me how uncomfortable it was to simply hand out gifts while officials took some disembarkees to one side to speak to them about their journey. Again, hospitality is clearly limited and strained in these circumstances, and the difficulties of

attempting to bridge parallel lives are stark where relations of authority and vulnerability persist.

Far from simply a relation between one human and another, rescue effectively invokes relations of gross inequality and operates as part of an architecture of coercion. Within a European approach comprising hotspots, rescue missions are inseparable from intelligence and monitoring missions and very quickly transform into a mechanism of detention and deportation. Both women and men participate in this process, with young female medics often appearing alongside masculinized white border guards in terms that are unsettling for those attuned to gender and racial norms. While gendered dynamics are complex and fragmented in the migratory politics across and around Lampedusa, familiar gender dynamics nevertheless recur.

[Insert image 11 here]

Recovery is not only about the rescue of live bodies, but also about the retrieval of things left behind (see Squire 2015b). Visiting the PortoM center of the activist group Askavusa is a stark reminder that there is much more than simply people arriving to Europe's shores. A series of artifacts are displayed here as a reminder of the people who have passed through the island. Life jackets, personal belongings, food packaging – even a message in a bottle have all been recovered by activists to help tell the story of people on the move.

In the sports field the remains of recovered boats are also evident for all to see. Until November 2014 the large field was full of boats, though almost all have since been broken up and removed. Activists intervened in order to recover some of the remains, which have been recycled to form the entrance of PortoM. Many people en route to Europe now describe themselves as travelling in rubber dinghies across the Mediterranean Sea <8>. They are often

picked up by navy ships, commercial vessels, Frontex or Italian authorities – or of course volunteers such as those from Sea-Watch. Just a few years ago, rescue happened much closer to the island, with many arriving much closer to the island in large wooden boats such as the one above.

[Insert image 12 here]

Of course, recovery can also be of the bodies of those who do not make it to Lampedusa alive. Although rescue is primarily focused on the living, sometimes it is possible to recover the remains of some who have drowned. A visit to Lampedusa's cemetery in this regard highlights the parallel lives of people on the move and citizens of the island. The two graves in the image below each hold two men, four in total, none of whom are named. They are described as most likely from the Maghreb, two around 30 years old, and two around 35 years old. These shared graves sit next to a well-tended grave of a seven-and-a-half month old baby from Lampedusa, with flowers, pictures, and of course the baby's name, date of birth and date of death recorded on the headstone. I was told by local activists that they have in some cases managed to identify those buried, adding names to the headstones in order to give migrants "dignity" in death. Still, the divisions remain clear.

[Insert image 13 here]

Divided Seas, Parallel Lives

My thoughts again return to Harmony of the Seas. If somebody reads this photo essay, would they still be able to contemplate a cruise in the Mediterranean, along with all the luxury of robotic cocktail makers and on-deck swimming facilities that this involves? Would they still experience the distance required to forget that their holiday takes place in a large liquid

grave? Would the privilege that divides the seas between extravagance and scarcity, between protection and exposure, continue to remain invisible? And would a parallel existence fighting to live remain beyond the imagination?

This essay is not written with the intention of castigating others for their pleasures, but rather to raise questions about the perversities of a world of divided seas and parallel lives. This is not a new phenomenon but has become increasingly evident across sites such as the Mediterranean Sea over recent years. How is it that we have come to inhabit a world such as this? How can people guard against the tendency to look the other way? How can memorials and practices of hospitality open up rather than close down the space for contesting a coercive politics of control? This photo essay does not answer these questions, but rather documents some of the ways in which they emerge at a site of complexity and contestation.

This photo essay has also documented a series of familiar gendered dynamics which arise from migratory politics across and around Lampedusa. From hostile, combative young men to women who are said to have been raped, people on the move are often represented in terms that play into divisions between those who are vulnerable and those with the authority to protect. Yet these gendered dynamics are also complex and contested. Male migrants are sometimes threatening and sometimes vulnerable. Authority is sometimes used to coerce people into detention and other times becomes part of a hospitable welcome by NGO representatives or medics at the port. Unequal gendered dynamics that mark out a call to "father" are overturned by the call to "sisters". In short, gendered dynamics are integral to the formation of divided seas and parallel lives, yet in multiple, fragmented and contested ways, which are not reducible to the masculinized images of fighting men with which Lampedusa has so often been associated.

Biography

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<1> Photos with alternative commentary were first published here: Squire, V. (2016) "12 days in Lampedusa: The potential and perils of a photo essay." FocaalBlog, 11 January, www.focaalblog.com/2016/01/11/vicki-squire-12-days-in-lampedusa-the-potential-and-perils-of-a-photo-essay

<2> As part of ESRC Urgent Research Grant ES/N013646/1, Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat: Mapping and Documenting Migratory Journeys and Experiences (see Squire et al 2015)

<3> See the commentary of these struggles by activists at https://strugglesinitaly.wordpress.com/equality/en-the-revolts-of-migrants-in-lampedusa-and-pozzallo/ (accessed 30.9.2016)

<4> See project details of Human Dignity and Biophysical Violence: Migrant Deaths Across the Mediterranean Sea. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/irs/humandignity

<5> See http://www.comitatotreottobre.it for more information (accessed 30.9.2016).

<6> See https://askavusa.wordpress.com (accessed 30.9.2016).

<7> This has since been rebranded as the European Border and Coastguard, see http://frontex.europa.eu/pressroom/faq/european-border-and-coast-guard/ (accessed 30.9.2016).

<8> See the preliminary findings of the project Crossing the Mediterranean Sea By Boat, see http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/irs/crossingthemed/

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