

# "Yes, we call it Dā'ish": blue crab assemblages in Tunisia

Massimiliano Fantò (University of Milan Bicocca)

## Paper Short Abstract:

The turbulent materiality of blue crabs in Tunisia provides a pretext to explore the cultural and social dynamics emerging from the disruptive era of ecological globalization. I weave adaptation-protection-exploitation as a lens to critically reflect on the oceanic world as a space of conquest.

## Paper Abstract:

The blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus* and *Portunus segnis*) is one of the most well-known invaders of the last decade. Likely transported to the Mediterranean Sea via ballast water from Atlantic Ocean cargo ships and through the opening of the Suez Canal connecting the Indian Ocean, its presence, facilitated by the better-known tropicalization of the Mediterranean, is viewed as a threat to biodiversity and economies, thus carrying deep social and cultural dimensions.

Tunisia, perhaps among the first states to act against this disruptive presence – local fishermen call it 'Dā'ish' like the Islamic State due to its size and danger – has, over nine years, established an export chain for the crustacean's meat worldwide, especially in contexts like Asia where the blue crab is a delicacy. However, reality is more complex and layered than it may seem, and only an immersive investigation and ethnography, as the author is conducting in the southern North African country, can highlight its various facets. The Gulf of Gabes, one of the most polluted in this context where the crab is the only survivor, is a particularly fertile field to explore turbulent materialities in the era of accelerated change.

In this proposal, I ponder: how are local communities, often engaged in artisanal fishing practices, reacting to this new presence? How have new seascapes formed in these territories? How has science constructed apocalyptic imaginaries about this invasion? And what cultural and social processes have intertwined among humans, non-humans, and the sea?