European borderscapes: The management of migration between care and control

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Tens of thousands of migrants and refugees stranded in camps in Greece and in Calais, shipwrecks and deaths in the Mediterranean, fences and walls across the Balkans, hotspots along the European Union (EU) southern borders, increasing controls within the Schengen space, military-humanitarian naval operations, the EU–Turkey migrant deal, NGOs and activists denouncing the ongoing ‘war on migrants’ is too often framed as a humanitarian emergency: these are some of the images we usually associate with the so-called ‘migration crisis’.¹ Nevertheless, this ‘crisis’ is neither new nor exceptional, especially when viewed through a historical lens. This discourse of an allegedly uncontrolled ‘invasion’ of Europe dates back to the 1990s when the alarming image was first used particularly in the Spanish media, followed by the Italian media. Soon the packed refugee boat on the open sea became the image that symbolised migration to Europe. It also became the central figurative element in the debate on European refugee and migration policy and was used by all sides to legitimise their respective demands and ideas.²

Over the last two decades, while the EU has more or less eliminated internal borders between member states in order to create a unified integrated European market, it has also sought to secure the EU’s common external border in response to fears that a continuum of ‘uninvited’ – unauthorised immigrants, known and suspected criminals and terrorists – will ‘deluge’ Europe.³ These fears were amplified and fomented in the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent terrorist attacks in Madrid, London, Paris, and the following major attacks in 2016 that have taken place in Brussels and Nice.⁴ Moreover, propaganda declaring war on Rome was released by the established presence of Islamic State affiliates on Libya’s coast, and the potential threats that terrorists could take control of migration networks were disseminated.⁵ These events have increased the perception of the Mediterranean as Europe’s vulnerable underbelly.

Articulating freedom of movement within the Schengen space with a variable geometry of control of the external frontiers, the 1990s are marked as the period

when the EU began tightening and militarising its borders.⁶ The EU justified its massive investments in border controls through the narratives of national security – combating human smuggling and potential terrorists.⁷ As well as a narrative of humanitarian action – rescuing lives and protecting asylum-seekers' human rights.⁸ As such, it becomes clear that the current focus on both the securitisation and the humanitarian sides of the phenomenon supports a more complex logic of risk and benevolence, of threat and vulnerability, allowing for a military-humanitarian response.⁹

The representation strategies and discursive practices enacted by a wide range of state and non-state actors present the Mediterranean Sea as the setting of a perpetual emergency. European and national political agencies, military authorities, humanitarian organisations, and activists, have been representing migrants crossing borders as a significant problem to be managed in terms of a wider social, cultural and political 'crisis'. Far outstripping any real crisis is the public anxiety about migration and asylum-seeking in Europe, which in part has grown due to the media coverage of the phenomenon as well as the rhetoric of politicians, who describe Europe as being besieged by people fleeing conflict or seeking a better life.¹⁰

The whole complex of these actors, their discourses, as well as their technologies of surveillance and control – which are at the same time confronted by diverse actors in their attempts to cross borders or to facilitate their transgression – is what several critical migration and border scholars describe with the notion of 'border regime'.¹¹ While constructing an Elysium-like sanctuary protected by perimeter fortifications and remote control border strategies, most of the EU and national actors commonly depict a border regime that is turning the Mediterranean into a mass grave in depoliticising terms as a 'humanitarian' crisis with its root causes always attributed to troubles 'elsewhere' – Africa, the Middle East and Asia – usually in desperate and chaotic places beyond the borders of Europe.¹²

The EU has been devising a securitised, depoliticising and technocratic approach towards the Mediterranean, which arises from the EU's construction of the region based on geopolitical considerations and threat perceptions.¹³ As Cebeci and Schumacher argue, securitisation refers to the state of exception where everything else is subordinated to the logic of security, commonly expressed through the rhetoric of the threat of terrorism, illegal immigration, energy disruption, the rise of extremism, economic instability or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It prioritises security over concerns with regard to democracy, human rights and socio-economic needs of the locals.

At the same time, removing the securitised issues from public debate and referring to the crisis in abstract technical terms, the EU's securitised approach to the Mediterranean is depoliticising because it means imposing the EU's measures on target societies without letting them 'politically' decide on their own lives and/or futures. Rather, it makes them agree on a set of standards, benchmarks and measures imposed on them by the EU and/or its member states.

As Kurki states, depoliticisation mainly refers to a technocratic approach which is based on 'a discursive set of ideals for governance, which emphasise the virtues of depoliticisation, harmonisation, rationalisation and objectification of policy-making and evaluation, and which promotes the role of technical experts in policy-making over substantively "political" or "democratic" public actors'.¹⁴

Ironically, at the same time, the EU authorities point to the high death toll, particularly in and around the Mediterranean, as part of their rationale for more restrictive border enforcement measures. As Shields claims, analysing the human cost of the EU's border regime, 'the claim is that the surveillances and border control system will save lives by providing "pre-frontier" information that will permit border patrol agents to intercept migrants' vessels soon after departure and before they undergo hazardous journeys'.¹⁵ Nevertheless, as Weber and Pickering persuasively argue, much of the death toll associated with displacement effects should be understood as a form of 'structural violence'.¹⁶ That is, rather than these deaths being directly attributable to an individual culprit, responsibility lies in good measure with the various public and private institutions, organisations, networks of actors and structures that forge and implement the EU's border control policy. In other words, the problem is that, adopting the alarming and compassionate frame in currently covering the 'crisis' and its management, the same state actors (Frontex, NATO and other EU members) and non-state actors (MOAS, MSF, Sea Watch and other humanitarian ships patrolling off the coast of Libya) use media (websites, social networks, newsletters, press releases) in a way that feed the depoliticising rhetoric of 'crisis'.¹⁷ Thus, this depoliticised politics based on compassionate care and technocratic control contributes to construct the Mediterranean as a 'migration crisis space' in which it is totally misperceived the same role and culpability in what has become a routine production of serious harm.

As Calhoun claims, crisis demands an immediate response often thought to be outside of politics.¹⁸ It asks that the situation categorised as a crisis be managed in some way. However, this crisis management is focused only on restoring the status quo, not on changing it. Meanwhile, questions regarding what this status quo looks like remain unaddressed.¹⁹ Thus, policymakers and common citizens do not realise that this crisis is also a crucial opportunity to reform an unsustainable system, changing it for the better. What are current communication strategies on 'migrants/refugees crisis' of the several European actors aiming at? What role do the media play in shaping this 'crisis'? And how does this affect solidarity with refugees?

Taking as a starting point Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics, Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereign power and bare life, and Achille Mbembe's work on necropolitics, this chapter focuses on the ambiguities and contradictions that bedevil discourses and practices around control and care of human mobility in the Mediterranean.²⁰ Contemporary scholarship provides important insights into the ways that migrant deaths result from bordering practices that govern through death.²¹ This chapter aims to shed light on the role of 'crisis' narratives and the

hyper-visibility of the 'military-humanitarian spectacle of the border' in obscuring (by making it invisible) the political stakes surrounding European borders.²²

Different aspects of the European border regime in the Mediterranean may appear paradoxical, incoherent and mutually contradictory: the role of humanitarian narratives and the human rights discourse in Frontex's operational activities; the language of combating human smuggling commonly used by the Italian navy while simultaneously rescuing lives; Barcelona's digital billboard that counts the number of people who have died in the Mediterranean in 2016; and the media campaigns aimed at dissuading African would-be migrants from making the unsafe journey to Europe launched by Hungary, Denmark and Italy. This chapter explores the double-sided nature of the military-humanitarian governance of migration, and suggests that these aspects are part of the intricate dichotomies of care and control that mark contemporary migration regimes.

Frontex and the humanitarian borderlands

Europe is at War against an Imaginary Enemy is Frontex's campaign slogan.²³ Supported by a platform of human rights organisations, the campaign started in March 2013 to unveil the increasingly securitarian approach by EU member states. The campaign was launched through a short video that taunts Frontex's quasi-military role in policing the borders, while denouncing how the EU has invested millions of euros in deploying disproportionate measures to fight an enemy who is not a real enemy: the migrant.

This campaign is a good example to start a discussion of the politics of the Mediterranean 'migration crisis'. It focuses on the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the EU – Frontex.²⁴ This agency has received a fair amount of criticism for its joint operations in the Mediterranean, and has been the most visible representative of the militarisation of European borders and of the so-called outsourcing of European asylum rights to third countries.²⁵ Frontex was created in 2004 as a 'compensatory measure' to Schengen.²⁶ Its overall mission is to promote and coordinate the management of EU's external borders, and it does so through common risk analysis, training of border guards, and most visibly, through expansive joint return, sea and land border operations. It has approximately 300 employees stationed in its headquarters in Warsaw, and a much larger pool of personnel and equipment at its disposal from member states for potential operations.²⁷ It receives funding mainly from the European Commission, in addition to funding from some member states, such as the Schengen countries. The agency's budget has grown from EUR 6.2m in 2005 to EUR 119.2m in 2013, exceeding that of Europol.²⁸ How does Frontex's public communication explain and legitimise its actions and the increasing investment in border control to the citizens of Europe and to the national politicians of the EU member states?

According to Horsti, through media, Frontex discursively assures its public that there are security concerns and border problems, which the agency needs to 'combat'.²⁹ For example, it reinforces official security initiatives through its language and practice of risk analysis. One definition of risk used by the agency is: 'Most risks associated with document fraud were assessed as high. Indeed, document fraudsters not only undermine border security but also the internal security of the EU.'³⁰ Implicit in this definition is a view of the border as 'vulnerable', while the people crossing it are construed as a threat. On the other hand, in recent years, Frontex is also embracing the discursive strategy of humanitarianism, based on saving migrant lives. After human rights activists and NGOs began complaining about its mission to protect the 'Fortress Europe' without respecting minimum human rights standards, the humanitarian discursive strategy has become a direct response to that. For example, the prevention of migrants from reaching their 'illegitimate' destination is described as a humanitarian action, 'saving lives'. In these joint operations with member states, Frontex prevented migrants from continuing their journey and forced them to return. At the same time, since the security discourse focuses on the trafficking and smuggling of humans, migrants are typically described as 'victims' of these criminals, and therefore those 'detected' in surveillance operations are 'protected'.³¹

Should we consider this humanitarian discourse simply a smokescreen for a repressive practice, as a critical observer might be tempted to conclude? Investigating this conflicting and ambiguous position of human rights and humanitarian ideals in the policing of European borders, Aas and Gundhs analyse the complex role of humanitarian thinking and the human rights discourse in Frontex operational activities.³² Based on interviews with Frontex officials and border guard officers, and on the analysis of relevant policy documents and official reports, they reveal that the emotive narratives of compassion and humanitarian assistance feature prominently in the agency's internal discourse, its training standards and in its self-presentation. This type of paradoxical policing – termed by the authors 'humanitarian borderlands' – is 'often conducted simultaneously with, against and through humanity. The mission is framed and legitimized through the language of humanitarianism and human rights, officers are partly required to perform their tasks as humanitarian agents, at the same time as they find themselves complicit and practically involved in deeply inhumane conditions'.³³

The Italian navy and the compassionate repression

A similar integration of humanitarian and security responses within a common 'emergency frame' can be explored through the representation strategies and discursive practices enacted by the Italian navy since the launch of the operation *Mare Nostrum*.³⁴ The military-humanitarian operation – targeted at both rescuing migrants and arresting smugglers, while stopping the illegal entry of unauthorised

migrants – was established by the Italian government after two big shipwrecks off Lampedusa on 3 and 11 October 2013, which resulted in the deaths of over 600 migrants. It was launched on the wave of the compassionate reaction of citizens watching hundreds of coffins on their television screens. Although Mare Nostrum signified a strengthening of two other permanent missions co-ordinated and financed by Frontex and Italy and operating in the Mediterranean during this period, it constituted a transformative moment that contributed to reshape the relationship between the military and the humanitarian aspect of the naval operations.³⁵ As we can read on the Italian navy's website, Mare Nostrum was established 'to tackle the dramatic increase of migratory flows during the second half of the year and consequent tragic shipwrecks off the island of Lampedusa'. At the same time, 'the naval and air units deployed by Mare Nostrum were necessary to improve maritime security, patrol sea lanes and combat illegal activities, especially human trafficking'.³⁶ As such, the operation was led by military personnel and means, with the participation of voluntary healthcare operators. The Italian navy, on the one hand, deployed amphibious vessels, frigates, helicopters, a coastal radar network and submarines to gather evidence of the criminal activities. On the other, it was supported by several humanitarian actors: the Fondazione Rava, the emergency services corps of the Order of Malta, the Italian Red Cross military corps and nurses, and Save the Children.

As I have shown in a previous article on the visual politics of this operation, speaking the language of combating human smuggling and potential terrorists, while rescuing lives and protecting migrants' human rights, Mare Nostrum performs the spectacle of the 'humanitarian battlefield'.³⁷ The concept of 'humanitarian battlefield' can be better understood if we investigate the communication performances of Mare Nostrum within what Chouliaraki defines as a 'war imaginary': 'a structured configuration of representational practices, which produces specific performances of the battlefield at specific moments in time, with a view not only to informing and persuading us, as per the instrumental aspect of propaganda, but also to cultivating longer-term dispositions towards the visions of humanity that each war comes to defend'.³⁸ Assuming, with Chouliaraki, that the imaginary works performatively through a morality of virtue, that is, 'it draws upon familiar practices of aesthetic performance so as to engage spectators with images and stories about our world and, thereby, to socialize us into those ways of feeling and acting that are legitimate and desirable in a specific culture', we see how these images contribute to influencing public perception, while shaping the social imaginary through moral discourses of care and responsibility.³⁹

The extent to which these images invite us to legitimise the operation (which costs EUR 9 million per month) becomes clear if we adopt a visual framing approach that takes into account how the images of rescue operations are symbolically organised, the representational genres that they utilise to convey distant suffering, and the sorts of ideological and aesthetic positioning of actors involved in this process. The

Italian navy's choice of some key words, phrases and images (as well as the omission of other elements that could suggest a different perspective or trigger a different sentiment) reinforces a particular representation of reality and a specific emotion towards it. Let me note that *Mare Nostrum* (our sea) was the Roman name for the Mediterranean Sea, picked up by Mussolini to frame fascist propaganda about the 'Italian lake'. As the same (ambivalent) name indicates, the possessive 'our' imagines the Mediterranean as a European space of care and control, while it ambiguously refers to both Italy and Europe. As most photographs available on the Italian navy's website make clear, the official visual narrative constructs borders at imaginary levels triggering sympathy for the soldiers and pity for the migrants.⁴⁰ There are plenty of images that portray the soldiers' activities with the aim of drawing us into a community of witnesses. Emphasising practices and discourses of care, aid and assistance, soldiers covered this operation as a programme of humanitarian, national benevolence that institutes an 'imagined community' between spectators and soldiers from the same country: a community in which the spectator is positioned as the possible saviour, while the rescued bodies are the 'other'.⁴¹ Through such images it becomes clear that border control is being redefined within a moral imagination that puts emphasis on human vulnerability. The soldiers' activities are depicted in the recurring imagery of aid delivery, with rescued, grateful migrants receiving food parcels and water. Women with tiny, innocent babies are the most commonly represented subjects.

To what extent the legitimacy of the military-humanitarian operation *Mare Nostrum* depends on how it is described and explained through media becomes evident through the analysis of the official video of the operation.⁴² It starts with silent images of a man drowning on the high seas, two black women desperately crying over a coffin, hundreds of coffins on a vessel, emergency news commenting on shocking images of the Lampedusa shipwrecks, and the trembling voice of the Pope announcing: 'the only word I can say is: shame!' During these first twenty seconds, through silence and with no voiceover describing the action, nor explanation and context, just drama, the editing of the erratic shots constructs a compassionate narrative that appears as 'real-time story telling' made by intense images. We are invited to read the military-security dispositive of *Mare Nostrum* through the moral voice of the Pope – a religious authority who is here reframed through a secular humanitarian narrative, continuing the sacred salvational narratives of rescue.

An intense apocalyptic musical score immediately erupts after the Pope's words. Following the visual quality of a Hollywood adventure, the rescuers arrive by helicopters, frigates and well-armed vessels, wearing uniforms and medical facemasks. The music grows increasingly epic. Images of soldiers rescuing people in the high waves alternate with that of medical care interventions as the rescued reach the technologically highly equipped vessel. The visual focus is on soldiers distributing food to starving children and exhausted women; a mass of black men praying on the vessels, thankfully gazing at the camera (us). In the last shot we are faced with

the smiling eyes of two grateful rescued children, with a signboard on which they have written: 'Thank you Italya'.

Furthermore, this rearticulation of the military as the humanitarian is even more evident in the docudrama co-produced by the Italian navy and broadcast at prime time in October 2014 by the Italian national television network (RAI): *Catia's Choice: 80 Miles South of Lampedusa*.⁴³ Catia Pellegrino is the (female) lead character of this ninety-two-minute docudrama, chronicling the rescue of refugees crossing borders during the last two months of the Mare Nostrum operation. Alternating images of the brave rescue operations with personal stories of the crew, the video focuses on the positive influence of Catia's strength and empathetic nature in serving others, while maintaining vigilance, keeping the seas safe on her watch.

Through the hyper-emotionalisation and psychologisation of the marines, these images project a moral agency of emotional fragility that humanises and 'feminizes' the armed forces within the realm of those needing 'protection'.⁴⁴ Emphasising the value of personal narratives, the marines appear closer to social workers than soldiers: *social workers with guns*. This attitude is in line with what Chouliaraki has defined 'the empathetic soldiering self', which is infused with the spirit of benevolence and can be associated with the soldiers' effort to cultivate a military subjectivity that sees the 'other' as the self and is committed to protecting her/him as one of 'our own' – 'thereby, paradoxically perhaps, effecting a new "civilianisation" of the military'.⁴⁵ To sum up, in the communication performances enacted by the Italian navy, the moralisation of the spectator takes place through a mechanism of aestheticisation of suffering that is detached from any historical or geopolitical context.

3,034: the number of fatalities in 2016

In order to get a picture of the inability of European countries to act cohesively in the face of common pressures at their southern shores, let me enrich the analysis with two different pieces of news released on 28 July 2016. Focusing on the current tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea, both the initiatives invite us to reflect on the effect of the media on public understanding of the so-called 'migration crisis'. On 28 July, Barcelona's mayor Ada Colau unveiled a large digital billboard showing the number of migrants and refugees who died in the Mediterranean Sea in 2016.⁴⁶ The large metal rectangular pillar is located near one of the city's most popular beaches and comes with a digital counter that began with 3,034 – the number of fatalities that year. But, as the inscription on this 'monument of shame' states, 'This isn't just a number, these are people'. On the same day, Italy's interior minister, Angelino Alfano, launched a media campaign aimed at dissuading African migrants and refugees from making the unsafe journey to Europe over the Mediterranean.⁴⁷ Drawing upon the same estimated number of people killed that year while attempting to reach Italy's southern shore, the Aware Migrants campaign features news, articles and powerful

video testimonials from refugees who made it to Italy but had to endure physical and sexual abuse from people smugglers along the way. Developed in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the campaign was launched in three languages – English, French and Arabic – on various platforms, including its own website, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

As different ways to framing current tragedies and raising awareness on what is happening in the Mediterranean, both the initiatives do not only report on the world ‘out there’, but also constitute this world in meaning, opening up the space for certain forms of intervention and the production of specific types of subjects. Assuming, as I did in the previous paragraph, that the military-humanitarian response to the political ‘migration crisis’ can be intended as a spectacle that invites us to look at the Mediterranean Sea as a ‘humanitarian battlefield’, the two initiatives make people ‘aware’ that there are different ways of looking this liquid ‘battlefield’ in the face. Tracking the dramatic deaths in real time, the digital monument in Barcelona invites us ‘to look the Mediterranean in the face and look at this number’, as Colau has said that ‘3,034 people who drowned because they were not offered a safe passage’. This radical initiative aims at making ‘us’ – European citizens – aware that our human fear towards these strangers, which often becomes open hostility and shameless xenophobia, and is expressed in racist prejudice and physical violence, is transforming the same blue sea of our relaxing holidays into a horrific graveyard. As such, it focuses on the pressures that these deaths are exerting in Europe upon the concept and practice of collective responsibility in order to expose our indifference.

The focus on the total number of people that died due to different causes (disasters, wars, inequality, bad policies, etc.) as a technique to denounce our normalised indifference is not new. Stats about deaths occurring in a specific place or within a certain amount of time have been around for years. Being large figures notoriously difficult to visualise and imagine, the communication of humanitarianism usually focuses on the individual to humanise a problem. By using a short, accessible phrase that in a brief period of time will convey both the emotional impact of the tragedy and that sense of scale and urgency that will precipitate some kind of action, NGOs and charities adopt those kinds of statistics to represent the horrifying image that grabs the headlines. In the Make Poverty History campaign, for example, a host of celebrities from the world of music, cinema and fashion appeared on a video clicking their fingers at regular intervals. Then the message was that ‘A child dies unnecessarily as a result of extreme poverty every three seconds’.⁴⁸

A few years later, the promotional videos of Enough Food for Everyone IF campaign, featured the host, the comedian Eddie Izzard, saying: ‘In every minute of every day, four children die of hunger’.⁴⁹ The WFP’s video campaign A Time for Action claimed that ‘Every six seconds a child dies of hunger’.⁵⁰ What is new, in this case, is the effort to make sense of the emergence of death as a routine or normalised dimension of contemporary bordering practices between more and less stable and privileged regions.⁵¹ In its attempt to unveil the biophysical violence in

any hierarchy of 'worthy' and 'unworthy' lives, Colau's initiative reminds us that, despite Enlightenment traditions and Kantian cosmopolitanism emphasising that 'every life matters' (as highlighted in the same motto of the search and rescue organisation MOAS), the EU is acting openly hostile towards asylum seekers.⁵² It forces us to reflect upon the fact that the ethics of responsibility are today suspended between European democracies' moral imperative to save the lives of people in need and an economy of indifference that, through denial and inaction in the sea, allows for the deaths of certain populations to take place without sanctions or repercussions.

On the contrary, assuming that migration is a decision often based on false expectations ('many migrants leave their home without a concrete project of precise idea of the socioeconomic and political situation of their country of destination', said *Aware Migrants*), Alfano's campaign aims at making 'them' – i.e. would-be African migrants – aware that if they are aspiring to leave their home countries in search of better lives for themselves and their families, they will experience the dangers of violence and exploitation during their perilous journey. Drawing upon statistics on migrant deaths in various regions and from various causes in its effort to reduce the influx of asylum-seekers, the campaign warns would-be migrants that their dream can 'end up a nightmare': the nightmare of women raped in front of their husbands in Libya, or people seeing loved ones die of thirst in the desert or drowning at sea. Furthermore, the news, articles and videos of the campaign advise potential newcomers from fifteen African countries (including the top three asylum-seeker suppliers to Italy – Nigeria, Eritrea and Sudan) that, even if they are strong and lucky enough to reach our shores, they need to convince us that they are really in need of international protection. Indeed, besides the stories of survivors who experienced terrible dangers to come to Europe, the campaign advises Africans that 60 per cent of refugees had their applications rejected last year because they were not deemed by authorities to be 'true refugees' fleeing war.

It is certainly true that, like Barcelona's mayor, Italy's interior minister recognises that 'Europe's migrant crisis is an epochal struggle', affirming that 'obviously, we pride ourselves on welcoming all those fleeing war'. Nevertheless, as he said, 'we can't welcome everybody'.⁵³ It is worth noting that the two initiatives adopt a 'necropolitical' tool to tackle different aspects of the same migrant crisis.⁵⁴ While the Spanish mayor seeks to tackle the crisis of humanity that is affecting European migration policies, urging everyone to awaken from indifference, Italy's interior minister seems to legitimate our ethical failure, highlighting that 'they' are unwanted and undeserved. If the former aims at convincing European citizens (and policymakers) to be more welcoming, the latter seeks to keep refugees out by making it clear that they have not been invited, and that we aren't willing to welcome many newcomers. Targeting different people but with the same aim of making them aware of the challenge of responsibility, the two initiatives appear to give opposite advice regarding the acceptance of immigrants. 'Don't turn a blind eye to poor and helpless people, they are in danger, we can avoid these deaths, it is our responsibility to help those who are

victims of our hostile policies' Colau seems to be saying to the European audience. 'Open your eyes and do not even think of starting the journey, it is dangerous and you are (perceived as) a danger, the loss and suffering you will go through is your own responsibility' – this is the veiled warning launched by Alfano and directed at the African audience. It is interesting to note that the EUR 1.5 million campaign is the latest of several attempts by Italy to convince fewer refugees to make the journey, with others including a deportation and relocation programme. Although this campaign focuses on reducing loss of life by informing migrants of the dangers of irregular routes, smuggling or trafficking, in its attempt to use communication to discourage irregular migration Italy seems to follow Hungary and Denmark.⁵⁵ This is not the first European fear-mongering campaign. Indeed, to limit the flow of refugees, in 2015 the Hungarian government – besides the 112-mile-long fences along its border with Serbia – used advertising campaigns to actively dissuade refugees from entering the country.⁵⁶ The advertisements were published in several Lebanese and Jordanian newspapers warning refugees not to attempt to enter Hungary illegally. The full-page advertisements, published in Arabic and English, warned that refugees caught entering the country illegally could face imprisonment. A few months later, the Danish government released a similar advertisement in major newspapers in Lebanon in which it warned migrants not to come to the prosperous Nordic country, highlighting that those rejected for asylum would be deported from the country. It spent EUR 30,000 on an advertising campaign that emphasised the stringent regulations and constraints that await migrants.⁵⁷ Probably to avoid accusations of drumming up anti-immigrant rhetoric (as seen in the Hungarian and Danish cases), Italy's Minister of Interior decided to adopt a more veiled warning to migrants; the involvement of the IOM, one of the main refugee rights groups that has called for better treatment of those choosing to make the journey, represents a strong humanitarian aspect of the project.

Angelino Alfano is the Interior Minister of the government led by Matteo Renzi, Italy's prime minister, who perfectly integrated the humanitarian discourse of assistance and hospitality within the ongoing language of migration governance. Alfano launched the campaign stressing that 'economic migrants comprised 60 per cent of last year's 154,000 arrivals', and noting that Italy and the rest of the EU 'must speed up the repatriation of migrants with no legal residency rights, otherwise the bloc's migrations policies will collapse'. Indeed, since 2015, Matteo Renzi has insisted that Italy and all of Europe had a humanitarian 'duty' to protect people making the journey. On 15 October 2015, for example, during his visit to the Italian parliament, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, paid homage 'to the Italian soldiers who saved thousands of human lives in the Mediterranean', and thanked 'the Italian population for the efforts made to welcome and assist migrants'.

Concluding the event, Matteo Renzi affirmed: 'the Italy that welcomes you is the country of the Italian officers who became nurses to deliver babies in the ships on the Mediterranean. It is an Italy of which we are proud'.⁵⁸ Furthermore,

on 7 March 2016, Renzi gave each EU leader at a migration summit a DVD copy of *Fuocoammare* (*Fire at Sea*, Gianfranco Rosi, 2016), a documentary about the plight of refugees as they wash up on the shores of the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, which won the top prize at the 66th Berlin Film Festival.⁵⁹ At the same time, Renzi – like most European leaders – is keen to show he is taking steps to differentiate between refugees who are fleeing war, and those who are seeking a better life and economic opportunities. Despite the fact that – as the GSDRC research report shows – there is extremely scant evidence on whether these campaigns are effective, and anecdotal evidence suggests that they have limited, if any, effect on migrants' decisions to leave,⁶⁰ these initiatives represent a further example of how media performances contribute to shaping the Mediterranean as an emotional and physical setting in which fears and insecurities can be used for both progressive as well as regressive purposes.⁶¹

Conclusion

In my attempt to critically make sense of the political stakes surrounding European borders, in this chapter I have explored several examples of initiatives that may appear paradoxical and mutually contradictory, but – this is my suggestion – are part of the complex dichotomies of care and control, the absence and presence of law, transparency and darkness, solidarity and indifference, which mark contemporary border regimes. The intricate role of humanitarian narrative and the human rights discourse in Frontex's operational activities of border control; the language of combating human smuggling while rescuing lives, currently adopted by the Italian navy; the digital billboard that counts the number of people who have died in the Mediterranean Sea in 2016; the media campaign aimed at dissuading African would-be migrants from making the unsafe journey to Europe launched by Italy's Interior Minister; Matteo Renzi's emphasis on the humanitarian duty to protect people making the journey: these examples suggest, on the one hand, that the discourse of assistance and solidarity has been perfectly integrated within the ongoing language of migration governance. On the other hand, it shows that coercive policies of control, which directly and indirectly contribute to the precariousness of life, co-exist with a humanitarian self-perception by European member states and EU agencies.

Drawing attention to the biopolitical, thanatopolitical and necropolitical dimensions of contemporary border practices as these operate in the Mediterranean Sea, this chapter invites to reflect on the co-existence of the humanitarian narratives of saving lives and the increasingly militarised borders, as well as the misperception of our own role and responsibility in this routine production of deaths. In examining the contradictory tension between different initiatives, discourses and practices of border reinforcement and border crossing, it shows how the ethics of security is intrinsically related to geopolitical reason.

Indeed, looking at the integration of humanitarian narrative in the language of security deployed by European and national actors, it would seem that the primary subject of security (i.e. deserving of protection) is the citizenry of the EU. Migrants and asylum-seekers do not feature as objects of state knowledge, either on the EU level or on the level of individual member states.

Thus, on the one hand, by enabling us to imagine ourselves as compassionate citizens who have both the capacity to save migrants in the high seas, and to defend our countries from the invasion of the aliens, the mediated nature of the humanitarian assistance results in undermining rather than intensifying solidarity.⁶² On the other hand, by seeing the deaths in the Mediterranean only in terms of crisis, while depicting the Mediterranean as a place where the 'state of exception' takes place and migrants are reduced to 'bare life' – excluded from the sphere of human values, civic rights and moral obligations – contributes to obscure the structural role of European border policies and everyday practices in these deaths.⁶³ As such, the consolidation of Europe's external borders, the implementation of Schengen and the restrictive visa regime, as well as the consequences on people's ability to seek safe and legal routes into the EU, becomes invisible. Indeed, if the governance of migration is reduced to a humanitarian question of saving lives and to a question of combating the smugglers, its technocratic management appears to be beyond politics. In spite of the humanitarian rhetoric often employed or the declared aim to target smugglers and traffickers, several scholarly analyses have demonstrated that no naval operation in the Mediterranean has made passage more secure for migrants.⁶⁴ On the contrary, the emergency management of the crisis has led to a situation in which tens of thousands of migrants and refugees are stranded in Greece and Turkey because crossing the Mediterranean has become more and more dangerous and expensive. The EU's border regime has funnelled migratory flows towards longer and more perilous routes as migrants seek to avoid detection, detention and/or return. These displacement effects, by now very predictable and foreseeable, have contributed to a terrible human toll.

Despite the emotional and technocratic framing usually adopted by the media to describe the Mediterranean as a depoliticised border, we must be aware about what Mezzadra and Neilson call the 'productive' and even 'creative' functions of the borders, which means the specific forms of 'order' they enable within the space they appear to merely circumscribe.⁶⁵ As they argue, the 'encounter' of a would-be migrant with the border, its crossing, tends to reproduce itself across large parts of that experience and biography, with multiple manifestations of the border haunting migrants in their negotiations with citizenship and labour markets, in the urban as well as the 'national' spaces they inhabit and to which they contribute and thus transform and produce. Since the birth of the EU, this 'productive' nature of borders has played crucial roles in the establishment and constitution of a European space. Yet, in the current situation it is nurturing a 'compassionate repression' that increasingly and silently legitimises the difference between the 'us' (the figure of the citizen) and the 'them' (the figure of the 'foreigner').⁶⁶

Amongst the 'existential' questions that are at stake for the EU integration process as a whole, it is fundamental to consider that migration to Europe will continue over the coming years, both because of the push of migrants and because European economies and societies need migration.⁶⁷ As it is confirmed by demographic as well as economic reports, Europe needs more migrants, not fewer.⁶⁸ Thus, the EU's political elites should understand the absolute necessity of attracting more migrants, and co-operate to convince voters that Europe's future is at stake. Stopping migration is not only an unrealistic prospect that produces concrete effects in the everyday life of millions of vulnerable people on the move. It also contributes to worsen the conditions under which migration will happen in the near future as well as of the lives of migrants already established in Europe. If we really wish to save lives and to come up with better responses to meet the tremendous needs people face risking the dangerous journey it probably would be better for EU governments to turn the core question from 'how can we stop migrants?' to 'why are people fleeing?' and 'how can we provide people with the ability to apply for visas/asylum lawfully?'

Notes

- 1 Although there is a crucial legal difference between 'migrant' and 'refugee', it is worth noting that in the media these terms are often used interchangeably, depending on the period and its public sentiment (e.g. according to Google Trends data, throughout 2015, searches for 'refugee' remained slightly higher than 'migrant' spiking in early September, around the time the distressing photos of Alan Kurdi were released). Moreover, although the legal and political separation between refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants is ever-present in the communitarian discourse and agenda-setting, the difference – upon which not everybody agrees, and that has received criticism by the double standard it imposes upon people in need, producing a selective recognition of suffering – is much more blurred in practice. According to this, it is interesting the announcement by Al Jazeera English it would stop using the term migrant, as it 'is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean'. See L. Westcott, 'Refugees vs. Migrants: What's the Right Term to Use', *Newsweek* (11 September 2015), www.newsweek.com/refugee-vs-migrants-whats-right-term-use-371222. Accessed 15 July 2017.
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