THE DESULTORY POLITICS OF MOBILITY AND THE HUMANITARIAN-MILITARY BORDER IN THE MEDITERRANEAN. MARE NOSTRUM BEYOND THE SEA

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This article investigates the reshaping of the military-humanitarian border in the Mediterranean, focusing on the Italian military-humanitarian mission Mare Nostrum, that started for rescuing migrants at sea after the deaths of hundreds of migrants in October 2013 near the coasts of the island of Lampedusa. The main argument is that in order to understand the working of the military-humanitarian border at sea and its impacts, we must go beyond the space of the sea, and analysing it in the light of the broader functioning of migration governmentality. The notion of desultory politics of mobility is deployed here for describing the specific temporality of the humanitarian border working and its politics of visibility. In particular, an analytical gaze on the military-humanitarian operations at sea to rescue-and-control of migrants' movements shows that what is at stake is the production of some practices of mobility as exceptional. Then, this article takes on Mare Nostrum operation for exploring the ways in which the military and the humanitarian are rearticulated and how they currently work together.

Keywords: humanitarian border, migration, governmentality, politics of visibility, biopolitics.[2]

"We left the Libyan coasts at night, let's say around 10pm, and in the early morning our boat started to sink. After few hours, maybe one or two, the big navy of Italy approached our boat and were been rescued. The police took our pictures and fingerprints in three, five minutes, and they asked if we were all from Mali"[3].

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[2] I want to thank Nicholas De Genova for his comments and for our discussion on the topic.

[3] Interview with a migrant coming from Mali and rescued by the Italian Navy. After the arrival at the harbour of Augusta, in Sicily, with other eighty people he was moved to Bologna into a hosting centre (11th March 2014).

"Our task is to save migrants' lives at sea. We arrive very close to the Libyan waters and rescue all people in distress, we are their secure ferry-boat to come to Europe. All migrants are identified on board painstakingly"[4].

"We disembarked in Sicily, after two nights, and then we were moved very quickly to Catania, by bus, and then to Bologna, by plane. At the airport we were partitioned: some, like me, in Bologna, another group were taken I don't know where"[5].

"The Country must build a hosting system to face unplanned migration flows through ordinary measures"[6].

"I'm waiting for the response about my asylum claim. Then, let's see. I would like to wander a little bit across Europe: France, Germany, and then maybe come back to Italy. I really like wandering, I think it is important to travel to open your mind"[7].

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The alternation of these voices and texts – a migrant arrived in Italy being rescued by the Italian Navy on the one hand, the voice of a military and a governmental text on the other – brings to the fore a texture of stories that shape the Mediterranean sea as a space of governmentality and as a space of military-humanitarian intervention. Stories, declarations and texts that actually give rise to partially discordant 'tales' and that, consequently, actualize and stage multiple spaces of movement – different images but also different lived spaces and practices of crossing that space. However, the Mediterranean as a space of governmentality narrated by migrants and by the Italian authorities as well is not new at all: the emergence of the Mediterranean as a sea of unsafe mobility and as a governmentalized sea traces back to the early 2000's, when, due to the increased difficulties for migrants to arrive 'legally' in Europe, EU member states started to set up military operations at sea to block migrants' vessels, although always (also) in the name of saving migrants' lives. Thus, drawing on Foucault's methodological insight on problematization[8] – namely, an analytical posture that retraces under what circumstances some phenomena, acts or practices at some point become a 'problem' for politics – this paper questions the image of the Mediterranean as a stable meta-geographical referent: it highlights the blurred and constantly changing political boundaries of the Mediterranean, and takes it as a space of migration governmentality crafted through techniques

[4] Interview with the Italian Navy, harbour of Augusta (22nd March, 2014).

[5] See footnote 3.

[6] "Agreement between the Italian government, the Regions and the local authorities to move towards an ordinary management of unplanned migration flows" (67/CU, 2013).

[7] See footnote 3.

[8] FOUCAULT, Michel. Polemics, Politics and Problematizations.

of monitoring and containment, processes of militarization and humanitarian discourses. But a history of problematization – in this case, the emergence of a space (the Mediterranean) as a risky space to govern – does not consider the problem in question as an object set once and for all. On the contrary, one of the main stakes consists precisely in finding moments of rupture and transformation, as well as discontinuities that reshape the Mediterranean as an unsafe space according to different technological and discursive assemblages and responding to new troubling mobilities. Therefore, this paper aims to unpack the ongoing reshaping of the military-humanitarian border in the Mediterranean focusing on Mare Nostrum operation for grasping these transformations.

The military-humanitarian border working across the Mediterranean

Therefore, coming back to the voices reported initially, it is important to specify to which 'Mediterranean as un unsafe space' they belong: indeed, they are situated some months after two big shipwrecks of migrants' boats occurred in October 2013 that caused the deaths of hundreds of people. 3rd October 2013, Lampedusa: 366 migrants coming from Libya died in the waters close to the Italian island of Lampedusa, 155 are rescued. 11th October 2013: another big shipwreck occurs between Malta and Lampedusa, 268 people die. In both cases the Italian authorities are accused of fatal delay in rescue operations. The Italian government declares a day of national mourning for the tragedies at sea, without mentioning the mobility restrictions of the Visa regime that force people to take a boat and cross the Mediterranean. Just one week after the second shipwreck, the Italian Home Office and the Ministry of Defence launch Mare Nostrum, as 'a military-humanitarian operation' in the Mediterranean for rescuing migrants at sea. A focus on Mare Nostrum, on its disseminations and impacts also beyond the sea boundaries does not mean situating the analysis within the frame of the exception – by looking at measures and actions mobilized in the name of exceptional situations. Rather, the hypothesis that I push forward is that the two big tragedies at sea in October 2013 and the launching of Mare Nostrum were seized as an opportunity for activating and implementing transformations and shifts in the management of migrants' movements at sea that were in part already in place. As I will show later, these shifts mainly concern the articulation between humanitarian and military interventions. Furthermore, a gaze on the recent military rescue operations allows bringing out the specificity of the regime of visibility and capture at play in the governmentality of migration at sea: what is at stake, I suggest, is a sort of *desultory politics of mobility* that, as I will explain later in the article, responds to a patchy visibility and to an intermittent hold over migrants' lives. This uneven 'catching eye' on migrants is the baseline for highlighting the specificities of the government of migration at sea and the articulation between

the military and the humanitarian in relation to other spaces of migration and refugee governmentality. As a third and final point, an enlarged focus on the government of migration movements at sea *beyond the sea boundaries* – namely, how migrants are managed once they arrive on the territory – enables seeing that power reacts and reassess its strategies in the face of the 'migration disorder' and of stories that remain unclassifiable and uncategorised, by fragmenting and hampering migrants' patterns and life projects.

The blurring of security and the fading of human rights into the sea

It is noteworthy that Mare Nostrum has not been designated as a securitarian operation – but as military-humanitarian, with the first term entirely redefining the second. In fact, only in the following lines does the document report that "the aim is to increase the level of human life security and the control of migration flows"[9]. The concept of security essentially remains on the backstage of Mare Nostrum's actions and it is not helpful for understanding the becoming of the Mediterranean Sea as a space of patchy governmentality, namely as a space in which zones at high density of control border on with others in which bodies pass more undetected. In particular, there are relevant slippages concerning the meaning of security and even its articulation with human rights that, I contend, characterize the production of the Mediterranean as an (un) safe space of mobility. However, they can clearly emerge on the surface to the extent that we do not remain at the level of official texts and documents that present Mare Nostrum as a military-humanitarian mission: only by investigating closely the effective actions of the military forces and hearing the stories of the migrants who survived the shipwrecks is it possible to fully unpack the script of security and look at the political technology which effectively is at play. Firstly, if the traditional governmental field of security cannot be detached from the production of insecurity and from a sense of 'unease'[10] – as in fact it is the case when 'illegal' migrations become part of the 'border spectacle' – in the current military-humanitarian operations at sea this is far from being the primary outcome. Indeed, the goal of what I would call the military channels of rescue is rather to subtract the island of Lampedusa from the 'threatening' border spectacle of migrants' arrivals, rescuing migrants close to the Libyan coasts and disembarking them in Sicily, and to perform a good border spectacle on the high seas – building a spectacle of rescue[11]. The continuum of threats formed by terrorism-migration-

[9] Cf. http://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/NazionaliInCorso/MareNostrum/Notizie/Pagine/Comunicatostampa18ottobre2013.aspx.

[10] BIGO, Didier. Security and Immigration. Towards a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease. See also HUYSMANS, Jef. *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*.

[11] De GENOVA, Nicholas. Spectacles of Migrant 'Illegality': The Scene of Exclusion, the Obscene of Inclusion.

criminality-trafficking does not well illustrate the rationale and the functioning of the patchy migration governmentality in the Mediterranean: especially after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict and the consequent increasing pre-eminence of a discourse about activating humanitarian channels for Syrians, migrants from Libya are accounted in the military-humanitarian rationale less as potential threats and risky subjects for Europe than as people at risk. They are depicted at the same time as subjects who are at fault by putting themselves in danger – leaving by unsafe boats – and as subjects at risk (of death and trafficking) that need to be saved. In this context, the human rights discourse in some way fades into the sea: while the humanitarian logic usually relies on human rights standards for opposing third-countries political governments – denouncing for instance the conditions in Libyan detention centres – when it is transposed into securing migrants' lives at sea it is immediately reframed as an affair of military concern due to its exceptional character; and the very notion of 'human' is translated into 'life to be rescued'.

Secondly, human rights are in some way redefined through the obligation for states to not push back migrants on high seas and the right to protection against return to a country where an individual faces the risk of torture or persecution. Therefore, human rights are taken away from the possibility of working as strategic footholds for migrants' agency since they come to designate dangerous conditions that people must be protected from (as the right of not being pushed back) instead of addressing specific freedoms to be granted. In this sense, the military-humanitarian politics of saving lives at sea contributes to translate human rights into the rights of the humanitarian, namely of those subjects who must not be left to die[12]. Human rights at sea function like the non-negotiable limits of any governmental action against migrations – for instance, the duty of non-refoulement – and become principles for people's spatial relocation – in the name of the respect for human rights migrants can be disembarked or not in certain states, or they must be allowed to arrive in a 'safe country'. In this regard, it is worth recalling 's reflection on the paradoxical and exclusionary character of human rights that emerges precisely when we are confronted with people deprived of any rights except of their being humans: "paradoxically, I am deprived of human rights at the very moment at which I am reduced to a human being 'in general', and thus become the ideal bearer of those 'universal human rights' […] Far from being pre-political, universal human rights designate the precise space of politicization proper"[13]. Thus, the rights of the migrants' life at

[12] BROWN, Wendy. "The Most We Can Hope For...". Human Rights and the Politics of Fatalism; RANCIÈRE, Jacques. Ten Theses on Politics.

[13] ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. Against Human Rights, p. 127.131.

risk are actually rights that reflect on the states' duties not to make and let them die or be put in danger.

The good border spectacle and the exceptionalization of migrants' mobility

What seems to be emerging is a new and odd assemblage of the humanitarian rationale that is well encapsulated in the military-humanitarian bond and in the reversal of the border spectacle: in fact, the military-humanitarian coupling indicates that the former is in charge of enacting the latter and, in turn, the humanitarian becomes a field of intervention that requires highly-equipped teams that could reach the Libyan coasts and save migrants in danger. Therefore, (migrants') mobility is 'exceptionalized', namely it is moulded as an exceptional affair in multiple ways: it takes place in exceptional risky conditions and it requires the intervention of humanitarian-military corps. However, it is important to stress that the shaping of migration movements as extreme and at risk forms of mobility does not necessarily also involve a power grounded on the exception. Rather, humanitarian government at sea and the increasing governmentalization of the Mediterranean prompt us to scrutinize techniques of intervention, containment and rescue that are neither fully characterized by actions in the name of the exception nor work outside of the law. In fact, the 'humanitarian task' performed by military actors should not mislead and lead us to think of a power playing through exceptional measures: on the contrary, the 'collapse' of the humanitarian into the military indicates that the latter is in turn normalized on the basis of daily patrols and procedures that become ordinary. Hence, what is of interest from this perspective is precisely the series of techniques, ways of acting and operative tools that are put to work in-between legal frameworks and arbitrary practices: in other words, these are regulative mechanisms of rescue-block-and-capture that, although not explicitly established by the law, nevertheless can be legitimized through it, forcing its boundaries of application. In this regard one could concur with Scott Watson's argument that "a militarized response is best understood not as a move from normal to exceptional, or from humanitarian to securitized, but rather as an intensification of humanitarian securitization"[14]. All at once, the border spectacle of the migrants' invasion of the island of Lampedusa is dislocated and reversed in sign: the scene shifts towards the high seas and the Libyan coasts, and the threatening spectacle of migrants is converted into the fair and human spectacle of the 'humanitarian-military ferry-boat' rescuing migrants at sea.

Moreover, freedom that in political liberalism is mutually constitutive of dispositive of security[15], in the context of the government of migration at sea

[14] WATSON, Scott. The human as a referent object? Humanitarianism as securitization, p. 9.
[15] FOUCAULT, Michel. *Security, territory, population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*.

is ultimately evacuated: in fact, neither freedom is the correlate outcome of more security – namely more restrictions and controls on migrants' movements – nor does it work as a necessary element for the functioning of securitarian mechanisms. Quite to the contrary, freedom remains the uncontemplated possibility for the rescued-secured migrants. Indeed, in the humanitarian-military discourse freedom is the 'great absent' since the beginning of the story: forced to leave from their country and from Libya, the rescued migrants put their life at risk crossing the Mediterranean by boat, and then, once rescued, they cannot but follow the established 'humanitarian channels' being allocated to a certain space, in such a way that no future movement and life project could be planned.

The desultory politics of mobility at sea: which biopolitics?

At this stage, it is important to scrutinize and unpack the assemblage between humanitarian and military in its peculiar nuances as it is deployed in controlling and channelling migration movements at sea. In this regard, my hypothesis is that not only the taxonomy of security but also the semantics of humanitarian and military need to be deeply challenged since they do not provide appropriate analytical lenses to grasp the functioning of the mechanisms of capture over migrants' lives but, on the contrary, they are precisely an object of questioning. The gesture of moving to the side of these 'border-signifiers', like 'humanitarian' and 'military' – entails, I contend, a dislocation of the gaze, shifting from the actors at play and form the discursive regime to the spatial effects of their border-working[16].

In recent years, with the growing militarization of the Mediterranean and the implementation of monitoring techniques along the coasts and on navies, the Mediterranean space has been depicted as one of the most watched seas[17]. Nothing seems escaping from the monitoring eyes of national and international authorities in charge of controlling traffic and movements. Therefore, a 'more for more' approach characterizes the discourse on security: more security for more surveillance for more migrants' safety. At the same time, humanitarian-military actors are supposedly operating in an incessant way, in the twofold role of watchdogs blocking 'illegal movements' and as rescue-forces of migrants in distress at sea. The dramatic events that happened near the Italian coasts tell another story and immediately undermine the image of an overall visibility in contrast with the constitutive elusiveness and opacity of migration movements.

[16] 'Border-signifiers' refers to the fact that they trace borders among bodies and conducts, dividing up people between 'illegal' migrants and those in need of protection. And at the same time it points to the supposed opposition between two poles – the military and the humanitarian – that actually work jointly and the one for the other.

[17] LUTTERBECK, Derek. Policing Migration in the Mediterranean.

In fact, the shipwrecks mentioned above (3rd and 11th October 2013) are only the most recent cases of migrants' deaths at sea in which national authorities are accused of not rescuing in time. This denunciation opens up a huge and thorny issue concerning the regime of visibility and, related to that, the power's hold on migrants' lives Indeed, if we take together the 'failures' in rescuing migrants and the effective visibility capacity of monitoring systems like radars, what emerges is a patchy cartography of the Mediterranean sea, formed by 'shadow zones' and 'blind spots', in which the alternation between visible and invisible spaces changes over time. Thus, far from being a smooth surface or a 'container' of different mobilities, the Mediterranean Sea appears as a discontinuous assemblage of moments and spaces of (in)visibility[18]. It is important to underline that the moments and the spaces of 'opacity' depend on the combination of two distinct factors. On the one hand, there are the technical limits of monitoring tools and the usefulness of radar images for the human eye to discern different kinds of vessels[19]. On the other, it is a matter of the odd biopolitics at stake in the government of migration at sea, where the abstract referent of 'life' emerges in its differential ontologies, gradients and forms: indeed, the meaning of 'life' implicated in the discourses on saving migrants at sea ultimately address subjects who are posited as inevitably *at risk*, engaging themselves in dangerous practices of mobility, tying to enact a freedom of movement that they are not entitled to enjoy. At the same time, the eventual disappearance of migrants at sea has not always the same salience and what emerges in migration governmentality at sea is precisely the uneven and unequal distribution of life's value. In this regard, the discontinuous humanitarian-grasp on migrants' lives is one of the most visible signs of a monitoring (securitarian-humanitarian) gaze that put into place a politics alternating *not making migrants die* and *letting migrants die* at sea. It could be argued that the life in question becomes worthy of protection and in need of being rescued when a 'good' border spectacle is in place, as in the case of Mare Nostrum.

However, the notion of 'desultory politics' over mobility at sea does not only indicate the temporality of the power's hold on migrants' lives but also its effects: migrants' movements are constantly fragmented and blocked. In fact, in combination with a patchy governmentality that sees, monitors and rescues at intervals (with many grey zones of invisibility), it operates through a simultaneous double move: blocking-rejecting on the one hand, and channelling people on the other. As illustrated above, this working through fragmentation characterizes also what I call *Mare Nostrum beyond the sea*, namely the continuation of

[18] HELLER, Charles; PEZZANI, Lorenzo. New Evidence Released in the Left-to-die Boat Case.

[19] In fact, also the most advanced Radar systems (C-230 Gabbiano) cannot see for instance rubber boats – that many migrants use to leave – since they fall under the minimum height.

the humanitarian politics of dis-charge after the moment of rescue, once that migrants arrive on Italian territory. In this sense, as Michael Dillon nicely captures, it is necessary to interrogate the slippages of the meaning and the functioning of biopolitics today, scrutinizing how the very referent of 'life' has changed over the last decades and whether it is still appropriate to designate biopolitics as a technology of protection[20]. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that in the context of the desultory migration politics of (im)mobility what is at stake is not a mechanism of life empowerment but, rather, the fuelling of a fragile ridge between not seeing – namely letting people die – and monitoring for channelling and blocking people – making people not die. In other words, is biopolitics a useful and adequate notion for describing mechanisms of governing conducts that work primarily through the taking of a hold on life but not through the capitalization (see, valorization) of life itself? In fact, building on Foucault's analysis, biopolitics is related precisely to a government over life that works through its sustainment and multiplication, and that aims at the increase in wealth of (national) population[21]. Moreover, if as Didier Fassin and Mariela Pandolfi have clearly shown, the coupling of military and humanitarian itself traces back to the Seventies, it must be noticed that it was built on "a paradigm that asserted the right to intervene in the name of lives to be saved and populations to be protected"[22]. Instead, at an attentive gaze the current entanglement between the two same terms in the government of migration at sea appears to craft a quite different working rationale. Firstly, rescue operations on the high sea do not respond to the logic of intervention to 'save' national populations in other countries. Indeed, international waters are not under any specific national sovereignty; contrariwise, through military-humanitarian operations to block-and-save migrants, European states have contributed to the governmentalization of the Mediterranean high sea, through the partitioning of zones of rescue and intervention. Similarly, it is not a national population that is the target of the desultory politics of mobility but a more blurred and composite 'migration population' that cannot immediately be connected to a unitary risky space of intervention. Secondly, despite the overarching discursive frame of the asylum and thus of the international protection, migration governmentality at sea and the working of the humanitarian-military border are not fundamentally based on a logic of protection but on a fragmenting and dis-charging move. To put it differently, the humanitarian-military convoy takes and rescues (some) migrants, then sorts them into the hindered humanitarian channels of waiting –

[20] DILLON, Michael. Governing through contingency: The security of biopolitical governance.
[21] FOUCAULT, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge;* IDEM. *Security..., op. cit*.
[22] FASSIN, Didier; PANDOLFI, Mariella. *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*.

that strand people for indefinite time and allocate them in space – or into the fast channels of deportations.

Hence, the patchy regime of (in)visibility corresponds to a likewise uneven hold on migrants' movements, that I designate here as 'desultory politics over mobility'. Nevertheless, by mobilizing such a designation two important clarifications are needed. Firstly, the *take-and-dump* capture over migrants' lives is not the result of a fully devised governmental strategy: rather, it is the outcome of the combination between different 'troubling mobilities' producing shifts and re-assemblages in the politics of control, difficulties in detecting people at sea and a politics of dis-charge that fundamentally does not care about loss at sea except in the moments that for some reason are under the spotlight of the political debate. Secondly, the stress on the 'shadow zone' in the Mediterranean – namely, the uneven regime of visibility – and the *politics of dis-charge* acted by humanitarian-military actors, is not staged at all here for pointing to the 'failures' of migration governmentality and demanding more security[23]. On the contrary, the issue is to highlight and destabilize the desultory politics of mobility in itself, not for its supposed 'failures' but precisely for the hold on migrants' lives that acts through a combination of take-and-dump and, simultaneously, the coupling of military and humanitarian rationales.

The humanitarian government beyond the camp

Looking at migration governmentality at sea through the actions of Mare Nostrum allows bringing to the fore the peculiarities of the humanitarian government at sea, through the overlapping of the military and the humanitarian. Although it goes beyond the scope of this article to undertake a detailed confrontation between humanitarian government at sea and in the camp, it is possible to point to some techniques, practices and procedures that in the former appear in a more distinct way and at the same time work through a slightly different angle. In fact, the notion of desultory politics of (migration) mobility represents a useful analytical slant for grasping the peculiar features and mechanisms of migration governmentality at sea and, by contrast, the functioning of humanitarian and biopolitical power in the camp. This becomes also much clearer if we follow the patterns of the migrants who stayed for more than two years in the Tunisian refugee camp of Choucha, close to the Libyan border, and then left Tunisia by boat to reach the Italian coasts and were rescued by Mare Nostrum. Firstly, in the camp the control over migrants' conducts and over their mobility is quite steady, although it is far from being exercised as an overwhelming pastoral power, as William Walters rightly stresses: "the pastoral care of migrants

[23] TAZZIOLI, Martina. *Spaces of Governmentality*.

[…] is not organized in the form of a life-encompassing activity [..] but as ad hoc intervention"[24]. Thus, it is a form of hold over migrants' lives that monitors more than taking care, and is as much spatially punctual – the borders of the space of the camp – as it is hampering and all-watching during the indefinite stranded condition of an asylum seeker waiting in the camp. Actually, the biopolitical grasp on migrants' lives is far from mobilizing a pastoral gaze: migrants saved as they are rescued but not 'redeemed' from their unfree mobility. On the contrary, they are channelled into the spaces of conditioned mobility put into place by the exclusionary mechanism of asylum.

At the same time the humanitarian works through a series of exclusionary partitions producing differentiations among the asylum seekers – sorting them into different mobility profiles. While at sea, migrants are either left to die, passing undetected, or they become lives at risk and to be rescued – subjected to a discontinuous governmental gaze. Then, they are fingerprinted on the boat by the police for a first identification and in this way they are channelled into the deadlocks of the Dublin III regulation, having no other possibility than claiming asylum in Italy. Just left to arrive: this sentence encapsulates well what happens on the 'scene' left out of the spotlight, namely once migrants arrive on Italian territory. In fact, in the processing of their asylum claims what seems to count is their common arrival via Mare Nostrum rescue operations, more than their singular stories, the national provenience or the reasons for their flight from Libya.

Secondly, a focus on humanitarian government at sea allows an unsettling of the fixed and bounded space of the camp – shifting to mechanisms of migration governmentality that produce and are grounded on *spaces on the move*, namely temporary spaces that flexibly change in their function as spaces of protection or containment. In fact, in order to understand the functioning of the desultory politics over migrants' mobility it is necessary to draw attention to temporary spaces of governmentality – where people are rescued, channelled through or let die – formed also by moving transports, like military navies. Moreover, it requires mobilizing a dislocating gaze that takes migrants' displacements as a vantage point to come to grips with the biopolitical holds and transformations to which migrants are subjected. Indeed, it is only by following migrants from the southern shore of the Mediterranean to their arrival on European territory that it becomes possible to see that something like a homogenous and continuous humanitarian government does not exist. Instead of pointing to an overall humanitarian rationality that manages migration 'from one shore to the other' of the Mediterranean, it is by far more salient to look at heterogeneous techniques of dis-charge that take a different hold on migrants' lives and shape likewise

[24] WALTERS, William. Foucault and Frontiers: Notes on the Birth of the Humanitarian Border, p. 158.

different humanitarian profiles changing from one border to another, working through a sort of *identity reshuffling*. For instance, the same migrants 'change' as far as their status and their subjective interpellation are concerned – on the boat they are rescued lives, on the territory they become asylum seekers or migrants to deport, and at sea they are addressed as subjects at risk. Moreover, the humanitarian grasp works differently – through heterogeneous techniques and temporalities of intervention – according to the different bordering spaces – the boat, the moment of the arrival, the identification procedure. Therefore, it could be suggested that focusing on migration governmentality at sea entails following the 'migration of the humanitarian' in its different stages and across spaces – in a nutshell, well beyond the sea. In fact, a gaze on Mare Nostrum and on the discontinuous holds on migrants' lives, as well as the different mechanisms of capture and management, highlights that the desultory politics over mobility at sea largely oversteps the boundaries of the sea.

The military-humanitarian ferry-boat beyond (il)legality

As explained before, the focus on Mare Nostrum highlights a reshuffling of the humanitarian government over lives that consists in a substantial overlap between military and humanitarian; or better, the latter is endorsed and enacted by the former. Therefore, if migration governmentality in and around the camp is eventually characterized by the spreading of humanitarian tasks beyond national governments, in the case of the humanitarian at sea this is rather reframed as a good border spectacle that cannot be performed other than by military forces. The agencies of the humanitarian, like UNHCR, are displaced by the deployment of 'military channels' that do not manage but rescue migrants' lives. Finally, the literature on the camp tends to focus on measures out-of-law that are acted in the name of the management of the exception, highlighting the way in which the juridical domain is deeply transformed and implemented by extra-juridical norms. On the contrary, in the context of the humanitarian government at sea, it emerges quite glaringly that a critical analysis should rather take into account what happens beyond, below and at the edges of the law. In fact, in the face of the 'military ferry-boat' that rescues and saves migrants at sea, it becomes more and more difficult to find a leeway for a disrupting critique of the humanitarian, especially if we remain within the space of the law: actually, after the denunciations from the part of human rights organizations for the violations of the international maritime code of rescue, states try to comply with legal minimum standards and join the human rights discourse. Consequently, the codification and governmentalization of military operations enables taking a cue on the military-humanitarian nexus: far from being oppositional terms bizarrely juxtaposed in Mare Nostrum actions, they define together the Mediterranean

as an unsafe space of mobility, paving the ground for specific techniques of government-and-capture. Concurrently, it contributes to foster the taking over of human rights into a multifarious "sovereign machine of governmentality"[25] and, jointly, to gaze at migration movements "from a humanitarian and human/migrant rights perspective, even ought to be managed"[26]. Actually, this helps understanding how to set the critique of military operations like Mare Nostrum that, despite everything, are rescuing migrants escaping Syria or Libya, allowing them to reach European coasts. In fact, it is not only a question of the militarization of the sea and the territories, as well as of securitizing technologies, put into place in the name of humanitarian concerns. Rather, critique acquires a greater salience insofar as the humanitarian itself is unfolded as a technology of government that contributes to and works through a substantial 'exceptionalization' of migrants' movements: in order to move or to stay in a certain place, people whose mobility is assumed and produced as 'forced' and 'risky' at the same time, cannot but be saved through humanitarian channels. Further, 'risky' is actually the condition in which the unequal geography of migration policies put some would-be migrants: indeed, it is the epithet given by states and migration agencies for designating people who cannot freely move, and who put themselves in danger precisely because of the freedom they are not 'entitled' to enact.

But what is likewise important to notice is that this refined and highly codified legal framework about rescuing operations at sea goes together with an operative way of intervention based on a longstanding practice that basically does not match with the supposed coordination between different actors and with international standards, as well as with the monitoring eyes of the 'advanced' surveillance system. In other words, the effective patrolling for detecting, blocking and rescuing migrants is conducted in a way that is more or less unvaried in comparison with the previous operations at sea[27]. Therefore, more than investigating which exceptional measures and techniques of intervention are integrated into the ordinary law, what is at stake here, I suggest, is the coexistence of a quite detailed legal framework and the effective ordinary practice of patrolling.

Mare Nostrum beyond the sea and the dock

Looking beyond the sea boundaries, namely beyond migration governmentality at sea and the attempt of Mare Nostrum to channel migration routes patrolling in proximity of the Libyan waters, the confrontation between

[25] MEZZADRA, Sandro; NEILSON, Brett. *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor.*

[26] GEIGER, Martin. The Transformation of Migration Politics: From Migration Control to Disciplining Mobility.

[27] Interview conducted with Guardia di Finanza in Lampedusa, 31st January 2014.

the words of one of the rescued migrants and those of governmental texts reveals a supplementary element: the government through non-government beyond the space of the sea. After the scene of the sea and the scene of migrants' arrival in Sicily on the boats of the Italian Navy, a temporal interruption occurs in the narration of the events and no trace is left of the presence of those migrants on Italian territory and the continuation of their patterns. While people arrived from Libya envisage a possible European space to get through and to travel across, enacting uneven geographies that appear quite inconceivable from the perspective of selective-ordered mobility, migration governmentality responds by stranding and suspending migrants' lives, producing a substantial fragmentation of any possible pattern of mobility. This does not refer (only) to the haziness of the established channels of protection – as it is actually the case of the new 'hub centres', a sort of spaces for hosting asylum seekers for short periods – since it would mean to point to the failures of the machine of governmentality and its mechanisms of capture. On the contrary, the issue here concerns the acting of governmental technologies through fragmentation and precarization of migrants' lives, as a response to their projects of uneven mobility. After the arrival at the harbour of Augusta, in Sicily, migrants are scattered across Italy into facilities with different designations (hosting centres, hub centres, Sprar) and according to the logic of 'spread hosting', as defined by the Italian government: the overcrowded ex-US military base of Mineo, where many revolts happened in 2011 and in 2013, the rest homes on the hills near Bologna used as hub centres, the tent-camp in the city of Messina and other arranged placements. People were literally forced to indefinite stop-overs in some of these spaces – without knowing neither the length of the asylum claim process nor the possible future location – de facto dumped as temporary presences in many Italian towns. Moreover, this *temporal captivity*, through which migrants are bounced or stranded in unchosen spaces and their journeys are fragmented, is combined with a fixation to a national territory – in this case Italy – on the basis of the Dublin III regulation[28].

What is your life's pattern and project?: this question, asked by territorial commissions that process the asylum claims would seem quite hard to answer to any one of us, especially if addressed nowadays to young people struggling with precariousness. But it appears even as a paradoxical question when asked to migrants who have arrived in Italy through the 'military-channels' of Mare Nostrum and who don't know for how long they will be hosted and parked in the hosting centres across Italy. Thus, a tenable answer cannot but be crafted by migrants according to the life-story required in order to be labelled as a

[28] In fact, according to the Dublin III regulation, it is the first Member State that should be responsible for examining a person's asylum application.Asylum seekers who leaves the first Member State and travels to another country will be transferred back to the first destination.

person at risk and in need of protection. However, despite the mobility profiles that migrants need to perform and to retrace/reshape their stories in order to get asylum, a considerable gap remains between the fixation of people to 'diagnostic' categories and life patterns on the one hand, and the envisaged or acted uneven migrant geographies across Europe. The 'humanitarian channels' strand people for an indefinite time, attaching them to juridical categories that pigeonhole migrants' patterns and fix migrants to national space through their fingerprints – due to the Dublin III regulation[29]. Therefore, migrants' 'disordered' geographies across Europe are not necessarily in continuation with the patterns of escape from war that they undertook before arriving or that are described by humanitarian actors as the feature of 'forced migration'. In fact, the 'forced' leave to which migrants from Libya were constrained and the risky journey they undertook crossing the Mediterranean, are supposed to correspond to a sort of availability without choice to be allocated somewhere in space.

Confronted with the image of an exceptionalized migration mobility that cannot but be risky and with the fair border spectacle of the humanitarian-military rescue, this paper mobilizes a dislocating move that oversteps the sea boundaries, following the traces of the rescued migrants after their arrival via the military ferry-boat. In fact, the governmental cartography of migration traces a map of the moments in which migrants' presence emerges through its clashes with the border spectacle and with the mechanisms of capture. The temporal captivity of migrants in Italian towns and in remote places on the hills or in the countryside remains fully *off the map*. Moreover, the move away from the paradigm of the exception is combined here with another overstepping gesture: the manifold impacts of the militarization of the Mediterranean – at sea as well as on the territory – and the different *border effects* caused by the tracing of technological or juridical boundaries lead to a disengagement from an exclusive focus on migration policies. Indeed, techniques of monitoring and surveillance and military operations at sea are not usually devised on purpose (only) for migrants but are multi-functional and most of the time have been activated beforehand for other goals. And sometimes 'migration crises' are seized on as opportunities for implementing existing technologies or for readapting them into other governmental rationale, building for instance a 'humanitarian technology': with the starting of Mare Nostrum for the first time Italian drones are used for monitoring and 'saving' migrants at sea.

21st March 2014, harbour of Augusta: the Sirio boat of the Italian navy is docking after two nights on the high sea, where it rescued 340 migrants who left

[29] KUSTER, Brigitta; TSIANOS, Vassilis and others. Thematic Report "Border Crossings - Transnational digital networks, migration and gender".

Libya by boat. 'Number 68, look here, on your left'. A policeman takes a photo of his face and then asks him name, age and nationality. The first identification process stops here, fingerprints will be taken later, in the hosting centres, for the moment the 340 migrants – Eritreans, Palestinians and Nigerians – are split into different groups according to the order they got off the military boat. Those who refuse to be identified are taken to one side and are not allowed to leave the dock. 'Where are we, are we in Rome or in Lampedusa now? And where do they take us?': nobody answers one of the Eritreans who is still waiting on the deck of the boat. Nor are the asylum processes is explained to the migrants who make the pre-screening with the police. The 'good' border spectacle that saves migrants' lives at sea stops just at the dock. And there starts the 'ordinary management of unplanned migration flows' quoting a recent national directive.

Despite the arbitrary measures adopted in identifying migrants on the boats – ultimately making a first partition between those who 'intend' to claim asylum and all the others – one would miss the point, I contend, by hinging the critique of the humanitarian-military dispositive on the violations of legal procedures. Indeed, on the one hand most of the operations are conducted just at the edges of (il)legality, more than being effectively out of law – for instance, the identification on the boats is not illegal *per se*, since Italian navies are formally part of the Italian territory; however, it is quite evident that it is not the proper place for granting rights to the asylum claimants. On the other hand, the binding up of identification, monitoring and sorting procedures to a juridical framework does not avoid – but rather, it legitimizes through juridical steps and language – the *mobility deadlock* to which migration policies fix some people – namely, those who are labelled as unauthorized migrants. In other words, the mobilization of a huge *humanitarian-military convoy* – that costs around twelve million euros per month – for saving migrants lives is the extreme and most spectacular underside of the likewise extreme condition in which those migrants are forced to leave. That is to say, the actual impossibility to freely move and take a flight to come to Europe to claim asylum because of the Visa restrictions, makes migrants' mobility a practice that could happen only under extreme conditions: leaving by boat risking their life and then either being let die or being rescued by the 'military ferry-boat'.

Uncanny sovereignty assemblages

Although Mare Nostrum is an Italian mission, in order to understand its 'disseminations' across the Mediterranean and its articulations it is necessary to overstep national boundaries. First of all, moving the gaze towards Europe, Frontex does not patrol for and within Mare Nostrum, and Frontex Hermes operation and the Italian 'military-humanitarian' mission are in two contiguous

sea zones[30]. But the European agency provides the Italian navies with *canny technological eyes* – infrared radars apt to watch and catch small vessels at night – and can identify people once they disembark at the harbour of Augusta, keeping the information in an autonomous database. Nevertheless, displacing the gaze on the southern shore, the involvement of Libya shapes the boundaries of *uncanny sovereignty assemblages*: Libyan officials on Italian navies facilitate the information exchange with Libyan authorities and are employed also as cultural mediators for interviewing the rescued migrants; then, Libyan navies are asked by Mare Nostrum to intervene and take the detected migrant boats back to the Libyan coast. And finally, also beyond Libya, the prompt collective deportation of all Egyptian migrants rescued by Mare Nostrum in virtue of the bilateral agreement between Italy and Egypt.

Border interruptions and non-steerable movements

However, despite the boat-space making any possible escape and flight hard, it is not unusual that migrants refuse to be identified. For instance, Syrians don't give their fingerprints, since they are aware of the Dublin III regulation and all of them want to enter Germany or the UK and not stay in Italy: "this is quite clear to us. It is impossible to force them when all refuse… and, moreover, it is finally a good solution for both, since they could move and Italy does not have to host them"[31]. But not everybody is allowed to get away with it. Harbour of Augusta, 21st March 2014: four hours after the beginning of the disembarkation about one hundred migrants are still waiting. After refusing to be identified on the boat, most of them accept being fingerprinted as the only condition to get off. Four Eritreans still refuse and are put in a corner of the dock by the military, not allowed to move. No photos, no fingerprints, thanks; the majority of the people rescued by Mare Nostrum want to move away, somewhere in northern Europe – their refusal resembles the drive to wander, across Europe and everywhere, that the migrant from Mali 'stranded' in Bologna talked about. In fact, despite their forced and peripatetic journeys to escape war, actually the subjective drives once they arrive in Europe cannot be fully 'channelled' and managed through 'humanitarian-military' convoys and it is precisely this that gets the *migration sorting machine* into trouble: beyond the sea and the rescue, people try to go through and disengage from the humanitarian grasp that strands people in spaces and channels migrants' lives into patterns of (un)protection that establish the conditions and the legitimate spaces of stay. Thus, far from being at hand, the spaces of freedom that the rescued migrants try to open are the

[30] Frontex operates mainly between Northern Tunisia and Sicily, while Mare Nostrum's navies patrol closer to the Libyan coasts.

[31] Interview with the Italian Navy, Augusta, 21st March 2014.

outcome of a *strugglefield* in which migrants are, and of a *strain* that sometimes they succeed in producing against the disciplining of bodies and movements, by dodging or troubling the meshes of governmentality and loosening its hold. *Border interruptions* that unsettle the humanitarian channels' machine with bodies, movements and subjective drives that cannot be fully regulated and that highlight the frantic attempt of border to capture and tame the 'disordered mobility' – *bordering captures*, namely migration policies, Visa restrictions and techniques of monitoring and containment. 20th March 2014: 250 Syrians and Palestinians escape the tent-camp in Porto Empedocle, one of the Sicilian harbours used by Mare Nostrum, and they spread across the country. Like many others who escaped and then wandered in the Italian towns, they refuse not only to be identified but also the 'hosting machine' of the asylum system and the exclusionary international system of protection that fixes their future movements to the territorial restrictions of the Dublin III regulation.

Conclusions

9th - 11th February 2015. A rubber boat with 105 migrants is rescued by the Italian Coast Guard at about 100 miles south of the island of Lampedusa, after receiving a phone call from the persons on board. 29 of them have been found died, and all the migrants are taken to Lampedusa. But the day after the Coast Guard communicates that actually two or three other migrant vessels are in distress at sea in that area and that rescue operations are going on. Only on the 11th February in the morning the two other boats are found. The first Italian news talk about 200 people died, then the number rises at 320, since the survived people tell that many However, according to migrants' testimonies, one more vessel with probably about 100 people was in distress in the same area and finally remains missing[32]. Therefore, in the Italian and in the European news the number of migrants who died at sea oscillates in a range of almost 100 bodies: "perhaps about 300 migrants drowned"[33], and "more than 300 died people"[34] up to "hundreds of migrants fear of dead"[35].

Almost one year and half after the shipwrecks of the 3rd and of the 11th of October, the "300 and something" died migrants have not produced so much resonance in comparison to those two shipwrecks. On the contrary, what provoked a big rumor was the possibility of terroristic infiltrations of jihadists using migrant vessels to enter Europe. Thus, the *shipwrecked bodies* of the migrants

[32] Cf. http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/95.
[33] Cf. http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2015/02/11/lampedusa-migranti-naufragio_n_6658586.html.
[34] Cf. http://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/02/11/news/strage_dei_migranti_a_lampedusa_trovati_altri_due_gommoni_si_temono_decine_di_dispersi-107017089/.
[35] Cf. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/11/migrants-missing-boats-sink-mediterranean.

fleeing wars started to appear if not as a human threat in itself certainly as a possible vehicle of it. The other big issue that the tragedy in question raised was the inadequacy of the European operation Triton coordinated by Frontex and that followed Mare Nostrum at the end of 2014[36], since it has been conceived not to rescue migrants at sea but to intercept and block them[37].

However, if engaging in such a debate would man going well beyond the temporal coordinates of this article that deals with on Mare Nostrum, it is important to stress that the answer to the militarization of the movements of those people who are fleeing war is not a question of a better Europeanization of the border regime[38]. Moreover, what the exclusive focus on the space of the sea and the rescue operations overshadows – recalling my initial suggestion to look at Mare Nostrum *beyond the sea* – are other border-scenes at the edges of Europe that actually contribute to make the selective machine of the humanitarian work. Indeed, beyond the sea involves, together with drawing attention to what happens *after* that migrants disembark in Europe, drawing attention also to what happens *before* migrant crossing in the Mediterranean, at the pre-frontiers of Europe, that is in countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey that are in charge of containing and managing migrants' departures. To put it otherwise, an approach that gazes *beyond the sea* should ask not only "what does it happen to the shipwrecked persons after being rescued"? but also "what does it happen to those who have not even arrived in Europe?". In fact, the attempt by the European Union to make the government of *shipwrecked* persons and *drowned bodies* a European affair with the launching of Triton mission is built on a broader strategy of *making people not leave* through the enforcement of the role of pre-frontiers of Neighbourhood countries[39]. Therefore, this last glimpse on rescue operations and on the recent development, show how the multiplication of events that are undergoing in the Mediterranean at the time of writing this article trouble even any possible conclusion, as much as permanent it could be.

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[36] Yet, despite officially Mare Nostrum finished at the end of October, the Italian Navy continued to operate until the end of December 2014, and Triton effectively started only in January 2015.

[37] Cf. http://www.euromedrights.org/eng/2015/02/24/frontex-poison-or-antidote-to-the-tragediesin-the-mediterranean/; http://ecre.org/component/content/article/70-weekly-bulletin-articles/855operation-mare-nostrum-to-end-frontex-triton-operation-will-not-ensure-rescue-at-sea-of-migrants-in-international-waters.html.

[38] CARRERA, Sergio; DEN HERTOG, Leonhard. Whose Mare? Rule of law challenges in the field of European border surveillance in the Mediterranean.

[39] This is confirmed not only by the Khartoum process that paves the ground for fostering the externalization of the borders of Europe, reinforcing bilateral agreements with http://www.esteri.it/mae/approfondimenti/2014/20141128_political_declaration.pdf but also by the testimonies of Syrian people who have been imprisoned in Egypt and in Tunisia and then deported to Turkey and who told their stories to groups of activists based in Europe to which I belong.

A focus on the Italian operation Mare Nostrum has shed light on the desultory politics of mobility and on the reassemblage of the military-humanitarian border that characterizes migration governmentality at sea and beyond. In particular, it has shown the spatial disseminations, namely spaces beyond the sea that a critical gaze should look at in order to grasp the deployment of the humanitarian-militaryborder. Moreover, confronted with a power that saves migrants' lives, it is necessary to reposition the critique of migration governmentality and to unpack the humanitarian itself as a set of heterogeneous techniques for capturing and channelling migrant mobilities.

In fact, the humanitarian-military bond designates a political technology of governing migrants' stays and movements grounding on the radical impossibility for some people to freely move and leave their country 'safely' without being rescued by military forces. Instead, the stress on the military that takes charge of the humanitarian backgrounds both the militarization of territories that result from it and the inequalities of freedom by focusing exclusively on its dramatic outcome – migrants' deaths at sea. As shown above, what is at stake is an exceptionalization of the mobility of many people.The exceptional-risky migrants' mobility produced by the exclusionary mechanism of the Visa system and by migration policies at large, is finally actualized in the 12 million euros per month spent by Mare Nostrum operations. However, this relevant data should be used politically with circumspection: indeed, the most popular criticism against the military-humanitarian operations focuses on the fact that 'this money is used to save migrants in the place of Italians', and 'in this way more migrants arrive on the coasts since they are aware that they will be rescued'. Confronted with this, we cannot but counter those criticisms that oppose migrants' lives to the lives of others, prompting the possibility for everybody to freely move and leave a country without being at the mercy of a desultory humanitarian-military gaze.

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Resumo

As intermitentes políticas de mobilidade e a fronteira humanitário-militar no Mediterrâneo. Mare Nostrum para além do mar

Este artigo investiga a remodelação da fronteira militar-humanitária no Mediterrâneo, com enfoque na missão militar-humanitária da Itália, Mare Nostrum, que começou com o intuito de resgatar migrantes no mar após as mortes de centenas de migrantes, em outubro de 2013, perto da costa da ilha de Lampedusa. O argumento principal é que, para entender a ajuda militar-humanitária no mar e os seus impactos, é preciso ir além do espaço marítimo e analisá-la à luz do funcionamento mais abrangente da governamentalidade da mobilidade. A noção de políticas intermitentes de mobilidade é usada para descrever a temporalidade específica da ajuda humanitária na fronteira e a sua política de visibilidade. Mais especificamente, um olhar analítico sobre as operações militares-humanitárias no mar para resgate-e-controle do movimento dos migrantes mostra que o que está em jogo são algumas práticas de mobilidade como exceção. Em seguida, este artigo usa a operação Mare Nostrum para explorar como o militar e o humanitário são rearticulados e como atualmente funcionam juntos.

***Palavras-chave**: fronteira humanitária, migração, governamentalidade, política de visibilidade, biopolítica.*

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