

## **The mediatized border: technologies and affects of migrant reception in the Greek and Italian borders**

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### **Abstract**

In line with the European self-description of its borders as a space of “humanitarian securitization,” this article approaches the border as a network of mediations around migrants and refugees, where emotions of fear and empathy co-exist through digital connectivities—what we call the “mediatized border.” Drawing on media, security, and gender studies, we demonstrate how such techno-affective networks are constitutive of (rather than simply complementary to) the border as a hybrid site of both military protection and care for the vulnerable. We do this through hermeneutic and participatory engagements with the two main border sites of the 2015 migration “crisis,” Italy and Greece, and discuss their implications on our understanding of the power relationships of human mobility.

**Keywords:** Mediation, emotion, border, humanitarianism, securitization, migration

### **Introduction: refugee care as gendered practice**

The migration “crisis”<sup>i</sup> in the Eastern and Central Mediterranean sea, which saw one million people entering Europe in 2015<sup>ii</sup>, resulted in the rapid, albeit piecemeal, establishment of both security and humanitarian structures in the Italian and Greek borders. In line with EU policy, which aimed at “the balance of humanitarian needs with concerns over sovereignty,” these structures consisted of two distinct spheres of practice. The first of these spheres was the military, which included EUNAVFOR (Navy rescue operations) in the Italian high seas and the national army/police forces and Frontex (the EU border control agency) on the Greek islands. The second, emergency aid services, consisted of the Italian Red Cross Military Corps & Nurses, Save the Children, Fondazione Rava, and the Corps of the Order of Malta emergency services, operating on the Italian fleet plus the UNHCR, The Red Cross/Crescent, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and Doctors of the World, operating on the island of Chios. Despite their seemingly different mandates, the two structures, military and humanitarian, co-existed and worked side-by-side, with military arrangements being responsible for the rescue and/or registration of arriving migrants while humanitarian ones were responsible for the provision of medical aid, shelter, nutrition, and information. It is the precarious combination of these two spheres of regulated practice and discourse—what Miriam Ticktin (2011) calls “regimes”— that we term “humanitarian securitization” (Scott Watson 2011).

What interests us here is how emotions work to hold the two together and how, in so doing, they negotiate (reproduce or undermine) the power relations of the border. While these regimes have been thoroughly studied as geo-political and bio-political forms of power (David Newman 2006; Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams 2009; William Walters 2011; Vicki Squire 2014; Vaughan-Williams 2015), they have not yet been approached as techno-affective practices — as practices that use technological platforms to articulate emotion, thereby

shaping the border as a particular regime of benevolent subjection. How can we describe these digital and affective networks? What forms of identity and attachment do they produce? What do these identities and attachments tell us about the power relationships across the border — about those who receive as well as those who arrive?

We begin addressing these questions by setting out our theoretical terrain. Drawing on feminist work on the geo-politics of security as well as on media studies (Carol Cohn 1993; C. Neta Crawford 2000, 2014; Stig Hjarvard 2008; Patricia Owens 2012), we approach humanitarian securitization as a structure of digitally mediated border practices that work to simultaneously protect “us” from, and care for, mobile populations — what we term the “mediatized” border. Using fieldwork and discourse analysis, we then proceed with a conceptualization of the border as a network of techno-affective mediations that constitute both *Mare Nostrum*, the military rescue missions in the Italian–Libyan sea border and *Chios*, one of the main border islands in Greece. Our emphasis falls *both* on how these networks differ across the narrated and the enacted border, *and* on what they have in common; a triple mediation structure of, what we introduce as “remediation,” “intermediation,” and “transmediation” (Lilie Chouliaraki 2013), through which they articulate variations of emotion (fear, compassion, anger, despair) and attachments of “us” and “them.” In so doing, we demonstrate, the mediatized border manages to cut across and reconstitute the two relatively distinct spheres of migrant reception, security and humanitarianism, as a space of affective configurations that may appear to momentarily challenge, but ultimately works to reproduce the power relations of human mobility.

### **Affects of the mediatized border**

#### ***The mediatization of the border***

Rather than fixed delimitations of territory, borders are increasingly theorized as mobile frontiers that regulate human flows (Didier Bigo 2002; Paolo Cuttitta 2014) in two different ways: as territorial barriers, the on-the-ground technological infrastructures that classify arriving populations, or what we may call the “*enacted*” border; and as representational barriers, the media portrayals that construe these arriving populations as “desirable” vs “undesirable,” or the “*narrated*” border (Lilie Chouliaraki 2017). While the narrated border refers to the mediated border, in that it is through media representations that we encounter actual stories of security and salvation around migration, the territorial border should be seen as mediatized, insofar as the whole range of on-the-ground practices becomes possible only through a series of digital mediations—for instance, the security systems used for fingerprint identification (Euroduct), or NGOs’ smartphone communication groups through the WhatsUp app (Lilie Chouliaraki and Myria Georgiou 2017). Rather than drawing a distinction between the two terms (see Sonia Livingstone for mediation/mediatization 2009), however, we here take both dimensions of the border to refer to the mediatization of the border, that is, to the various ways through which the identities, and emotions of the border are performed and constituted through media technologies.

Drawing on Hjarvard’s definition of mediatization as a process in which “the media exert a particularly dominant influence on other institutions” (2008, 13),

our conception of the mediatized border captures the role of digital technologies in managing human mobility, as digital infrastructures do not simply facilitate the regulation of such mobility but provide the very conditions of possibility for the border – in both its narrated and territorial forms. Even though, as we shall see, the European border is always more than its technological components, we argue that its digital capacities (security infrastructures and use of social media) are indispensable in the communicative flows of migrant reception in the Mediterranean.

Whether territorial or narrated, the mediatized border always entails a *symbolic* dimension. The border, as Vaughan-Williams puts it, is always “a process of bordering” that “seeks to *rhetorically identify and control* the (very) mobility of certain people, services and goods that operate around its jurisdiction” (2015, 6; emphasis added). As a technologically-driven process of “rhetorical identification and control,” “bordering” thus systematically produces its own “discursive or emotional landscapes of social power” (Anssi Paasi 1996, 63). Our focus on the *techno-affective networks of the border* in Italy and Greece intends, therefore, to map out the regimes of emotion articulated across these two border types: the *narrated* (the official narratives of Mediterranean rescue missions by the Italian Navy)<sup>5</sup> and the *enacted* (the border networks on-the-ground in Chios).

Both these types of border, the narrated and the enacted, circulate emotion across three networks of mediation (Chouliaraki 2013): *remediation*, which is about the vertical mobility of emotion as it moves from social media onto mass media platforms (for instance, from local Facebook posts to the local or national press); *intermediation*, which is about the horizontal mobility of emotion across social media contexts (for instance, when an activist Facebook message becomes a Twitter hashtag or when an activist Twitter message appears on local websites); and *transmediation*, which is about mobility from online to offline contexts (when WhatsUp messages lead to actual face-to-face meetings, say, at the coast where migrants arrive). It is these three processes of the mediatized border, their similarities and differences, as well as their implications for the power relations of the border, that our analysis focuses upon.

### ***The affective politics of humanitarian securitization***

The mediatized border, we have argued, consists of techno-affective networks of mediation. It is these networks that hold together the border’s structures of reception by regulating its affective potential—its capacity to distribute emotional states so as to configure affiliations of “us” and “them.”<sup>iii</sup> Echoing Crawford, who considers emotions to be “an essential element of world politics conceived of as a system of reflexive and complex adaptive systems” (2014, 537), we treat emotion as necessary in the critical analysis of the power relationships of the border.

Our focus on the use of emotion in constructing border identities is informed by the assumption that these techno-affective networks do not simply sustain the power relationships of human mobility but, in so doing, they also reproduce norms and practices of the global order. Following Cohn (1993) on the tentative coupling between emotion and gender in world politics, we understand this coupling to be a matter of how the norms of humanitarian securitization regulate emotional investments at the border, variously privileging some over others in

the spheres of security and care. Along similar lines, Crawford (2014) argues, fear of loss or harm is regularly attached to the masculinized culture of military security, which classifies certain migrants as threatening and thus “illegitimate” for entry, while empathy is attached to the feminized practices of humanitarian care that are indifferent to threat and treat them all as human beings-in-need.

Even though our analysis is not gender-driven, the main implication of this distinction, for our purposes, is that it allows us to highlight how, despite their competing moral claims, the two regimes ultimately converge in producing their own “unintended effects” of power. While in the masculinized regime of security, “certain ideas, concerns, interests, information, feelings and meanings are marked in national security discourse as feminine, and are devalued” (Cohn 1993, 231), feminized empathy may claim to privilege the migrants’ rights to care and recognition, yet its implicit hierarchies and exclusions ultimately create their own “casualties of care” (Ticktin 2011). An important question for us to ask, thus, is what remains systematically devalued and excluded, or invisible and unheard, across the two regimes of the mediatized border.

At the same time, even though rigidly linking emotions with border practices and effects can admittedly be problematic, the introduction of emotion as an analytical lens in the study of the mediatized border helps us explore humanitarian securitization as a hybrid and complex sphere of governance defined by, what Crawford again refers to as, “institutionalizations of passion” (2014, 545)—partially stable institutional formations that organize the practices of the border around the emotions of fear and empathy. Even though, as Crawford continues, once institutionalized, passions “... recede from view and reappear as reasoned argument” (2014, 546), it is important that we keep this fluidity of institutional emotions in focus as objects of critical study. This is because, insofar as these “reasoned” passions are formulated differently in different institutional settings, for instance through the authoritative narratives of the Italian state (the narrated border) or the in situ multiple mediations of registration and advocacy in Greece (the enacted border), they come to illustrate the subtle permeabilities, tensions and struggles that are at play at the mediatized border.

The reason why fear and empathy are instrumental in our argument and analysis, then, is not only because these emotions correspond to the empirical description of the European border as a site of both repelling threats and tender-hearted care. It is also because, in so doing, these passions are variously distributed across different institutional mediations (from official State narratives to local security interactions), thereby complicating our understanding of the mediatized border as an uneasy and contradictory, yet ultimately exclusionary, order of global governance.

Rather than taking for granted the fear and empathy distinctions, therefore, our analysis asks instead which type of border communicates which emotions about whom and to which effects? Looking into official narratives of Italian search-and-rescue (SAR) missions and Greek registration and care practices as networks of techno-affective articulation, rather than as de-facto spaces of security or care, opens our analysis up to the ambivalences of affect across narrated and enacted borders. Fear and empathy, we show in line with Owens, are “mutually

reinforcing” (2012, 548) but there are also crucial variations in the ways each establishes the identities and attachments of those who inhabit the border. Given the symbolic nature of the mediatized border, we explore below the narrated border through a textual analysis of online publicity stories by the Italian Navy during the period of the *Mare Nostrum* operation (documents, images, the official video of the operation, and a story-documentary), following how these are mediated in mainstream media (remediation), connected through social media (intermediation), and confront “us” with “them” in face-to-face narratives (transmediation). We explore the enacted border through a participatory methodology, where fieldwork observations and interviews made possible the reconstruction of the networks by which fear and compassion are articulated among actors on the ground and how these are remediated, intermediated, and transmediated across mainstream and social media. Variations and similarities alike emerge as the two regimes work to shape the mediatized border. The narrated one, for instance, in representing the official imaginary of humanitarian securitization, is less flexible and heterogeneous than the enacted border; yet, the enacted border, subtle variations of good-doing as it may enable, never actually interrupts the trans-national orders of militarized security. If there is a key similarity across the two techno-affective networks, then, this is, in David Chandler’s words, that they may differ in their emotional manifestations but they do so “without radical changes at the level of [the border’s] ... power relations” (2008, 466).

### **The mediatized border in Italy and Greece**

#### ***Italy: the narrated border***

The narrated border refers to the images and narratives that articulate the “emergency imaginary” (Craig Calhoun 2010) of humanitarian securitization associated with *Mare Nostrum*—a large-scale military-humanitarian operation, targeted at both rescuing migrants and arresting smugglers, while stopping the illegal entry of unauthorized migrants. The operation, launched in 2014 after two major shipwrecks off the Lampedusa coast, was branded as a symbol of responsible governance in Italy and the EU.

*Remediation.* The launch of *Mare Nostrum* marked a transformative moment in Italian communication strategies in that it introduced the very idea of the “narrated” border. While the border had long been invisible in the media, in 2014 the Italian Navy began disseminating a range of publicity material (photographs, videos, stories by officials and migrants) about their rescue missions—much of which was aimed at being remediated onto mainstream media as part of news stories or current affairs documentaries. Created as social media material, in the form of dramatic rescue YouTube videos or photo galleries on the Italian Navy website, these stories were routinely remediated on television. In so doing, they brought the national public closer to the masculinist imageries of protection where heroic navy patrols sail the high seas, in the sounds of an epic score, and salvation, in the humanitarian imageries of migrant faces of despair and the grateful gazes of children (holding a “Thank you Italya” signboard)<sup>iv</sup>. In addressing fears of a migrant “invasion” while celebrating “our” own tender-hearted civility, the remediation of the narrated border worked thus to legitimize Italy’s Mediterranean border as a site of both geo-political sovereignty and national benevolence.

*Intermediation.* Even though remediation was responsible for the national broadcasting of the Italian Navy's official border narrative, thereby acting as an instrument of state legitimization (Pierluigi Musarò 2017), the *Mare Nostrum* message was in fact designed for circulation across social media, notably Twitter and Facebook—where they were routinely tagged together with EUNAVFOR and humanitarian NGOs. A typical example of these inter-mediated messages, the *Mare Nostrum's* official video<sup>v</sup>, narrated the border through a visual combination of heart-breaking loss—a drowning man, African women mourning, coffins on a vessel followed by a news clip of the Lampedusa shipwreck—with threatening scenes, such as rescue officers in military attire or medical uniforms and holding guns—protecting “us” against “their” potential contamination.<sup>9</sup> Framing the humanitarian imagery is the Pope's trembling voice (“the only word I can say is: shame!”), which invests these imageries of pain with a religious sense of guilt and calls for a collective response towards the suffering of the vulnerable: the military rescue missions. In this manner, the intermediation of militarized imagery through compassion-driven language use ultimately worked to legitimize the orientalist hierarchy of power between “them” as powerless but potentially “poisonous” victims, and “us” as their guilt-ridden saviours.

*Transmediation.* While transmediation is about the shift from online to offline encounters, in the narrated border, this process inevitably refers to representations of face-to-face—namely, to migrants who confront “us” through the camera in order to share their experiences of suffering and loss. The 2016 flagship campaign, *Aware Migrants*<sup>vi</sup>, for instance, funded by the Italian Ministry of Interior, transmediated the migrants' personal confessions of martyrdom and hardship across a number of social media platforms. Through its arresting confessions of physical and sexual abuse, the campaign articulated a similarly contradictory regime of emotions, as above: the migrants' gratitude towards the rescuers, yet, at the same time, their traumatic warning to aspiring travellers in Africa and elsewhere that their dream can “end up a nightmare”—as in information that 60 percent of asylum applications were rejected in 2015.<sup>11</sup> Despite giving voice to migrants, these transmediations of these narrated border capitalized on their suffering not as a source of collective responsibility for “us” but as a precautionary story of the hazards of migration for them—turning them into potential perpetrators of their fate and ultimately propaganda instruments of the European border regime<sup>vii</sup>.

In summary, the narrated border reflected and reproduced the language of humanitarian securitization as Europe's dominant approach to the governance of human mobility. This discourse relied on the masculinist ethos of military security infused by the empathetic emotion of humanitarian care, in ways that legitimized the hegemony of the former over the latter. While its stories did capitalize on the migrants' suffering and sorrow in the high seas, it ultimately prioritized the celebration of the “humanitarian-soldier,” the gratitude of the surviving victims towards “us,” and the threat and blame towards those who dream to follow the same route to Europe (Musarò 2017).

The narrated border was thus a fully normative border that aimed at disseminating and normalizing the exclusionary practices of the Italian/European military both as public acts of salvation and protection and as sites of trauma and threat. What happens to these normative affects of the border, as we move from official narratives to actual enactments on the ground?

To address this question, we move to another part of the European border: the island of Chios.

### ***Greece: the enacted border***

Our empirical material comes from a ten-day fieldwork on Chios in December 2015, conducted by Lilie Chouliaraki and Myria Georgiou.<sup>12</sup> Their pre-existing connections with key actors on the island enabled them to establish immediate relationships of trust with a number of agents in the field, giving them access to the full whole circuit of bordering, from the provision of local care upon their arrival to the process of formal registration (though aspects of this were naturally off-bounds), and from UN/NGO management meetings to activists' work for food provision, baby-care, and legal aid (see Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2017 for details)<sup>viii</sup>. What emerged out of this rich fieldwork material is a pattern of intersecting mediations that cut across the two communicative spaces of humanitarian securitization: military security and humanitarian care. It is these spaces that we map out and reflect on next.

### ***Military securitization***

Military securitization took place at Chios' Registration Centre, where migrants were subjected to passport control, de-briefing (short interviews), and digital identification—a process that determined whether they could continue their journey or be detained—by Greek military and Frontex staff. Institutionalized in these security practices of monitoring and surveillance, as Cohn (1993) and Owens (2012) would argue, are emotions of fear and suspicion, themselves embedded in a masculinist logic of vigilance and potentially aggression—the threat of potential terrorists ensuing imprisonment, encampment, and deportation.

Co-existing with these, however, are also emotions of despair and resignation by the Greek military actors who, in the context of the Greek economic crisis, received no support for setting up their local reception infrastructures. For instance, the Registration Centre was a derelict factory with no proper flooring, heating, or lighting, provisionally split into “working areas” by metallic fences (medical space, queuing corridor, and the registration proper areas, consisting of a translation desk and six passport control desks). Disaffection towards both the Greek government and the European Union, as well as light-hearted sarcasm for the low Greek salaries, especially in comparison to Frontex staff, were accompanied with a sense of pride and self-value for Chios' border performance as “best practice” in refugee management (processing 1,800 applications per day). This performance (shifts 24/7) was justified in terms of the team's sense of professional and patriotic commitment but also on the grounds of compassion (“we can't let those poor people and their small children wait for days, as they do in Mytilene [Lesbos, another major Greek entry point on the Eastern Mediterranean]”).

The institutionalization of fear as the dominant emotion of security was here complexified by a new configuration of diverse emotions, absent in the narrated border, that define security as a heterogeneous regime: anger and disappointment at the governing authorities, national and trans-national, but also pride and love—as attachment to the national community and as empathic

care towards vulnerable migrants. How are these affects distributed and re-organized through securitization's networks of mediation?

*Remediation.* Registration practices were kept resolutely outside the spotlight of publicity and remained absent from mainstream media. With the exception of ceremonial snapshots of visiting officials, passport control, de-briefing, and digital identification were invisible on television. While such processes are evidently highly classified, this invisibility consequently kept the unpaid labour of security forces outside public scrutiny—both in terms of its negative emotions against the failures of national and trans-national authorities, and positive emotions, in the coupling of group attachments (nation or army-driven) with fragments of good-doing for those who suffer.

*Intermediation.* Nowhere in the border is fear more solidly encoded than in the Euroduct technology of digital identification—the technology that offered confidential data on the biometrical make-up of each migrant and enabled their classification in categories of legality/ illegality. By inserting migrants in digital matrices of global surveillance, intermediation inscribed technologized suspicion into the bio-political apparatus of the border, thus protecting Europe from, what an officer termed, an “invasion” of foreigners and potential terrorists (Ticktin 2011; Kerry Moore, Bernhard Gross, and Terry Threadgold 2012). Yet, at the same time, this technology was also invested in sentiments of care, insofar as registration officers capitalized on Euroduct's speed and efficiency so as to reduce the waiting time for families with children and the sick. Even though, therefore, the predominant understanding of the process was one of security, the border was not intermediated through a pure sentiment of fear. Instead, the intermediation of security was a heterogeneous regime of emotions that combined digitally-coded suspicion with a sense of relentless alertness, in the staff's twenty-four-hour shifts, and a fleeting sense of humanitarian tender-heartedness, in the officers' concerns for the toll that long waiting time might have on certain migrant categories.

*Transmediation.* The move from digital communication to co-presence highlights the ways in which emotion was performed in the contact between bodies—eye contact, posture, tone of voice, and dressing code. This process thematized the migrants' habitus as a crucial site for an affective politics of the border, whereby how one looked, how they interacted with officers, or what they wore were turned into objects of analytical scrutiny. The middle-class postures and attire of Syrians, for instance, were regularly perceived as respectable and dignified, while others' (for instance, Pakistanis and Africans) were seen as alien—their squatting or avoidance of eye contact being interpreted as dubious. While human contact at the border thus involved a range of affective responses, including respect and care, trans-mediated security was predominantly permeated by an ambient sense of suspicion that occasionally turned into antipathy—emotions informed not only by the military mandate of security but also by broader imaginaries of cultural “othering” towards certain bodies. Aware of this selective scrutiny of the border, migrants too turned their bodies into meaning-making “media”; they did so by engaging in calculated performances of “the refugee,” whereby those who did not arrive from war zones would claim to have lost their passports and pretend to be Syrians so as to gain entry into Europe as asylum seekers.



In summary, military securitization relied on a network of mediations that combined a fully censored mainstream publicity (remediation) with biometric governance (inter- mediation) and a corporeal hermeneutics of distrust in face-to-face contacts (transmediation). This complex techno-affective network relied primarily on suspicion, where the migrants' security profile was fully scrutinized, digitally and corporeally. The two key features of the network of suspicion were its secrecy and its hybridity. First, security in the enacted border was kept invisible both in terms of the intense labour of army staff, thereby holding their gruelling working conditions outside the public spotlight and in terms of their unexamined assumptions about the "others," which similarly escaped the remit of institutional scrutiny. Second, hybridity refers to the status of security as a mixed regime that went beyond suspicion to incorporate elements of professional duty and nationalist love of country as well as self-sarcasm, hints of compassion, and an acute sense of disaffection towards local and European governance structures. Through this network of suspicion, the enacted border challenged the normative emotion of the narrated border: fear. It appeared instead to be torn by a diverse range of minor, under-the-radar affects—that complexify but do not ultimately subvert the masculinist assumptions of the military.

### ***Humanitarian care***

Humanitarian assistance and advocacy on Chios addressed the urgent needs of the continuous migrant flow—with each NGO catering for a different set of needs (UNHCR for accommodation and nutrition; the Red Cross or ICRD for missing persons and psychological support; Doctors of the World or DoW for medical aid; and the Norwegian Refugee Council or NRC for information; and minor ones such as WAHA and Drop In The Ocean offering assistance at sea).

This regime of compassion was shaped by two prerogatives: the transience of the migrants' stay (maximum two days), which accelerated the rhythms of care; and, the life-changing significance of border decision-making for migrants (asylum or deportation), which intensified NGOs' advocacy work with them (on a 24/7 basis). This double prerogative, shaped care on Chios in terms of "proactive humanitarianism" (en-route services of shelter, food, and medication as well as rights- and travel-related information), and, in so doing, brought security and compassion close together. Medical and information-related provisions, for instance, were practically located in the Registration Centre where NGO workers took care of sick migrants during their waiting for de-briefing and offered advice on their legal rights, while the UN camp was close by, rendering the migrants' trip to it a matter of only a few minutes.

Proactive humanitarianism, at the same time, also placed the emotional dynamics between NGOs and migrants under pressure. Migrants were anxious and tired, despite the initial euphoria of their successful sea-crossing to Europe, and NGO staff felt that the pace of arrivals deprived them of deeper bonds with individual people. Even though for most this simply meant minimizing interaction and maximizing their professional routines (distributing a nutritional bar per day and a blanket), some made a point of slowing down and speaking to them—demonstrating a more profound sense of care: "at nights, I cannot sleep for long. I need to visit the camp again and again to make sure they sleep well and have a good rest. They are in the middle of a long journey," confessed an NRC

worker. What are the networks of mediation that organized the emotional relationships of humanitarian care, in the enacted border?

*Remediation.* There were two ways in which humanitarian care gained visibility in main-stream media. First, through news reports on what NGOs did on the ground, and second, through news reports on NGOs themselves reporting on care-related activity on the ground. In so doing, the Greek media communicated a conflicting and conflictual set of emotions around humanitarian care: on the one hand, gratitude towards the efforts of humanitarian NGOs to sustain the border in the absence of state infrastructures, but also concern for the lack of local regulation in the NGO sector, accusing minor NGOs for potentially creating “more chaos on their small islands rather than a coordinated response” (Helen Nianias 2016); and, on the other hand, irritation and criticism on behalf of the UN and other major NGOs for Greece’s inadequate administrative response to the “crisis” that rendered their job more difficult than it should have been.

*Intermediation.* If remediation was about the public visibility of humanitarian care on the national (and often international) stage, intermediation was the scaffold through which care was sustained on the ground, as social media were responsible for co-ordinating NGO activism on Chios. Two networks of horizontal connection were thus established: first, among NGOs themselves and second, between NGOs and external parties—volunteers, and refugees and migrants. The first relied on WhatsUp, a multi-participant technology of ambient vigilance, which co-ordinated the activity of major NGOs through regular updates on a 24/7 basis. Even though it claimed to include the local authorities and secondary agencies, however, this circuit included these latter only through Twitter hashtag groups (ie., #Chios\_refugees) and addressivity markers (i.e., @wahaint); minor care players, consequently, felt excluded from the core of decision-making activities—as a local volunteer put it, “they [international NGOs] are friendly with us, but they just want us to follow.” While, therefore, operationalizing empathy at the enacted border heavily relied on the ambient vigilance of Twitter, participation in the practices of empathy was in fact a matter of selective intermediations, which worked to establish an internal hierarchy of compassion in the field.

It was, however, the second intermediation network where the most significant hierarchy was established, as, despite 80 percent of migrants owning a smartphone, no social media links between NGOs and migrants were established—“Nethope,” a minimum-function WhatsUp circuit at the service of migrants, simply forwarded pre-formulated messages, such as “I’m ok,” to a restricted number of contacts (migrants’ families or friends). It was instead through pre-electronic technologies that most migrant-related intermediation took place: pamphlets (on legal rights upon registration), maps (of Greece and Europe), diagrams (of routes within and beyond the island), posters, or announcement boards. Despite, then, the focus on migrants’ rights, voice, and dignity, the regime of care undermined the potential for meaningful connections between “us” and “them” by excluding their voice from its intermediation platforms. Migrants at the enacted border may have been the object of “our” care but they were never subjects entitled to speak to “us.”

*Transmediation.* The face-to-face encounters between NGOs and migrants relied on pre-electronic technologies—for instance, speaking trumpets, which co-ordinated the manoeuvring of migrants during their chaotic arrival at the

Registration Centre or leaflets with right-related information, which were distributed in the long queue for passport control. Despite their success in managing crowds, however, speaking trumpets relied on monologic and impersonal structures of address, which, as previously, did not offer options for inter-activity, feedback, and fine-tuning with the receivers. Similarly, leaflet distribution maximized outreach and minimized dialogue, at the cost of personal contact. The affective potential of care could here be summed up largely in terms of an operational efficiency that privileged speed over human engagement, rendering migrants' emotions irrelevant to the process. Transmediation was thus defined by a structure of "othering," which turned migrants into objects of a routinized professionalism but remained indifferent to their needs and feelings. In summary, the enacted border managed humanitarian care by differentially distributing emotion through various media, in ways that at least partly challenged the normative benevolence of the narrated border. It did so, by encompassing a more diverse and contradictory affective repertoire of both routinized and more personalized care. However, the intermediation of benevolence was infused by a fierce sense of institutional order and hierarchy, organizing the humanitarian space in a strict centre-periphery NGO structure, while encounters of compassion were saturated into a managerial spirit of professional good-doing that de-emotionalized the encounter between "us" and "them" and de-humanized the presence of migrants.

### **Concluding reflections. The techno-affective politics of the border**

In this essay, we examined the border as a techno-affective network of reception for migrants and refugees, wherein a diverse range of emotions co-exist and co-articulate through the connectivities of digital media. Rather than simply define it as lines on a map or as markers of geo-political control (security check-points, passport controls, transit points), we theorized the border as a site where digital media narrate and perform connections for and barriers against human mobility—the mediatized border.

Our analysis consequently explored variations and similarities in the ways in which these two types of border, the narrated and the enacted, operate in two of Europe's most crucial entry points, the Italian sea and a Greek island, and identified how, in so doing, they negotiate tensions around the prototypical emotions of humanitarian securitization: fear and empathy. This analytical exploration has something important to tell us about the power relationships of human mobility. The key difference between the narrated and the enacted border, we demonstrated, lies in the degree of their normative "porousness," that is in the relative openness each border grants for fear and empathy to fuse (or not) with various other emotions in the course of its symbolic engagements with the actors of the border.

How is this difference played out? The narrated border, as we observed, is characterized by relatively low porousness. Its representations exclusively privilege the official discourses of the Italian military, national pride and humanitarian good-doing, thereby providing an institutionally-sanctioned story of humanitarian security that constructs "us" as heroic benefactors and "them" as either passive victims or potential evil-doers. The enacted border, however, is highly porous in that it is animated by a more complex and often conflicting range of emotions across its two sites, the military and the humanitarian, which

both confirm and undermine the official discourse. In security, fear is mixed with disaffection and despair with care, while, in humanitarianism, empathy is mixed with security, in their shared spaces with Registration, and it appears to be both fully professionalized, in its distanced and impersonal service provision, and fully engaged and emotional, in certain NGO workers' personal involvement with the migrants' plight.

A manifestation of what we may call "border 2.0," (paraphrasing Thomas Rid and Marc Hecker's "War 2.0", 2009), the narrated border seems to co-opt the social media uses of like, upload, and share into its rhetorical strategies, in ways that reproduce Owens' gendered power relations of humanitarian securitization (2012). Feminized, care-oriented emotions invest security's masculinist border violence in an ethos of compassion that ultimately disguises its exclusionary politics into benevolent morality. The enacted border, on the other hand, far from reflecting the institutional textualities of the military, comes about from its actors' "lived realities." It is in and through these lived realities that the affective permeability of security becomes most apparent, mutating, albeit not fully transforming, the masculinism of the border.

Examples of such realities include the disaffection, frustration, and distrust of security officers not against migrants but against the authority of the very nation and continent they protect—the Greek and EU authorities; the compassion towards children and families they occasionally demonstrated; and the proud affection they nurtured for each other—an emotion of comradeship (Samuel Hynes 1998) that is well-established in war literature but neglected in accounts of humanitarian securitization. By the same token, such lived realities also include the migrants' own affective agency towards border control, where their fear of being deported played out into creative negotiations of identity—the performance of "the refugee." And finally, the lived realities of the border further consist of the mixed emotions of humanitarian workers, some "unable to sleep" because of their anxiety for migrants well-being and others resorting to organizational skills that prioritized efficiency over empathetic connection. It is these variations that complicate the gendered pattern of border emotionality, fear and empathy, producing subtler accounts of the ways in which the actors of the border relate to each other, within the regime of humanitarian securitization. Despite, however, this potential for alternative readings, we demonstrated, the promise of a different border appears to be seriously undermined, once we shift focus from significant variations to a key similarity between the narrated and the enacted border. What they both have in common, let us recall, is a tripartite structure of mediation that lies at the heart of humanitarian securitization and its relationships of power—the structure of remediation, intermediation, transmediation. The main effect of this structure is, as we demonstrated, the devaluing, silencing, and marginalization of certain emotions of the border over others. This process, of what Nancy Fraser (2008) calls "misframing," takes place through two methods of symbolic control: invisibility and hierarchy.

Invisibility is evident in the erasure of certain emotions of the enacted border, in the process of their remediation into mainstream media. This is the case of the negative emotions and critical voices of security officers, which remained resolutely outside the mediated public sphere; or their immense invisible labour that literally made the border infrastructures possible, in the first place, was left unrecognized and unrewarded. By this token, what also remained absent is the

unexamined assumptions about certain migrants, which did not seem to cross the threshold of institutional reflection. Finally, invisibility is also evident in the narrated border, where migrants appeared as ambivalent objects of empathy and threat but never as political beings endowed with a heroic subjectivity themselves and demonstrating a strong sense of civil agency.

Hierarchy, the second method of symbolic control refers to the unequal ordering of emotions across both the narrated and the enacted border. The narrated border, as we saw, either entails a restricted range of emotional subjectivities for migrants (victim/beneficent or terrorist/perpetrator) or subordinates their voices of suffering to a regime of fear (in implicit warnings that future deaths in the sea would be their responsibility). Similarly, the enacted border uses intermediation to classify the voices of its actors in hierarchies of declining significance and relevance: the core NGOs belonging to an inner circle of intense digital connectivity with “satellite” players designated as social media followers only and migrants regarded as irrelevant to the humanitarian effort and kept resolutely outside its techno-affective networks.

It is precisely these structural patterns of invisibility and hierarchy that subordinate the border’s variations of emotion to the dominant regime of benevolent subjection and position its identities into pre-existing classifications of “us” and the “other”. Through these patterns, the mediatized border emerges as a complex network of mediations, which may allow for intersecting connections of local affect and solidarity yet ultimately reinforces the power relationships of global mobility. Neither an impenetrable shell of protection nor a space of unconditional solidarity, Europe’s border, we have shown, is best understood in terms of its permeability as a hybrid configuration of emotions and practices that exclude as they rescue and police as they care. In the process, they may momentarily allow for alternative representations and enactments of identity and attachment yet never interrupt the violence that has always been at the core of global geo-political power—the violence of de-humanization (Giorgio Agamben 1998). For, despite humanitarianism’s benign emotions, the “human” of the border is, as we saw, never the fully human, that is a feeling, thinking, agentive subject, but always a residually or potentially human, a passive, self-harming, and menacing “other,” for whom we can afford to feel little, if anything at all.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> "Migration crisis" is placed in quotations to challenge Eurocentric uses of the term, which point to the high number of the 2015 arrivals as their main cause for concern and policy focus, whilst ignoring the ongoing conflict-related crises in the Middle East that led populations to flee in the first place (Nick Vaughan-Williams 2015).

<sup>ii</sup> See <http://frontex.europa.eu/news/frontex-publishes-risk-analysis-for-2016-NQuBFv> (accessed March 12, 2017).

<sup>iii</sup> The relationship between symbolic practices of communication and emotion is the subject of a rich body of literature. Following Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, we define affect as a pre-discursive state of experience that regulates our capacity to act through varying degrees of intensity. Yet, as a state, we can only encounter it through symbolic expressions, corporeal and linguistic/semiotic, that work to establish bonds of sociality; that is, through "regimes of expressivity ... tied to resonant wordings and diffusions of

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feelings/passions—often including atmospheres of sociality, crowd behaviours, contagions of feeling, matters of belonging ...” (Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth 2010, 8 in Zizi Papacharissi 2014, 16). For our purposes, then, we understand that affect becomes accessible in the form of emotions of various qualities and intensities, as these are articulated (i) in the visual story-telling of the official videos of migrant rescue operations, produced by the Italian Navy Forces; and (ii) in the online and offline communicative practices of actors in the enacted border (registration officers and NGO practitioners).

<sup>iv</sup> It is worth noting that these videos may be referring to *Mare Nostrum* but have been released just after Operation Triton substituted *Mare Nostrum* in the Mediterranean (November 1, 2014). Nineteen countries took part in the operation and the European Union funded it with 2.9 million euros per month.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7LWma67WAA> (accessed February 9, 2017). But the emotional regimes of intermediation are also repeated in the documentary 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*. 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.

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.awaremigrants.org> (accessed March 12, 2017).

<sup>vii</sup> This is not the first European fear-mongering campaign. Indeed, although this 1.5 million euro effort 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 (and before them, Australia).

<sup>viii</sup> The fieldwork lasted for ten days, in December 2015, so that all discussions refer to that period of time and reflect reception arrangements at that point in time. Data collection relied mainly on multi-sited observation (divided between us) and, where appropriate, participation, online communication (through our inclusion in local Facebook groups), document collection, and interviews.