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Orientations of Europe: Boats, the Mediterranean Sea and the Materialities of Contemporary Mobility Regimes

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This paper is an investigation of how the specific design and materiality of the artefact of the boat, as well as the various material, visual, technical and geographical practices at work in the space of Mediterranean Sea, orientate a specific space and produce a selective politics of seeing, saving and framing of bodies on the move. It highlights how the very presence and movement of 'unseaworthy boats' in this actively orientated space of the sea brings to the fore the many strategies and techniques that have been employed to make it a space of European control. We argue that this is an active and deadly orientation carried out in an often dispersed number of practices and interventions within a seemingly flat space of water. The paper concludes that border transgressors' act of moving by boat, with all of the losses involved, both challenge and potentially reorientate European mobility regimes.

Introduction

Borders continue to take on new forms and different practices. These include various artefacts, sites and spaces of different sizes and scales, such as passports, visa regimes, data banks, border guards and checkpoints, airports and train stations, boats and coast guards, camps and detention centres, deportation techniques and devices, and so on. This paper brings to the fore the necessity and importance of understanding and thinking through the materiality of these things, practices and their relevant operating environments. Focusing specifically on boat migration via the Mediterranean Sea, we examine the roles that different aspects of materiality—from boats and their specific material affordances of mobility, to water and its specific

potentials for control and surveillance—play in shaping a situated politics of movement.

We understand materiality in line with a growing body of literature that addresses how specific actualised qualities of matter participate in the production of meanings, effects and politics. As witnessed in key texts by authors such as Karen Barad (2007) and Jane Bennett (2009), this 'material turn' in recent theoretical approaches involves treating seriously the way in which '[m]atter and meaning are not separate elements,' but rather mutually constituted and 'inextricably fused together' (Barad 2007, p. 3). In contrast to prevalent understandings of materiality that focus on notions of the purely substantive or symbolically representative qualities of material things, these writings focus on how materials and matter participate in actualising certain sets of relations and potentials over others.

Scholars of migration and border studies have adopted a similar approach towards materiality in order to examine ways beyond discursive practices by which migration is regulated and represented (Johnson et al. 2011; Walters 2015; Andersson 2016). For instance, writers have highlighted the ways in which people, places and things are co-constituted within specific sites and the particular sets of materially-informed relations that they afford, such as the Mexico-US Sonoran Desert (Squire 2014) or occupied East Jerusalem (Pugliese 2015). These authors examine how power relations within mobility and migration are mediated by processual constellations of objects, things and materials. Such a take on materiality allows us to claim that the policing of the Mediterranean Sea is not simply about the policies and human actors involved, but also the material affordances of particular kinds of boats and the qualities of the sea as a potential space for movement and control.

These material affordances and potentials should however not be understood as simply 'there' but are rather historically and politically orientated. As Sara Ahmed argues, 'bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other' (Ahmed 2006, p. 54). In other words, orientations arise as part of an ongoing history of things being specifically directed more in certain directions than others. Ahmed: 'to orientate oneself by facing a direction is to participate in a longer history in which certain "directions" are "given to" certain places': they become *the East*, *the West*, and so on' (p. 113). Such 'imagined geographies' (Said 1978) make certain directions and movements given and normal, and thus 'oriented' and in place, while simultaneously producing others as 'disoriented' and out of place.

This understanding of materialities and orientations involved in various politics of movement aims to point to the complex ways in which the national and international circulation of goods, bodies, capital and labour require a massive political apparatus actualised through dispersed material and technological practices so as to regulate bodies and their speed of spatial and temporal access to movement across

territories (Salter 2013). We understand these complex and dispersed actualisations of materially orientated practices in terms of a regime (Foucault, 1991), specifically what we describe here as a mobility regime. Mobility regimes produce asymmetrical spatial and temporal access to movement, with access understood here not simply as a procedural, bureaucratic matter, but as being about how spaces are experienced and lived as orientated towards bodies and their capacities and incapacities to navigate through them (Titchkosky 2011). In this sense, mobility regimes perform according to intentional, anticipatory, contingent and uneven acts of orientations.

In this paper, we focus on the case of the Mediterranean Sea and migration politics, and study how there has arisen over recent years a particularly purposeful and material orientation of this body of water and the vessels that travel in its space. These are orientations that Europe has a powerful and direct role in shaping. Whether one is speaking of the policing forces of Frontex (the EU's border agency), politicians and commentators, commercial and technological lobbyists, news agencies of all ends of the political spectrum or even European philanthropists working to rescue migrants – all work in their own ways towards giving ideological and material orientations to this space of water and the boats that would pass through it.

While this paper focuses on contemporary practices that orientate this space of water, such orientations are not entirely new. Scholars of history have previously shown how the Mediterranean, as a dynamic space of mobility and trade negotiated between different powers in the region on all sides of the water, was gradually transformed into a European space of exploitation and capital under various forms of colonial rule (Borutta & Gekas 2012; Clancy-Smith 2012). And most recently, others have shown how the emergence of a seemingly stand-alone entity such as the European Union in a so-called postcolonial time was in practice a product of specific economic, cultural and political interventions in African countries (Hansen & Jonsson 2014). All of these scholars, despite their disciplinary differences and the theoretical frameworks they use, share the notion of how the Mediterranean was and is shaped through colonial and neo-colonial practices exercised by European governors to the extent that this sea has become first and foremost a European space of control and management, both politically and economically. It is against this background that the current European mobility regime should be read, examined and challenged. This is necessary to avoid the naturalisation of European states and to resist falling into an analysis that reproduces a Westphalian imaginary about European borders (Korvensyrjä 2017).

These shapings and orientations involve a variety of infrastructures and materialised markers, orientating the Mediterranean Sea as a hospitable and welcoming space of mobility for certain bodies and vessels at the same time as being inhospitable and unwelcome one towards others. In all of this, the so called 'unseaworthy boat' used by refugees to cross the Mediterranean Sea is one important artefact that

can be understood as a direct result of both larger European border politics as well as specific qualities of the Mediterranean Sea. These boats are not only a product of the mobility regimes of Europe, they are also orientating a politics of movement as it is being played out in the context of migration today.

In order to speak of the geopolitical and material significance of these boats in relation to the ongoing politics of migration, this paper discusses such boats, their specific design and visual politics and furthermore the determining space of the Mediterranean Sea in which they operate. It further discusses the specific technical perceptions at work in this space and how these material, visual and geographical qualities produce a selective politics of seeing, saving and framing of bodies on the move which consequently orientate particular understandings of contemporary migration.

Boats: orientations at sea

Boats have played an important role in movement and migration historically. European refugees fleeing World War II were often only able to escape from the southern shores of Europe by boat, as the sea was not as heavily controlled as the land (Weber 2011). Without boats, seeking asylum in North and South America was essentially impossible for these refugees. At the same time, boats have been an important technology of deep sea faring and consequently colonialism and imperialism. For instance, John Law (1986) has examined how Portuguese colonialism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries relied on maritime vessels to succeed in enacting control over long distances. He demonstrates that Portuguese colonial expansion was made possible by the particular design of such ships, along with the use of 'documents' (records of travel and written instruction/observation), 'devices' (astrolabes) and 'drilled people' (navigators, experts) involved in their workings. Carlo Cipolla (1985) explains the ways in which the ruling classes of Western European states were able to conquer and colonise the world between 1400 and 1700 because of two distinct and soon powerfully combined technological developments. These included the cast-iron cannons forged by English craftsmen, which were rapidly disseminated to military forces across Europe, and the deep-sea sailing 'round ship' of Northern Europe, which slowly eclipsed the oared 'long ship', or galley, of the Mediterranean. The round ships that Cipolla discusses are indeed those European deep-sea sailing ships of which the slave ship was a variant (Rediker 2007). Slave ships in particular have played a very important role in speeding up the slave trade and consequently the genocide of African enslaved bodies (Glissant 1997; James 1989).

Boats provide possibilities of migration and moving when other vehicles and routes are inaccessible, dangerous or simply impossible to use. Today, the impossibility of taking safer vehicles and routes is the result of specific mobility regimes shaped by the global mobilisation of capital and simultaneous immobilisation of major poor populations of the world

inhabiting the so-called Global South. These include the introduction of strong visa regimes and security measures as a consequence of the formation of the Schengen region as well as various policies coming out of the ongoing 'war on terror'; the introduction of bans on airline companies that would take travellers without the right papers; and the rise of lucrative markets of militarised security technologies to secure borders, fences and walls. As a result of such practices, boats as artefacts and vessels of mobility are still able to provide a small possibility of movement for those whose access to mobility has otherwise been drastically reduced within such regimes.

As highlighted by William Walters, boats as migratory vessels are present even when they are not in the frame:

Think of the history of unwanted or demeaned migrations and how frequently its subjects, its targets are specified not just by institutional and legal categories but in their bodily existence and by their forms of transportation. The boatpeople. The wetbacks. The stowaway. The hobo. In all these cases an encounter with travel follows you around. Long after your journey is finished you remain a boatperson (Walters 2011, p. 5).

While boat migration is the result of specific border politics and material practices involved in limiting the possibilities to move by air and on land, boat migration and related arrivals to shore are often framed and presented in more spectacular ways than other migratory vehicles, routes and events. In recent years, more attention has been given to boats, seas, islands and shores, both at the level of policy-making, media discussion and humanitarian action, with recent tragedies on the Mediterranean Sea providing telling examples of such attentions (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins 2016; Pallister-Wilkins 2015; Cuttitta 2014).

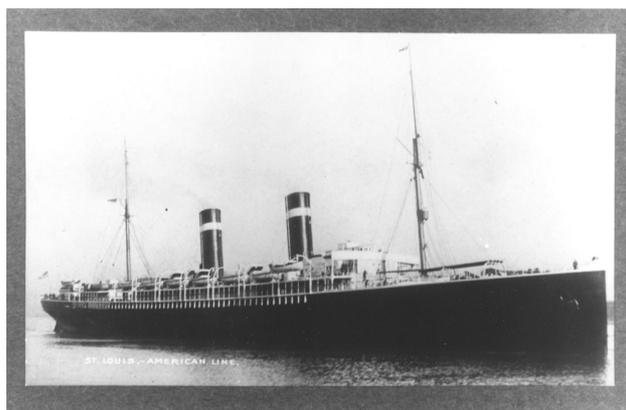
Governments, meanwhile, often shape and persuade their discriminative migration policies around the artefact, image and discourse of the boat and its passengers, who have often been labelled as 'boatpeople' (Pugh 2004; Mountz 2004). For example, Australia has made it impossible for refugees to enter the country by boats (Hyndman & Mountz 2007; Perera 2009); the EU has set up its own military complex—Frontex—on the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas to stop refugee boats (Andersson 2012); and Canada and the United States have historically shaped their policies of migration based on the image of arriving boats (Mannik 2013).

The visual politics of boats

While much attention is focused on those who have to make dangerous journeys by boats at sea, the politics of these vehicles and their role in migration politics—as well as the specific politics they produce—is typically overlooked. For instance, the common image of crowded boats at sea, the imposed precariousness that they present and the attention that such images produces is not an isolated image of

suffering that requires humanitarian action. It is an image that together with other establishment images helps in the production of certain discourses and politics. It is a spectacle. But the spectacle is not autonomous. Things come together and become a spectacle when they are looked upon in a way that can be appropriated, exchanged and consumed. Therefore, the spectacle is not about a collection of images, but rather the ways in which they perform and repeat their presence, shaping social relations mediated through the circulation of particular images or visualities over others (Debord 1995 [1967], p. 19).

A historical example makes this clear. The MS St. Louis was a German cruise ship that departed from the port of Hamburg in 1939, carrying 937 refugees seeking asylum from Nazi persecution. After being denied entry to Cuba, the United States and Canada, the ship returned to Europe. Besides denial based on visa policies, passengers of the St. Louis were not considered as genuine asylum seekers because the luxurious outlook of the cruise ship did not communicate a perception of a boat transporting desperate refugees fleeing persecution (Piché 2015). As a result, the claim to asylum of those on-board the ship was perceived as 'bogus'. In contrast, in the present time, the militarised forms of control of the Mediterranean Sea by Frontex are often justified in terms of saving refugees before they drown since they are portrayed as using disqualified transportation vessels, commonly referred to as 'unseaworthy' boats. Unseaworthy fishing boats and rubber dinghies, while affirming the desperate situation and risk refugees are ready to take in fleeing war and persecution, are at the same time used to frame these movements as representations of organised crime by so-called 'smugglers and traffickers' – the boat owners who 'do not care' about the safety of their passengers. Thus, in the case of the St. Louis, its luxurious shape and design invalidated the disparity and precariousness of its passengers, while here, the not-safe-enough look and design of fishing boats disqualify their passengers as asylum seekers and at the same time qualify them as 'illegal' migrants.



M/S St. Louis, Postcard print of the St. Louis, c. 1939. Courtesy of the Canadian Jewish Archives (formerly CJCCC National Archives)

But what is it that makes boats such a strong spectacular instrument – a well-understood thing for mobilising policies against migration, restricting borders or even advocating humanitarian actions? Why don't the airplanes, trucks, containers and travels by foot that are also involved in some parts of an illegalised journey play an equally central role in the imagery and discourses against or in favour of migrants?

In considering the materially-informed orientations involved in such a question, one can first point out that boats and their specific design arise in relation to their operating environments—the sea—affording the production of specific forms of imagery. Other vehicles of mobility, such as trains, trucks and cars, with their typically roofed interiors and the many other further surrounding foreground and background details of land, clearly don't afford the extreme visibility and vulnerability of bodies to cameras that something like a rubber dinghy on an otherwise 'blank' canvas of the sea does.

For some time now then, it has seemed that any article involving migration in the Mediterranean Sea must necessarily be accompanied by what has become a now ubiquitous image of cramped black and brown bodies on boats. These images are of course not the only images that could be used in discussing and representing the situation of boat migration. Therefore it is important to understand how these affordances intersect with other discursive forces circulating around migration, such as racism.

The racism of such imagery operates at different levels. To begin with, there is a racism embedded in specific practices of mobility regimes (e.g. visa policies and passport validity) that make certain bodies on the move subject to more inspection, checks and control and thus subject to the European gaze. At another level, such imagery produces a dominant associative notion of irregular migration to non-whites bodies. Consequently, any white body on the move within the space of Europe is always already assumed to be a legal traveler and any non-white body on the move potentially an 'illegal' traveler. 'Crooked representations' (Odumosu 2015) such as these, with their own long histories of racism, orientate such precarity at sea from its sites of production (specifically, European mobility regimes) towards the bodies on the boats, either as the ones to be saved at a particular moment or the ones who are complicit with 'criminal smugglers' by putting themselves into their 'careless' hands. As Nicholas De Genova writes, 'the border spectacle works its magic trick of displacing "illegality" from its point of production (in the law) to the proverbial "scene of the crime", which is of course also the scene of ostensible crime-fighting' (2013, p. 1189).

Compared with other strategies of irregular movement that are often about hiding from sight, boat migration tends to be about being public, visible and exposed at certain key moments. For instance, the use of a forged passport to board an airplane from Istanbul to Berlin is a process of hiding the irregularity of that travel from various forms of sight and

surveillance on the part of the authorities (Keshavarz 2016). In other words, such examples are about strengthening power and access to mobility through a level of invisibility. Europe's strategy for responding to such practices is to heighten powers of visibility through engaging in heavy surveillance within its shores—geopolitical borders—as well as its external borders and along the various possible routes of migration into Europe. Scholars of critical surveillance studies have called this a nexus of the outward and inward gaze (Amoore 2006; Coleman 2009).

Boats, on the other hand, do not hide from European authorities' sight and heavy surveillance, but rather impose themselves to the authority's eye, asking to be seen, saved and taken into European lands as soon as they enter the high seas or territorial waters of an EU state. This is a reappropriation of 'the politics of the governed ... as far as migrants know that they are governed by the same actors that monitor and detect them at sea, they claim to be rescued by them' (Tazzioli & Walters 2016, pp. 459-460). Though it is important to state that the use of such a strategy is of course not at all voluntary. European border regimes push migrants into taking dangerous routes of travel, often involving dangerous vehicles of moving. Crucially though, the specifics of a vehicle like a boat participate in shaping different politics and producing certain images when compared with other vehicles of travel. Thus, where the spectacle of the typical images of boat migration can be said to further mobilise certain racist discourses, the tactical visibility used by migrants on boats is in these particular instances about claiming to be seen, rescued and taken into Europe. In this particular moment, being visible is about a form of legal recognition and is a strategy of the moment of border crossing. After reaching Europe, some might then deliberately choose other strategies of in/visibility in regards to other orientations and materialities of land-based mobility regimes.

What is it specifically that orientates such a visibility at sea? A complex set of material affordances, artefacts, regulations, technologies, images and practices of looking. In such instances, the particular design of such 'unseaworthy' boats (the small shape with overloaded bodies with no possibility to hide) intersects with these other relational forces, becoming in the process a very particular vehicle of migration in an age of mass displacement, harsher border control and a 'shrinking space of asylum' (Mountz 2011).

The design politics of boats

As indicated above, the majority of boats employed by refugees for crossing waters such as the Mediterranean Sea are often referred to as unseaworthy boats. This is because these boats are not designed for deep sailing (travelling over long distances at sea). Fishing boats, rubber dinghies and small motorboats have been the most common vessels used for crossing to date. Despite their designs (specifically, their limitations in regards to long distance travel with large passenger numbers), such boats, while highly lethal, remain the most accessible means of travel to illegalised travellers.

Beyond being ill-fitted to the task at hand, the reduced scale of these boats' material structures in relation to the boats of patrolling authorities also make them vulnerable to a strategy of 'push-back' operations. A push-back is a law enforcement tactic whereby the coast guards of sovereign nations engage in a series of military operations to intercept and force illegalised boats to change their routes and push them back into international waters—if the boats are in a stable enough condition to so. This process of push-back is possible because of the particular design and size of fishing boats, that, in encounters with military and equipped coast guard boats, become particularly compatible and thus vulnerable to such operations. The disproportionalities of scale and their compatibility for push-back creates an increased possibility for interception and employments of force.

Such material discrepancies in the boats used can also be seen to have important consequences, not only in instances of push-backs, but also in the case of search and rescue operations. In the current moment, in which search and rescue operations have been reduced or willingly disregarded, the situation continues to arise whereby massive commercial shipping vessels are regularly asked to cooperate with rescues at sea, something which they are woefully inexperienced and unequipped to deal with. Furthermore, due to their typically very large relative sizes, such boats act as dangerous vehicles that often have unintentionally deadly effects for those much smaller vessels they are aiming to help out, as has proven to be the case in several recent examples, such as the *King Jacob* incident (Heller & Pezzani 2016). While the design of boats used for migration often make them vulnerable to certain forms of law enforcement or even rescue action, their design can at the same time be used to enact other laws in favor of migrants. For example, such smaller scale boats break easily or can be destroyed tactically in comparison with other types. A broken boat in the sea has to be saved according to conventions of rescue at sea.ⁱⁱ As possibilities of asylum only become available on humanitarian grounds or through discourses of crisis, some of those who board so-called unseaworthy boats to cross the Mediterranean into Europe intentionally damage the boats in order to show how deadly their situation is, and to show that they deserve rescue (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). They are not rescued from the water because they are asylum seekers fleeing war, violence and persecution, but because they are drowning at sea. While these are extremely rare cases, they demonstrate how the possibilities of asylum within current mobility regimes operate. Apparently, boats have to sink in order for their passengers to receive permission to enter into the space of asylum policed by nation-states and supra-states like the EU. However, the infamous case of the 'Left-to-Die Boat'ⁱⁱⁱ tells us that there is no guarantee that such conventions will be followed in the Mediterranean Sea.



Maritime Incidents, Heiko Schäfer, 2008. Photo documentations of five wooden fishing boats used by refugees to cross the Mediterranean. Image courtesy of Heiko Schäfer.

When looking at the complexities of migration from the position of boats, their specific design, their politics and the politics they produce, new potential understandings, challenges and openings arise. Boats materially perform what is legalised and what is illegalised in the mobility regimes operating within the Mediterranean Sea. Boats are more than moving seafaring vehicles. They act as mobile sites of law enforcement and oppression, as well as resistance and the claim to freedom of movement. A boat is an artefact as well as a site of practicing the right to move. In this sense, it is an orientation device, both orientating the sea and its regulatory policies as well as being orientated by the sea itself and the policies and practices created in response to such boats. Consequently, as a key player in migration politics, boats establish visual, performative and material practices and authority over the right to move.

Mediterranean: Orientating a sea

Boats used for irregular migration become 'unseaworthy' and generate specific visual and design politics because of the fact that the boat is itself a direct product of its operating within a particular kind of material space: that of water, and specifically the Mediterranean Sea in this case. Thus, a further investigation into the ways in which this space of water has been orientated in relation to the policing of migratory boats within the Mediterranean Sea is needed.

Uneven geographies

The sea, that 'other' 71 or so percent of the planet, has long presented a challenge to notions of boundaries, borders, territory and sovereignty. As a large, watery expanse, it suggests a space of no readily demarcated borders, and has throughout history often been cast as a suggestively amorphous^{iv} and unruly space that challenges land-based politics of territory (Schmitt 2003 [1950]; Steinberg 2001). Such an

orientation of any space as a blank canvas whose designated blankness is to be 'filled in' notably does the work of framing such spaces as both readily amenable to projecting colonising interests (Miller 1985; Mignolo 1995; Ryan 1996; Perera 2009) and as in need of a certain 'guardianship' (Gold 1981, p. 30) or 'stewardship' (Steinberg 2001) of their unruly qualities. The ongoing and particular histories of various European actors giving large spaces of water a sense of inscribable and possessable qualities typically begins with a process of making the sea legible to ostensibly land-based perspectives and their technologies of operation. From such a perspective, the contours of a body of water can initially be defined according to the land that seemingly surrounds it. Indeed, the *Mediterraneum* of English and Romance languages is in its literal translation a 'sea between the lands'. As indicated in such a denomination, the sea is in this context orientated in relation to land and made measurable and capable of being plotted out according to existing techniques of cartography (with their own already strongly orientated polarities and histories of North/South/East/West divides).

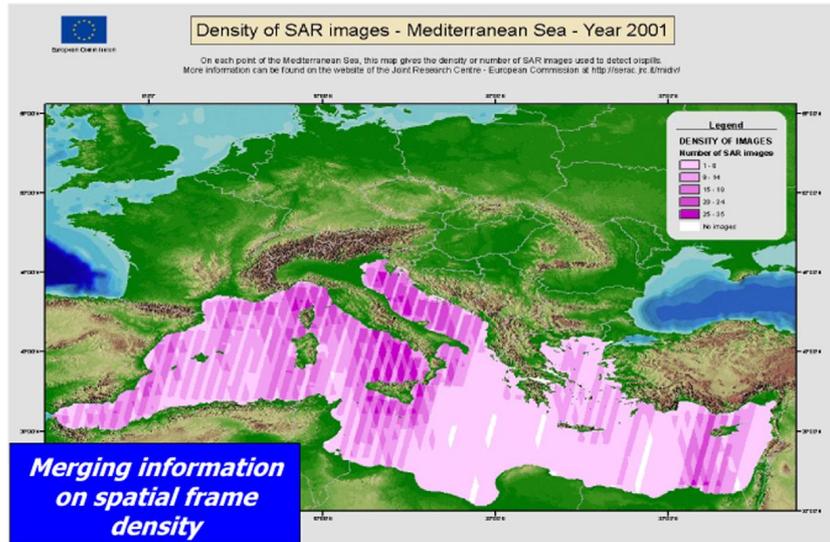
One typical result of such positionings of the sea as more of an ancillary space to the default paradigm of land-based perspectives and politics is that the sea is often seen or imagined as a kind of flat space of mobility. As Allan Sekula captures in *Fish Story* (1995), his photo essay on the steady emergence of the sea as a space of globalised commodity production and distribution, this can be seen to represent a kind of a forgetfulness of the multiform qualities of the sea, a forgetfulness that can be understood as an unsurprising result of the now centuries old push towards a capitalist ideal of the sea as a seamless space and friction-free surface of circulation without volume or history. It remains an ongoing task to bring to the fore how such a flattening out of the material qualities of the sea requires a vast amount of geopolitical, technological and ideological work in order to sustain such a mirage and orientation of the sea as a flat, frictionless space (e.g. Steinberg 2001; Elden 2013; Cowen 2014; Heller & Pezzani 2014; Steinberg & Peters 2015).

For instance, in opposition to a notion of flatness, a sea like the Mediterranean can be understood to have what the likes of Eyal Weizman and others have described as a strongly 'vertical' dimension (Weizman 2002; Elden 2013; Heller & Pezzani 2014). Territorially speaking, vertically determined categories of the continental shelf, the continental margin and the abyssal plane help in establishing internationally agreed upon juridical distinctions between territorial seas, exclusive economic zones and the high seas. Economically speaking, many of the sea's resources lie in the depths below the water's surface, whether in the form of fishable resources or in the seabeds further below, upon which submarine pipelines and communications cables can be laid for the transportation of oil, gas and information, and also from which the potential extraction of minerals creates a newly mineable surface of submerged geology. Thus, the securitisation of the sea operates at various horizontal and vertical dimensions, both above and below waters, whether in the age-old form

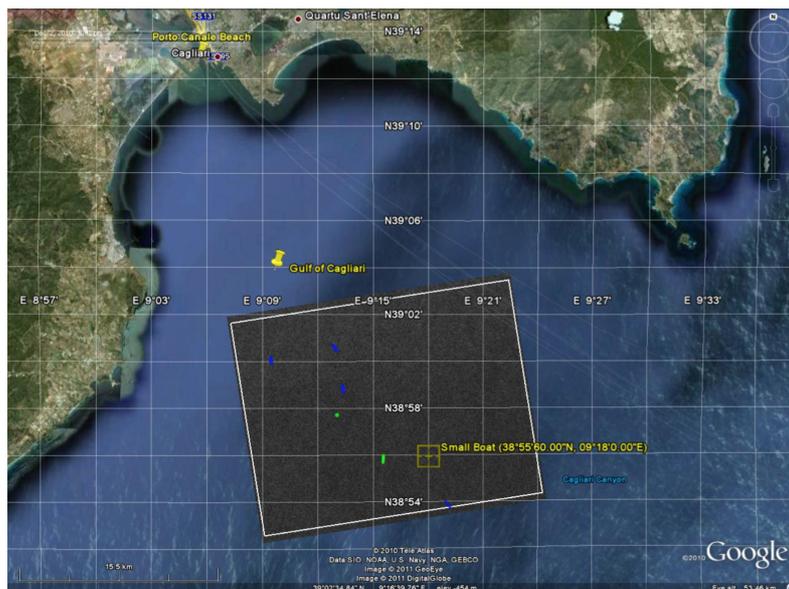
of lines of sight from various elevated points on land, or in the often privileged forms of various kinds of aerial and/or submarine visibilities, such as those of remote sensing satellites or monitoring by aerial and aquatic vehicles, such as in the case of helicopters, drones and submarines.

In actual practice though, the logics, technologies and practices that work to produce any discourse of a totalising flatness are produced in a series of material enactments that are not in fact totalising. The practices of orientation and control that one sees in both historical and present examples like the EU's policing of the Mediterranean Sea '[do] not cover territory evenly', but are rather made up of differentiated corridors, enclaves and zones of various extensions and forms, with authority radiating out unevenly from the various connecting nodes and edges in any such regime (Benton 2005, p. 717). The uneven nature of such geographies and orientations are highly evident in their direct effects on those travelling by boat, but are also often obscured by the various mobility regimes and multiple framings through which they navigate.

A quick example can make this uneven nature of the material distribution and actualisation of control clear. While the contemporary satellite view of the world presented via mapping interfaces onto 2D screens might suggest a perfect world picture available to any would be surveilling powers, this is not the actual case in the context of the Mediterranean Sea. As a 2011 case study carried out by Frontex and the EU's Joint Research Centre (JRC-Frontex 2011) highlights, the typically small size of boats used for clandestine migration (often falling in the range of 10-15 meter Zodiac style rubber dinghys and wooden or fibreglass fishing boats) prove difficult to detect using synthetic aperture radar (SAR) imagery. Such boats can only be captured in high-resolution images that cover a small area, and in the case of a sea as large as the Mediterranean, the report concludes that 'maritime surveillance with high resolution images would require a large number of images to cover wide maritime areas, which is very expensive and for the time being technically not feasible' (JRC-Frontex 2011; see also Heller & Jones 2014).



Density of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellite coverage in the Mediterranean Sea in 2001. Image from Topouzelis et al (2008, p. 10).



One of a series of images in the JRC-Frontex (2011, p. 48) report, 'Spaceborne SAR Small Boat Detection Campaign – Italy & Spain', investigating the capabilities of Synthetic Aperture Radar to detect small boats.

While not always the determining factors, such practical conflicts between technological affordances and their material costs point to the way in which orientations of any kind are enacted and sustained via the situated, oftentimes uneven actualisations of their material possibilities. In the case of the Mediterranean Sea, the great expense of monitoring such a vast space of water currently involves decisions as to the scope and resolution of image and data capture, the number of boats to

employ towards tasks of surveillance and/or rescue, and so on, with most state agencies choosing to focus the attention of their enforcement regimes on the main routes and vectors of sea crossings.

The mobility regimes at play in the Mediterranean Sea are multiple and composed of many different elements. These include the specific operations of boats upon the water for purposes of pleasure, economy and national interest; the legal demarcations of jurisdictions at sea; the spread in use of the technological devices of remote sensing and the geospatial, meteorological and oceanographic apparatuses of maritime surveillance; and also closer to sea level devices such as flags, passports, shipping logs, checklists, visa regimes, maps and other forms of regulating techniques and networks that are so actively at work in this complex geopolitical body of water. These practices and artefacts of control are also often highly contingent and subject to the many different factors at play. As we have seen, a material vessel such as the boat affords particular mobilities of one form or another for those on the move, with rubber dinghies offering different affordances to those of fibreglass fishing boats. A newly assembled and applied technology or set of laws might lead to particular migratory routes closing down and others opening up. As a consequence of such contingencies, activists might find methods of reappropriation and interventions into various elements of these mobility regimes that in turn might lead to the saving of lives (e.g. Alarmphone 2016).^v Similarly, the often swift changes of political winds from modes of empathetic readiness to save lives at sea to reactionary resistance to such assistance leads to situations in which the purposeful cutting down of the knowingly strained resources of rescue operations such as that of Frontex's *Mare Nostrum* are then temporarily bumped back up in the wake of one tragedy after another. With the important proviso that almost any such increase in search and rescue operations to date have almost inevitably been accompanied by stricter tactics on land for dealing with those rescued.

Orientations that aim to produce narratives of flatness and a smooth, hegemonic totality of operational scope serve particular purposes. As Ahmed makes clear, any discourse of "flatness" is itself "orientated" in the sense that it still depends upon a point of view, as a point lost on the horizon, or that is concealed in the very mode of its operation' (Ahmed 2006, p.113). Orientations do not happen in isolation but rather require continuous work and enforcement in order to produce any sense of 'what appears' as that which is given. As discussed earlier on the politics of representation in relation to images of people travelling by boat, it is little surprise that recent incidents and images relating to migration across the Mediterranean Sea have been massively politicised while erasing the ways in which the EU and Frontex have orientated the sea into a producer of violence and vulnerability. This type of framing serves as a reminder of the way in which every orientation and forging of one relation to another is always simultaneously a disconnecting of other possible relations.

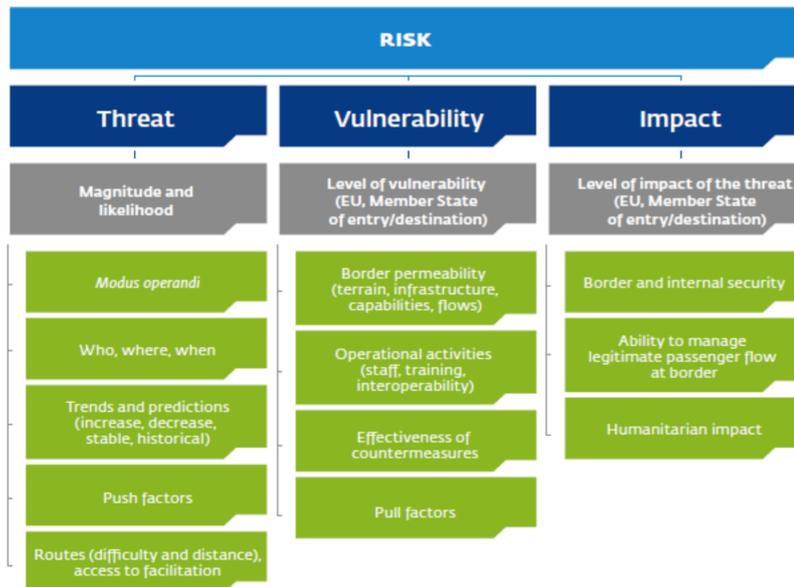
In considering such differentiating orientations at play in a space of water such as the Mediterranean Sea, it is not a case of privileging one such orientation over the other—e.g. the vertical over the flat or the technological over the legal—but rather of studying the ways in which the different but often intersecting forces of these orientations become materially performed practices of control. The same body of water can be orientated according to a variety of practices: as a relatively flat surface area through which a shipping lane might pass; as a vertically surveilled space, whether from above (aerial vehicles, satellites) or below (submarines); and/or as a dynamic material volume weighted with economic value (e.g. fish, oil). In practice, none of these orientations are of a geometrically neat or consistent nature, but rather subject to what are often uneven forms of material enactment and enforcement.

Weighting risk

Faced with the specific challenges that this space of water presents, the EU continues to work to put into place various systems for determining where and when to focus their interventions. In the control rooms of EU border policing forces such as Frontex, one can witness ways in which weighted systems of remotely directed forms of control are implemented, typically in the form of risk analysis style approaches that aim to work with this variegated actualisation of control as it is exerted in the Mediterranean Sea. Initiated in 2013, Eurosur (the European External Border Surveillance System) is an example of an information collection and exchange system aiming 'to provide situational awareness of conditions and activities along the external borders as well as all the necessary tools to react accordingly' (European Commission 2008, p. 6), with a specific aim to 'to detect, identify, track and intercept persons attempting to enter the EU illegally outside border crossing points' (p. 3). By facilitating the collection and exchange of information between national immigration agencies, and in the process providing further visual tools for representing this data, Eurosur can be seen to create not a single panopticon-like gaze, but rather multiple regimes of visibility (Tazzioli & Walters 2016) that often involve complex and at times competing webs of diplomatic and technological protocols, inter-organisational rivalries and restrictions in regards to amount of access.

In order to craft the kind of situational awareness that it does, Eurosur weights its information by assigning various levels of what it describes as risk and level of impact to any given movement tracked by its system along the various borderzones it is tasked with covering. To quote, as Martina Tazzioli and William Walters (2016, p. 458) do, from a Navy staff officer speaking on the Eurosur system for surveillance of migration, 'in order to see and detect, the most difficult job is to select what we want to see, which vessels should be displayed on the map; indeed, if we visualise all vessels, the map ... [becomes] unreadable and the Mediterranean would appear as a coloured undistinguished space'. A seemingly obvious point, but one that requires constant

reiteration and study. What is made to appear in each orientation and what material vectors of actualisation inform and further produce such orientations? And furthermore, what bodies and entities are dis-oriented from such orientations? For whom is the sea not a frictionless, flat space?



'Table: Risk components (CIRAM)'. CIRAM is the Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model. Table appears in the European Commission's report 'Adopting the Practical Handbook for implementing and managing the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR Handbook)' (European Commission 2015, p. 31).



Frontex Situation Centre Dashboard. Still from Frontex's promotional video 'Frontex Situation Centre' (Frontex 2015).

A key part of making this border work at sea operational is the digital mapping interface, in which various streams of information (e.g. from a national Coast Guard, a Navy or other military actor, EU satellite feeds, an SOS signal sent by a boat, etc.) in regards to vessels at sea are collected and visualised as a series of dots on a map of the region. The significance allotted to the dots representing the migrant boats is one

of a definable calculus that ostensibly aims to code and rank the risks and level of impact of any potential border violation on the part of these boats. For example, the nationalities of those on board and their likely access to asylum might play a key role in the weighting of such an impact assessment. What informs these calculations can of course be changed at any agreed upon point, but each in the end aims to address the question of where and when to intervene. Tazzioli & Walters define this as the 'governability' of the boat in question (2016, p. 456). The boat in such systems takes on various forms of orientated weightings and significance, many of which relate very little to the individual situations of those on board or to any present situations of high risk and distress. Indeed, the focus of risk here in these interfaces is often in relation to future moments of anticipated stress upon EU member states in the event of their potential arrivals into EU territory. While paying close attention to how such systems work, one should at the same time not be blinded or misled by any sense of their technological sophistication. These systems serve very particular wills. They are one important part of an arsenal of artefacts and regimes that continue to produce ongoing suffering and death at sea.

Histories and practices of the present such as these point to the ways in which the seas have long been and continue to be dynamically oriented spaces of what can be described as 'elastic' and 'patchy' regimes of control (Heller & Pezzani 2014, pp. 663-4). Elastic, in the sense of selective uses (and abuses) of laws and other forms of enforcement on the parts of various powers at play. And patchy, in that any such enforcement is itself subject to its practical, often changing, material reach and implementation. As researcher and activist groups such as the Watch the Med team are able to clearly show^{vi}, this elasticity of the law and its deliberately patchy and selective application can be used to deadly effect, as one sees over and over again in regards to the practices around search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea (Basaran 2015). While search and rescue laws oblige a government to put in place adequate search and rescue services and to attend to distress messages or witnessed reports of a boat with people in peril, daily examples can be found whereby such messages are deliberately ignored on the part of the responsible nation states (such as in the particularly notable case of the 'Left-to-Die Boat'). Indeed, as Jasbir Puar (2007) points out, today's biopolitical and networked forms of surveillance often aim to control such situations in as hands-off and 'viciously intimate' a manner as possible. These modes of control

are not removed, abstract, or cohered, but viciously intimate ... They are discontinuous in that intimate proximities are orchestrated to produce the ephemera of nonconnection, of not-touching—not through a vacuum of distance or of severing or separation, but in the proactive, provocative swerve away from contact, the refusal of tactile knowing: the discontinuity is a deliberate rupturing, not simply a missing or a missed connection, but an intimate, brutal, almost-but-no kind of taunting. (p. 154)

Similarly, Davies et al, in the context of the Calais encampments, build upon Mbembe's concept of 'necropolitics' to discuss the slow and structural violence enacted through certain modes of 'inaction', arguing that 'inactivity—as well as political actions— can be wielded as a means of control, coercion and power' (Davies et al 2017, p. 19). Such forms of elastically direct and remote control on the part of EU practices represents a 'diffused and dispersed' kind of violence, a conscious form of governmentality in which violence 'is exercised less by effecting a destructive force onto a given actor, than by creating *the conditions* in which the sea becomes a liquid trap' (Heller & Pezzani 2014, p. 671).

Amidst all of this enterprise and activity, the Mediterranean Sea has become a very particular kind of space for the migrant boats that would traverse it. By looking into such matters it is possible to trace the very specific nature in which this space of water has been orientated by Europe in ways that have highly material and deadly consequences for those whose movement via boat across these waters have been illegalised. In entering into a highly orientated space such as the Mediterranean Sea, a boat enters into a set of mobility regimes within which crude binaries such as 'regular' or 'irregular', 'bogus' or 'genuine', 'visible' or 'invisible', 'seaworthy' or 'unseaworthy' can arise. More directly, this space of water has been orientated in such a way as to create knowingly dangerous conditions of crossing. Where a boat as a material artefact is articulated and designed in relation to the material properties of the sea (and the further economic, legal or technological needs of its particular time), the sea itself can be designed and orientated by power. Thus the geopolitical will of Europe capitalises and orientates very particular qualities of this sea, weaponising its particular material properties in an at times uneven but nevertheless deliberate and increasingly structural fashion against those whom Europe would prefer to keep out. Having specifically orientated the very particular conditions of the Mediterranean Sea as they exist today, Europe can then—whether in an active mode of enforcement or passive mode of inaction—be seen to apply selectively uneven, elastic and asymmetric forms of control. Modes of control which take their place within a continued lineage of European exceptionalism and its production of spaces of inclusion and exception, each enacting within them various weighted distributions of rights and power. In such ways, a once seemingly flat, frictionless body of water becomes a geographically orientated space, politically operable site and consequently dynamic regime of mobility, whose deadly effects are clear to see.

Final remarks

Europe does not look the same when one changes the position to that of migrant boats, cruise ships or Frontex satellites and drones. Europe extends its powers of control at sea along the very specific shape, design and utilities of specific forms of boats that shape a space of water into the site of the Mediterranean Sea and political space of Europe. Through a variety of techniques and logics, an orientation of the sea is enacted so that certain actors, artefacts and sites are

considered as legal or illegal, seaworthy or unseaworthy, worthy of rescuing or not rescuing. These orientations act as coercive factors in encouraging certain possibilities of movement and access over others. In their repeated performances and the material enforcement of certain possibilities over others, such orientations can tend to inertia, taking on qualities of normalcy and continuity and thus eliding or masking their qualities as historical manipulations of a space that lead to specific deadly conditions over others.

The boat is one artefact that comes into material being and operation within such a myriad of orientations. Its design is a complex reflection based on the shape of its specific operating environment: in this case, the Mediterranean Sea. The act of designing in this respect should be understood as not ending in the artefact of the boat but rather as flowing from the boat to the sea and from the sea to further objects, systems and techniques that are produced and installed as forces aimed at operating within this environment. All are, in one way or another, extensions of the water, just as they are also further orientated by the land-based ontologies and political wills that drive their operation. The boat is not isolated from the water, the politics, technologies and laws that orientate these waters as European and thus subject them to European enforcement. The motion of a boat in its various sites of operation can make a boat into something more than what defines a boat according to the laws of physics, principles of design, laws of the sea or common practices of seafaring. It can also become an effective fence on the liquid surface of the sea, a death trap or a floating detention centre (D'Almeida 2015; Holehouse 2016).

Within such an orientated space of mobility regimes, the boat continues to act as one particularly important material practice of such orientations, one that performs and demands an engagement with their charge and intention. As Ahmed (2006, p. 178) highlights, orientations create collectively recognisable lines that might be followed, deviated from or resisted. Against a continuity and presentation of a space and politics as given, the 'unseaworthy' boats of irregular migration can also be understood as collectives that resist and bring to the fore the particular nature of this space as orientated. In this sense, these boats are both disorientated and disorienting. They are located as disoriented because they specifically do not follow or accept the existing orientations produced by the mobility regimes of Europe in general and the Mediterranean Sea in particular. And they are disorienting because their movements through this space reveal the orientations and configurations at work. As Ahmed (2006, p. 179) puts it, movements of such a nature express both a refusal to accept as given the existing lines to follow, and at the same time an act that materialises different practices of the given and different possibilities of orientation and modes of being. In fact, these boats affirm that—despite Europe's attempts to totalise and monopolise the space and time of governance over mobility in the Mediterranean Sea—there will always be spaces remaining, or emergent spaces that escape from governance and control. As Talal Asad (2004, p. 279) reminds us, these spaces are the 'space between bodies, law and discipline'.

Europe can be looked at anew when one re-orientates herself to the lived experiences of those frequently referred to as 'illegal border crossers' or 'boatpeople'. Such reorientations of the relations and operations of a boat lead to new material and political openings within mobility regimes, potentially challenging and reshaping the very orientations that would control and direct their usage. Boats and those who use them for moving across the Mediterranean to enter into Europe 'still produce new maps; they fashion new passages and points of transition in and through the border, marking the possibility of other spatial relations and new, as yet unrealised, geographies that confound the territorial trap' (Perera 2009, p. 70). One only needs to consider the simple strategic refrain of the Watch the Med group of activists working to assist migrants in need of rescue at sea: 'Ferries not Frontex' (Alarmphone 2016, pp. 98-99). While the example of the MS St Louis highlighted earlier reminds one not to imagine that a different boat would actually change the underlying and driving motives of the situation as it is, it nevertheless highlights how the adopting of another category of boat—a ferry—leads to different affordances and politics of visibility, of vulnerability and of the potential and willingness to rethink, reorientate and work through an ongoing material politics of movement within and beyond Europe.

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Notes

ⁱ Frontex, as a European Union regulatory agency, is tasked with the integrated border security and fortification of the European Union's external border. Frontex manages operational cooperation at the external borders of the European Union's member states. Established in 2004 and located in Warsaw with financial, administrative and legal autonomy, Frontex works to promote a 'pan-European model of integrated border security'.

ⁱⁱ The current legal architecture of maritime governance and territory is largely codified in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which amongst its other functions, serves notice to ships at sea and to the nearest coastal states of their 'duty to render assistance' to any persons in need of rescue at sea.

ⁱⁱⁱ Heller and Pezzani (2012): 'In the case of what is now referred to as the "Left-To-Die Boat", 72 migrants fleeing Tripoli by boat on the early morning of March 27 2011 ran out of fuel and were left to drift for 14 days until they landed back on the Libyan coast. With no water or food on-board, only nine of the migrants survived. In several interviews, these survivors recounted the various points of contacts they had with the external world during this ordeal. This included describing the aircraft that flew over them, the distress call they sent out via satellite telephone and their visual sightings of a military helicopter which provided a few packets of biscuits and bottles of water and a military ship which failed to provide any assistance whatsoever. The events, as recounted by these survivors, appeared to constitute a severe violation of the legal obligation to provide assistance to any person in distress at sea, an obligation sanctioned by several international conventions'.

^{iv} In the words of the European jurist and theorist of sovereignty Carl Schmitt (2003 [1950], pp. 42-3), 'The sea has no character, in the original sense of the word, which comes from the Greek *charassein*, meaning to engrave, to scratch, to imprint'.

^v For example, as one finds in practices like those of the Watch the Med initiative (<http://www.watchthemed.net/>), a project initiated in 2012 by a wide network of organizations, activists and researchers with the specific aim of appropriating information from a range of both publicly available and privately assembled sources in order to create a transnational platform for the monitoring and intervention into situations of distress at sea.

^{vi} See, for instance, the ongoing archive being documented on Watch the Med's 'Reports' page (<http://www.watchthemed.net/index.php/reports>), or a helpful overview of the situation as it has been presented in the report 'Moving On: One Year Alarmphone' (Alarmphone 2016).

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