



Terraqueous Necropolitics: Unfolding the low-operational, Forensic, and Evocative Mapping of Mediterranean Sea Crossings in the Age of Lethal Borders

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Abstract

Over the last years, the European Union (EU)'s anti-immigration policy has shifted the imagery of the Mediterranean Sea from a lifeworld into a deathworld. The ensuing media attention on migration across the sea has resulted in the dramatic proliferation of images exhibiting human suffering and death. These images include maps, which have been barely discussed by critical scholars. This paper narrows this gap by examining the relationship between the lethal policies affecting the Central Mediterranean Migration Route and its maps. It introduces the terraqueous necropolitics as a new framework of analysis, by acknowledging the power to kill that EU is exerting over an amphibious space, that is, through the blocking of migrants on the firm land and the intentional inaction in sea rescues. This power is also perpetrated by the media representation of migrants as quasi-objects. On the other hand, due to the multivocal relations of cartography with marine territoriality and what I call "the geometry of the unliving," I draw on three case studies on mapping and migration to explore the modes through which maps produce, expose or evoke the necropolitics of the Mediterranean Sea. I frame these "mapshots" through three interpretive categories: low-operational, forensic and evocative mapping. These visual and spatial regimes of investigation require interdisciplinary attention on the distinctiveness among cartographic events and the configuration of the terraqueous border they enact.

Keywords

Necropolitics; Mediterranean Sea; migration; visual culture; critical cartography; terraqueous border



Introduction

In recent years, the daily crossings, blockages, and shipwrecks faced by migrants in their journeys across the Mediterranean Sea have dramatically affected Western media. The visual narrative of the alleged migration crisis has been constructed ambiguously, oscillating from representations of migrants as a horde ready to ‘invade’ the shores of Europe to epidemic accounts of the mortality caused by their crossings. In the second case, both the overview of numerous tragedies and detailed accounts of specific iconic deaths, such as that of Alan Kurdi, have contributed to the public discourse on migration and policies regarding border control. Such images of suffering and death have often been mobilised as evidence of the nonhumanitarian response of Western countries to the migration, thereby confirming an obsolete and externalised border politics that is nourished by securitarian paradigms and fear of the other (Ashutosh and Mountz, 2012; Bialasiewicz, 2012; Loyd and Mountz, 2014). Furthermore, such images have raised ethical concerns about the public understanding of migration, leading critical scholars to examine this visual onslaught and disclose the exclusionary and uneven degrees of empathy and humanity constructed through different “raciological” (Gilroy, 2000) and spatial geometries (Bischoff et al., 2010; Bleiker et al., 2013; Giubilaro, 2017; Squire, 2017).

In migration and border studies, critical and emotional attention to the migration crisis’ photographic construction have not usually solicited substantial interest in the cartographic images that pervade the visual regime of borders and immobility. Yet migratory cartographies are similarly informed by the abovementioned dual narrative, which alternates between a representation of people on the move and tragic accountability to dead bodies. In the first narrative, geovisualisations exist that are aimed at capturing and measuring—albeit with very different objectives—the massive movement of migration, disclosing an interest among mapmakers in tracing how ‘undesirable’ life, such as that embodied by migrants, is moving toward Europe. However, such dynamism has been translated in a biased manner by various governmental actors and media agencies, reproducing “a politics of invasion and moral panic” (Mainwaring and Brigden, 2016). This is poignantly illustrated by Frontex maps (known since 2016 as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), which virtually and numerically defined the external ‘assault’ of migrants by measuring their “illegal” border crossings, especially in 2015 and 2016. To fight against the generalisations and stereotypes of one-way migration rhetoric, the human movement has also been alternatively outlined by critical cartographers and activists beyond the media spectacle (see, for instance, www.migreurop.org; Bacon et al., 2016). This has been done mostly through the visual rendition of nonlinear migratory paths that affect various countries and continents, of which Europe seems to constitute only a small part.

However, and this leads us to the second narrative of the migration crisis, when people plan or start to move across land and sea, they experience differential mobility capabilities, interruptions, physical pain, blockages, and death that render their movement—and its representation—a much more intermittent and constrained experience than the frictionless one rendered through migratory maps’ continuous lines. Considering, more alarmingly, that deaths at sea constituted 70% of global migrant losses in 2015 alone (Brian and Laczko, 2016) with over 3,770 estimated deaths in the Mediterranean Sea (Source: International Organization for Migration), not only migratory flows but also their fatal interruptions have increasingly concerned the work of cartographers. Yet, the imagery and practice of this necrotic gaze on migration, pertaining to the cartographic apprehension of how migrants’ undesirable passage is inhibited and interrupted, remain vastly under-theorised. Of course, some exceptions exist to this statement (Casas-Cortés et al., 2017; Heller and Pezzani, 2014; Tazzioli, 2015) and most are confined to the field of critical cartography.

In this paper, I attempt to further enlighten this necrotic face of the migratory map by assuming a visual and aesthetic perspective on the cartopolitics of this deadly migration. To this end, I seriously consider the practices of seeing and sensing migratory necropolitics through various uses of the cartographic image. When speaking of necropolitics, I refer to the analytical tool theorised by Mbembe (2003) within the context of the African post-colonies. Biopower, as Mbembe argues, does not merely concern the control of practices of living but also multiple practices of dying (see also Braidotti, 2007). While the magnitude and modes of suffering and death resulting from border policy management are tragically experienced throughout the Mediterranean (also in many overlooked seas such as the Caribbean and Andaman, as well as in the Strait of Malacca), in this paper I want to specifically focus on those occurring in the Central Mediterranean Route, the deadliest passage ever with more than 2,892 deaths in 2015 and 4,576 in 2016. Moreover, I wish to unfold the crucial role played by mapping in this spatiotemporal context. In a deeper sense, this cartographic reading will stimulate a geographical critique at several levels. Such a critique will enable a transversal examination of the space in which the necropolitics materialise; the spatialisation of such necropolitics, which is provided by different maps; and the political, cultural, and phenomenological contexts in which such mapping performances occur.

Before interlacing those conceptual layers, I turn first to the peculiar nature of the necropolitical space. In the exhausting journey taken by numerous people through deserts toward North Africa (mainly Libya) and finally to Malta or Italy via sea crossings, thirst and heat in the desert, torture in Libyan camps, and burns and drowning in the sea lead to the realisation of a right to kill that is exerted over an amphibian space. Like an amphibian, the necropower disciplining human mobility inhabits a dual and interrelated surface: it is able to produce slow movement and death both on firm land and through the sea. More importantly, the amphibian perspective helps us consider the correlation between the politics of land enclosure and the ensuing embarkment on a sea route. Indeed, as EU member states refuse to grant migrants visas in many African countries and push people back to prisons and camps, the sea becomes the last possible escape route. In other words, as Heller and Pezzani (2016, 3) indicate, policies imposed on the governance of Mediterranean migration have “locked land and sea into a continuum”. Under the pressure of border enforcement, the Mediterranean Sea looks, however, anything but a free and safe passage or a positive alternative to the borderland. By contrast, it is the space in which the power of death is especially perpetrated by way of the violent inaction (Davies et al., 2017) of EU member states that manifests through the delaying or even denying of search and rescue (SAR) operations, which would normally help to prevent migrants drowning.

Taken together from an amphibious perspective, the territoriality and liquidity of border policies denote the emergence of a terraqueous necropolitics. In what follows, terraqueous necropolitics takes on two meanings. It configures the space in which the border enclosure of the land and strategy of deferring rescue operations at sea conjoin to create a concerted right to kill, yet this notion can even apply to the sea itself. In the context of boat migration, the Mediterranean Sea configures indeed as a terraqueous necropolitical order on its own. This means that it comprises the agency of different aqueous territorialities, that is, “uncertain sovereignties” (Cuttitta, 2018), which are in turn recognised or denied to control or defer migratory activities in the maritime space, depending on the interests of the political actors involved. In this respect, the adjective “terraqeous” has recently been proposed in global history to acknowledge that “territory ... can be aquatic—in the same way as—water spaces have been, and continue to be, territorialized” (Bashford, 2017, 262). In merging the two spatialities, the sea and terrestrial places such as the desert or semiterrestrial spaces such as islands (Mountz, 2011) can be ideally territorialised and deterritorialised, possessed and dispossessed, and visibilised and invisibilised by the activities of state and nonstate actors as a strategy of migration governance.

In the central Mediterranean Sea, where I pose my attention, the terraqueous necropower is substantially transformed into what Mbembe (2003) calls the “letting die”. What is crucial to note is that

the letting die—the necropolitical governance of slow agency and immobility—clearly unfolds through the in-activity of mapping devices; for instance, when cartographic tools and navigational systems do not track potential casualties during SAR activities. By contrast, other maps visually or vocally spatialise the necropolitical migratory system, such as those mobilised by activists and artists to expose the “repressed topographies of cruelty” (Mbembe, 2003, 40) which are usually silenced by the authoritarian narrative of the border. This means that, in relation to Mediterranean necropolitics, maps engender plural outcomes: they are either technological tools that (de)generate (in)action or loci of meaning, visual residues of political struggles, and evocative meditations. The adoption of a visual and aesthetic lens in mapping serves here to contextualise each of those mapping functions and to highlight the different visual regimes to which those migratory mappings are subtended.

In combining ethnographical approaches with critical deconstructive analyses (see Boria and Rossetto, 2017; Dodge et al., 2009; Tazzioli, 2015), I specifically introduce three critical ways of examining, with and through maps, the Mediterranean necropolitics: the low-operational, the forensic, and the evocative. Exemplified by three ‘mapshots’, the selected corpus draws methodologically from visual and textual analyses, participatory observation, and interview data that were collected between 2015 and 2016 with actors that range from maritime institutions and investigative journalists to an artist/cartographer. In staging different performances of the terraqueous border, the three categories embrace discordant notions of visibility and invisibility as well as several practices of counting and accountability for humans.

To unravel the several threads of analysis, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section explores the terraqueous necropolitics of the Mediterranean Sea crossing; the third section discusses how cartography can capture and activate such a deathscape differently thanks to its affinity with marine territoriality and the construction of what I define a ‘geometry of the unliving’. The term delves into geometric and posthumous constructions of spatial events of migrant crossings performed by maps, which are often blamed by critical geographers for killing the vibrancies and simultaneities of living spaces and objectifying or expelling subjectivities on the move. The threefold distinction (i.e., low-operational, forensic, and evocative mapping) finally contributes to raising several problematics concerning cartographic operations and representations of migrant bodies. To this end, a visual analysis of maps, both critical and empathic, seems beneficial for learn from the multiple practices of death inscription and transcription, with the aim of putting cartography in the service of a more ethical migratory aesthetics.

The terraqueous necropolitics of the Mediterranean seascape

The burgeoning of academic work on the voluminous, transient, and nonhuman properties of the ocean (Anderson and Peters, 2014; Peters et al., 2018; Steinberg and Peters, 2015) has contributed to the rediscovery of the complex agencies of the sea, thereby challenging the presumption that water worlds are somehow “empty of activities, mobilities and lifeworlds” (Anderson and Peters, 2014, 7). In the emergence of the so-called “wet ontology” (Steinberg and Peters, 2015), migration through traversing the seas has often received negligible attention, perhaps because the notion of materiality constructed through migratory processes and border policies tragically suppresses any joyful and posthuman appreciation of the sea space and, rather, evidences the inextricable (and brutal) relationship between water and land (see Jones, 2015). In other words, the Mediterranean Sea has become a space of mediatic visibility—not as much for the appreciation of its enlivened and connective essence, what the adherents to the wet ontology would call a “lifeworld”—but rather for the necrotic component inflicted by the externalisation and enforcement of EU border control policies. The sea has more vividly turned into a “deathworld” (Mbembe, 2003), with this other conceptualisation suggesting that when land politics flirts with the water, the border may corrupt the sea in such a manner as to alter its spatiality with violent rules.

The dramatic intrusion of border categories and human agencies into the sea is indeed forging an inhuman space made of bodies, boat relics, and various objects left by migrants during their sea crossings and sometimes dragged to shore by water itself.

Considered a peculiar extension of the violent, terrestrial border (Jones, 2015), the Mediterranean Sea is the stage where the necropower efficiently acts as an amphibious, terraqueous force. Cuttitta, for instance, interprets the political surface of the sea as one where conflicting territorialities are interspersed with grey zones of accountability: “sovereignities and territorialities are ... subject to crises and negotiations, as well as to twists of fate, resulting in a high degree of uncertainty about the outcomes of actions occurring in a given maritime territory” (2018, 78). In the context of Central Mediterranean boat migration, this means that the maritime territory is in turn petrified or liquefied depending on which of the two components of terraqueous necropower prevails—land or water. Terra (land in Latin) refers to “the sense of a sustaining medium, solid” (Delaney, 2005, 14), and is the component marked by the alleged presence of jurisdiction and spatial governance at sea; by contrast, water is the component that unsettles and liquefies the interterritorial administration of the sea, because it recalls the unregulated or ever-changing properties of the policies imposed on the Mediterranean Sea’s governance. Moreover, the necropower of the terraqueous border, which is carved from the land and sea, acts as a dispersed yet capillary force that transcends the sovereign state because it is reproduced within a broader network of (supra)national governmental forces.

Wielders of such decentralised power to kill are mainly EU member states. Altogether, they have not only reduced their SAR operations at sea since the end of 2014 but also criminalised and hampered the patrol and rescue activities of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), especially in the case of Italy. Finally, they have fostered collaborations with several African countries to strengthen migrant containment on land. De facto, EU member states have decelerated SAR operations by taking advantage of the uncertain application of the regulatory framework that governs maritime sovereignty and international sea rescue. Hence, in this section, I discuss the effects of this land–sea agglutination to affirm that both the territorial components (border control decisions and the observance of treaties and conventions) and the watery processes (grey zones of accountability) of the policies designed to govern the migration of the Mediterranean Sea are meaningful in considering the current system of necropolitics; they can each be intermittently activated and assembled to enact the lethal forces of border policies. Moreover, this blurred ‘terraquacity’ helps to understand the similarly ambiguous role played by cartography in the contemporary necropolitical regime of migration.

Whose sea?

The conceptualisation of the Mediterranean Sea as a terraqueous entity also has a historical and conceptual legacy, for which I will offer a brief outline. The convergence between aquatic and territorial patterns of comprehending the Mediterranean Sea was already grasped in the notorious definition by Fernand Braudel, who pictured the sea as a “liquid continent” (1948). Throughout time, the Mediterranean Sea has been constructed as an ambivalent territory, either in terms of a border, a demarcating line between Europe and Africa, or as a junction sea, a territorial corridor that justified colonial conquests. For instance, the principle of a unified maritime sovereignty was claimed by Romans through the appellation of the *Mare Nostrum* (Our Sea). During the 19th and 20th centuries, the appellation of *Mare Nostrum* was revived by the Italian and French, who referred to the Mediterranean as a “lake”.

This reference to a more intimate and compressed space was made to sustain their imperialist aspirations for Africa thanks to a “process of material and symbolic appropriation” (Blais and Deprest, 2012, 34). A democratic redistribution of the various national territorial powers over the sea emerged only after the Second World War, when the idea of sharing the space of the sea between various

sovereignties, avoiding its possession merely by one country, was intensely discussed. On this matter, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) was established to regulate sovereignty over the sea; the body today allows coastal countries to claim territorial waters up to 12 miles, after which point marks the start of international waters, also known as the high seas. Although no country can claim sovereignty over international waters, they can still apply their laws to or jurisdiction over events or people out there. Besides, territorial principles can be circumvented in case of rescue at sea, as the 1979 Hamburg Convention states. This situation occurred with *Mare Nostrum*, which this time refers to the name of an Italian military initiative that was implemented between 2013 and 2014 and brought the Italian navy to extend its SAR operations close to Libyan waters.

In the last period, the spectacularisation of migrant arrivals and the rise of populist right-wing parties in Europe have led to a reversal of that Italian precedent. Current discourses and agreements between EU and non-EU states are allowing many countries to circumvent their national and supranational legal obligations to rescue people, by enacting a slow—or even nonintervention—strategy in migratory events on the Central Mediterranean Route. For instance, an agreement signed by Italy and Libya in February 2017 permitted Libyan patrol boats' involvement in purported SAR operations, which are in fact aimed at preventing migrants from reaching Europe rather than rescuing them. As a result, in the last years, Libya has on several occasions assaulted NGO rescue vessels, both in international and territorial waters, with the tacit consent of Italy and in breach of the UN convention. Ten years before, an agreement signed on December 28, 2007 between Italy and Libya had already stated that Italy would give Libya a number of patrol boats, although Libya refrained from participating in joint patrols in the Mediterranean (see Paoletti, 2010). This cooperation based on the 2007 agreement, as well as on the 2008 friendship treaty, resulted in forced returns and the almost total sealing of the Libya route in 2009/2010.

The responsibilities of Italy clearly emerged in July 2017, when the former Italian Minister of the Interior, Marco Minniti, demanded the signature of a controversial code of conduct for NGOs (active at sea since 2014), which effectively diminished their participation in rescue operations. With Operation Themis (launched in February 2018), Frontex eventually reduced the number of vessels at sea as well as limited the area permissible for Italy's intervention. This scenario is made even more alarming by the fact that Italian and Maltese ports have often been closed for days or weeks to both nongovernmental actors and mercantile vessels carrying migrants in distress (in the case of Italy, restrictions have also been applied to its own navy). The pretext is one of preventing further fatalities and combating human trafficking, which the same NGOs have been accused of favouring.

This concerning overview evidences the construction of the Mediterranean as a complex terraqueous border. Instead of the desire to control and possess the marine space that has been historically manifested, for instance, when states claimed their sovereignty over the sea against others to guarantee the exploitation of marine resources, the territorialisation of the Mediterranean in the context of migration policies today alludes to something different. In terms of border surveillance, it is the extension of the European border beyond the sea directly to North-African and sub-Saharan states. Such 'extroverted territoriality' consequently results in the construction of the sea route as a prolongation of land-based deathscapes (desert routes, prisons, and camps). Indeed, despite the preventive blockage through containment on land, as well as in the absence of alternative safe routes, many people still rely on the sea escape route (McMahon and Sigona, 2018).

However, once the borders of northern African countries have been passed, the aqueous, deterritorialised component of the sea is often activated catastrophically as an alibi to absorb the EU's direct responsibility to intervene and rescue. This means that the refusal or lags by EU member states in extending SAR interventions over the sea even reveal an 'introverted' or 'liquefied territoriality'. In fact, SAR operations should also be considered processes of territorialisation, even if of a different, beneficial

nature, because, through the synergic assemblage of human actors, technologies, and the observation of maritime conventions, they turn the amorphous sea into a charted and determined space, ready for intervention.

The loose interpretation of treaties that regulate rescues in international waters actually suspends the process of territorialisation and causes the open sea to be presently considered an unformed and natural *terra nullius* (a no man's land) rather than the locus of a joint intervention. Therefore, the consequence of this dynamic is that, as Doty recognises in the role of the Sonoran Desert at the Mexico–US border, “the natural geography of migrant crossing areas provides a convenient moral alibi in terms of where to locate responsibility for deaths” (2011, 608). However, responsibilities are more than clear; as I will indicate in the following pages, migrants drowning is a result of their unanswered distress calls and of deliberate strategies of delayed intervention (Pezzani and Heller, 2016).

Theorising necropower

As already argued in the introduction, necropolitics is a useful analytical tool for understanding the current governance of migration. Even if the origination of the term goes to Mbembe (2003), it was already in conception in the work of Foucault (1990), who argued that sovereign power always impends a decision between life and death. Foucault, however, analysed the way in which the sovereign exercised this right over his subjects, constraining its effectiveness within the boundaries of the state. As such, the priority of ancient sovereignty was “the right to take life or let live” (1990, 136), whereas the philosopher read modern biopower as a mode for authorising and regularising life, namely “to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (1990, 138). Outside the borders of the EU, modern biopolitics translates the drive to produce and regulate the life of a population mainly through the affirmation of the death of another one (Esposito, 2016). In other words, Europe preserves its alleged cultural and ethical integrity by delegating its sovereign right to kill thousands of migrants per year to other actors (e.g., in Libya) and nonhuman agencies, apparently far from its shores (in deserts and camps). It also and foremost produces the conditions of migrants' expendability at sea through interrupting or decelerating SAR activity. In short, EU countries through their policies perform an “indirect power of life and death over them [the migrants]” (Foucault, 1990, 135).

From a careful reading of the current situation, the biopolitics of migration is, thus, far fiercer and more insidious than that examined decades ago by the French philosopher. Here, the power over life is capillary and boundless and it brutally slips from the first part of the couplet, to foster life, into the second part, disallowing life to the point of death. In this sense, biopower is exercised in terms of a pure necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003), which can be revised, especially in the context of boat migration, as the detrimental potential for taking life by way of inaction. This way, necropolitics shifts biopower, commonly understood as the management and progress of the life of a bounded population to other plans; it affects new categories of humans, which are presently represented by migrants. Those subjectivities are discursively constructed to have no value. This means that people who are forced to move are not only materially exposed to death during their journeys but are also repeatedly rendered “living dead” and “empty subjectivities” (Mbembe, 2003) because of the dehumanisation by which they are affected in the political and media narrative.

Entrapped in the practices of “slow death” (Berlant, 2007), migrants are caught in the subtle and slow process of silent and routinised dehumanisation of their stories, motivations, and corporeality. This is done through different political, economic, and mediatic discourses, which make their deaths justifiable in the necropolitical regime. In this light, the migrant has become the ‘quasi-object’ of the current media discourse, in which we, first, consent to the reduction of human existence to “bare life” (Agamben, 1995), a biological entity, in order to be exposed to the homicidal force of the terraqueous necropolitics.

The terraqueous cartography of the Mediterranean deathscape

Once that the necropower of constructing the sea as a terraqueous border and migrants as quasi-objects on a discursive level and through policies and technologies has been introduced, we can start to think about the relationship between maps and the terraqueous necropolitics. As a part of our visual culture, maps can be addressed both as communication and navigational tools; they not only stir our imagination over the world or a particular issue therein, but they are also technologies that help us to concretely move through space. Although mapping is conventionally understood as a landish device, modern cartography actually developed as a maritime navigational tool. Especially in the age of explorations, maritime cultures attributed more substance to the sea by conceiving the body of water as a traversable and measurable space. Portolan charts, developed during the 13th and 14th centuries, were the first navigational maps to illustrate sea routes and ports, and one of many examples of the longstanding relationship between cartography and the Mediterranean Sea (Della Dora, 2010). Before the portolan chart, the idea of the Mediterranean as a border was presented differently in the medieval Christian T-O map, where the sea was conventionally represented as a thick line dividing the three continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa (Savage-Smith, 2014). Even Deleuze and Guattari, who conceptually distinguished the smooth space (the sea) from the striated space (the land), reconsidered that, although the Mediterranean Sea is a smooth space par excellence—a space made of intensities rather than properties—it was “the first to encounter the demands of increasingly strict striation” (1988, 479). Territory has extended materially and visually “beyond Terra”, as the fortunate title of a recent volume illustrates (Peters et al., 2018), rightly through a wide range of cartographic acts and practices. In this sense, the several territorialisations of the Mediterranean Sea could not have taken place without the constant mediation and striation of cartographic illustrations.

Migratory crossings and border policies are further reshaping the contemporary cartographic striations of the sea. For instance, GPS-enabled mobile apps and nautical maps are today also used by smugglers and migrants to plan clandestine routes towards Europe. Maritime charts, moreover, mark the ongoing changes between territorial and international waters, because they separate national jurisdictions and allocate or discard responsibilities to intervene in or thwart events of human migration at sea. Finally, thousands of dots on activists’ maps evidence left-to-die boats and corpses, which float and are then deposited on the sea floor until they disappear from the threshold of visibility. Consequently, instead of using the fathomless notion of the aquatic to excuse deaths at sea, through critically informed spatial analyses we should become more apt at seeing the submerged deathscape of the sea. This cartographic visibility is crucial for assessing the various governmental actors’ responsibility in the current Mediterranean necropolitical crisis.

Mapping the unseen of necropolitics

Besides its navigational qualities, cartography can be approached as a language made of/in virtual absence; that is, digital and nondigital maps are not only orienting tools for traversing and territorialising the sea in real-time but also political and cultural subtexts that can help to make visible that which we cannot see, that is not there, or that is no longer there. In this activity of representing and meditating on the unseen, maps’ modern ontology requires the transposition of posthumous spatial events through the nonhuman categories of the geometrical and algebraic: this is why maps are usually perceived by critical scholars as pertaining to the phenomenological field of the unliving. If the unliving generally attends to the sphere of that which cannot be directly experienced or experienced anymore, with the term “geometry of the unliving”, we might consider more specifically the cartographic constructions of migratory spatial events (such as crossings and deaths at sea) that normally tend to freeze the changing temporalities of living spaces and objectify or erase subjectivities on the move. Evidently, the previously discussed quasi-objectivity and disembodiment of migrants are inherent to these cartographic visualisations.

Generally speaking, both photographs and maps prefigure death because they are snapshots of a moment that will never return, but it is precisely maps' pertinence to both marine territoriality and the geometry of the unliving that allows them to offer a distinct entry point to the current terraqueous necropolitics. In photojournalism, the commingling of the horrific and the beautiful of human tragedies is standard practice, as was the case of the photographic construction of Alan Kurdi's death. Migration-crisis photography often elicits an engaging tension between the "looking at" and the "looking away" (Holert, 2019, online), yet we do not seem to look at and turn away from maps that speak about suffering, death, and immobility for the same reasons. In modern maps, geographical language is in fact overlapped with geometry; human stories become instances of calculations; the feelings and dynamism of people are rendered inert rather than emphasised; and the abstraction constructs a taxonomy of order and control. Compared with the tragic reality effects of migratory photography, maps certainly involve attention while simultaneously producing effects of distance and detachment. When interlacing human beings with borders and numbers, cartography, in sum, acts in the guise of a powerful discursive formation that reproduces a sort of "mathematics of skin" (Browne, 2010; McKittrick, 2014).

However, this deconstructive and delegitimizing approach to cartography may not suffice for multivocal understandings of migratory mappings. Giving more ethical density and vitality to the political mapping of migration, even to the deadly one, would suggest a more emphatic look inside the frame, elucidating—with multimodal readings and the use of mixed media—the stories of those foreclosed subjects who are reduced to dots and grids through the cartographic screen, even if they meaningfully inhabited the spaces performed by maps. Because of the paucity of mapping's representational potentialities, it becomes important to also let those individualities and groups emerge who design or/and use maps for migration-related issues and whose concerns, vulnerabilities, and sensitivities can often be generalised or delegitimised by critical theories. Significantly, more ethnographic work is fundamental for understanding how the diverse mappers and viewers are supposed to react and decode such different maps.

A concrete engagement with the visual and material culture studies of maps (Dodge et al., 2009; Rossetto, 2019) helps to better consider maps as more than detached, flat, and fixed representations of migration crises. First, among map scholars, maps are usually considered spatial agents. This means that they form and participate in the construction of events beyond what they may be said to statically represent (Lo Presti, 2018). In recognising the agency of maps in the context of migration crises, we should nonetheless address them as performative inscriptions that may or may not work. Nevertheless, maps are not only operational and navigational tools but can also provide information about complex phenomena. In this communicational activity, they should be perceived as more than technical devices; they are impregnated with meaning and trigger emotional responses. In considering both the activity of making space and the semantics of cartographic performances, maps should be conceived as visual events that entail different practices of looking and sensing, thereby enabling their limits of representability to be alternatively explored.

Some such events may suggest that maps can hurt and devour us differently through unexpectedly revealing the beleaguered and intimate (necro)political atmosphere of today.

In the following sections, I attempt to describe the visual collisions between mapping and the terraqueous necropolitics through a threefold trajectory, in which I distinguish between the low-operational, forensic, and evocative mapping of Mediterranean Sea crossings. I believe that for each of these practices of looking and sensing in regard to mapping and necropolitics, both problematics and potentialities at the levels of agency and representation must be carefully underlined. Thus, "language needs to be translated and ambiguous meanings teased out for the striking visual power to be apprehended" (Perkins, 2004, 383).

Even maps fail: The delayed temporality of low-operational mapping

“Nothing better reveals how something is supposed to work than when it isn’t working.”
(Delaney, 2005, 1)

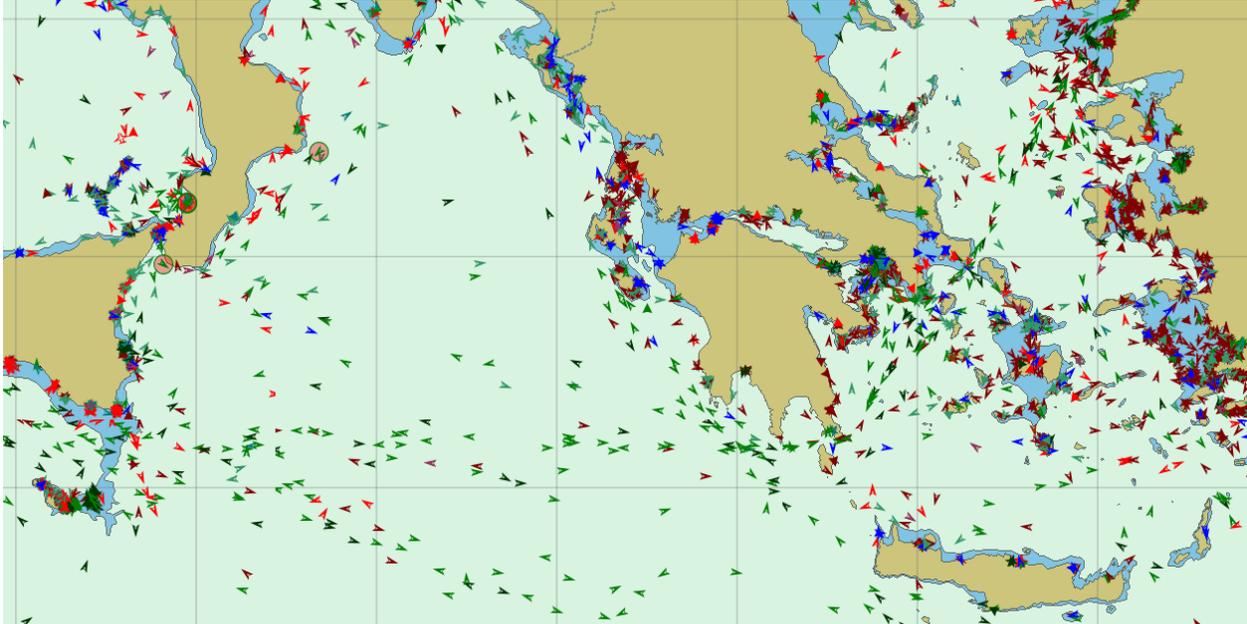


Figure 1: *Mapshot #1:* Tracked vessels on the sea visualised on the screen of Italian Coast Guard’s control rooms. © 2015 Capitanerie di Porto-Guardia Costiera. Source: <http://www.guardiacostiera.gov.it/mezzi-e-tecnologie/Pages/rete-ais-nazionale.aspx>

Within the Mediterranean region, coast guard control rooms usually act as navigational laboratories packed with screens of all sorts. Some hang on the walls, and others lounge on desks. The first mapshot (Fig. 1) introduces the observer to one of these screened surfaces with moving and floating triangular markers of blue, red, and green, which usually represent fishing boats, vessels, and cargo ships that move across the sea space. These boats are monitored to ensure that not only no invasion of the territorial waters of other states occurs, but also to track them to help them reach the nearest harbour in case of danger.

However, Tazzioli (2016) noticed that the migrant subject is not usually the object of interest of these nearly real-time maritime cartographic activities. The EU border agency, often assisting the activities of the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Rome, would at most be interested in preventing migratory crossings by relying on statistics of previous maritime events. In a sense, collected data may assess threats and risk by suggesting and anticipating (though not always successfully) future actions that should be taken by border agencies. Under such constraints, the distinct cartographic apparatus that emerges during the tracking of migratory events at sea is worthy of attention because it reveals a highly ambiguous relationship between the mapping of movements and shipwrecks of migrants.

My concern is that, although the presentation of the migration crisis has acquired an ever-growing array of tools to chart migratory events for preventing massive arrivals in Europe, when it is time to use detection for a humanitarian cause (i.e., to prevent migrants from drowning), EU countries look weak, blind, and slow. What I have already discussed as slow action is then provided with its own visual

behaviour, because to make “letting die” (Mbembe, 2003) effective, the current regime of violent inaction requires the slow detectability of distress events. As such, EU agencies and coast guards may pretend not to see migratory events or fail to respond effectively just to avoid being forced to take in these people who attempt to cross to the other side of the Mediterranean coast. In such situations, the map, with its constructed limitations, becomes a meaningful visual event shedding light on the infrastructure that produces the slow migratory governance of the EU.

A glimpse into this system is provided by the mapshot in Fig. 1, where the conventional architecture of the nautical map challenges the idea of a totalising, controlled, and abstract georeferenced space. In fact, even if it performs a “watchful politics” (Amoore, 2007), where some privileged actors can, via a view from above, observe without being observed what is happening in the Mediterranean Sea, on the screen they can only see boats that are equipped with a radio-satellite system. It is crucial to understand that migrant subjects ideally travel on untraceable boats—and therefore off the map—unless any of them or the smuggler decide to activate the satellite phone. In that precise moment, their boat can be detected, and it enters, in the guise of a little triangle, the visual architecture of the screen (Coast Guard of Palermo, November 12, 2015, Conversation). This request for visibility frequently happens “in situations of distress—where—they [migrants] may do everything they possibly can to be detected and on the contrary states and other actors at sea may selectively close their eyes on their distress” (Casas-Cortés et al., 2017, 22). As Pezzani and Heller indicate, “surveillance thus operates in a ‘patchy’ way, focusing its attention on particular routes but leaving much maritime traffic uncharted. It is through these many visibility cracks and gaps that migrants may move [or die]” (in Casas-Cortés et al., 2017, 22).

The reality of rescue events sadly shows that many other maritime actors can contribute to this regime of penumbral visibility. First, navy ships, which for security reasons are not obliged to switch on their Automatic Identification System (AIS), can decide to switch it on and off as they please (Heller and Pezzani, 2014). Second, commercial vessels may decide to switch off their AIS to avoid being involved in SAR activities, which are perceived as a waste of time and money (Cuttitta, 2018). As a further example, on March 18th, 2019, the Italian Financial Guard ordered the *Mare Jonio* (a private Italian boat sustained by the activist platform *Mediterranea-Saving Humans*) to “turn off all the machines”, including its navigational systems. This was done to deter the boat from the rescue of 49 migrants in the SAR zone of Libya¹.

Bearing those examples in mind, cartographic frictions and interruptions should be discussed, depending on the various contexts in which they operate, within the practices and discourses of “low-operational mapping”, which attempts to silence and null the disruptive forces of migratory events. The performance of low-operational mapping discloses, in particular, the abiding tension between the potential of real-time visibility that could be enacted by modern technologies versus the factual, postponed, or nonresponse of rescue agencies. In this cooperating system of penumbral visibility and delayed temporality, the only way to subvert the reluctant agency of necropower is to challenge it with an alternative, nonvisual, and real-time strategy of intervention. Alarmphone, for instance, is an activist hotline that receives and tracks SOS calls sent by migrants or their relatives in situations of distress (Stierl, 2016). Through the platform, activists mediate between migrants, who attempt to reach them by phone, and national and international actors, who may not detect distress calls or choose to ignore them, as previously illustrated. In sum, the possibility for reconnecting those bodies of waters with the land is

¹ The video recording of the conversation between the custom corps and the *Mare Jonio* boat is available at the following link: https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/03/19/news/gdf_nega_via_radio_ingresso_in_acque_territoriali_nave_mare_jonio_prosegue_verso_lampedusa_per_ripararsi_da_mare_mosso-221959028/

actualised through a range of sonic and vocal experiences of tracking unseaworthy boats (see Casas-Cortés et al., 2017; Stierl, 2016; see also <https://alarmphone.org>).

The asynchronicity between the deferring of rescue operations and the endurance of people adrift to send signals to be saved transforms mappings into navigational devices that work now frenetically, now intermittently, by visibilising or nullifying the subjects who physically cross the sea space but visually (dis)appear on the screens of maritime institutions. Generally speaking, the effects of invisibility are tremendous: if something occurs at sea but does not appear on the digital screen for the various aforementioned reasons, it can be simply treated as nonexistent (Tazzioli, 2016).

Ultimately, the low-operational map fully embodies a necropolitical function because it is not effectively navigated: it is not put in the condition to detect events of distress because its tracking functions are voluntarily or forcefully suspended. From an object-oriented viewpoint, these governmental mappings appear paradoxically dormant and inefficient, rather than hypervisual and panoptic as critical geographers would expect to reveal. This is because the broader regime of inaction produced by EU border policies has affected mapping tools in a way that maritime surveillance devices appear quite limiting and personified to distinguish “good from bad, relevant from irrelevant, and threats from the innocuous” (Soderlund, 2013, 168). In this sense, the cartography of maritime institutions became an extension of the subject’s inability to see and hear what happens at a remote distance. Mapping ended up performing the defects and limitations of the human agent rather than amplifying his potential for action.

It is through this cartographic overview that we can now think of the sea as a(n) (im)mutable discursive frame that shifts accordingly from movement to blockage, from liquidity to solidity, and from nonvisibility to visibility as it follows both forceful governmental agencies and nongovernmental pressures that in turn shape its waves. In other words, the reconceptualisation of the sea as a terraqueous b/order rather than an exclusively territorial or fluid entity helps to visualise the conflicting territorialities and grey zones of accountability navigated by EU and non-EU states, as well as by nonstate actors.

Even maps bleed: The counter-gaze of forensic mapping

“Counting casualties is one of the only ways to assess the effect of the policies of European governments.” (The Migrants’ Files, 24 June 2016, online)

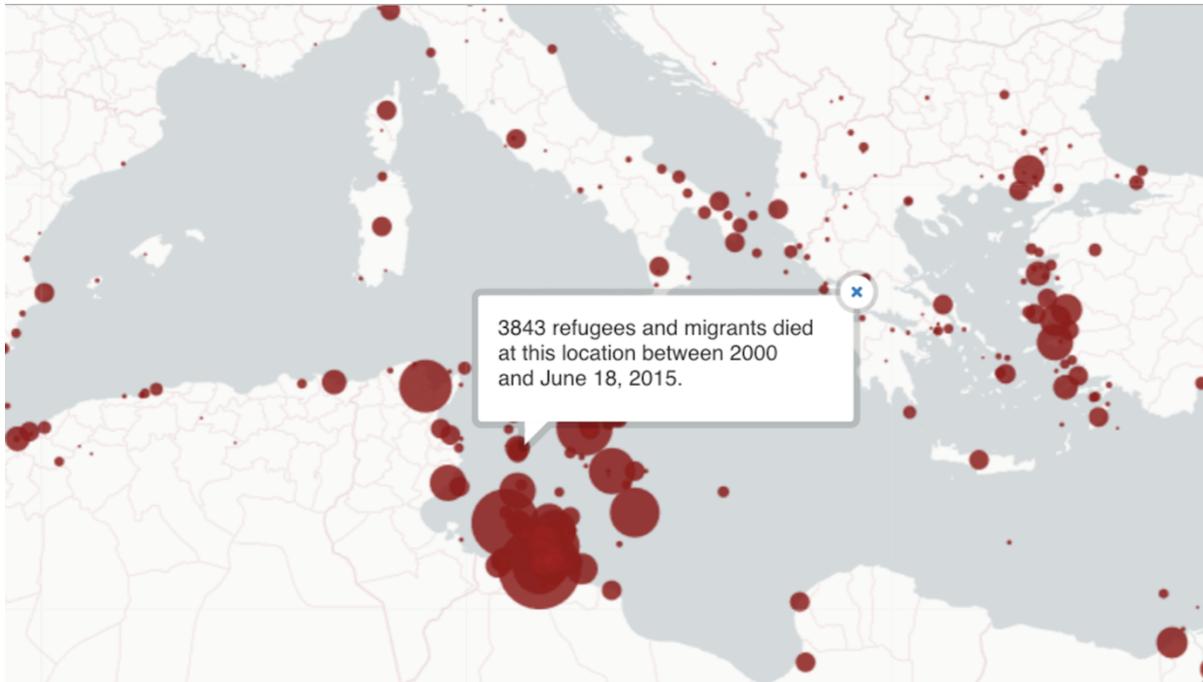


Figure 2: *Mapshot #2:* Bleeding map of people dying in the attempt to reach Europe from 2000 to 2015. © OpenStreetMap contributors, CartoDB attribution. Courtesy of Nicolas Kayser-Bril, former member of The Migrants’ Files.

Alarmphone is an emblematic case for the mapping of migration to re-emerge as a form of protest against the deliberative inaction of EU agencies. However, this specific platform is foremost a nonrepresentational tracking system that may help to prevent fatalities at sea through the interception of vocal signals. By and large, casualties that have occurred during sea crossings have also been textually and visually documented (Brian and Laczko, 2016; Spijkerboer, 2007; Weber and Pickering, 2011), but in terms of the purely cartographic apprehension of mortality, *The Deaths at the Borders Database* is noteworthy. This database is the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam’s collection on migrant deaths that occurred between 1990 and 2013. Another example is offered by *Liquid Traces*, a video performance that was produced by Heller and Pezzani from the Centre of Forensic Oceanography at Goldsmiths, which used the traces left by those same mapping tools used to monitoring migrants’ movements, to reconstruct the shipwreck that occurred on the Libyan coast in 2011. This approach proved the reluctance of European countries and NATO to save those people left alone on the sea (see Heller and Pezzani, 2014). Additionally, Heller and Pezzani created an online platform, *Watch the Med*, where shipwrecks and deaths are recorded daily (see Casas-Cortés et al., 2017).

Overall, academics, activists, journalists, and artists have intensely documented through several media “the map of violence the governmentality of migration tries to keep in the shadows” (Pezzani and Heller in Casas-Cortés et al., 2017, 24). In this alternative space of intervention, maps strike back as counter-visualisations that quantify and display deaths at sea as their mapmakers are animated by a sense

of responsibility, namely the commitment “to speak truth to power” (Foucault, 1985; see also Crampton, 2003). The political practice of bearing witness to the dead as a form of activism (Braidotti, 2007) is thus increasing through several practices of counting, tracking, and objectification of human bodies. Certainly, such map-activism does not approach the geometry of the unliving as an enumerative practice aimed at managing and controlling migration (as it is the case of governmental operative mapping). Instead, it recognises the urgency of bringing to the surface the invisible traces of necropolitics, which would otherwise be dispersed. The map user assumes, in substance, the role of an investigator, and maps are consequently designed as evidence and archives for public advocacy.

More suitably, the investigative aesthetics resonate with the concept of *forensis* (Weizman, 2014). This requires the investigation of a crime scene, whose body of crime is dispersed in the sea, a liquid mass that, to the same extent, leaves traces in the same instruments used to monitor migration flows (Pezzani and Heller, 2014; 2016). Another semantic meaning endowed by the word *forensis* is the forum, the political arena “where the results of an investigation are presented and contested” (Weizman, 2014, 9). Including the search for traces, the production of evidence, and the circulation of these cartographic witnesses within a broader political forum (e.g., the Internet), the forensic speculative gesture opens up a public space of visibility that results in a call to militant responsibility.

Viewed from this angle, the relationship between visibility and invisibility is differently undertaken if compared with the practice of low-operational mapping. While governmental forces work to dissipate the power of the visual and stop the flow of disturbing voices, a general awareness exists among activists that being invisible is something negative that renders reaching political goals and achieving social justice impossible. Invisibility is treated as “the contingent blockage which prevents the ‘proper’ realisation and assessment of a claim” (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, 168). That is, the invisible is downgraded into the sphere of the nonreal because it has no exposure value and no interest, whereas a phenomenon must stand out, be revealed, and be reclaimable against another to exist. To this end, the point of such forensic necrocartographies lies in the effort to make migratory invisibility understandable as a mechanism of the necropower. On the other side of the necropolitical map, map activists are indeed aimed at returning the evidence of what is kept hidden by lethal force, to bring the slow and penumbral ‘exposure to death’ produced by the current governance of migration into sharp relief through a comprehensive ‘exposure of death’. Moreover, while for SAR agencies cartographic instruments have an intermittent and inertial navigational purpose rather than an aesthetic and communicational one, several map activists find themselves with the responsibility inherent to translating complex migratory phenomena into a cartographic representation.

In the media context, engaging critically with mapping demands a deep understanding of the intentions, methods, and visibility (namely the political, cultural, and phenomenological contexts) in which this death exposure occurs. The mapshot in Fig. 2 offers an emblematic case of analysis to meditate on such criticalities. This map-like visualisation is taken from The Migrants’ Files, a consortium of more than 300 investigative journalists that—by relying on an open source methodology used by secret services—was able to collect information about fatalities in newspapers, websites, government publications, interviews with survivors, and grey literature (e.g., policy reports). The project, now ceased, aimed to assemble and analyse data on the deaths of migrants from January 1st, 2000 to the end of 2016 to provide evidence of EU policies’ impact on migration. Such data were finally constituted by cartographic visualisations crafted from the output of their relative databases.

By surfing The Migrants’ Files database, an observer may be struck by the magnitude of the tortures and drownings that have occurred in the central Mediterranean Sea and beyond (Fig. 3). The migratory event is shattered into the single bodies and deathful situations that constitute it. From an aesthetical perspective, the map and the database give the spectator a dramaturgic and spatialised view

of the terraqueous necropolitics by visualising the migrant fatalities that have occurred at sea as a numerical haemorrhage of dead bodies.

	B	C	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	cause of death	CartoDB_Cause_of	date	quarter	Date-month	Year	dead	missing	dead_and_missi	Intent of going to Eur. 1(yes) 0(not confirmed)
2	shot by the police	authorities relat	2016-06-20T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	8	0	8	
3	drowned	drowning or ext	2016-06-16T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	1	0	1	
4	drowned	drowning or ext	2016-06-12T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	1	0	1	
5	stabbed	malicious intent	2016-06-02T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	2	0	2	
6	unknown	unknown - supf	2016-06-07T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	0	1	1	
7	exposure	other	2016-06-07T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	1	0	1	
8	died in a sewer	other	2016-06-09T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	1	0	1	
9	drowned	authorities relat	2016-06-01T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	1	0	1	
10	drowned	drowning or ext	2016-06-03T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	10	329	339	
11	drowned	drowning or ext	2016-06-02T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	133	0	133	
12	murdered	malicious intent	2016-05-30T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 5	2016	1	0	1	
13	drowned	drowning or ext	2016-06-01T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 6	2016	2	0	2	
14	unknown	unknown - supf	2016-05-29T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 5	2016	1	0	1	
15	unknown	unknown - supf	2016-05-30T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 5	2016	1	0	1	
16	drowned	drowning or ext	2016-05-28T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 5	2016	1	0	1	
17	drowned	drowning or ext	2016-05-26T00:00:00Z	2Q2016	2016 -- 5	2016	0	9	9	

Fig. 3. A snapshot of the open database of migrants' deaths. Courtesy of the Migrants' Files.

See the link below to navigate the database:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YNqIzyQfEn4i_be2GGWESnG2Q80E_fLASffsXdCOftI/edit#gid=1085726718

Using this style of visualisation, forensic journalists and cartographers have often been accused of dehumanising refugees (Kayser-Bril, 3 November 2016, Interview). Certainly, if one reads the list of injured, drowned, and missing people whose bodies are listed along with merely their cause of death, its date, and the georeferenced point of the tragedy, a sense of dehumanisation is clearly palpable. In this respect, the database might recall the mechanism of the slave list, where black bodies were usually reduced to numbers and defects that were caused by violence and physical torture were often listed (McKittrick, 2014). Journalists involved in The Migrants' Files may have accidentally repeated this modern technology of constructing otherness, even if they promoted the power of numericality, the evidence of the data, and the synoptic gaze enhanced by mapping as the essential processes of forensic investigation. As Kayser-Bril argued (one of the investigative journalists I interviewed) mapping is "the only way one can get a clear picture of an issue as a whole" (3 November 2016, Interview). However, investigative journalists may have to speak the language of power figures because if another language were proposed, power itself might remain deaf to their claims. If so, these maps force their audience to take a position based on the incontestable evidence of what they reproduce. For activists, mappings thus become objects of denunciation and are made politically perceptible through bleeding dots and numbers to take a position and criticise the European values system. Moreover, examining the terraqueous necropolitics through the practice of forensic mapping puts the observer in front of a machine that now patiently records the spatial chronicle of contemporary migratory policies and does not forget their traces. It configures the spatial arrangements and numerical practices in which the current terraqueous power is consumed and justified.

In conclusion, forensic mapping raises a rabid chorus, one that is a shared and incontestable symptom of the cultural, social, and political inhuman system in which Europe dissects and decomposes its 'others'.

Even maps feel: The sensitiveness of evocative mapping

“A map, unfortunately, gets inside you. At least when I draw it, when I conceive it, when I think of it, it has already come inside me. And, then, I greatly suffer, too.” (Canali, 6 May 2016, Interview; author’s translation)



Figure 4: *Mapshot #3:* “The Mediterranean Sea is no longer liquid and no more poetic”; author’s translation, courtesy of Laura Canali. Source: <http://www.limesonline.com/rubrica/il-mediterraneo-non-e-piu-liquido-e-non-e-piu-poetico>

The third and final mapshot (Fig. 4) brings us back to April 17, 2015, the day before the tragic shipwreck where more than 900 people disappeared 73 km from the Libyan coast. On that occasion, a blank map was published by the cartographer and artist Laura Canali on the website of the Italian Geopolitical Review LIMES² titled “The Mediterranean is no longer liquid and no more poetic” (Canali, 2015, online; author’s translation). The designed map’s function was explained by Canali as outlining the ethical and political claims that underpin her mapping production:

I made the cover design of Limes with an image devoted to the concept of limit/border. I chose our Sea because today is one of the most problematic frontiers of the world ... When I had to choose the colour to fill the sea, I realised that land colours were more suitable for marine ones because, in fact, this sea was no more fluid in my eyes but harsh and rocky like a mountain chain (Canali, 2015, online, author’s translation).

Compared with the previous two mapshots, the surface of this one displays broken lines that are drawn near Syria and Libya and then unrolled into the seascape. They do not represent exact migratory routes but instead evoke them. In other countries, the broken lines are replaced by straight lines. Canali has suggested that they are the breaking points where geography has been replaced by geometry. In other words, they represent how the geography of movement, the risky but planned journey of migrants, often

² Limes publishes scholars and policy-makers’ contributions which are visually accompanied by Laura Canali’s maps. They are held in different sections of the online site and in the printed journal.

comes to being blocked by the necrotic border of Europe. Her reference to the sea as “a mountain chain” returns sense to migrants’ perilous journeys from an enlarged viewpoint, recalling the fundamental meaning of the terraqueous necropower as the dual force of the border to immobilise people on both the land and sea. Indeed, during a personal interview, Canali explained that the map genesis comes from “the feeling that the sea is now a land ... Those people arrive [on the shore] after crossing the desert. It might be much worse than traversing the Mediterranean Sea. Who knows how many die during the route!” (Canali, 6 May 2016, Interview; author’s translation).

Her apprehension concretises through this cartographic transfiguration of the Mediterranean, where she decides to adhere together sea and land, water and surface to emphasise both the potential and aporia of the crossing. In Canali’s consideration, the aesthetic account of the Mediterranean Sea vacillates from a turbulent and effervescent space enacted by moving subjects—“they [migrants] cross the desert, then they travel across the unsafe sea and who is stronger at the end survives” (6 May 2016, Interview; author’s translation)—to a bordered, solid, and interrupted space of circulation: the stage of the impossible event of migratory routes. The interruption of movement is visually translated into the removal of water “to give the idea of the hard path”, and, especially, through the erasure of those little islands that are used as handholds by people escaping their countries. As the cartographer further states, “the island is still a safe zone ... Removing them [the islands] was like taking the ladder away from a swimming pool” (Canali, 6 May 2016, Interview, author’s translation). In truth, the vision of the island as a safe arrival overlooks the mobilisation of islands as sites of confinement where people are often isolated onshore and kept at a distance from the firm land of Europe (Mountz, 2011). However, what is interesting to outline is not only the way the cartographic aesthetics tangibly grasps the rigid spatiality of the Mediterranean frontier, but also the emotional and political context in which the map is conceived. In this cartographic practice, the cartographer designs a conflictual relationship with the representation of migration through considering whether depicting migratory crossings through border obstruction and marine reification is “frustrating” and “painful”, but nonetheless “unavoidable” (Canali, 6 May 2016, Interview). This is nevertheless necessary because the cartographer “resent[s] this historic moment in which Europe is cautious and takes no clear position on the issue of migration” (Canali, 6 May 2016, Interview, author’s translation). Emerging as a gesture of accusation towards the EU, this map’s political stance is somewhat shared with forensic mapping. However, the emotional perspective now distances this cartographic performance from the previous revindication. In fact, the realisation of this map proceeds with many hesitations and second thoughts because the cartographer acknowledges an intimate and sensitive involvement that precedes the charting of woeful journeys and the denouncing of Europe’s brutal inaction.

Through a continuous game of deletions, the map evocatively uncovers the border expansion over the sea, but thanks to the use of vivid colours and sensitive comments of the artist, the stories, suffocated movements, and disruptions experienced by those who face those dangerous journeys also transpire. Ultimately, for many who critically design the cartography of migration or think about it emotionally, maps are more than mere technical routines as they are for operational cartographers. They are also different from the “descriptive analytics of violence” (McKittrick, 2014) that we saw in the practices of mapactivism. Conceived as an evocative representation, rather than a technological or purely informational means, this last cartographic act exudes the anger and impotence that are emphatically experienced by the artist/cartographer when she depicts those tragic events, without necessarily showing any numbers, corpses, or blood. Evocative mapping, despite the inflexibility of its representation, is creatively addressed as an open and dynamic event, and it claims a sensitive dimension of analysis. This alternative way of conceiving maps attempts to give a voice to their creators and understand how their design strategies concur in the understanding of terraqueous necropolitics. It invites us, as readers and viewers, to a different kind of critical and emotional investment that is not usually demanded by conventional political maps.

Conclusion

Although the photo shooting of border sea crossings has attracted crucial attention in migration and border studies, the political, visual, and affective dimensions of the cartographic representations involved in the migration crisis have not instead fully unpacked. This paper showed, however, that cartographic images, despite their alleged representational fixity and inhumanity, help to discuss, as much as photography, a range of migratory events engendered by the obscene mortality and fatalities of sea crossings. The border politics, counting and accounting for the human, and visibility and invisibility are nonetheless experienced quite differently through the three mapshots this paper proposed. The triadic architecture endowed by the distinction between low-operational, forensic, and evocative mapping suggested a value in such difference and proposed that recognising the applicability of such mapping examples is limited to a specific mode of envisioning and acting upon migrant subjects and necropolitics.

To address the several cartographic conditions through which meaning is given to subjectivities on the move, as well as the border policies that attempt to rule them, I expressly introduced the terraqueous necropolitics as a new conceptual framework. Through this notion, I highlighted the amphibian space and corresponding power that concur to define the immobility governance and its visual and cultural imagery. European countries have indeed promoted the preventive blockage of migrants through their containment on land, in prisons and in camps. Nevertheless, those who have the strength and resources to cross the borders of North-African states also face the aqueous component of necropower. With the term aqueous, I primarily alluded to the physical space of the sea to distinguish it from the land. However, once the sea was acknowledged to have its own territorial texture, the water ended up undertaking, in a more conceptual and metaphorical way, the intentional indefiniteness that surrounds the application of treaties and conventions regarding SAR activities in the Mediterranean Sea.

As I see it, in boat migration, the rationale of the terraqueous necropolitics reverberates in the construction of a system of inertial navigation. This means the implementation of a system of migration deterrence now requires Europe to slow down, block, and suppress any movement by setting the stage for a delayed temporality. In other words, in the regime of migration control, EU Member States let migrants die through the deferred action of their own institutions, maritime transport, and mapping systems. The unmapping of migration however conflicts with the remapping and sense of a different reterritorialisation of the sea enacted daily by activists and artists. In fact, on the other side of the necropolitical map, mapactivists are focused on exposing the consequences of the EU's deterrence and the regime of immobilisation it has constructed. In these complex configurations of power, spaces, and representations, geographers should not only acknowledge how to underline the criticalities concerning all the different faces of the mapping of migration; they should also better reason how they could actively experiment with "what else maps can be" (Crampton, 2003, 53). As a programmatic outcome, it becomes crucial to encourage more studies on the visualities of migrant cartographies that are constructive, sensitive, and experimental in alternative and progressive imageries and actions.

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