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## **Communicative memory of irregular migration:**

### **The re-circulation of news images on YouTube**

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#### **Introduction**

‘This video is in memory of the victims of the boats, the attempt to cross the sea to the promised land.’ (Kamal Zhimi, *La Guerra de las Pateras*, 27 October 2007).

A coalition of European activists estimated almost 19,000 migrant deaths at the borders of Europe from 1993 to 2013 (United for Intercultural Action, 2013). For example, on 3 October 2013, 368 people died when a migrant boat travelling from North Africa to Europe caught fire and sank near Lampedusa, Italy. An Italian charity, Caritas, has called the Mediterranean a ‘cemetery without tombstones’ (Kington, 2009). Similarly, human rights organisations have reported deaths at the Spanish enclave Ceuta’s border since its militarized border fence has been enforced, particularly since 2005 (Amnesty International 2014). This type of unauthorized border crossings are highly visible, unlike the more common overstay of visas. Particularly rickety boats full of migrants surface as iconic depictions of immigration in European media, creating transregional imagery where emergency and disruption merge with repetition. In the mediation of unauthorized migration, emergency is normalcy: a discursive and aesthetic paradigm that characterizes contemporary ways of confronting disasters more generally (Ekström, 2012: 473).

This article scrutinizes 24 user-generated YouTube cut and mix videos produced from 2006 – 2010 that mix popular music with news images of irregular migrants and the tragedies along the dangerous route (see Appendix). These videos are treated here as performative civic acts (Dahlgren, 2009: 80 – 101; van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj 2010) of YouTube *producers* who have invested their time and creativity in the issue of irregular migration without necessarily

being part of a social movement. This study suggests that while professional media practices are still crucial in producing hegemonic visual tropes of an era or event, contemporary irregular migration in this case, new cultural intermediaries of the digital age importantly shape the circulation of professional products, and in doing so they participate in collective remembering of migration. As this analysis shows, news images and popular music have a second life in the online spaces where *producers* circulate them in new contexts. This re-mix of different cultural productions complicates mediated representation of irregular migration in public sphere. The article examines an emerging area in memory studies: practices of vernacular remembering afforded by the new media ecology and their convergence with more institutionalised and professional media and memory practices (see e.g. Hoskins, 2009; Knudsen & Stage, 2013; Askanius, 2013).

In the analysis I combine two perspectives to media practice: the analysis of representation and the analysis of mediated circulation. I ask how the videos represent migration and what kinds of meanings and relationships between agents they (re)produce. The explorative qualitative analysis focuses on visual images and music used in the videos and tracking down the origins of reappearing images in ways that seek to gain depth instead of generalizability. The practice of cutting and pasting news images and combining them with music expresses the emotions of the *producers* who have been touched by (mediated) migration tragedies. Moreover, to examine the social significance of media representations, I discuss them in the context of collective memory. Individual understanding of the past emerges in the context of socially shared frameworks. In media saturated societies, mainstream media and new social networking sites are crucial spaces where collective memory is performed (van Dijck, 2007: 22–23; Hoskins, 2009: 92). I argue that the media practice of circulating news imagery in a new context potentially (re)constructs European collective memory in light of tragic deaths on southern European borders. These videos gradually construct what Aleida and Jan Assman have termed ‘communicative memory’ (Assman, 1995: 126–128) on irregular migration. The videos are communicative reactions to emotionally disturbing news images of suffering – the public’s re-articulations of migration and migration control. YouTube videos exemplify how popular engagement with news images is a complex media practice in which people perform citizenship by creating communicative collective memory. Noticing this type of more hidden and unorganized performances of citizen agency and commemoration nevertheless is crucial for social justice particularly since until very recently non-performance of memory in relation to contemporary migration tragedies has dominated European public spheres, including

memory institutions (see also Horsti 2015). Moreover, given the global reach of the Internet, these videos may have a wider resonance beyond Europe. However, this article concludes that although paradoxically these vernacular practices clearly have a critical and alternative potential since they resist cultural amnesia and non-commemoration of migrant death in public sphere, their visuality is very much entangled with the mainstream hegemonic frameworks that tend to represent Europeans as humanitarian agents and caring subjects where as migrants remain in a more passive role.

### **Irregular migration in Europe**

European countries increased migration restrictions of so called ‘third country nationals’ in the mid 1990s at a time when intra-European mobility was facilitated by the Schengen agreement. Irregular migration, a term that refers to unauthorized entry, residence or work became a policy concern throughout Europe at the turn of the century (Triandafyllidou, 2010; Düvell, 2011.) The principle of free internal movement is one of the fundamental pillars of the European Union. The Schengen agreement has abolished internal border controls within 26 member countries, which makes undocumented movement across these countries (theoretically) possible. This is one crucial reason why along with national framing irregular migration has become a Europeanized issue in public debate. For instance, media also in the North European countries such as Sweden and Finland present irregular migration by boat as a common European issue (Horsti, 2008).

Until the early 1990s, the Mediterranean and the strait of Gibraltar were more like boundaries where seasonal movement back and forth took place. For instance, locals accommodated spontaneous migrant arrivals to Lampedusa in the 1990s (Gatta, 2012: 129–130). However in the new millennium European Union increased the production of a border zone. European Union created the border agency Frontex in 2004 as a “compensatory measure” to the Schengen process that diminished internal European border controls (Vaughan-Williams, 2008: 66). Gibraltar and the Spanish enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla on the African continent are today heavily militarized. As the borders and the forms of legal immigration have become more restricted in Europe, some migrants have undertaken dangerous means of travel. These treacherous routes include a sea route from the West African Coast to the Canary Islands of Spain, across the Evros River from Turkey to Greece, from Libya and Tunisia to Italy and Malta. The news media has covered migrant deaths at sea regularly since the early 2000s. However, while unauthorized boat migration and climbing over the militarized fence in Ceuta

and Melilla have been visible in the media coverage on irregular migration, only a small percentage of migrants arrive to Europe without documents this way. For example, in Italy 60 – 70 per cent of irregular migrants overstay their legal permit (Clandestino project, 2009: 74).

Critical border theorists stress that all borders are constructed and mobilized for particular political and symbolic ends (see Casey, 2011; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012). Therefore they are never eternal and definite but there is always movement and porousness across borders. As Edward Casey (2011: 393) argues, mobilized borders eventually transform into more relaxed boundaries that allow movement and connections. Borders in Europe have become more heterogenous as they now permeate spaces within and outside Europe. The EU and individual countries have turned countries such as Libya, Morocco, Turkey and the Ukraine into a borderized buffer zone that prevents migrants from entering the actual EU border. (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012: 68; Vaughan-Williams, 2008: 67). Furthermore, particularly those migrants with temporary permits or without papers live in a precarious situation "embodying borders". European societies mark them by class, gender, phenotype, ethnicity, and age in ways that force them into liminal spaces outside of social citizenship. As Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2012: 68) argue, the border produces an optic that differentiates migrants into those who might integrate and those who remain external. These divisions create positions where some migrants become vulnerable for exploitation.

### **Representation of irregular migration in digital network memory**

The question of how the public collectively remembers migration tragedies connects to the mediated representations of two interrelated categories of irregular migrants and asylum seekers. Media representations not only shape understandings of current events and identities here and now but they also add to the ways in which these events can be re-called later. Media scholars have shown that the European media typically frames irregular migrants and asylum seekers as threats and as victims (van Gorp, 2005; Brune, 2004; Horsti, 2008). The first frame presents unauthorized boat migration as a border control crisis and the second frame as a humanitarian crisis. However, the two hegemonic frames are not exclusive but complementary. For instance, the European border management agency Frontex justifies surveillance, deportation and increased border management by framing them as humanitarian actions (Horsti, 2012).

Nevertheless, mediated imageries and framings available in online spheres should not be treated as a memory archive — a metaphor, which suggests static, organized and hierarchical form of memory. Instead, media images and narratives accumulate over time into a mnemonic horizon from which ‘contemporary context puts the objectivized meaning into its own perspective, giving it its own relevance’ (Assmann, 1995: 130). In contemporary complex media-scapes, representations circulate in digital and social networks where they mix and become re-articulated in new contexts. As Andrew Hoskins (2009: 91) argues, the metaphor of a network describes ‘the highly mediated and mediatized memory’ of the digital age. Archival memory is being replaced by the much more fluid temporalities of ‘data transfer’ (Hoskins, 2009: 97). Therefore, media research needs to examine how news is produced, understood, stored and shared in a complex network that expands in time and space. When one seeks information about a past event, using Internet search tools is the first step. Texts and images that originate from news sources, organizations and audiences or users, both past and present, merge in search results according to algorithms. State interests, commercial value and popularity shape the results available to us. We are also exposed to past events through our social networks online and offline.

Images originating from different sources are important for collective memory in the new media ecology in several ways. Along with the online archives of large news organizations, other professional and non-professional organizations and individuals can contribute to digital circulation of the past. This carries the potential for more fluid, participatory and heterogeneous constructions of memory outside and within of memory institutions and in different kinds of media (see Hoskins, 2011; Marselis & Schütze, 2013; Kantola, 2014; Reading, 2011). Moreover, the conflation of human and automated connectivities afforded by algorithms, popularity and social connections determines accessibility and compass to the vast amount of material on the Internet (van Dijck, 2013: 13, 26; Papacharissi, 2010: 164). Finally, paradoxically, the life of a news story has both shrunk and extended during the new media era. Although the initial news cycle is very short, stories and images are easily re-called from the online news archives and circulated in social media.

My approach to collective memory and media in this article is to treat re-circulation of news images of migration as an everyday media practice (Couldry 2004) that produces a specific type of collective memory, ‘communicative memory’ (Assmann, 1995; 2007). Aleida and Jan Assmann distinguish between communicative and cultural memory. For them, communicative memory is closely entangled with the everyday communication, whereas cultural memory ‘is

maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)' (Assmann, 1995: 129). Cultural memory emerges when collectively shared knowledge 'crystallizes' into 'the culturally institutionalized heritage of a society' (Assmann, 1995: 130). However, both types of collective memory produce and use ideas of a shared past, and, therefore, contribute to the construction and re-telling of cultural identity and belonging (see also Hall, 1990: 224). These configurations are in a constant process of change and re-negotiation, including forgetting. The new digital network memory discussed in Hoskins' work is one current transformation in communicative memory that will shape vertically rooted cultural memory in ways yet unknown.

### **Research material, method and questions**

There are different types of user-generated YouTube videos related to irregular migration to Europe that produce communicative memory, such as those that migrants have filmed with their mobile devices during travel and those filmed by locals, rescue experts and tourists. However, in this article I explore 24 videos that combine music, lyrics, text, footage and images, most of which users cut and mix from online image searches. I collected the videos by using search terms '*inmigración, cayocos, pateras, haraga*'<sup>1</sup>. The type of video interests me specifically because it re-circulates news images and footage. Such cutting and mixing is a typical aesthetic form of You Tube, particularly in the early years of the platform (van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2010). The selection of videos is not exhaustive and given the algorithm bias and the popularity principle of You Tube (van Dijck, 2013: 13, 26; Askanus, 2012: 13) aiming for generalizations in this case would not be relevant. Rather, my approach is to examine in depth the representation of migration and the circulation of news imagery in this selected collection of similarly made videos. Moreover, the videos do not appear in the context of any social movement but rather they are performances of individuals who have decided to invest their creativity on the issue<sup>2</sup>. I understand the making and uploading videos as practices of civic agency and performances of citizenship (Dahlgren, 2009: 80 – 1010; van Zoonen, Vis & Mihalj 2010). In this case, the *producers* express their emotions about an issue they witness through media. For the purpose of this article, the identity of the people who made the videos is not relevant. The people are not just You Tube users but they have actively collected images online, re-organised them in a particular sequence and combined them with

music. Following Axel Bruns (2008: 256) I term the video makers as *producers* to highlight the combination of production and use that is characteristic of social media in general.

I divide the empirical analysis into two analytical dimensions: the representation of irregular migration and the practice of circulation. I ask how the videos represent migration and how they position different agents, namely migrants, rescue workers, control agents, tourists and locals. First, I examined the visual images in all 24 videos, identifying the most recurring single images, their original contexts of shooting and publishing. The concept of gaze offers a compass to examine the relationships and representations of different agents. Second, I analyzed the lyrics of the two most popular songs that were used in 10 videos. Third, I analyzed the texts that appeared in the videos, the author's introductory texts and their responses in the discussion forum. After the analysis of representation, I discuss the videos in a broader context, asking how to understand re-circulation of news imagery in the contexts of European immigration, identity and communicative memory.

### **Visuality of migration tragedy**

I captured recurring still images from the videos and applied a reverse image search using Google image search to track the original publication of the picture. The images in the videos are cut and pasted from online sources. They originate from international and national news providers representing irregular migration in a variety of locations in the 1990s and 2000s. However, in online circulation the original authorship and location disappear from the context. Although the pictures depict a particular event, the witnessing power of the image expands to other contexts and rises to a more universal level. This blurring of time and space is characteristic of networked memory of the digital age (Hoskins, 2009: 93). Any blog entry, news story about immigration, or call for action can be illustrated with *any* image picked out of the visual repertoire of 'migrant tragedy.' One image stands for the whole phenomenon. This universality of 'migrant tragedy' reflects the porosity and fuzziness of both iconic and connotative meanings in images (Zelizer, 2010: 6, 13). Images can travel across associations; they have the capacity to take new directions and create a plurality of meanings.

A re-appearing theme in the images is that of a boat: wooden boats (*pateras, cayacos*) or dinghies full of migrants and empty boats on a beach. The boat has become a new visual symbol of migration into Europe, similar to the way in which the immigration museums in



Hamburg, Paris and New York present the suitcase and the large passenger ship as symbols of successful European migration to ‘the New World.’ Passenger ships and the sea journey of the old days represent industrial advancement and an escape from the unemployment and persecution of Europe in the early 1900s. However, the boat can also evoke memories of exploitation in colonial Europe and in the Middle Passage of slave trade. This historical parallel is problematic, though, since the migrants today consciously choose to take the dangerous journey.

Nevertheless, the sea and the boat are ancient symbols of both passage and separation, which appeal to a wide range of mythology and cultural memory. In the case of irregular migration today, the hyper visibility of a wooden, anti-modern *patera* in European media carries different kinds of connotations. The *patera* naturalizes the migrant tragedies at sea as it serves as a quick explanation for the tragedies and a justification of the solutions to the problem. The migrants’ journey with such a rickety boat seems illogical and unprepared; the tragedies are represented as an emergency without political and historical connections. In this discursive structure, the European agents can be positioned as benevolent actors who ‘save Africans from themselves.’ Furthermore, the hyper-visibility of the sea seems like a natural separation between Europe and Africa, concealing the border and migration politics of Europe, which partly push people to these desperate means of travel in the first place. Moreover, death at sea is not visually explicitly violent in the same way as a militarized border fence, such as the one constructed in the Spanish enclave on the African continent at Ceuta that is also visible in some videos. This invisibility of bordering practice at sea is countered in some videos by mixing the images of boats with those of the barbed wire fence. The strong visual symbol of a border – the fence – stretches to the images of the boats in ways that suggest reading the sea as a bordered zone. Moreover, the notion of the border is complicated in those videos that mix images of desert - including those that depict migrants, dead bodies, and objects in the sand - with pictures of the fence and the boat rescue. These images open up imagination towards the heterogeneity of bordering. Bordering of Europe extends beyond the actual Schengen border and migrants experience the violence of European bordering practices long before the physical border itself.

Another re-appearing theme in the videos is rescue. Pictures of rescues include situations where border management or the Spanish civil guard, *Guardia Civil*, vessels meet migrant boats and where *Guardia Civil*, Red Cross workers, medical professionals, tourists and locals

care or resuscitate migrants. The dead bodies are pictured either in the condition in which they are found such as floating in the water, at the bottom of a boat and lying on the beach or wrapped in body bags or white cloth. The bodies appear alone or guarded by authorities. There is no image where migrants care for one another. Repeated emergency visuals powerfully shape the understanding of irregular migration and migrants. The emergency spectacle at the border produces objects of double character: victims and threats, those who can be simultaneously cared and detained. 'The idea of emergency,' typical for humanitarian communication (Calhoun, 2010), invites urgent response rather than asking more fundamental questions about why and how the misfortune has taken place, and most importantly, why the suffering at European borders continues year after year. It also resists looking for long-term solutions and structural changes.

The reverse image search and the tracking of the original photographs show that the videos consist mainly of images originating from professional press photographers. Some of these images have received professional recognition. The practice of giving awards to pictures increases their circulation, and again, powerfully contributes to the generic visuality of the topic of migration. Awards reinforce the role of certain images in communicative memory. For instance, Alexia Singh, in a Reuters' blog, 'How to squeeze a decade into 100 pictures,' defines iconic images and narratives as follows: 'Some stories were included because they produced such haunting and memorable pictures that they have become part of our consciousness of the decade' (Singh, 2009). Singh's definition comes close to Susan Sontag's (2003: 22) notion of 'memory freeze frame,' by which she refers to a still image: a photograph. These iconic images offer us a quick way, a quotation, of understanding something and a 'compact form for memorizing it' (Sontag, 2003: 22).

Certain images become representative of an era, an event or a topic and they offer an instant recall to the shared meanings. These memory freeze-frames are crucial for the construction of collective memory. Although Sontag makes a point that a still image carves into collective and individual memory, I would stretch Sontag's idea a bit further and argue that, in addition to particular images, a hegemonic visual representation, such as the circulated flow of similar images of irregular migration analyzed here, can also create 'a consciousness' of a topic. This idea resembles the 'hegemonic visual paradigm' developed in the work of Peter Hamilton (1997), who argues that a particular photographic approach offers 'a certain vision of the people and events that it documents, a construction which rests on how they were represented

by the choices of both photographers and the press' (Hamilton, 1997: 76). Sontag's and Hamilton's analyses need to be re-thought in the context of digital circulation and practices of sharing and spreading. In the era of new media circulation, I argue, a production of a hegemonic visual paradigm depends not only on photographers and the press but also on the decisions and the editorial gaze of *producers*. Circulation and repetition of a certain visual trope are crucial practices that shape communicative memory today as they participate in making certain images into 'memory freeze-frames'.

The works of photographers Arturo Rodríguez and Juan Medina are exemplary in this respect. Their prize-winning pictures reappear in the videos. In the following I discuss the iconic images of these two photographers using the concept of gaze that illuminates the relationships between different agents. Gaze refers to a conditioned and contextualized look, seeing that is regulated by discourses. Gaze positions different agents in the image and outside of it into relationship with one another. In addition, gaze refers to the sense of being watched, even if there is no physical evidence of someone seeing what one does. (Mirzoeff, 2009: 45, 171.) In these videos, the idea of gaze manifests in different ways. There is the editorial gaze of YouTube video *producers* who express their emotions and views on migration by selecting images. Then, the photographers shoot events from a particular perspective, framing characters in certain positions. They are often working under the gaze of rescue and border agents but in addition they are aware of the imaginary gaze of their professional community and the imagined audiences. Moreover, within the images themselves different characters gaze objects and other characters.

Arturo Rodríguez won two World Press Photo prizes in 2007 for his photography of African migrants in the Canary Islands. The series of 12 photos called 'The beach' includes pictures that are widely circulated in the videos. They are taken on 30 July 2006 at La Tejita Beach in Tenerife, Canary Islands where a boat of 88 African migrants arrived while tourists were sunbathing. The tourists began to care for the migrants before the Red Cross arrived. The prize-winning pictures represent Europeans in humanitarian action. Tourists are active and humanitarian agents, helping the migrants with bare hands. The lack of sanitary masks and plastic gloves that otherwise appear regularly in rescue images makes the tourists seem particularly caring, compassionate good Samaritans. Coldness of the sanitised touch between rescue agents and migrants becomes visible when juxtaposed to the more humane touch of the tourists in the flow of images. In one of the winning images, a white woman has stretched her

arm around a black male migrant who is sitting on the sand. She is positioned a bit above the man, like a guardian angel, a composition that underlines the humanitarianism of her action. These images reconfigure the tourist gaze (Urry, 2001: 7) – both of the beach and of the way in which tourists are seen. The view of the beach suddenly changes from leisure to suffering and the position of the tourist from the one enjoying and being cared for to the one who cares. Moreover, the winning images show the paradox of the Canary Islands, which is a destination for those on holiday but also for irregular migrants, a combination that makes the spectator ‘see’ both inequality and the border between us — the Europeans — and them — the migrants. It also illustrates the underlying explanation of migration, the economic discrepancy, between the two continents. On a sunny day, the arrival of suffering migrants to a tourist beach offers a visual contrast of the two guests — the healthy, white, invited tourists and the suffering, black, unwanted migrants. This contrast between wealth and poverty, leisure and suffering repeatedly emerge in the editorial gaze of the *producers*. They also underline this contrast by mixing images of malnourished children with images of rescue.

Nevertheless, the images of the beach follow the general perspective present in most images in the videos, the perspective of Europeans: authorities, tourists and the rescue workers. The composition positions the spectator to gaze at the arrival of migrants *with* them. The sea without a shore in the background represents arrival from the other side, a world that cannot be seen from *here*. Although the identifiable rescue agents would be out of the frame and the image would show only migrants, the visible symbols of rescue, such as blankets and vessels, indicate their presence. There are almost no pictures from the migrant’s perspective; no images show reception from that perspective or solidarity among the migrants. African migrants are represented as suffering figures, objects of the Eurocentric gaze of compassion or control, and their agency, identification and history are limited.

The photographer Juan Medina worked extensively on the topic of irregular migration in the Canary Islands in the early 2000s and was awarded the 2004 World Press Photo prize and 2005 Care International Award of Humanitarian Report. Of the Care winning series of 10 pictures, the videos circulate images of dead bodies and an image of migrants in the water fighting for their lives. Medina was filming this ‘about to die’ moment from a *Guardia Civil* boat in Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands on 12 November 2004. The image is widely circulated as this gaze from above towards a person below near drowning provokes tension among viewers who begin to think not only about what is happening at the moment, and what

led to the situation but also the moments that follow. In addition, such moment makes one ask if the photographer is making an ethical decision of filming and not offering his hand to rescue migrants. This is the visual power of an ‘about to die’ image (Zelizer, 2010: 2). To me, this tension in the relationship between the migrant, photographer and the spectator is what makes this image particularly spreadable. The picture has not only haunted the *producers* who choose to share it but also Juan Medina, the photographer, who followed up on the migrant in an Al Jazeera documentary (Al Jazeera English, 2007). The picture provides an example of the gaze that recurs in the videos. The sea as a background underlines the perspective *from* Europe to Africa. Moreover, the photographers look *towards* migrants *with* authorities and rescue agents, from high on the deck down to the water. They access the scene with the border management agents, in their ship, under their conditions. However, in this image there is a particular detail. While we do not see who is the one offering his/her hand and pulling the migrant from the sea, the hand is dark skinned and without sanitary gloves. Thus, this person could also be a migrant or a photographer. Nevertheless, the agent is framed out of the picture, which constructs an assumption of control agents, such as the *Guardia Civil*, as humanitarian agents.

This humanitarian gaze contributes to the construction of a new border regime that is increasingly founded on humanitarianism (Walters 2011; Horsti 2012). Humanitarian gaze conceals the fact that the unauthorized border crossers are not only rescued but through the ‘border spectacle’ they are transformed into objects of care and control, into figures suitable for the asylum processing (De Genova, 2013; Gatta, 2011). Their lives are rescued but their aspiration for social life is limited and conditioned by the European migration system. They enter the process of identification that results in undocumented liminal position, refugee status, residence permit or deportation. Rescue at the Schengen border does not promise social survival. Moreover, the images that position rescue agents in a humanitarian role and suggest this as the preferred viewpoint for the spectator offer a decent self-identification for Europeans. Suffering of migrants is difficult to look at and, thus this humanitarian gaze offers a dignified way out of disturbing images such as ‘about-to-die’ moments. It offers a moral purification for rescue and control agents, the photographer and the European spectator. Humanitarian gaze that is so prevalent in the remembering of border tragedies conceals European responsibility in the violence of bordering, and instead represents Europeans as the ones alleviating suffering. In addition, militarization of localities in border areas is concealed from communicative memory (see also Mannik, 2014: 84). While this humanitarian gaze is

prevalent in the videos, some *producers* complicate this reading by mixing images of the wired fence that represent a more violent border management.

Europeans mostly emerge in caring positions in the images. However, there are some pictures that question this humanitarian hegemony. Juan Medina photographed a migrant man who crawls on all fours in Gran Tarajal Beach in the Canary Islands on 5 May 2006. This picture is included among Reuters' 100 most important pictures of the decade, making it one of the iconic memory freeze frames of irregular migration. The photographer has kneeled down to the same level of the migrant in the foreground. In the background, although out of focus, we can see three tourists relaxing and talking to one another, yet doing nothing to help the migrant. The active agent here is the migrant who painstakingly moves forward. Medina offers us a view of the migrant, but also a view *from the migrant position*. We as spectators can *feel* how the migrant is ignored. Moreover, the visual composition underlines the divisions between the two kinds of agents. The tourists are in a group whereas the migrant is alone; the tourists are colourful whereas the migrant is dark; the top part of the picture forms a sphere of leisure and the bottom represents suffering. This photograph depicts a border between the rich Europeans and the poor migrants, similar to Rodriguez's photographs. However, while the source of suffering in his pictures is not identified (it could be the roughness of the sea), the blame in Medina's picture lies in European ignorance. The photograph from Gran Tarajal reveals the tourist gaze that superimposes pleasure over the landscape, and that ignores the elements of suffering that do not meet its desires. Do the tourists actually *see* the migrant? Claims for immediate compassion and for solidarity to the broader issue of irregular migration are aroused. By posing an implicit question "what would you do?" the photograph invites the spectator to act. While this image originates from professional photography and news agency distribution it powerfully re-positions the spectator. *Producers* flash this image in between those pictures where the Eurocentric gaze dominates. Juxtaposing the two gazes sheds critical light towards the dominant positioning of the European subject as caring and humanitarian.

Furthermore, another image among Medina's winning pictures catches my attention as it represents a critical gaze to the humanitarian hegemony. The image shows care between migrants: a woman hugs and consoles a man at the back of a police car. Even in the liminal, controlled space of a police car, the woman is represented as a caring subject. This picture is available for online cut-and-pasting among other award winning pictures, but for some reason it is not circulated in the videos. It could be that since the image does not have a dramatic

dynamic between characters nor graphicness of suffering it has not been originally picked up by the news media and therefore it does not reach the circuits of online cultures. It was only through the slide show of winning pictures that I encountered this particular image.

Finally, I direct attention to the images of dead bodies. They appear covered or lying on a shore or floating in the water. One reappearing picture is Juan Medina's image of a black male body floating on the sea on 18 January 2004 near the site of a shipwreck in Antigua, Canary Islands. The question of why some dead bodies are acceptable in the public visibility while others are not is morally a difficult one. In addition to ethics and dignity, mainstream media considers sensitivity of the audience. However, in online circuits, graphic images and dead bodies are more boldly disseminated. They have certain value of authenticity. Generally, cultural context determines what types of representations are acceptable and what kinds of rules apply regarding privacy and dignity. Several scholars point to how the discrepancy between distance, ethnicity, gender and age shape the borders between the acceptable and the unacceptable. Distant 'others' often appear in more graphic images of death and violence than people who can be identified as culturally, geographically and ethnically closer to the viewer (Hanusch, 2008; Zelizer, 2010: 22–23). The gaze of the imagined audience shapes the editorial process. Death in Africa, images of war, famine and disease, AIDS in particular, are a recurring trope in the Western media, which naturalizes suffering in Africa. As Judith Butler (2009: xix) explains, mourning death and suffering is selective as visual and textual frames produce 'radical ungrievability of certain populations, or the differential distribution of grievability.' Following Butler's thinking, we should ask whether in the Western mediated circulation African lives and deaths are depicted as 'ungrievable' because ontologically their lives are already lost before death; whether suffering and death are depicted as normal for 'Africans.'

The images that juxtapose European white tourists against African black migrants and the images of malnourished black children that flash in between the pictures of irregular migration frame mobility against the background of economic inequality and 'African poverty.' The images offer a visual explanation for migration. However, at the same time, this visual comparison between Africa and Europe constructs and naturalizes the separation of the people. Following Judith Butler's work on the frames of war and grievable life, we can argue that the representations of 'poverty' and 'primitiveness' strip the migrants' 'life worth living,' and their death or suffering in shipwrecks and at the border fence in Ceuta and Melilla is not

sensed as a real tragedy. Shocking images of dead bodies can generate reactions and engagement, such as the videos analyzed here. Digital circulation of shocking images can keep tragedies of irregular migration on the European, even global, agenda and collective consciousness. However, paradoxically, circulation also normalizes and de-sensitizes people to death as a regular feature of irregular migration, something that is simultaneously an exceptional emergency and a ‘naturalized’ phenomenon among the Other.

### **Contexts of the videos: Solidarities of salvation and revolution**

The images circulated in the videos also need to be analyzed in the context of the ‘soundtrack’ and in relation to the *producers’* texts inserted in the videos and in the space below the videos.<sup>3</sup> This textual context offers a preferred meaning for the visual content. Moreover, music and lyrics play a crucial role in the making and dissemination of videos. It is this dimension of user generated media practice that I now turn to by focusing on two popular songs used in 10 videos out of the total of 24 videos. Two Spanish songs in particular have inspired the public to engage with news images in creative ways: *La Valla de la Muerte/ The fence of death* by Haze and *Papeles Mojados/Wet papers* by Chambao. These songs came out in 2006 – 2007; a period when irregular migration in southern Europe emerged as a mediated issue also in the North (Horsti, 2008). These user-generated videos converge not only with news media and professional photography, as discussed above, but also with artistic production and the music industry. For instance, popular Spanish lyrics websites recommend these You Tube videos. When I searched for Haze’s lyrics, the lyrics website Quedeletras.com offered a cut and mix video (posted by Mamba Negra) next to the song’s lyrics. There is no official video for Haze’s *La Valla de la Muerte* on You Tube, which accelerates the spreading of videos. For instance, Mamba Negra’s video has been watched 473, 322 times (14 February 2013).

The videos based on Haze’s and Chambao’s songs are also a tribute to the song and artist, connecting the videos to fan culture. The fan frame appears in the comments, which often celebrate the cut and mix of images as a tribute to the artist. At the same time, however, the *producers* have a vision on migration they wish to spread with the video. Interestingly, the visions of *producers* are split between the two popular songs: the videos that use Haze’s music as a soundtrack draw on solidarity of revolution whereas the videos based on Chambao’s music draw on solidarity of salvation. The videos that use Haze’s *La Valla de la Muerte* take



an explicit position against European border politics in the captions and by including images of detention, control, and demonstrations with visible signs saying ‘no to the fence!’ and ‘no one is illegal.’ Mixing these images with those depicting boats and rescue position the hegemonic emergency framework in critical light as they visualise the militarization of the border and question the representation of ‘illegality’. Furthermore, the lyrics in *La Valla de la Muerte* describe violence at the physical border fence in Ceuta. Thus, the images depicting control are symbols of injustice that call for activism for migrant rights. A clear opposition to the Ceuta fence is present in all videos using Haze’s song. For instance, one *producer*, Mamba Negra, explains his/her video ‘Haze — *La Valla de la Muerte*’:

‘Video about immigration that claims for human rights and is against the fence of Ceuta. Who defines the land that belongs to everyone?’<sup>4</sup> (Mamba Negra, Haze — *La Valla de la Muerte*, 29 October 2006).

The videos based on the other songs, including Chambao’s, silence the securitizing practice of the *Guardia Civil* and depict it as a humanitarian agent in ways that confirm the hegemonic visuality. This humanitarian position, which does not exemplify power relations and border management but stresses compassionate emotions and universality of human beings, is the most prevalent amongst the videos. For instance, *producers* Josué Verde and Chabelaloca explain their motivation:

‘With this video I do not want to complain, I will not ask anything, just to see and think, nothing more.’ (Josué Verde, *Inmigración*, 13 November 2007).

‘Sad but true. Video about what currently happens, I hope to touch your Heart. A kiss.’ (Chabelaloca, *Papeles Mojados*, 10 April 2008).

This division between discourses on rights and humanitarianism manifests what Lillie Chouliaraki (2013: 11-13) calls two forms of solidarity: revolution and salvation. The majority of the videos reflect humanitarian solidarity of salvation, which is based on the morality of altruistic benevolence and compassion. Haze’s song, on the contrary, has inspired more critical and revolutionary responses to the news images of suffering. The videos using Haze’s music reflect a more political form of solidarity that calls for attention to social justice and rights.

Nevertheless, the lyrics of Chambao's flamenco 'chill out' song *Papeles Mojados* and its original music video offer alternative gaze and positioning. The video represents a story of a sub-Saharan woman who seems to be waiting in North Africa for a journey across the sea to Europe. The song came out in 2007, a time when unauthorized boat migration to the Canary Islands of Spain had been widely covered in the news for about a year. *Papeles Mojados'* lyrics point to boat migration. The title 'wet papers' and the chorus 'many do not arrive, their dreams drown, wet papers, owner-less papers' refer to dangerous sea travel. The lyrics ask the listener to imagine himself/herself in the migrant's position: 'put yourself in their place.' Similarly, the official music video proposes a position of solidarity. It ends with a scene where the singer walks next to a sub-Saharan migrant woman sitting on the ground, viewing the sea. Chambao sits beside her, reflecting solidarity to her situation, and symbolically, to the cause of irregular migrants. When she sits at her side, they do not speak or greet, both just look towards the sea, symbolically, to Europe. This video and the lyrics take the migrant's perspective as we, the spectators, gaze Europe *with* her. This positioning, the narrative in the video and the lyrics re-construct and make visible the border between Europe and Africa. It represents the splitting between Europe and Africa that is employed in cultural identity construction (Hall, 1990). However, in opposition to the general news imagery, including the picture of the tourist who rescues migrants at the beach, the gaze here is critical as it positions the spectator less conventionally; here the spectator gazes the border and Europe *with* the migrant from her side of the symbolic boundary: the sea.

Similarly, Spanish flamenco-rapper Haze raps directly about irregular migration and positions himself as the migrant. His album *El Precio de la Fama/The Price of Fame* that has the track *La Valla de la Muerte* came out in the summer of 2006 when news accelerated on tragedies at European borders. This song's lyrics connect to events that took place in 2005 in Ceuta, a tiny Spanish territory located in the northern tip of the African continent, bordering Morocco. High barbed wire fences and surveillance technology surround the enclave to keep out the irregular migrants reaching European territory. European border management agencies and Spain have strengthened the original fence (1993) and surveillance particularly after 2005 when 13 migrants died, some from bullets that were most likely shot from the Moroccan side, and hundreds were wounded in a single group attempt to climb over the fences. Amnesty International (2006) reports that both the Spanish *Guardia Civil* and the Moroccan authorities violated human rights in Ceuta.

In the lyrics, Haze tells a story of a migrant who crosses the Sahara Desert from Sierra Leone and climbs over the fence to Ceuta. By using the first person singular the artist takes the position of an irregular migrant and his/her difficult choice of taking a risk. Death and danger are topics in this song: ‘the smell of thousands of bodies in lethargy,’ ‘despite hunger and weariness, I tend to my senses and my spirit, I get even with hunger’. The Ceuta fence is referred to as ‘the fence of death’ and the handcrafted ladder as a bridge to liberty. The song ends with the sound of gunshots and a scene where migrants jump over the fence. The Moroccan - Spanish border is ‘the last door towards tomorrow’ and ‘its weeds draw me in, in flames I’ll escape’. This song speaks about borders from the perspective of the migrant. Not only is the Ceuta fence a site of violence but the song also represents other borders – Sierra Leone, Sahara and Morocco - along the migrant route dangerous.

Positioning oneself *with* the migrants appears also in some of the *producers*’ captions and commentaries. Some pronounce their intention to commemorate the lost migrant lives and suffering in their video productions. It is this commemorative aspect that I find particularly powerful in the collage videos since opportunities for participatory public commemoration have been lacking from European public sphere. For instance, these *producers* dedicate their videos to the memory of migrants:

‘This video is intended for all those who have experienced immigration and what it entails.’ (Mamba Negra, Haze – *La Valla de la Muerte*, 29 October 2006).

‘This video is for those who died in silence in search for hope.’ (Khalid Chao, *Chambao Papeles Mojados 2008*, 28 January 2008).

The videos are not memorials in the sense that they would be consciously intended as memorial sites or that they would be searched and viewed as memorial videos (on online memorial sites and videos, see e.g. Knudsen and Stage, 2013). Nevertheless, these videos seem to function as do-it-yourself memorials in a culture that has largely ignored commemoration of migrant tragedies. They are forms of participatory citizenship through which people create their own memorial rituals in a moment when they are touched by a mediated tragedy.

### **Videos as technologies of communicative memory**

Seeing death and suffering in the news media, ‘distant suffering’ in Luc Boltanski’s (1999) terms, has sparked *producers*’ urge to react. News media brings the misfortunes of migrants to the everyday lives of European/Western spectators, and by showing migrant tragedies, the media, in addition to pressing politicians with questions about what they should do, poses the question, what would you do, to audiences. In Lilie Chouliaraki’s terms, the mainstream media offers moments for moral education — a ‘series of subtle proposals as to how we should feel and act towards suffering’ (Chouliaraki, 2008: 831-47). Through sharing, transforming and circulating the news images the spectators turn into *producers* and express their own emotions, which often become the centre of communication. Anxiety over European border politics, the need for collective commemoration and the admiration of Haze’s and Chambao’s music are emotional triggers that have pushed *producers* to engage with music and images that touch on immigration. The affective dimension of this media practice is what affirms the videos’ function in communicative memory. As Jan Assman (2006: 3) argues, emotions are crucial in the formation of all memory: ‘images and scenes imprint themselves on the mind exclusively through their emotional force.’

This emotionality appears in the *producers*’ introductions and commentaries mainly in ways that produce solidarity of salvation, a compassionate reaction to images of suffering. The solidarity of revolution emerges mainly in connection with the flamenco rapper Haze’s music. The more common emotions of sadness and compassion connect with the framing of emergency, which is typical for news coverage of migration tragedies. Pictures of rescue and death imply humanitarian emergency: the fight for immediate life and survival. The hegemonic visuality present in these videos re-produces the European gaze towards Africa and migrants in ways that make European agents seem humanitarian actors in the constructed ‘border spectacle’. The humanitarian gaze suggests a parallel between rescue and border management agents and positions spectators next to them in ways that offer a decent self-identification for all European agents and Europe as a whole. This imagery contributes to the construction of a ‘humanitarian border’, a new border regime that fuses humanitarian and securitized rationales (De Genova 2013; Horsti 2012). The systemic violence of the border regime is invisible particularly in the images that depict ‘boat migration.’ Systemic violence refers to Slavoj Žižek’s differentiation between subjective and objective violence in which he identifies objective violence as something that is ‘inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of

domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence' (Zizek, 2008:9). Drowning in a sea seems like a natural catastrophe, not produced by any system, as the border and its violence are hidden. In depictions of boat tragedies, Europeans emerge as benevolent agents who save Africans from naturalized chaos and death. The lives of African migrants might be depicted worthy of rescue, but their deaths are not represented as 'grievable.' There are no visual signs of ritual commemoration such as flowers or memorial services in the videos. Images do not represent grief over those who lost their lives. Moreover, migrants themselves are not depicted as showing care or grief for one another. Being alone or in groups, they are positioned as objects of Western humanitarianism.

Nevertheless, the cultural production of these user-generated videos also offered alternative readings and gazes. *Producers* momentarily counter the hegemonic framework when they mix images of more visible border management and those that re-position the spectator along with migrants. In addition, the lyrics offer a critical horizon to the images. The lyrics that position us, the audience with migrants counter the hegemonic visuality in the news images that position us on the side of the control and rescue agents. In so doing, this media practice of re-mixing news images with music complicates the representation of irregular migration and offers alternatives to the hegemonic narratives in ways that possibly increase heterogeneity in collective memory of undocumented migration. Moreover, the possibility to read these videos as commemoration offers an alternative to the public ignorance among European memory institutions. In the more participatory media culture of the digital age, the media's 'contemporary function is closer to that of a translator or even an author of identities' (Turner, 2010: 3). Media today provides not only representations but spaces in which people can create and perform their do-it-yourself citizenship (Hartley, 1999: 178).

The analysis shows how in online cultures the news industry tangles with other cultural industries, the music industry in this case, in ways that open a horizon of multiple meanings. However, it also shows how these videos are intertwined with the entertainment business. They are linked to different music related sites to sell advertising space. Human-technology interaction that interconnects algorithm, popularity and social networking contributes to the spreading of these videos and their role in the future understanding of irregular migration (van Dijck 2013). On the one hand, the circulation of similar and the same images over and over again produces a generic visuality, a hegemonic visual paradigm of irregular migration, which now clearly centres around irregular boat crossings of southern European sea borders and the

positioning of Europeans as humanitarian agents in this constructed humanitarian emergency at the border. On the other hand, however, re-mediation of disturbing images keeps the topic on the agenda, and in doing so the videos resist cultural amnesia. In addition, the commemorative aspect in the videos, which is sometimes directly expressed in the texts, but often emerges in the aesthetic of slowly flowing pictures of suffering and death, resists the European public attitude of ‘ungrievance’. European societies do not collectively mourn over migrant deaths, as is the case when Europeans die in catastrophes. While resting on the available visual sources online, these videos nevertheless, offer an additional dimension – that of commemoration and remembering - to the public understanding of migrant tragedies. The study shows how emerging practices of vernacular remembering and their convergence with more institutionalised and professional media and memory practices shape the ways in which contemporary irregular migration can be remembered in the future. Thus, we should not pay attention only to archives, such as news archives, but also examine the myriad of online cultures. Communicative memory in the age of networks and new technology is characterized by hyper-textuality without clear narrative. Popularity, search engine algorithms and social networks link fragmented pieces of the past to one another in complex networks of communicative memory.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>These keywords refer specifically to migration towards Spain and the Canary Islands of Spain. More recently, after 2011 the main sea route has shifted towards Italy.

<sup>2</sup>The only producer whose YouTube account refers to any organisational context is Kraken31 who uploads videos related to sea patrol and Guardia Civil. The videos in this sample include footage filmed on Guardia Civil vessel.

<sup>3</sup>While a discussion of the comments section is out of the scope of this article, I wish to mention that the videos also attract racist comments. These aggressive voices are often

countered with anti-racist commentaries that discipline online media practice (see also Knudsen and Stage, 2013).

<sup>4</sup>All translations are by the author.

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Accessed 7 November 2014: 945 views.

### **Author biography**

Dr. Karina Horsti is Academy of Finland Fellow at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä where she also teaches in Master's program in Cultural Policy. Her current research project (2014 – 2019) examines remembering of forced migration in cultural productions in Europe. Horsti's research interests focus on qualitative and critical studies on media and culture in the contexts of migration, anti-immigration movements, cultural diversity, and humanitarianism. Horsti's work has appeared in journals such as *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2013); *Citizenship Studies* (2015), *Patterns of Prejudice* (2015) and *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* (2013). She is the co-editor of *National Conversations: Public Service Media and Cultural Diversity in Europe* (2014).

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