SOPHIA
The Language of "Trafficking" in the Mediation of Gendered Migration[1]

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On November 5, 2017, the Spanish ship Cantabria, a vessel in the European Union's *Operation SOPHIA* "anti-trafficking" program, docked in the port of Salerno in southern Italy. Alongside the survivors, the ship carried the bodies of 26 young Nigerian women and girls who had perished in two shipwrecks off the coast of Libya. Because the only victims of the shipwrecks were women, the Italian authorities opened an inquiry to investigate whether the women had perhaps been purposely killed—thrown overboard by traffickers in the Mediterranean.[2] The Communications Officer for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Marco Rotunno, informed the press that it was highly probable that the women were victims of sex trafficking rings. Traditional and social media in Europe and North America, which focused on the episode over the space of several weeks, circulated multiple images of a body bag suspended in mid-air, unloaded from the hold of the Cantabria. Some photographs were tightly cropped, indefinitely suspending the corpse's landing; others showed the corpse dangling over a series of hearses, whose doors stood open for a seemingly infinite number of victims; still others revealed alternately the surviving migrants descending from the ship's deck, or ship staff (clothed in white protective gear and blue gloves and face masks) controlling the procession off the boat.[3] The representation of the female victims vacillated between massification and singularity—between the individual coffin suspended in mid-air and the row of hearses, between naming the women (the two identified by family members) and un-naming them (in their anonymous repetition).

1 This article expands and elaborates a brief commentary piece that appeared in the journal *Feminist Media Studies* in 2018. Lynes, "Drowned at Sea." I would like to thank also Tyler Morgenstern and Ian Alan Paul for their generous and generative comments on this article in its draft form. Their insights particularly on the ontology of race, as well as on the "a risk/at risk" formulation were central to my fleshing out my argument here.

2 Eltagouri, "26 teenage girls were found dead at sea."

3 The homogeneity of the images, while formally linked to an iconography of crisis, is also materially and structurally linked to the press agencies which distributed photographs. Most of the press images were provided by a single press photographer's series and distributed through the European Press Agency. It is notable that the images from the port formally echoed the images from the funeral, which also portrayed a seemingly endless row of coffins onto which grievers placed white roses.

These images re-crystallized the figure of migrant death circulating in media images (not the least among them the press photograph of a drowned boy, Alan Kurdi, on a resort shore in Turkey), which in their volume and velocity have created the very contours of the "crisis" as such. Never mind that when the autopsies had been completed it was concluded that the women showed "no signs of abuse" and that they had simply drowned, the images nevertheless continue to constitute a repertoire for visualizing trafficking in its trans-Mediterranean dimensions.[4] As the facts of their accidental drowning came to light, the story virtually disappeared from the news, its everyday depiction of the mortality of crossing less mediatic than the speculations that drove the press attention to the story at the outset.[5] Nevertheless, as Radha S. Hegde explains, such sites of mediation form a critical site for elaborating the causality of the crisis (the distinction of "refugees" from "economic migrants," for instance, or the focus on "rescue" vs. "securitization"), for framing social reality, and for giving shape to the figure of the migrant—steeped in thickly gendered, racialized and classed imaginaries.[6]

As a story of gendered migration, one where the risks of the perilous crossing of increasingly fortified borders is unevenly borne by women, it both masks more than it reveals, and reveals more than it lets on: on the one hand, the focus on trafficking scotomizes a more complex and dilated vision of the conditions, causes and conclusions of gendered movement, and thus works to obscure the complexity of gendered migration across the Mediterranean; on the other hand, though, the very focus on trafficking, its emphasis on the fungibility of migrant life, and the cast of characters that come to dramatize the rescue operation crystallize both allegorically and with striking literality the haunting instrumentalization of Black women's lives in and through mediations of migration *as crisis*.

It is thus vital, as Ariella Azoulay's understanding of the "civil contract" of photography suggests, to pull at the threads of the so-called migrant crisis' mediation of gendered movement and trace the image "in such a way as to reopen it and renegotiate what it shows, possibly even completely overturning what was seen in it before."[7] This strategy is particularly necessary given the pervasiveness, the insistence, and the recursivity of images of death and drowning in the Mediterranean, and the specificity of the gendered and racialized imaginaries that frame the outlines of the corporeal figures of migration's "crisis."[8] This recursivity works assiduously on those it seizes,

4 Nadeau, "Twenty-six young Nigerian migrant women laid to rest in Italy."

5 Such mediatory flux is common with respect to cases of women's movement. Enrica Rigo traces another event occurring in Italy in July 2015 when 69 women were intercepted at sea, and transferred from Sicily to the detention center of Rome-Ponte Galeria in order to be deported from Rome-Fiumicino airport. Similarly, the large number of women transferred, their young age, and the circumstances of their arrival were highly mediatized and picked up by several national mainstream newspapers. Rigo, "En-gendering the Border," 177.

6 Hedge, *Mediating Migration*. With respect to the case's conclusion, Professor Antonello Crisci, a medic who worked on the postmortems, noted "There were no signs that they had been raped or physically abused […] They most likely couldn't swim." The coroner also noted that many of the victims were wearing two layers of clothing, common for migrants held in Libyan detention centers.

7 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 13.

8 See Bishnupriya Ghosh's essay in this collection for the affective charge of such recursivity in the reception of the image of the drowned Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi.

on both shores of the Mediterranean. The mediation activates an internal reservoir of images that are—in Azoulay's terms—"planted" very differently in different bodies, sometimes while its subjects are unaware of the violence involved, often in an instantaneous fashion (a snap-*shot*), "ruling out any opportunity for negotiations as regards what they show or their genealogy, their ownership or belonging."[9] The images of death work (as I have previously argued) either to confirm a body hypostatized and enshrined as an ideal of transparency, one which effaces the liveliness of social life, even in death,[10] or to confirm a necropolitical aesthetic, an iconic reminder of the power of death and exclusion wielded by state and para-state structures across the Mediterranean.[11] How might we (differentially located in the West) receive the image of a coffin hovering over the port city of Salerno? How might the phenomenon of "trafficking" itself shape the closures contained in the image, the image's taken-for-granted status as a story of gendered migration? What might be reopened through it regarding the tangle of gender, sexuality, mediation and migration?

The setting of the Cantabria rescue focalizes accounts of gender-based migration squarely around issues of "trafficking," occluding in their wake the EU's increased border "securitization" policies, externalized border controls, treaties with third countries, and denials of family reunification visas, all of which render travel routes more perilous and incidences of violence more significant.[12] As will be elaborated below, the United Nations Security Council, making use of "trafficking" as its justification, has put forth a resolution that would authorize Europe to use military force to stop migrant smuggling boats that set off from Libya across the Mediterranean.[13] Simultaneously, the EU's externalization of its border operations, and accordingly its support to Libya (both on its territory and with its "Coast Guard" and Navy), directly impacts the incidences of gender-based and sexual violence faced by people on the move.[14] Smuggling operations have become more significant as EU border securitization policies have rendered routes of travel more perilous and incidences of violence more significant. They are accordingly an effect of the consolidation of border securitization regimes rather than their cause. Smugglers have both assisted and threatened refugees seeking safe passage, frequently providing the only possible movement towards European shores under new border security regulations. For women with insufficient means to pay their passage, transactional sexual relations frequently constitute the only manner in which women and sexual minorities may move through and along smuggling routes.[15]

9 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 13.

10 Lynes, "Decolonizing Corporeality."

11 Mbembe, "Necropolitics."

12 For a detailed account of these policy shifts, see Heller and Pezzani's contribution to this volume.

13 The significant increase in women refugees travelling alone is certainly a result of conflicts or violence in their home countries, but is also an explicit strategy of smugglers, and the result of family separation by border control agents. Women may also make a subjective wager to risk the voyage to flee violence or to seek out some form of security. See Freedman, "Violences de genre et 'crise' des réfugié.e.s en Europe."

14 Sengupta, "U.N. Wants to Let Europe Use Military Force to Stop Migrant Smuggling Boats."

15 Freedman, "Violence de genre et 'crise' des réfugié.e.s en Europe," 62.

Despite the dominant rhetoric's depiction of women as victims of trafficking, women are more frequently deported or penalized for seeking asylum in the EU, this despite Italian legislation that grants victims of sexual exploitation a right (at least on paper) to remain in Italy in order to protect them from their perpetrators and provide for their "rehabilitation."[16] It should also be noted that the focus on trafficking works to eclipse the violence and traumas that greet minoritized subjects upon their arrival in Europe, exacerbated by the various "hotspots" that the EU has created to respond to the waves of refugees in Greece and Italy. Both the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and Frontex operations have "mainstreamed" gender equality issues into their directives, which in principle oblige EU member states to take gender issues into consideration in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees, and in refugee status determination procedures. In practice, not only is no attention paid to issues of gender, but border guards themselves may be the source of (gender-based and sexual) violence and human rights abuses against migrants and refugees.[17] A focus on sexual exploitation or forced prostitution has thus, rather than fortified international protections, instead shifted policy towards "anti-trafficking" border securitization measures.

Thus, while trafficking is a significant site for women's exploitation and experiences of violence (and indeed gender-based and sexual violence is omnipresent at every stage of movement), confounding the categories of "trafficking" and "smuggling" in fact eclipses both the various shapes violence takes (by armed forces, police, smugglers and traffickers, other refugees and members of one's own family) and the multiple forms of (more or less voluntary) movement across state boundaries that propel gendered movement across state borders. The script of women being 'trafficked'—which is a key trope through which gendered migration is mediated and visualized—serves to assign women to the clear category of victim, rendering impossible and unthinkable the willfulness and agency of women (much less the shifting constitution of gender) in movement. In this mediation, the corpse becomes a key modality of representation, binding migrant movement to death, isolating networked actions into singular (or serial) victims, focalizing the transit over the arrival, and literally dangling the figure of the migrant in mid-air, suspended in the thick of trajectories of movement and border securitization measures.

Trafficking and 'Containerization'

In the case of the Cantabria 'rescue,' trafficking provided the lens through which the gendered violence of the Mediterranean crossing came into focus. Most of the press coverage in the initial days reiterated a statement by the prefect of Salerno, Salvatore Malfi, who noted that sex trafficking frequently employs specific routes and dynamics: "Loading women onto a boat is too risky for the traffickers, as they could risk losing all of their 'goods'—as they like to call them—in one fell swoop."[18] Malfi's statement provides a coda for critically reading this story of gendered migration against the grain of its imaginaries, in order to understand the haunting violence contained in its principal

16 Rigo, "Re-gendering the Border," 178.

17 Freedman, "Sexual and gender-based violence against refugee women," 21.

18 Giuffrida, "Arrests in Italy as 26 Nigerian women and girls found dead."

image, namely the eerie resonance between the images from the Cantabria and the image repertoire of container shipping in the commercial maritime trade. The vacillation—in the image and Malfi's statement—between human subject and commodified object, the embeddedness of the female corpse within the commercial logics of transnational shipping, binds the "migrant crisis" to the calculus of trafficking and loss that instrumentalize life—and black women's lives particularly—within the economic logics of global trade.

Trafficking is, of course, thoroughly imbricated in these logics. It rides upon the structures of globalization, using its circuitous routes and decreased internal border controls to support a broader structure of bonded sex-work. Rasheed Olaniyi notes that the traffic in women can be traced back to "the 'engine room' of western capitalism, namely the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery, which spanned over 300 years."[19] In the wake of slavery's abolition, trafficking took the form of forced abductions, false marriages, false adoptions, and forced sex-work. Trafficking is not solely a story of migration but of displacement engendered by a militarized global economy. Particularly in relation to Nigeria, trafficking has been a longstanding concern, with women trafficked through border towns and communities, including Delta, Akwa Ibom, Lagos, Imo, Rivers, Ondo, Kano, Ebonyi, Osun, and Enugu, transported across Ghana and the Ivory Coast, and then by sea to Italy, or through Morocco and Libya as transit points for onward movement to Spain and France.[20] Olaniyi emphasizes that traffickers themselves may also be women, relying on the capital and connections acquired through the sex trade to then organize rather than be organized by its commerce. Rather than tell a story of gendered migration that relies on clear gendered distinctions between trafficker and trafficked, Olaniyi emphasizes that the driving forces of trafficking are "the advance of capital over labor and nation states, economic recession, neo-liberal political transition and instability and corruption."[21] She points to Nigeria's dependence on the petroleum industry, for instance, as a contributing factor in supporting trafficking networks.

For Christina Sharpe, cargo containers (what Allan Sekula and Noël Burch call "coffins of remote labour-power") are connected to the journeys of Africans over land and across the Mediterranean Sea as "asterisked histories of slavery, of property, of thingification, and their afterlives."[22] She calls these processes the "containerization of people" or the "asterisked human" (with a play on the term "risk" which presents itself in this term) to point to both the "shippability" of life as well as its excess, the manner in which the prefix trans- in the Trans-Atlantic points to a range of configurations of Black being in movement. Among these trans* processes (and I return to them later in this essay), Sharpe points to "transubstantiation," a process of "making of bodies into flesh and then into fungible commodities while retaining the appearance of flesh and blood."[23]

In this respect, the use of the violently anodyne term "pay as you go" to describe gendered and sexualized migrant passage through smuggling networks masks the

19 Olaniyi, "No Way Out," 46.

20 Olaniyi, "No Way Out," 47.

21 Olaniyi, "No Way Out," 51.

22 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 71.

23 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 73.

violence of present conditions of slavery, indentured labor, and exploitation that are constitutive of the passage across the African continent, the Mediterranean, and the European Union. Unpacking the term "trafficking" thus becomes an instrument for identifying the imaginaries of gendered movement across a broad range of media, and the vacillation between voluntary and involuntary forms of movement contained therein.

The images of the Cantabria 'rescue' rest both on the specter of transnational trade (of the free passage of goods over labor, of the trade in human subjects-as-objects) and also on the ghostly architectonics of the trans-Atlantic crossing, because of the instrumentalization and jurisprudence that underwrote the structures of the slave trade. Christina Sharpe attends to the historic calculability of Black life in slavery and its afterlives by recounting the story of the *Zong*, a 1781 slave ship which ran low in provisions and jettisoned some of those enslaved in order to "save the rest of the cargo."[24] Sharpe reminds us that this act of violence defined modern structures of insurance value, risk and loss in the economy of maritime commercial transit, and constituted the "mathematics of Black life" still at play in catastrophes such as the Lampedusa shipwreck,[25] but (in my estimation) in the Cantabria deaths as well. Understanding the distribution of risk by traffickers across separate crafts, and the calculus of potential loss entailed, is thus only thinkable within the architectonics of the persistent instrumentalization of Black life.

The language of trafficking, or of *human cargo*, thus reveals something of the refiguration of subjection mapped by, among others, Saidiya Hartman. For Hartman, the language of rights fails precisely because liberty, sovereignty and equality not only coexist with—but also depend on—extant and emergent forms of intensified domination, subordination, indebtedness, inferiority, encumbered status and subjection.[26] Insofar as liberation freed black subjects into a fungibility in and through which their capacities could be quantified, measured, exchanged and alienated, abstract equality thus actually bestowed an encroaching and invasive form of social control over Black bodies. The language of 'human cargo' thus exposes the fungibility of the Black body, the exchangeability of subjects, within the violent contemporary social order, marked by what Hartman called the "nonevent of emancipation."[27] What the language of 'trafficking' exposes (at times as its ghostly unconscious) is the mechanisms in and through which movement across the Mediterranean is already marked by a logic of accumulation and the fungibility of the Black body.

What's in a name?

The mediation of gendered migration is thus caught up in the constraints posed by the story of "trafficking," even in discourses whose aim is humanitarian: a story where the representation of women vacillates between subject and object, and where the figure of the corpse violently abstracts and anonymizes women on the move. I argued in an

24 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 81.

25 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 35–36.

26 Hartman, "The Burdened Individuality of Freedom," 35–36.

27 Hartman, "The Burdened Individuality of Freedom," 32.

earlier article that the story of the Cantabria's rescue is marked by a descriptive flux (describing the women as girls at times, women at others, young women or women between the ages of 14 and 20).[28] This liminality highlights a kind of unwritten category error—of girl-women or women-girls, of humans and 'goods,' of Nigerian women crossing the Mediterranean from Libya—produced by the very act of migration. Their liminality is unassigned in media coverage, which ignores "how this liminality is a mark of the border-identities and thresholds through which gender articulates itself time and again as it crosses state and geo-political systems and structures."[29]

Movement, which Sharpe indicates through the term Trans*—"translation, transatlantic, transgression, transgender, transformation, transmogrification, transcontinental, transfixed, trans-Mediterranean, transubstantiation"[30]—forces a critical, conceptual, aesthetic and political imaginary that is lateral, that crosses relations in movement across land and sea, across bordering regimes, across forms of making and unmaking that constituted gendered and racialized bodies-in-motion. But instead of the unmooring of gender that transition and transitivity entail, the women's identities in the Cantabria mediation are governed only by loss and erasure, by the verticality of maritime and port infrastructures.

What work does the concept of "trafficking" do not only to the understanding of gendered migration, but also to its mediation in Euro-American media contexts? Azoulay's invitation cited above to "reopen the image and renegotiate what it shows" allows us to flesh out the named and unnamed figures in gendered migration, to examine their echoes, the passage of subject-to-object, of migrant-to-vessel, of anti-trafficking-to-border security. Instead of asking whether the women were voluntarily killed by traffickers, for instance, we might begin by asking how we account for an "anti-trafficking" operation embedded in the apparatus of the EU's border securitization measures.

How indeed can we reopen the Cantabria story through Azoulay's invitation to renegotiate what its iconic images show? In the midst of the erasure of Black women's agential possibility (of the impossibility of thinking a will-to-move by Nigerian women), the "life-saving" EU anti-trafficking operation, *Operation SOPHIA*, speaks volumes about the movement of peoples through juridical frameworks, policing and security operations, treaties and pacts with third countries, the externalization of borders, and imaginaries of passage that inform and materialize gendered migrant death, beyond the media's framing of gendered migration as instances of "trafficking."

How to renegotiate a border security operation named after a young Somali child born aboard a German frigate, itself named after a figure of German imperial power? How can we name the willful forgetting that forces these condensations to remain unpacked? And how to do so without reconfirming the language of rights or freedom curtailed by anti-trafficking discourse from the outset?

First, *SOPHIA—the operation*: The setting of the ship Cantabria (and the "rescue operation" under the auspices of *Operation SOPHIA*) focalizes accounts of gender-based migration around issues of trafficking, using both the terms "smuggled" and "traf-

28 Lynes, "Drowned at Sea," 2.

29 Lynes, "Drowned at Sea," 2.

30 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 73.

ficked" to describe women's passage across the Mediterranean. As Rigo makes clear, borders mirror the "imperialistic genesis of the world order […] and confirm its current postcolonial condition."[31] Anti-trafficking operations must accordingly be examined for the manner in which they assign migrants to distinct legal, political and symbolic spaces, and thus hierarchize movement according to gendered, racial and class categories. The EU's anti-trafficking operation might be parsed in both its pre-nominal and post-nominal dimensions: as EUNAVFOR MED—a "military crisis management operation"[32]—and as "Operation SOPHIA," a new name for the operation, coined to "honor the lives of the people we are saving, the lives of the people we want to protect, and to pass the message to the world that fighting the smugglers and the criminal networks is a way of protecting human life."[33]

EUNAVFOR MED, which was established on May 18, 2015 following the death of 800 migrants after the boat in which they travelled sank off the Libyan coast, forms part of the EU's common security and defense policy (CSDP) military response to human smuggling and trafficking in the Southern Central Mediterranean, and focuses particularly on trafficking organized in Libya. It outlines several phases of operation, moving from the detection and monitoring of migration networks to the boarding, search, seizure and diversion of boats—first on the high seas, and following this, in the territory of coastal states.[34]

Its new designation—EUNAVFOR MED operation SOPHIA—occurred in September 2015, when the Operation Commander, Admiral Enrico Credendino, proposed the new name on the occasion of a visit by High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini to the mission headquarters in Rome. Operation "SOPHIA" because a Somali child born on board the German frigate Schleswig-Holstein on August 24, 2015 was named after the earlier battleship, the Schleswig-Holstein, which in 1905 went by the radio call "Sophie." This shift in nomination, ratified by a Council Decision in October of 2015, accompanies a shift from detection and monitoring of the high seas to boarding, search, seizure and diversion of vessels (and ultimately, to operations in Libyan territorial waters, with military capacity-building for the Libyan "Coast Guard" and Navy offered in return). In this juridical regime, migrant populations are frequently turned back to a country where they will face detention, brutality and persecution, contributing to what Paul Strauch calls "a concerning norm of militarized extraterritorial border control."[35]

The Operation's capacity to move between the high seas and territorial waters constitutes what Dal Lago names the "militarization of contiguity,"[36] a networked coordination with NATO's *Active Endeavour* mission, as well as Frontex, Europol, and the International Maritime Organization. Further, despite the poetics of Operation SOPHIA's name, the focus of the operation has always been on deterring criminal

31 Rigo, "Re-gendering the Border," 183.

32 European Union Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/778 of 18 May 2015.

33 Operation Sophia, "European Union Naval Force Mediterranean EUNAVFOR MED."

34 Estrada-Cañamares, "Operation Sophia before and after UN Security Council Resolution No 2240," 186.

35 Strauch, "When Stopping the Smuggler Means Repelling the Refugee."

36 Dal Lago, "Note sulla militarizzazione della contiguità," in Ritaine, "Blessures de frontière en Méditerranée," 16.

activities, not on saving lives.[37] One might also note that, despite the fact that both Operation Sophia and Operation SOPHIA (capitalized) are used in news reportage on the operation, the legal documents indicate the name in a capitalized form, "SOPHIA," which pulls the name towards its operational acronym (EUNAVFOR MED) and away from the body of the Somalian infant, from which it nevertheless continues to draw its humanitarian force. The operation's framework of "preventing more people from dying at sea" is based not on a politics of rescue but on preventing more people from boarding boats. While it acknowledges the existence of a "human emergency" in the Mediterranean, it does not refer to migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean as potential asylum seekers or refugees, this despite its concern with trafficking. In this respect, calling Operation SOPHIA a "life-saving operation" (as news sources did in the case of the Cantabria "rescue") obscures its participation in the very vulnerability from which it "rescues" people.[38]

SOPHIA's politics of prevention, along with its policing of Libyan waters and its support for the Libyan "Coast Guard" and Navy, thus constitute not simply a politics of EU exclusion, but, as Saucier and Woods argue, a politics of "preclusion," a preclusion premised not solely on European governmentality and biopower, but also on the insistence on the fungibility of the Black body *prior to* its capture within the circuits of neoliberal exploitation and alienation.[39] For Saucier and Woods, anti-Black violence in the Mediterranean (importantly, both trafficking and anti-trafficking in this case) "has its roots in the earliest racial slave trade in which Italian merchants funded Portuguese raiders across the Mediterranean Sea and down the Atlantic coast of Africa."[40] The shift from the boarding, search, seizure and diversion of boats in international waters to the multiple arrangements with the Libyan State, and the coextensive and contiguous bordering operations that constitute the EU's anti-trafficking operations assumes that gendered and sexual violence is a result of movement, and of illicit movement specifically. A politics of preclusion presumes that home spaces may not be the source of conditions from which one might wish to flee, and ultimately that sexual violence is a result (and not a cause) of movement. The bordering apparatuses' anti-trafficking gesture thus serves to keep women in the protective "care" of patriarchal orders all the way down the line. Further, the violence those who are trafficked face in the territory of the EU are disavowed by an operation that targets traffickers. Ultimately, a focus on trafficking is a manner of saying that there is no legitimate asylum claim, no legitimate refugee status (except insofar as movement itself has constituted

37 It is notable that, by contrast, UN Security Council Resolution 2240 (2015) sees saving the lives of persons on board vessels used for human trafficking and migrant smuggling as the main reason behind UNSC's authorization to act against such vessels. See Estrada-Cañamares, "Operation Sophia before and after UN Security Council Resolution No. 2240," 190.

38 Further, the statement that the women drowned because they couldn't swim ignores the nexus of race/class/gender in which positioning on crossing crafts is apportioned (with different fees for upper vs. lower level passage). It also renders unthinkable the relations of mutuality and care under the worst of conditions whereby the spaces where passage is most perilous if things go wrong are also the most secure spaces if all goes right, particularly for those who can't swim, and for young children, potentially already in a state of heightened anxiety and trauma.

39 Saucier and Woods, "Ex Aqua," 59.

40 Saucier and Woods, "Ex Aqua," 64.

the scene of human rights abuse). Calling the operation "SOPHIA," after the infant, after the ship, masks the violent border securitization the operation entails (one that extends European biopolitical power into the lifeworlds of the Mediterranean's southern shores) behind the face of rescue, of an infant rescued, carried by the craft that buoyed her into an Italian port. *SOPHIA* thus becomes the name for the production of a European social cohesion, arrived at through a politics of preclusion, reinterpreted as a form of humanitarianism. In this regard (even though their article dates tellingly to 2014), Saucier and Woods argue:

> "A basic purpose of police power is not simply to mark the objects of police scrutiny, the threat against which the society must militate; but it also serves as a methodology for producing social cohesion. Solidarity is the product of *not* being policed, *not* being noticed, *not* having one's humanity called into question fundamentally; belonging is nothing less than the prerogative to *ignore* the banal terror of policing (Martinot and Sexton 2003). Civil society knows itself to be 'free' by virtue of who populates the hold of the slave ship, migrant boat, detention center or police blotter."[41]

The humanitarianism of anti-trafficking (particularly as it serves as an alibi for military operations in the Southern Mediterranean) therefore sustains social life on the Mediterranean's north shores through accessibility to the Black body, in both directions of trafficking and anti-trafficking operations.

Women in movement, and gendering across borders, are thus figured at once as both "a risk" and "at risk"—a risk to be policed by a politics of preclusion, and at risk and thus in need of security forces' protection.[42] The specific risk women's movement poses to European identity is steeped in fantasies of race/gender/sexuality, wrapped up in the biopolitical regulation of reproduction and sexuality more broadly. This a risk/at risk juncture "serves to justify, while rendering inevitable, public sexual violence against women."[43] Moreover, anti-trafficking operations, which take place to "secure" against sexual violence and exploitation in the context of social, economic and political upheavals that are the direct result of former colonized states' integration into the global political economy, are more than simply the border spectacles of exclusion. Anti-trafficking activism—which identifies human trafficking with a 'new slavery'–also positions Europeans as "modern-day abolitionists,"[44] and therefore shore up notions of justice, sovereignty, equality on European shores through the name SOPHIA.

The legislative, political and mediatic focus on "trafficking" then both engenders and dis-genders the migrant body—engenders because the trade in sex rides on sexual and gender differentiation, and dis-genders because the language of units and cargo eclipse the subject, the person or the individual.[45] The space of the ship's hold suspends the gendered and racialized subject "in the oceanic,"[46] even as gender comes

41 Saucier and Woods, "Ex Aqua," 66.

42 For the formulation "a risk/at risk," I draw from Susana Galan's analysis of the history of public sexual harassment in the Egyptian context. Galan Julve, "Risk-Taking Activism," 88.

43 Galan Julve, "Risk-Taking Activism," 92.

44 Saucier and Woods, "Ex Aqua," 69.

45 Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 83.

46 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" in Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 83.

to map the force of the figures of trafficker, savior, child, and ship that animate the passage across the Mediterranean and beyond. The fungibility of the female migrant's body for producing value or pleasure and the "shared vulnerabilities of the commodity, whether male or female, trouble dominant accounts of gender."[47] Rather than begin with the violence against women perpetrated alternately by traffickers, the story of the Cantabria demonstrates the primacy of gender and sexual differentiation in the making of the worlds of migrant movement.

In this regard, policing is "a central methodology for organizing the social globally."[48] Operation SOPHIA thus indicates the impossibility of thinking Black women's self-possession in movement, which persists as a site of suspicion ("a risk") in the "non-event of emancipation" today. Trafficking indicates the gendered direction of this fungibility, in a bordering regime in which gender, race, sexuality and class are not always where one thinks, and not always in the same location. The tangle of gender, race, class and sexuality are constantly worked on and reconfigured by multiple actors, in an ongoing practice of gendering the border.

Second, Sophia—the ship: The "story" of *Operation SOPHIA*'s name on the agency's website notes that the Somalian child (Sophia) born on board the German frigate was herself named after the ship, the Schleswig-Holstein, which was dedicated to the Prussian princess Sophia of Schleswig-Holstein, a figure in the courts of Prussian imperial power and colonial expansionism in the late nineteenth century. Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* teaches us to pay attention to the naming of boats and people, as she traces the epistemic violence entailed in naming a young girl, Phillis Wheatly, after the slave ship (the *Phillis*) on which her transatlantic abduction was carried, and the slave owners (the *Wheatleys*) who purchased her on her arrival in Boston, Massachusetts. *Sophia*. *Phillis*. The particularity of a proper name erases itself as the exchange between girl child and ship reverses itself again and again—from ship to child, from child to ship—enacting recursively the general law of value in the context of migration *as* crisis, and in the afterlives of the transatlantic passage: What does it mean to be a subject, and what does it mean to be an object?[49]

The German frigate's operations along the coast of Libya also signals the ubiquity of border operations, made up of control technologies that are pixelated rather than linear.[50] The frigate itself has operated for multiple agencies and in vastly disparate but interconnected geo-political contexts. For instance, it was deployed as part of the Maritime Task Force of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon in 2009, and worked on behalf of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to destroy Syrian chemical weapons and complete military exercises in the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf in 2014. More importantly, it deployed with Operation Atalanta, the common security and defence policy (CSDP) which preceded Operation SOPHIA, working to counter piracy off the Somali coast. This operation was devoted specifically to transferring persons suspected of having committed acts of piracy and armed robbery. The frigate is

47 Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 83.

48 Saucier and Woods, "Ex Aqua," 69.

49 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 122.

50 Ritaine, "Blessures de frontière en Méditerranée," 12. See also Ian Alan Paul's contribution to this volume.

thus imbricated in a range of security and defense policies across the Mediterranean, crossing agencies and jurisdictions, national actors, international and transnational agencies, in patrols relating to commerce, military material and piracy. Its redirection to the Libyan coast as a vessel for EUNAVFOR MED thus manifests and allegorizes the ties that bind the movement of humans, commodities, cargo, and weapons.

This contemporary militarized oceanic infrastructure, however, is superimposed with a mythical structure indexed by the name Sophia, which binds this specific craft to EUNAVFOR MED's Operation. Sophie refers to the radio call sign used by an earlier Schleswig-Holstein destroyer, itself a reference to the early battleship the SMS Schleswig-Holstein, which had been dedicated to the Prussian Princess of the same name. The name Sophie is thus bound to German naval history. The website of the German Navy notes the story of "Sophia" in a news release from November 7, 2015, recounting that the young infant was midwived by a marine engineer on board:

> "The child came very suddenly and I was there. It was nice to hold such a small bundle of hope in one's hands, between all the misery that one usually sees. When we could choose the name, it was clear: it must be Sophie—like the old pager name of the first 'Schleswig-Holstein.' But in Arabic, the name Sophie does not exist, so an 'e' was replaced with an 'a' without further ado. And so Sophia not only become one of the 4225 people saved, but EUNAVEDFOR MED was officially called 'Operation Sophia' from then on."[51]

The eponymous first frigate, dedicated to the Prussian Princess, was laid down in the dockyard in Kiel, Germany in 1905, a mere twenty-years after the Berlin Conference and in the thick of Germany's imperial *Weltpolitik*. As an instrument of imperial vision, however, it comes late to sea, after Britain has demonstrated its preeminent control in the manufacture of battleships, and when new ship-building technologies had made the Schleswig-Holstein too small, too poorly defended and too slow to effectively put into motion a *Weltpolitik* for the twentieth century. Thus, while Sophia conjures an imaginary of German imperial power on a global scale, it in fact indexes a moment of falling profits, overcapacity, fierce competition, and worldwide shipping crises.[52]

Third, Sophia—the Prussian princess: An anomaly of history: a brief footnote in the annals of the *New York Times* reveals that Princess Louise Sophie of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg had several near-death experiences, including once in 1896, when the Princess and one of her ladies, Baroness Colmar, broke through the ice while skating near Glienicke Castle in Potsdam. Prince Frederick Leopold of Prussia, her husband, was upbraided by the Emperor William II for the "indifference of his treatment of his wife" and consequently placed under arrest for fourteen days, confined in a room in his castle.[53]

Operation SOPHIA thus exposes which names remain in the record, and which names do not. The mediatized focus on trafficking covers over the stories of gendered movement in a veil of anonymity and indifference, making it impossible to identify, name, or tell the stories of the twenty-six women who drowned in 2017, even as Prin-

51 "Libysche Küstenwache soll deutsche Fregatte bedroht haben"

52 Epkenhans, "Krupp and the Imperial German Navy."

53 "The Emperor Exhibits his Temper."

cess Louise Sophie's travails are an object of public record. SOPHIA thus figures (by reverse) the irreconcilable gulf between the Prussian Princess, Louise Sophie, and the young Somali child, Sophia, born aboard a German frigate in the Mediterranean Sea. Read against the grain of its obscure operations, SOPHIA performs the work of holding together in a name the afterlives of colonialism, imperialism, and slavery that shape the "crisis" of contemporary movement.

Fourth, (philo)Sophia—Knowledge, complicity … SOPHIA is an operation for naming what migration-as-crisis doesn't know that it knows, what it obscures in the name of the proper pronoun. In this regard, an Afro-pessimist position calls out "the efforts, on the part of [identity-based politics] to produce a coherent subject (and movement), and [reduce] antagonisms to a representable position," calling these a circumscription of liberatory potential and an "extinguishment of rage with reform."[54]

And hence, Sophia—the child: Saidiya Hartman argues that "gestational language has been key to describing the world-making and world-breaking capacities of racial slavery."[55] In her view, the ship's hold carries this world making/breaking capacity. Under slavery, the mother could not claim the child, could claim only the transfer of dispossession to the child under a systemic process of natal alienation.[56] In Spillers' words, "'kinship' loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by property relations*." This theft and regulation bind themselves to the afterlives of slavery. Women in the hold of the ships crossing the Mediterranean remain also in the hold of the language of units and cargo, a language that eclipses the subject as an individual person. In this context, "flesh provides the primary narrative rather than gendered subject positions."[57]

Taken individually, the *Sophias* that constitute the dramatic scene of "trafficking" across the Mediterranean operate according to incommensurable logics: one, an inexhaustible, militarized, metonymic action that absorbs all objects and subjects into its order—system, child, ship, signal, princess—under the name of a failing but persistent imperial order of things; the second, an unnamable refusal of the child who does not name herself, who does not consent to the ship's hold, to the engineer-midwife who assists at her birth, who does not wish to bind her body to a radio signal, much less a Prussian princess … and yet, who is named and in whose name policing-becomes-humanitarianism.

Taken *together*, however, *Sophia* names a nexus—of migration in its gendered, raced, and sexed complexity, returned to the context of the unfinished processes of imperialism, slavery, primary accumulation and state violence. As a name that holds together these processes, it exposes the name of the operation itself, SOPHIA, as a reservoir for imperial thinking. In so doing, it assists in removing the "planted images" I referred to at the outset of the body bag as the icon of women-in-movement, those "phantom pictures" Ariella Azoulay sees as embedded in bodily memory. This *sophia* strains against resolving itself into a (philo)*sophia*, an episteme rather than an ontology

54 "Introduction" to *Afro-Pessimism*, 11.

55 Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 80.

56 Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 80.

57 Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 83.

of gendered and racialized movement. It labors to attribute images to their creators and initiators (not the body bag but the crane, the dock, the coast guard, the hearse, the medic), and "allows civic negotiations about the subject they designate and about their sense."[58] It indicates, without achieving, a fuller way of knowing migration that does not displace this fullness wholly into the epistemic, learning from Afro-pessimism's emphasis on the ontic status / non-status of blackness in the white supremacist colonial world system.[59] This alter-*sophia* names a position that is "neither constituted nor circumscribed by the sovereign."[60]

The gendered, racialized movement named "trafficking" in the current discourse of crisis names this eclipsing of subjectivity in the language of anonymity, and covers over a view into another motion, another gesture, another resistance, another refusal: "What is the text of her insurgency and the genre of her refusal? What visions of the future world encourage her to run, or propel her flight? Or is she, as Spillers observes, a subject still awaiting her verb?"[61] Rather than a name, then, a verb: not craft but crafting, the vexed, contradictory, perilous poetics of crossing, what Edouard Glissant calls a "thinking thought," a "knowledge becoming."[62] The Cantabria and the Schleswig-Holstein are ships; the migrants' boat is a *crafting*.

What the erasures and revelations of the Cantabria story suggest—traced through the figure of the name *Sophia*—is that the mediation of migration needs to radically re-envision women's movement beyond the language of "trafficking," and beyond a focus on images of death and drowning. Rather than mediating migrant loss principally through narratives of "trafficking"—narratives which enforce the view of those on the move as involuntary captives of transnational flows (including flows of media and the circulatory dynamics of images)—we thus need to understand the complexity of movement in its entangled voluntary and involuntary dimensions.

Mainstream Western media needs to be confronted with media produced by migrants and activists, which visualize and unpack the complex calculus that instigates decisions to move, and migrant experiences. There needs to be space for images of both gendered movement (with all its violence, risk and exposure), and the real threats of *non-movement* (of detention and deportation, among other holding patterns).

As scholars also, we need a framework for understanding the shifting and constitutive force of gender, sexuality, race and class in shaping both the character and trajectory of migration. This shifting force attunes us to the transitive character of identity itself for people on the move, particularly in and across state borders. Over a decade ago, Ursula Biemann maintained that—rather than take a human rights approach to issues of sex trafficking—she would prioritize a geographical theoretical framework, which would allow her to link geopolitics to subject formation.[63] The visions of globality produced by satellites, the infrastructures of rescue and surveillance, press agencies, and migrants themselves visualize and enact a sexual, gendered, and racialized economy of displacement on a global scale. Biemann observes that "trafficking hinges on

58 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 13–14.

59 I thank Tyler Morgenstern for drawing out this insight in reading an earlier draft of this chapter.

60 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 21.

61 Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 88–89.

62 Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation*, 1.

63 Biemann, "Remotely Sensed," 181–182.

the displacement of women, their costly transportation across topographies from one cultural arrangement to another, from one spatial organization to another, from one abandoned economy to a place of greater accumulations. It is the route that counts."[64]

Gender and sexuality are more than subjective attributes of (or data points for) migrants and refugees; they are forces that organize the trajectories of movement, the transactions across boundaries, the economies of exchange, the patterns of reception, and the politico-aesthetics of images of crossing—and they do so on and through the body. Literature on gender-based migration emphasizes that gender is "a latticework of institutionalized social relationships that, by creating and manipulating the categories of gender, organize and signify power at levels above the individual."[65] The decision to move, its voluntary and involuntary dynamics, the vast terrain of negotiation in which movement advances in fits and starts, en-genders and de-genders migrant subjectivity. Gender operates on multiple and frictional spatial and social scales (the body, kinship structures, the state) across transnational territories. Within and across these scales, gender ideologies and relations are alternately reaffirmed or reconfigured.[66]

Enrica Rigo paints instead a picture of women migrants who, by crossing borders, resist all at once the "conditions imposed on them by patriarchy, violence, wars, the sex industry, smugglers, and borders themselves."[67] She notes that women take advantage of the very migratory routes opened by the people from which they are simultaneously trying to flee. In doing so, they use their bodies "in ways that reject their depiction as docile victims, willing accomplices or defiant opponents of their tormentors."[68]

Such subjective movement is shaped by one's location within historical, political, economic and geographic power hierarchies, that affect the trajectory, force and velocity of movement. Intersectional hierarchies of class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality and gender frame bodily life in passage, and expose subjects to their differential articulation in the multiple formal and informal social orders through which migrant subjects pass. The ability to act, to wager one's possessions or selves depend on gendered geographies of power. Doreen Massey argues that some individuals "initiate flows and movement; others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it."[69]

These dimensions are present in the multiple testimonies, maps and guides, communications, and images by and through which migrants represent their own trajectories and experiences, always already "entrenched within media worlds."[70] Aesthetic strategies assist in lifting the lid on the complexities cooking beneath the image of a suspended body bag, hovering over the port of Salerno. Ursula Biemann's *Remote Sensing*, for instance, proposes "a mode of representation that traces the trajectory of people in a pancapitalist world order, wherein the space between departure and arrival is understood as […] a potentially subversive space which does not adhere to national

64 Biemann, "Remotely Sensed," 183.

65 Pessar and Mahler, "Transnational Migration," 813.

66 Pessar and Mahler, "Transnational Migration," 815.

67 Rigo, "Re-gendering the Border," 177.

68 Rigo, "Re-gendering the Border," 177.

69 Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 149.

70 Hegde, *Mediating Migration*, 3.

rules."[71] Similarly, Bouchra Khalili's *The Mapping Journey Project* gives voice to migrants' own accounts of their travels, which she records in a single shot and does not edit in post-production. For Khalili, the narratives (and the trajectories drawn across maps of the world) demonstrate not only how individuals are trapped in "nets of arbitrary power"[72] but how they might refuse the forms of representation and visibility demanded by surveillance systems, border controls, and press accounts. Such accounts and grassroots mediations help to reveal the force of gender-in-the-making in constituting the violence and loss—but also the possibilities—in the Mediterranean crossing and elsewhere. They also refocus media attention more clearly not only on the dangers of crossing, but on the pernicious "border securitization" policies that themselves negatively impact gendered trajectories of movement.

71 Biemann, "Remote Sensing," 187.

72 Michalarou, "ART-PRESENTATION."