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Borders, (Im)mobility and the Everyday

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Concept Paper

B/Ordering Emotions: Fear, Insecurity and Hope

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Abstract: By focussing on the emotional and affective dimensions of borders, this article suggests integrating the negative emotions that the European Union (EU) states' border politics aim to instil—including fear, anxiety and trauma—with the positive emotions that the dream of a life in Europe encourages. Drawing upon the psychological and philosophical approaches to hope, this article highlights the centrality of hope in shaping agency, stimulating alternative visions, and overcoming difficulties. What is the impact of hope and daydreams in shaping migrants' decision to engage with risky journeys? To what extent might the dream of Europe counterbalance the EU's securitarian technologies? This article introduces and explores the processes of b/ordering and the role that emotions, as spatially grounded, play in it. This article will ultimately contend that, once confronted with the uncertainties of long and risky journeys and the prospect of a bright and dreamed future, the latter often prevails. Under this scenario, states' deterrent systems might not be as effective as hoped, as the dream of Europe overrides the fear and anxiety that EU states' border security aims to generate.

Keywords: mobility; Mediterranean crossing; hope theory; security and border studies

1. Introduction

Mobility is an integral part of our everyday life. We go out, go to work, go shopping, go dancing, visit family and friends, travel and return home. Even when at home, we do not stand still; we keep moving: cleaning, cooking, eating, celebrating, working, exercising, and so on. If observed through our daily movements, mobility, as Tim Cresswell argues, "is central to what it is to be human" [1] (p. 1). The centrality of mobility in our daily life has probably been (re)discovered during the long periods of forced immobility imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was an immobility that—together with the knowledge of a deadly virus—generated a variety of negative emotions, including fear, anxiety, insecurity, uncertainty, frustration, uneasiness and powerlessness [2–7]. These very emotions are not dissimilar to the many negative emotions that the European Union (EU) border politics aims to instil into unauthorised 'border-crossers' [8] [1]. By introducing a variety of disciplinary and punitive technologies—including sea patrolling and blockades, detention, encampment and forced deportation [9–11]—EU states aim to discourage, prevent, and repress international mobility. This is not simply achieved by transforming EU territory into "Fortress Europe" [12]—that is, an unreachable territory save for highly-skilled professionals—but most importantly by instilling fear, insecurity and dread among those who attempt to cross it irregularly. It is worth noting that dominant "punitive aspects of border regulation" [13] (p. 11) have been countered by a variety of acts of resistance, solidarity, assistance and hospitality, which have emerged thanks to the

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activism and mobilisation of local populations, NGOs, and members of civil society as well as migrant networks [14–18].

Given the rich security literature—primarily articulated upon Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality [19]—this article will not scrutinise how states manage, control, discourage and prevent mobility [20–22]. Rather, by privileging the emotional and affective dimensions of borders [23], this article will juxtapose the negative emotions that EU states aim to instil—including fear, anxiety, sense of danger and the spectre of death—with the positive emotions that the dream of a life in Europe [2] stimulates. Specifically, the emergence of conflicting emotions will be scrutinised in light of the risky, and quite often deadly, crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. Notwithstanding awareness of the lengthy journeys through several countries, the harshness of the Sahara Desert, the economic costs, the violence of Libyan camps, the unpredictability of smugglers, and the risks that the sea crossing entails, departures from African coastlines are not diminishing. All these risks—and the corresponding (negative) emotions—are not necessarily functioning as pre-emptive barriers. Positive feelings—though unrelated to the life that awaits them during and after their journey towards (the dreamed land of) Europe—seem to neutralise the fear and insecurity that bordering practices aim to instil. By projecting and imagining another (wealthy, joyful, free and rewarding) life on the other side of the border, hope, faith, and optimism emerge as the primary drivers of mobility.

By drawing upon psychological and philosophical approaches to hope, this article will highlight the positive impact of hope—in its meaning as daydreams, or 'positive fantasies'—in influencing "goal-directed behaviour" [24] (p. 69). As many psychological analyses suggest, not only does hope work as a key driver for action—and thus as a crucial tool for generating agency—but it also functions as "a psychological response to uncertainty" [25] (p. 3). The aim here is not to investigate what hope is, but rather what it does in shaping agency, imagining alternative realities, directing energies, and overcoming difficulties. Specifically, when confronted with the uncertainties of long and risky journeys and the prospect of a bright future, migrants tend to focus on the brighter future they *believe* awaits them beyond the borders. Although the risk of death is considered as a *possible* outcome, it is not necessarily contemplated as a *certain* one. This means that the greatest fear for many irregular migrants is not necessarily the risk of dying during a dangerous crossing, but rather the prospect of remaining in a country with no future. If this is the case, then state security systems are unlikely to prevent irregular mobility, as the dream of Europe overrides the fear and anxiety that EU border security aims to generate.

The concept of 'b/ordering emotions'—the *Leitmotiv* of this article—has been introduced as a theoretical tool for highlighting the dual bordering processes of emotions. On the one hand, EU states' bordering policies and practices aim to instil fear, anxiety, and a sense of danger. In this way, they create a demarcation line that privileges negative emotions and discourages false hope. On the other hand, migrants frequently reverse this hierarchical order of emotions. By hoping and dreaming that another future is possible, they prioritise positive emotions over negative ones. In other words, the concept of "b/ordering emotions" used here—rather than affective bordering or, more generally, affective or emotional governance—aims at highlighting that states are not the only agents that draw demarcation lines. The processes of bordering, as much as the processes of ordering, are also produced, albeit figuratively, by border-crossers themselves. By prioritising certain (positive) emotions and marginalising the (negative) others, they actively produce and (re)shape border practices. In other words, mobility decisions are shaped and produced by negative emotions as much as positive ones, and the negative ones might not be the dominant ones.

By scrutinising the affective dimension of borders, this article will argue that more attention should be paid to the positive emotions inspired by the dream of another life. If it is hope, and not current border violence, that prevails when migrants decide to risk their lives, then we should move away from the dominant Foucauldian approach. This article will, therefore, suggest that mobility should be scrutinised not only by examining states' b/ordering practices—and (humanitarian) counter-practices—but *also* by investigating how border-crossers' *(re-)b/order* negative emotions.

The argument will be developed in four main stages. Firstly, a brief overview of the concepts of border, b/ordering, and borderscape will be presented, with special attention to the shift in focus from a geopolitical to a constructivist approach. Secondly, an in-depth analysis of the ways in which emotions may be b/ordered will be undertaken. This will be accomplished by examining two opposing perspectives, which will be explored in two distinct sections. While the first section will focus on the politics of fear, the second will engage with the theory of hope and its positive impact. Thirdly, attention will shift to the 2023 film *Io Capitano* (I, Captain), inspired by a true story, which follows the long and harrowing journey of two cousins, Seydou and Moussa, who decide to leave Senegal and pursue their dream—the dream of Europe—a dream that leads them to disregard all warnings concerning the high, and deadly, risks involved. Finally, the narrative of the film is scrutinised in light of its reception in a few Senegalese villages, as part of a public campaign aiming at raising awareness of the deadly risks of irregular crossing.

2. Some Methodological Clarifications

Although this article is conceived as a conceptual paper—with no fieldwork conducted and, consequently, no ethical clearance required—a brief methodological clarification remains necessary. The decision to incorporate Matteo Garrone's film, *Io Capitano*, was not incidental. Firstly, the film was inspired by the true story of the Ivorian national Mamadou Kouassi, who endured the brutality of the desert, torture in Libyan detention camps, exploitation as a forced labourer and the perilous sea crossing as a "captain" before reaching Italy in 2008. These critical episodes are faithfully represented in the film. Secondly, the narrative does not constitute an exception or serve merely as an illustrative anecdote. Rather, it presents a realistic depiction of the harrowing journey undertaken by thousands of 'border-crossers' in their attempts to reach Europe [26–28]. Numerous NGO reports document the prolonged duration of such journeys, the extreme conditions in the Sahara, the violence within Libyan camps, and the high mortality rates in the Mediterranean Sea [29–31]. Thirdly, the film's narrative offers a compelling lens through which to examine the 'power of the dream' of Europe. The protagonists do not merely aspire to a different life across the Mediterranean; the images they access online are perceived as more tangible than the numerous warnings regarding the dangers of the journey. Fourthly, *Io Capitano* was publicly screened last year in seven Senegalese cities—including Dakar, Thiès, Mboro, Mèrina Dakhar, Kolda, Sédhiou, and Ziguinchor—as part of an Italian public campaign aimed at raising awareness about the severe risks associated with migration to Italy and Europe. The documentary that resulted from this screening tour, titled *Allacciate le Cinture* ("Fasten Your Seatbelts"), provides an additional analytical tool for examining the emotional responses of local populations who engaged in open debates following the screenings. Finally, as a conceptual paper, this article does not seek to make broad generalisations. Instead, it uses the film's narrative to reflect on the role of positive emotions in contrast to the negative ones that EU states aim to instil through their border policies.

3. Borders, B/Ordering, Borderscapes

International borders have traditionally been conceived as simply invisible lines that surround states, yet with clearly visible (and deadly) consequences [32]. Nowadays, academics no longer, or not exclusively, look at borders in terms of geographical lines that separate sovereign territories. Increasing attention is paid to the practices that dominate along and beyond borders. By moving away from "the 'Line in the Sand' metaphor" [33] (p. 728), attention has shifted to "the various forms of interpretation and representation that [borders] embody" [34] (p. 2). The social turn in human geography—and especially the shift from "bounded spaces to relational social constructs" [35]—has stimulated new approaches that look at borders as social, political, cultural and historical constructs [36]. The very concept of b/ordering well mirrors the emergence of new perspectives. Not only are boundary-drawing practices always the result of power relations [37], but they are also the result of the construction and perpetuation of social, legal, and cultural boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Moreover, the process of 'Othering' is not exclusively constructed upon cultural diversity, but also through spatial manipulation: identities are constructed, maintained, and shaped through physical boundaries [38].

By scrutinising borders relationally, attention is focused on the way in which space interacts with a multiplicity of subjects and communities. The concept of landscape is crucial here, not simply because the concept of borderscape is derived from it, but because it suggests dynamism, vitality and counteractions. This is precisely how the concept of 'borderscapes' has been adopted in Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr's edited volume. As they state: "*borderscapes* [is taken] as both a derivative dimension of human landscapes and as ways of thinking through, about, and of alternatives to dominant landscapes of power" [39] (xxviii). In their search for "alternative border imaginaries 'beyond the line'" [40] (p. 17), many scholars are reading borders through the struggles that animate them—namely, through the many "strategies of adaptation, contestation and resistance" that aim not only at "challenging the top-down geopolitical control of borders", but also at highlighting the interaction between "in/visibility, space and power" [41] (p. 2).

While the concept of borderscapes is a useful theoretical tool for investigating spatial relations, the emphasis here is primarily on the concept of b/ordering, in its dual meaning. While *bordering* highlights the way in which space and its (fluid) populations are divided, marginalised, excluded, insulated, restricted, encamped, and (re)routed, the concept of *ordering* suggests not only further division, through hierarchical lines, but also an imposed order of things [42]. What is interesting to capture from the current b/ordering literature is the processes through which borders, and immobility, are governed, and especially how those processes impact, shape, and influence the affective dimension of mobility.

By highlighting that international boundaries "do not begin or stop at demarcation lines in space" [43] (p. 126), Henk van Houtum and Ton Van Naerssen stressed that bordering practices are not restricted to certain space or time. Rather than observing borders as geographically fixed, analyses tend to focus primarily on bounding processes. Investigating borders through b/ordering practices means, predominantly, looking at borders through the many technologies that states use to maintain, sometimes violently, demarcation and separation lines [44]. This approach has been especially prominent within IR discipline, overwhelmingly approached through securitarian lenses, that is, through the many technologies of power that states employ to govern (im)mobility. Dominant border definitions—including biopolitical, biometrical, zoo-political, necro-political, immunitary and "let-to-die" [9,22,45–48]—offer a clear picture of the analytical lenses through which borders tend to be observed.

However, more recently, attention has also turned to the emergence of an humanitarian approach to borders [49,50]. By devoting attention to how border policies are evaded,

resisted, and humanised, recent investigations highlight the variety of actions, activities, and forms of engagement within and along EU borders, including the preparation and distribution of meals, clothing, and basic necessities; the provision of (legal) advice and information, language services, rescue operations, acts of hospitality, and public campaigns in favour of open borders and spaces of safety. It was especially the so-called 2015 'Mediterranean crisis' that made visible the deadly effects of EU border closure, encouraging an unprecedented involvement of volunteers willing to offer help, assistance, and solidarity along terrestrial [51–55] and maritime borders [56–58]. The emergence of solidarity and humanitarianism was not solely a response to migrants' needs but also a reaction against dominant EU politics of closure. This, no doubt, includes the construction of nineteen border lines stretching over more than 2000 kilometres, also within Schengen countries, compared to only 315 kilometres in 2014; increased border patrolling, including the deployment of border guards from sending and transit countries [59–61]; the reinforcement of internal police patrols; compulsory (hotspot) centres for identifying and screening newly arrived migrants [62,63]; severe penalties for those who assist undocumented migrants even in emergencies [52]; increased bureaucratic and legal obstacles for NGOs engaged in search and rescue operations in the high seas; and the de facto exclusion of selected nationalities, predominantly from the Global South, from obtaining a visa.

4. B/Ordering Emotions: The Power of Fear

In order to illustrate the power of fear in the process of b/ordering and show that the spatial and emotional are intimately connected, we proceed genealogically before moving to contemporary developments. In particular, we start from Hobbes [64] and the historical context in which he developed his theory of the state since fear played a relevant role in it. That imprint is still relevant for modern International Relations, especially in the realist tradition.

For Hobbes, the pervasive fear that characterizes the state of nature is overcome (and governed) by the power of the state, the Leviathan, a powerful institution that first exploits fear to emerge and then deploys it to survive. Fear is at core of the state as the fear of a sudden death in the state of nature is replaced by the fear of the power of the state that will punish disobedience. The relevance and characteristics of fear in early modern Europe—the historical context in which Hobbes wrote—are captured by Jean Delumeau's [65] work, *La Peur en Occident* (Fear in the West), one of the first extensive studies of fear, which highlights how the spatial and the emotional are intimately connected and linked to world ordering. Specifically, adopting a Foucauldian reading, his work allows us to capture how fear becomes part of strategies of governance and part of the process in which the modern state, and its territorial (and border)-based order was emerging, supplementing and replacing the role of the Church in ordering and controlling fears in early modern Europe.

Delumeau's work is relevant for our analysis of b/ordering practices and the role of fear in the process for three main reasons. First, the book begins with a description of the frightening experience of entering the city of Augsburg at night as described by a famous traveller of the time, the philosopher Michel de Montaigne, in his travel journals [66] (pp. 68–78). This introduction provides a first-hand account of the fear experienced by a foreigner entering the city and illustrates how b/ordering operates through spatially grounded emotions. Second, in his analysis of the Western order through its fears and search for security, Delumeau not only explores how fear can be used as a strategy for governance. He also illustrates the development of a 'fortress under siege' mentality that characterized the emergence of the modern state and influenced subsequent approaches to state security [65] [3]. Finally, over the past two decades, we have witnessed a resurgence of

fear in political discourses and academic debates that is reminiscent of the centuries of fear described by Delumeau.

According to Montaigne's account [66] (pp. 67–78), entering the city of Augsburg at night is a fear-provoking experience. The city is protected by formidable gates reinforced with iron barriers, sturdy doors, sealed passageways, and drawbridges—all controlled at a distance by guards hidden in their quarters. Doors slam shut behind the travellers, trapping them in dark, confined spaces and leaving them completely at the mercy of powerful, faceless wardens. Even if the emotions are not different from those experienced by many present-day migrants, it is 1580, and Augsburg is a prosperous Renaissance city in an unsecured turbulent Europe [65]. The complex procedure for being admitted at night is part of the strategies and symbolism to instil fear and keep threats of violence, misery and disease outside the secure space of the city. Montaigne's account highlights the tension between maintaining an open, pluralist environment within the city and the need to secure it from enemies from outside and from within [67] (pp. 5–6). The tension he captured reflects the emergence of the fortress under siege mentality and the challenges of balancing legitimate concerns with the responses to them. These challenges are similar to the ones the EU is facing today.

The fortress mentality has been the imprint of the modern territorial state and the inside–outside structure [68,69]. This imaginary remains part of a narrative that represents states as territorial entities constantly threatened in a hostile, anarchic environment, which is dominant in realist accounts. It contributes to creating a territorial trap with the "reification of state territorial spaces as fixed units of secure sovereign space" and the separation of "the domestic from the foreign" [70] (pp. 76–77) that makes it difficult to imagine political spaces beyond or beside the state. It is a narrative that presents porous, unprotected borders as a threat.

Finally, Delumeau's work is relevant to understand that for Hobbes, fear was not considered as "a primitive passion, waiting to be tapped by a weapons-wielding sovereign. It was a rational, moral emotion, taught by influential individuals in churches and universities" [71] (p. 33). As Robin explains while Hobbes considered fear as a "reaction to real danger in the world", he also appreciated "its theatrical qualities" [71] (p. 33). Fear is strategically and theatrically utilized by power elites to shape behaviours. It serves to create a distinct division between the subjects and the objects of fear, where the masses experience fear while the elites manipulate those fears [72] (p. 59). This manipulation is part of the broader process of b/ordering. Fences, gates, and walls play a relevant symbolic and material role in the process, especially in times of crises.

Back to contemporary times, the analysis of fear in International Relations (IR) is a relatively recent but rapidly growing field [73,74], which emerged from Neta Crawford's call to consider emotions as part of the discipline [75]. The late emergence can be attributed to the historical downplaying of emotions in IR, particularly from mainstream rationalist approaches, despite the relevance of fear in classical realism and its sources [76,77]. Most of the recent literature is interested in the psychological aspects of emotions that have supplemented historical and constructivist accounts.

Yet, the association of fear with strategies of governance is a recurrent theme in IR, especially in the realist tradition [64,78]. By introducing certain security technologies, states shape, instil, privilege and b/order specific emotions. This is done by creating spaces and lines that limit, exclude, and establish certain orders. Focusing on the spatial dimension of fear, as we are suggesting here, is a way to give attention to how fear is experienced by migrants and how it is manipulated by states to deter (and govern) mobility. This allows us to add to analyses that explore how the threat (and the fear) of uncontrolled mobility is mobilized within countries to gain consensus for policies to contain it, as part of the

extensive literature on the securitization of migration [79,80]. Border control maintains its symbolic function, mobilising fear and anxiety. At borders, control is implemented, state's power is exercised and fear is mobilised. Surveillance cameras observe, fingerprints are collected, and decisions are made. These practices go hand in hand with the less visible and subtle process of b/ordering in a context where borders are thickened, de-localised, and replaced by a field of insecurity [45,81,82]. The symbolic function of creating sites of inclusion and exclusion, or better sites where state-controlled access is exercised, remains even if control and bordering are made at a distance through visas, travel agencies and airlines' boarding procedures that verify, admit and exclude [77].

The theatrical and symbolic aspects of mobilizing fear are also present in the reporting of torture in detention centres or in the warnings about the dangers of the sea. They are echoed in threatening narratives that foreshadow death and incarceration as checkpoints, walls and increased surveillance channel migration flows towards hostile natural environments like the desert or the sea. The construction of borders as spaces of exclusion and fear is not natural, even if it has been part of a specific articulation of the state as a territorial entity. It is rooted in the early modern fortress under siege mentality and reflects IR theorizing. Fear, insecurity and threats towards unwanted flows are opposed to a sense of safety, protection and solidarity towards fellow nationals. The negative conceptualization of borders as limits, whose crossing is dangerous, is evident, for instance, in contemporary imaginaries of 'planetary boundaries' [83]. The concept is used to warn about the dangers of contemporary ecological crises and the risk of moving out of the safe operating system of the planet Earth. Borders are used metaphorically to evoke fear and their evocative power is related to a specific, shared emotional and spatial construction. The point can be appreciated by comparing the term frontier—which often evokes exchange and possibilities of exploration—with borders and by noticing how contemporary debates are replacing the former with the latter.

Yet, the discourse that presents borders as places of fear rather than, for instance, spaces of encounters and exchange is not natural but constructed. Securitization and the role of fear in the process are illustrative here. According to securitization theory, there are no objective threats waiting to be discovered and counteracted. Almost anything can be transformed into a security threat if a political community agrees and shares that construction [84]. Securitization illustrates how porous borders can be presented as a threat but also how migrants can be transformed into a threat. It also illustrates how the constant articulations of threats have replaced positive visions and dreams. This process has been popularized in documentaries like *The Power of Nightmare*, which illustrates how the imagery of the global war on terror empowers those who can imagine the worst, even against a phantom threat rather than those who can provide different positive visions. On the academic side, these developments have been analysed as part of the spread of the governmentality of unease [81] or the the normalization of the state of exception [85] that characterized a renewed period of fear and anxiety, similar to the one described by Delumeau in early modern times.

These dynamics impact on policy decisions. Realist perspectives focus on protecting the territory from external threats, hence they both mobilize fear against migration, through securitization, and instil fear strategically to dissuade it. They do so by building fences, walls and by portraying the dangers of the trip. Fear, however, operates also through neoliberal forms of governmentality that aim at governing and controlling populations rather than directly protecting a territory [86]. Security in this perspective works through governing flows, selecting and encouraging the desirable ones, while limiting and dissuading others. Once again, the representation of dangers becomes a way to dissuade and

govern migrants. Yet, the messages are often conflicting as they mobilize different threats that contrast with other emotions.

5. B/Ordering Emotions: The Power of Hope

While IR scholars tend to engage with negative emotions, such as trauma, fear, anxiety, angst, risk and threats, this section shifts the perspective from "seeing like a state" [81] (p. 66), or "seeing like a EUropean border" [87] to seeing like a (dreaming) migrant. This will be done by relying primarily on the theory of hope from (positive) psychology and philosophy. It was Karl Menninger, in 1959, who first suggested scrutinising hope as a new line of research in light of its positive impact on shaping and motivating action [88] (p. 3). By generating certain positive expectations, hope is seen in terms of "an adaptive resource rather than a delusional deficit" (p. 4).

It is mainly Charles Richard Snyder's theory of hope [89] that dominates the cognitive and behavioural perspective, whose research focuses on the thought process through which hope operates, rather than the emotions that hope evokes and shapes [90]. By understanding hope in terms of positive expectations aimed at achieving specific goals, Snyder distinguishes two core components of hope: agency-related and pathway-related hope. While the former refers "to the individual's determination" in choosing certain goals, the latter refers to the pathway that the individual selects in order to reach the desired goal [24] (p. 70). To use Snyder's own words:

> part of goal thinking had to do with the protagonist's thoughts about whether workable routes to the desired goals could be achieved. This I called pathways thinking. Additionally, people were thinking about their willingness to use the pathways to desired goals. This motivational or energy component I called agency. [. . .] *Hope is the sum of perceived capabilities to produce routes to desired goals, along with the perceived motivation to use those routes* [89] (p. 8)

Snyder's Hope Theory is specifically based on the premise that hope is central not only to identifying certain goals but also as a "strong source of resilience and determinant of positive outcomes in most circumstances" [89] (p. 4). In other words, hope does not simply refer to a list of desired outcomes, it is central in stimulating inventiveness to overcome barriers (p. 10). Interestingly, Snyder distinguishes between two groups of people "high-hope" and "low-hope", each of which responds to "barriers" differently (p. 11). Although he recognises that "barriers can produce negative emotional reactions", it is only high-hope individuals who adopt a "more adaptive, positive emotional response to barriers" by generating "additional, alternative paths" (p. 11). Thus, according to Snyder, not only does "hopeful thinking" help achieve one's goals, but "it should be *especially* helpful in the face of impediments" (p. 11).

By approaching hope as a process, attention is directed not only to the way in which a different reality can be imagined, but also to the energy, passion, and activism that emerge when trying to achieve certain outcomes. As Victoria McGeer puts it, in her *The Art of Good Hope*, "human agency is about imaginatively exploring our own powers, as much as it is about using them" [91] (p. 104). The line between what can, or cannot, be done runs along individuals' imaginations. From this perspective, psychologists do not view hope as wishful thinking, but rather as the ability to recognise and imagine another reality, another future, upon which to build a desired life. To use McGeer's words: "no matter what the circumstance, hoping is a matter, not only of recognizing but also of actively engaging with our own current limitations in affecting the future we want to inhabit" [91] (p. 104). By focusing on the agency that hope presupposes, attention shifts away from the hope *per se* to the creative strategies used for reaching specific goals. Hope is, therefore, both goal-directed and future-oriented. The connection between the present and the (dreamed) future

operates through imagination. By imagining a future reality, the agent simultaneously imagines the obstacles that hinder its achievement. In this way, not only is the present linked to the future, but it is also projected as the moment in which action must be taken.

In short, analyses of the cognitive and behavioural aspects of hope—to be distinguished from optimism, which is the general belief that good things will simply happen—highlight the centrality of hope in activating agency. However, as already mentioned, hope is also a producer of positive emotions. Specifically, positive fantasies shape the feeling of hope. The philosophical approach to hope is particularly instructive. Most well-known philosophers, such as Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant, have devoted some time to the concept of hope, although they have mostly examined it as a (negative) passion. It is Ernst Bloch (1885—1977), in his *magnum opus*, *The Principle of Hope* [92]—written in the United States, in German, between 1938 and 1947—who offers a fascinating, and detailed, analysis of hope.

Bloch begins his investigation by posing a few basic, and fundamental, questions: "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What are we waiting for? What awaits us?" (p. 3). Although he recognises that these questions generate uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety, which might be transformed into fear, he asserts, from the very first page, that hope is "superior to fear", as it is "neither passive" as fear is "nor locked into nothingness" (p. 3). Bloch suggests approaching hope as "a daydream", not only because our daily life is "pervaded" by it, but also because daydreams might be "trained" toward a particular direction. As he puts it:

> Everybody's life is pervaded by daydreams: one part of this is just [. . .] enervating escapism, [. . .] but another part is [. . .] not content just to accept the bad which exists, does not accept renunciation. This other part has hoping at its core, and is teachable. [. . .] Nobody has ever lived without daydreams, but it is a question of knowing them deeper and [. . .] keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right [92] (p. 3).

For Bloch, it is possible to shape, train, and even learn how to hope; that is, how to direct daydreams. Starting from the premise that our lives are projected towards the future—although the future contains both "what is feared or what is hoped for"—"human intention [. . .] when it is not thwarted, [. . .] contains only what is hoped for", especially "in times of rising societies" when hope is "continuously activated and extended" (p. 4). By reading hope as a daydream, Bloch essentially transforms hope into a modality of thinking, the ability of "venturing beyond" (p. 4), of venturing toward a new future. Hopelessness, conversely, is seen as "the most insupportable thing, downright intolerable to human needs" (p. 5). If hope dominates during positive times, hopelessness and fear dominate during times of decline, times when people "cannot find their way out of the decline [and] are confronted with fear of hope and against it" (p. 4).

The ability to look beyond the present, by desiring another future, transforms expectations, intentions, and hope into a new becoming. As Bloch puts it, daydreams are the "Not-Yet-Conscious, Not-Yet-Become" (p. 6). Hope is thus not only an "orientation that generates positive expectations", but does so "as 'anticipatory consciousness' of a delayed condition, a 'not yet'" [93] (p. 365). Bloch makes it clear that hope, and the imagination that emerges from daydreams, does not amount to a utopian vision alone, but acts "*as a directing act of a cognitive kind*". To use Bloch's own words:

> The anticipatory thus operates in the field of hope; so this hope is not taken *only as emotion*, as the opposite of fear (because fear too can of course anticipate), but *more essentially as a directing act of a cognitive kind* (and here the opposite is then not fear, but memory). The imagination and the thoughts of future intention

> described in this way are utopian, [. . .] not in a narrow sense of the word which only defines what is bad [. . .] but [. . .] in the newly tenable sense of the forward dream, of anticipation in general [92] (p. 12).

Needless to say, Bloch recognises that we are pervaded by both positive and negative emotions, but for him, "the most important expectant emotion, the most authentic emotion of longing and thus of self, always remains in all of this—hope" (p. 75). While for Bloch, hope is the "counter-emotion against anxiety and fear" (p. 75), for Spinoza [1632–1677], for instance, "hope is never hope without the presence of doubt, an element of ontological insecurity" [93] (p. 366). Interestingly, for Søren Kierkegaard [1813–1855], it is not hope but anxiety—'*angest*' in Danish—that drives action by driving freedom. As he put it: "anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility" [94] (p. 42). Anxiety, for Kierkegaard, is an "intermediate term" between possibility and actuality (p. 49), between being able to act and the actualisation of that possibility. As Rollo May explains [95], anxiety emerges every time people engage with something new. Because it is new, they do not know what they are going to experience. It is this unknowability that generates anxiety. Kierkegaard uses the image of the abyss, and the sense of dizziness it produces, to illustrate the sense of anxiety that arises when confronted with the unknown. As he puts it, the dizziness one feels when looking "down into the yawning abyss" is the same dizziness one feels when "freedom looks down into its own possibility" [94] (p. 61). However, as May clarifies, 'normal anxiety', which emerges from freedom, should not be confused with 'neurotic anxiety', which arises from an "individual's failure to move ahead in situations of normal anxiety" [95] (p. 42). While the former opens up new possibilities, the latter pulls in the exact opposite direction.

6. Dreaming Europe

The focus on mobility through the concept of hope suggests a shift away from the rational *homo economicus* and from the push/pull factors perspective towards exploring daydreams as alternative mobility drivers. As extensively discussed in Nauja Kleist and Dorte Thorsen's edited volume, *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration* [96], for millions of Africans, migration is the only response to uncertainties and hardships. The dream of Europe is still strongly perceived and widely shared, despite intensified border controls and the well-known risks associated with crossing the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. However, Africans' dreams—that is, the "anticipation of Not-Yet-Become", as suggested in Bloch [92] (p. 11)—are not "pure fantasy", as they are connected to "social imaginaries of the good life or 'sparks' of faith or confidence, however frail" that they project on Europe [96] (p. 2). It is the hope of another life awaiting them on the other side of the Mediterranean that motivates African migrants to "circumvent impediments to their mobility, [. . .] struggle with perilous situations, generate strategies to accumulate material and symbolic wealth and grasp new opportunities" (p. 3). The focus on hope does not, however, suggest that migration is simply driven by hope, or that hope is the key emotion at play. Social, economic, and political determinants in countries of origin remain crucial, as does the soft power exerted by EU member states, to which must be added the innumerable messages and videos circulating on social media, the persistent culture of emigration in many African countries, and the narratives and remittances shared by migrants going back for vacations [8].

Despite the centrality of hope, rather than identifying border-crossers as 'hoping subjects', as for instance in Ghassan Hage's work [97] (p. 107), the concept of 'dreaming subjects' will be employed here. Specifically, in *Against Paranoid Nationalism* [98], Hage links hope to contemporary transnational capitalism and the immobility it has engendered. Beginning with the premise that societies actively shape and produce hope, he explores the

type of social hope generated by a given social system, and more precisely, the kinds of hoping subjects it cultivates. Identifying hope as "a projection of our dreams of upward symbolic mobility" [97] (p. 112), Hage argues that hope consists not merely of "images of the future"—as a state of pure potentiality—but also represents "a real practical possibility that people can pursue as a concrete future project" (p. 120). The transition from "something nice to dream about" to a viable social reality is made possible insofar as hopes are "themselves drawn from the potentialities of social reality" (p. 120), that is, from lived experience.

The concept of 'dreaming subjects' adopted here is in alignment with Bloch's theorisation of hope as a daydream—a projection of an alternative future that elicits action, effort, adaptation, strategic planning, and counter-practice. This is closely related to the notion of the "dreaming subject of mobility", discussed in a previous work [8]. The ability to dream another life is due to cultural narratives, expectations, frustrations, hope, feelings of powerlessness, as much as the desire to reach the other side of the Mediterranean—factors that often outweigh the well-known risks of the journey [8]. This very narrative is vividly portrayed in the 2024 *Io Capitano*. What is striking about the film is not merely the story of the two 16-year-old cousins, Seydou and Moussa, but the conversations between them and the array of emotions that accompany their long journey. It is their dream of Europe, and their determination to realise that dream, that serves as the *Leitmotiv* of the entire film. The cousins do not simply dream of leaving Senegal for a well-paid job in Europe; their aspirations go far beyond that. Seydou, the main protagonist, hopes to become a famous singer. The two work secretly for six months to save enough money for the journey. When Seydou finally tells his mother of his plans—under the premise that he will support the family—his mother reacts strongly. She is vehemently opposed, well aware of the dangers.

Seydou explains: "I want to go to Europe to work and to help you. Many have gone and they made it, I want to help you [...]. I love music, there I can make my dream come true" [4]. Her response is immediate: "Be silent. Who told you this? [...]. There is no need for you to leave". Seydou timidly responds: "I want to leave, to become someone, I want to help you. [...] Those who made it are not better than me". His mother remains firm, warning:

> those who left ended up in the desert, they died in the desert, they died in the middle of the sea, everywhere there are dead bodies [...] do you have the slightest idea how many have died in those boats? Seydou, do you have the slightest idea of this?

Seydou's mother was not the only one cautioning against the risks. When they seek advice, they are told to find someone named Sisko, who has apparently made the journey. His warnings echo hers:

> If I were you, I would not leave. Do you think that Europe is better than Africa? Europe is not what you imagine. What you see on television and what you hear is not true. [...] you walk and see people sleeping on the streets. [...] If you two want to die, then go.

At this point, Seydou begins to waver. It is Moussa who reminds him of all their sacrifices and reignites his hope: "Europe is waiting for us. Think you'll become a great star and give autographs to white people. You'll perform on stage. [...] You didn't believe that madman, did you?" Sisko's words were not taken seriously—to the point of considering him as a "madman"—as the images he described were totally different from their imagined Europe.

Convinced once again, the cousins leave Dakar in secret. Their journey begins with hope and positive energy. The tone of the film shifts dramatically soon after the journey starts. The narrative traces well-known elements: internal routes, forged documents, bribery, high financial costs, smugglers' deceit, a brutal desert crossing (sometimes on foot),

visible corpses, abandonment of the weak, violence at the hands of Libyan police, and the physical and psychological torture of detention-camps. At this point, the cousins are separated by Libyan police. Both endure the harsh conditions of detention. Freedom is offered only to those who provide family contacts for ransom. Torture is performed openly to coerce compliance.

Seydou escapes thanks to another detainee—a carpenter—who persuades the guards that they work together. They are 'sold' as labourers and only released after completing the work assigned to them: building a perimeter wall and a fountain for a private family. Once back in Tripoli, Seydou prioritises finding Moussa. He eventually succeeds. Moussa, injured during his escape attempt, wants to return home, believing their decision to leave was a mistake. It is now Seydou who encourages his cousin not to give up:

> You won't die, I'm here! I'm here, I won't leave you. Europe is near, we're almost there. Moussa, Europe is there. We're almost there. Enough [. . .] You are a man. Overcome the difficulties! You need to be strong. Remember when you said we'd sign autographs for white people? Now stop it and let's go! Come on, let's go! [. . .] After all we've been through in the desert? They did everything to us in that desert. [. . .] Don't you remember? Stop this story and let's go. Europe is there, we are almost there. [. . .] We will realise our dream. Can't you imagine? Come on, get up, now! Let's go.

Lacking the money for two places for the Mediterranean crossing, Seydou agrees to captain the boat himself. As is common practice, he receives minimal instructions, a mobile phone and a contact number for emergencies. Unsurprisingly, an emergency arises. Seydou repeatedly calls the Alarm Phone. The woman on the line is as distressed as he is. Neither the Maltese nor Italian coastguards respond. Only the next day does an Italian helicopter arrive. The film concludes with Seydou screaming, repeatedly, "I, captain", proud and relieved to have made it with no lives lost. He is unaware of the legal consequences. In reality, the young man on whom the story is based spent six months in Italian prison, charged with smuggling.

7. B/Ordering Which Emotions?

As previously discussed, emotions play a crucial role in mobility processes. The film *Io Capitano* vividly illustrates the power of dreams in shaping actions and adaptive mechanisms in response to obstacles. In other words, as noted earlier, "human agency is about imaginatively exploring our own powers, as much as it is about using them" [91] (p. 104). The story of Seydou and Moussa is presented here not merely to underscore the influence of daydreams in motivating mobility, but also to juxtapose positive emotions with negative ones. *Io Capitano* provides an opportunity to examine this juxtaposition—not only through its narrative but also through the emotional impact that this narrative elicited among the local Senegalese population, where the film was screened in April 2024. The screenings aligned closely with EU information and awareness-raising campaigns aimed at combating smuggling and discouraging irregular migration, as extensively examined in Ida Marie S. Vammen's work [99].

Io Capitano was screened in public squares, and locals were informed in advance—not only through children, who were naturally attracted to the media technologies but also via loudspeakers. A few hours before each screening, the cinema tour travelled around the villages announcing the event. The main protagonist of the film, Seydou Sarr, also attended every screening and engaged with the audience afterwards. If one were to assess the event based on public reactions, it is evident that negative emotions surfaced during the screening. However, these were not the only emotional responses; a wide range of sentiments emerged during the numerous conversations that followed.

Although Seydou highlighted: "The director made this film to show what really happens in the desert", not all viewers appreciated the message. Some highlighted the difficulties of obtaining a visa and affirmed that Europe remains a source of aspiration—not only because of the alluring images of Italy or Paris found on Instagram, but also because no one begins the journey expecting the vessel to sink. Without alternative pathways, many see no choice but to leave. As a girl from the audience commented: "White people come here when they want without problems, why do we, if we want to leave, have to face problems and take illegal routes?" Following this comment, a young man added: "it is not common people who should see this film, but [. . .] those who hold power. To tell the Europeans: "'Stop'. If you do not give visas to our citizens, we will not give them to yours". In other words, despite the severity of the journey and the grave risks involved—well depicted in the film, from the dangers in Libyan camps to the perils of crossing the Mediterranean—many local residents, particularly the youths, were not necessarily dissuaded from contemplating the life-threatening attempt to reach Europe. Very similar frustrations have been echoed in other migration information campaigns organised by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Italian association CinemArena. As noted by Vammen and Kohl [100], the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, together with the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation launched CinemArena in 2002 (p. 5). Initially, these outdoor cinema events aimed to promote educational and information campaigns in several sub-Saharan countries, including Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, The Gambia, Nigeria, and Sudan. Since 2019, however, the cinema tour has become a visual tool for "evoking horror and trauma of death" (p. 7). The authors describe one such event they attended. Although the screening began with joyful emotions—similar to Garrone's film—the tone soon shifted to depict the grim realities of desert crossings. The screening concluded with harrowing footage from the Sky News documentary, *Europe's Migration Tragedy: Life and Death in the Mediterranean* [101]. Although it featured the involvement of NGOs in search and rescue operations, it also included disturbing images of dead bodies, including children, floating in the sea—a report that evoked pure horror.

What is particularly insightful in Vammen and Kohl's analysis is their personal observations and further investigation into the emotional impact of those screenings. Despite the traumatic imagery, attendees were still asking what alternatives were available—questions the OIM personnel were not equipped to answer. The dominant emotions the campaigns elicited were "frustration, anger, and resistance" (p. 8). Following one such screening, Vammen and Kohl recall this exchange with a group of young people:

> I think in Europe people don't understand why people go when they know they might die. But they should come here then I think they would understand. I am a university student, but I have no illusion of finding a job here. [. . .] Farming is not part of many of our dreams [. . .]. I will try *Dem Mba Dee*—go or die trying—because farming is really the last option for us. [100] (p. 8)

In short, the assumption held by EU countries—that thousands of Africans risk their lives due to ignorance of the dangers and that the circulation of dramatic and traumatic images will therefore serve as an effective deterrent—is not necessarily supported by evidence. The assumption, dominant in security studies, that fear, threat, horror, and trauma render people governable, does not automatically hold if the positive images coming from the other side of the Mediterranean continue to project an alternative and compelling reality. The knowledge that many have adds another layer to hope that needs to be taken into consideration.

If hope is indeed "superior to fear", as posited by Bloch [92] (p. 3)—which appears pertinent to the awareness-raising campaigns illustrated above—then greater consideration should be afforded to positive emotions. This does not imply that prevailing security poli-

cies are ineffective, but rather to emphasise the necessity for further research. If emotions are significant instruments of (in)action, then equal analytical weight should be placed on the influence of daydreams in motivating mobility. A cursory examination of recent data suggests that sea arrivals along the Mediterranean routes are not in decline. Excluding the exceptional figures from 2015–16—commonly referred to as the Mediterranean crisis—the number of arrivals, as reported by the UNHCR, remains considerable, particularly when aggregating entries to Greece, Italy, Malta, and Spain: 141,472 in 2018, 160,070 in 2022, 270,700 in 2023 and 50,027 up to 25 May 2025 [102].

8. Concluding Remarks

This article has scrutinised mobility by shifting the analytical lens from state-centric and security-oriented perspectives to the emotional and affective dimensions of borders. While much of the literature in International Relations and Border Studies remains overwhelmingly preoccupied with negative emotions—including fear, anxiety, trauma, and threat—this study has devoted greater attention to positive emotions, especially hope and the capacity to dream another future. By scrutinising both the technologies of control that EU states have developed in order to discourage mobility and the powerful affective drivers that incentivise mobility, the analysis has questioned the limits of current EU states' border regimes. Although border politics, deterrence campaigns, cinematic interventions, and awareness-raising strategies—all articulated through insecurity, trauma and fear—do provoke *immediate* emotional responses, they are not necessarily powerful enough to dismantle the deeper structures of aspiration and the imaginaries that Europe evokes.

Drawing from the philosophical and psychological theories of hope and through the cinematic narrative of *Io Capitano*, this article has suggested reading migrants not as fearful subjects of security but as dreaming subjects of mobility, that is, individuals who are not only able to imagine and project another future, but they are able to struggle and find the resources to achieve that very (imagined) future. Their dreams—far from being irrational—are shaped by complex social imaginaries of a world beyond as much as grounded in the stark realities of exclusion and marginalisation. International mobility is thus constituted not only by the fears that states seek to impose but also by the hopes that migrants cultivate. This duality—between bordering as a practice of fear and mobility as an act of hope—suggests that new lenses through which to approach securitised borders and mobile subjects are needed.

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Notes

1 The concept of 'border-crossers', rather than the concept of migrants, is preferred here. It refers to those who left their country and crossed, or are about to re-cross, multiple borders irregularly. Their lives are suspended in a condition of limbo, as it is unclear what is going to happen to them, whether caught, imprisoned or forcibly returned to their country of nationality or to one of the transit countries see [8].

2 In this article, Europe and EU refer to the very same geographical space. We use 'Europe' as a way of highlighting the vocabulary used by migrants, which rarely, if at all, refer to the EU. We refer to the EU when discussing official politics and practices.

[3] Delumeau describes the West as a fear ridden civilization, a fortress under siege, struggling to defend itself during the centuries of fear from the Black Death to the wars of religion (XIV-XVI). The "fortress under siege" (cité assiégée), to which Delumeau refers to, is still the Church rather than the state but, as he clarifies, it is the Church as power (p. 34).

[4] The quotations included here are taken from the film subtitles in Italian. The translation from Italian into English is the first author's.

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