To Care like a Pirate, to Pirate Care:

Ethics of Confrontational Search and Rescue, Practiced by Sea Watch

by Morana Miljanovic

I. Introduction

The Central Mediterranean is the deadliest border in the world, guarded by mechanisms established by the European Union and its member states.[1] It it so because legal and safe routes of escape from war, slavery, torture, rape, inhumane and humiliating treatment, other forms of violence, and economic injustice and insecurity, have been closed by these states.

On 22 December 2018, the crew of Sea Watch 3 brought 32 humans floating in a dinghy in international sea to the safety of the ship. We headed to the closest safe port to disembark the survivors of the world's deadliest border but were not let in for over 2 weeks, so we "loitered deliberately"[2] some miles from Malta, waiting, out on the sea.

Waiting, trying to explain to those who have just escaped abuses mentioned above, why exactly Europe is afraid of them, telling them that our teams on land are working very hard to appeal to humanity of state functionaries (it was Christmas after all), deaf to the word of international law (inconvenient provisions originally made to apply to lives of white male sailors). That is a story of state terror, capitalism, socially organized death, borders, racism. There is another story though. What we did those two weeks was not only waiting. We lived, each day, the world we wanted to see, there and then.

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1 See Grodotzky (2020) for a brief history of this border regime, and IOM: *Missing Migrants Project. Tracking Deaths Along Migratory Routes.* International Organization for Migration, https://missingmigrants.iom.int.

2 Maltese coastguard, in an email sent to Sea Watch 3 Bridge, in the week following the rescue.

II. "Here and now", we value care

Vital part of this prefigurative politics (Boggs 1977; Graeber 2009; Dixon 2014) are relationships of care. Caring by crew members for other crew members, for the ship, for the guests (survivors) and care of the organization for the crew, can all be seen as a function of a successful rescue mission. Certainly, without considering physical and psychological well-being of crew members as well as guests, and rusty parts on deck that must be chiseled and painted, rescue missions could be undermined. But there is more to relationships of care as social relationships on a ship: they embody value. Social relationships are created through human action, when a general potential to act somehow becomes concrete action, whereby value is generated (Munn 1983). Within an temporary autonomous space[3] of the Sea Watch 3, a common sense of dissidence creates a dissident community (Federici 2018). This is a social system - a structure of creative action (Graeber 2001:230) – and it is within that structure that "people asses the importance of what they do (…) as they are doing it" (*idem*:47).[4] In other words, crew members on the ship create value as they are creating social relationships daily through they own actions.

That care might be a central value on board should be hardly surprising for a project the very existence of which demonstrates care for human lives that European states do not care for (not in the positive sense implied above; elected politicians do have an interest in that these human lives are lost at sea and that such deaths deter future departures from places such as war-torn Lybia). However, many unfortunate flip sides of professedly radical communities "defending" certain human rights[5] tell a story of discrepancies between *caring for* and *caring about*. Virginia Held, writing about the ethics of care, reminds us that "these distinctions may not be as clear as they appear, since when we take care of a child, for instance, we usually also care about him or her, and although we could take care of a child we do not like, the caring will usually be better care if we care for the child in both senses." (Held 2006:41)[6] Focusing on this "better" care, Akwugo Emejulu's concept of *care-full solidarity* is of interest. Emejulu (2017) pointed out that "care about others is not mere empathy. To care about others requires development of political imagination that takes seriously the lived experiences of the

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3   I was tempted to use Hakim Bey's (1995) term "temporary autonomous zone" but refrained, considering that the ship did not sail out with the intention to found an anarchist enclave, but rather to return to ports within state control, bringing rescuees to safety.

4   This is how Graeber defines value, in his "Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams". Besides finding this understanding illuminating in general, when it comes to conceptualizing care specifically, I find it interesting what happens to statements such as "care is both a practice and a value" (Held 2006:42) under the lenses of value defined through action.

5   Marilyn Strathern (1988) pointed out that any notion of "rights" ultimately refers to a framework of property. Western notion of human rights too is rooted in the intellectual tradition with assumptions of ownership of own unique individual person. While I think that a better framework for human rights is possible, I continue using the term along the lines of best what we have got, and, more importantly, because it is sufficiently clear what is meant, at least as long as radical movements refer to this legal category.

6   Unsurprisingly, the productive distinction comes from ethics of care as feminist ethics (Held 2006), and the gap between caring about a certain human right and caring for humans that should have that right, has often been related to problems of the hierarchy of gender.

most marginalized." For Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998:83), ethics of care has to do with "attentiveness, responsibility, responsiveness and the commitment to see issues from differing perspectives." Maria Puig de la Bellacasa reminds us that the word "care" is burdened, contested, disruptive, common, omnipresent, an on-going intervention, ambivalent, and "like a longing emanating from the troubles of neglect, it passes within, across, throughout things" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017:1). For Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher, care entails "everything we do to maintain, continue and repair "our world" so that we can live in it as well as possible" (*idem* 2017:3), which led Puig de la Bellacasa to articulate politics of care as one that "engages much more than a moral stance; it involves affective, ethical and hands-on agencies of practical and material consequence...it also suggests interdependency as the ontological state in which humans and countless other beings live." (*idem* 2017:4). For Donna Haraway, "Caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning." (Haraway 2008:36) A multifaceted concept of care, including concrete work of maintenance as well as political and ethical commitments of interdependent persons in relations, underpins this piece as well. *Caring about* and *caring for* correspond to *why* and *how* of the material practices of a search and rescue mission and life on board a rescue ship. To the extent that contents of care on the ship Sea Watch 3 are delimited by my interviewees, it is their (implicit) concepts of care that constitute what care means.

III. New villains of all nations

Turning pirate in the first half of the 18th century was not only a statement about class, nationhood, and race[7], it was also a deliberate choice of a (very short and merry) life lived out of reach of abusive employers of the capitalist states accumulating wealth in the Atlantic trade, choice of life by the values of egalitarianism, collectivism, and anti-authoritarianism (Rediker 2004). It was life lived on a ship, an autonomous zone of pirates of various national and ethnic/racial origins, governed by the crew collective, and it was "a struggle for life against socially organized death" (Rediker 2004:154). Inasmuch as those pirates rejected the notion that their loyalties should lie with a particular nation state, and came from a wide variety of places, Rediker called them "villains of all nations."

Differences to the crew doing sea rescue in the Central Mediterranean in the year 2019 are many (to begin with, life expectations: the form that state terror in this age takes against white European dissidents is not hanging), but few similarities are worth noting. If for nothing else, then for an utopian curriculum mapping out all resistance movements throughout history. For weaving new narratives of bed-time stories to tell as a pedagogical practice that "transforms

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7   Rediker used the words "dramatized concerns of" referring to class, nationhood, race, and gender. Regarding the latter, from the evidence he offered, it seems that this was at best true in very few cases and not structural.

all aspects of a being: intellect, imagination, sensibility, and will" (Lozano Lerma, in Walsh 2017:278; translation mine).

The ways of socially organizing death also differ. Instead of an underfed, disease-stricken and brutally disciplined white sailor, facing dangers at sea for a meager salary, we see tortured black bodies trapped in war or enslaved. The sailor dared to head for a place with plentiful food, socialized heath care, and social order where captain slept in bed equal to others and could be released from his responsibility at any moment. He knew that the odds were against his life being long. The refugee dares to leave the horrors behind. She/he faces the dangers at sea knowing that death is highly probable, for life in safety and dignity is possible. Both are terrorized by states: lately they invest in so-called Lybian coastguard rather than gallows shows. Pirate chooses the terror-instilling image to keep safe from fighting; refugee has no control over his image and can not afford one of a terrorist in a fear-governed place where she is looking for safety. You will have noticed that the focus has shifted from the rescue crew to the survivors. In the next paragraphs, I will put it back on the crew, because within it was where I was able to observe the relationships of care, for practical reasons.

IV. Pirate care

The Centre for Postdigital Cultures, Coventry University, UK, came up with a term of "Pirate Care" and convened a conference to explore two related phenomenons it sought to denote. One is dissolution of social services of contemporary capitalist states in the West, which pushes these services towards illegality. The second consists in emerging of networks and communities of care, outside of state structures. Sea Watch participated, testifying about the criminalization of care.

What I hope to contribute here is a closer look at what pirate care means on Sea Watch 3, and learning opportunity through poking at practices that might be a useful anchor for expanding political imagination through lenses of care and piracy as ethical and political concepts. While it has been noticed that care given by organizations such as Sea Watch is being criminalized, shifting the focus from what states do, pursuing their project of socially organized death that aims at keeping privilege within the fortress, to what a crew of a rescue ship does, in their struggle for life worth living as well as life of any human.

Looking at relationships of care, I wondered to what extent they are created in ways that extend beyond a particular mission, perhaps amounting to form a core of Sea Watch "culture", how much of it emerges in unique crew constellations and among specific personalities of crew members, and how much is deliberately sought, nourished and channeled by the

structures and protocols in place. I interviewed 12 Sea Watch activists[8] who have been with the organization for several years and experienced multiple missions.

Despite the clear politics of valuing human life as such as minimal common ground, Sea Watch crews assemble persons of different ideological commitments. More different than Sea Shepherd, for example (according to Phillip) and less different than some other NGOs, where sexism is tolerated, for example. Common cause – even though it is one that is in opposition to state policy – does not in itself explain caring relationships among crew members, as "people with common cause can be assholes to each other" too, in words of Kim. Interestingly, it is exactly the common goal and common cause that has also led to failure of crew care in some cases, according to Ruben, "because we always put the mission first, and sometimes we should say crew first", not as regards safety on board but giving time off to hard-working volunteers. Common cause does account, according to Ariane, for more caring among the crew of Sea Watch 3 compared to a crew of a commercial ship, where one works for a competitive wage. Fabian Melber identified the common challenge of having to cope with stressful and traumatizing situations, images, and stories, as contributing to "very strong sense of caring for each other within the crew." He noted that difficult experiences on the sea and witnessing others' emotional responses to those experiences bring together people who begin a mission as strangers, with very little in common, and bond strongly as a community. Pressures and risks associated with state policy towards sea rescue has that effect on crews as well as (other) organization members, bringing them close in a "family" way (according to Fabian Melber). This is how caring for each other's psychological well-being becomes both a by-product and a function of successful mission and work of Sea Watch that enables the missions. However, beyond common fears, there is an understanding of how the others feel that is fundamental to crew care, according to Fabian Melber.

Almost all interviewees believe that the social dynamics on the ship heavily depends on individual personalities of crew members. However, the composition is not random since the crewing department seeks a good "mix" of experienced and inexperienced persons and "fitting personalities". According to one interviewee (Phillip), long-time Sea Watch activists have imprinted certain rules of performing socially. Occasional misfits occur and a "bad mood" around a person complaining about food, for example (according to Fabian Warnatz). Crews being mixed in the sense of different backgrounds of individuals entail different ways those individuals perceive own identity and role as well as the aims of Sea Watch. Some come from radical left backgrounds and have seen themselves as pirates and the mission of the organization as one of making and statement and challenging the border regime, beyond humanitarian work (according to Ruben). Some crews become close and stay close, some do not. Size of the community is significant: as the organization grew from a small informal group where everyone knew each other well, had beers together, and could take care of each other,

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8   Daniel Bebawi, Frank Dorner, Alexandra Ecke, Kim Aaron Keaton-Heather, Phillip Kahn, Anne-Paul Lancel, Ariane Masson Ville Allaman, Fabian Melber, Carolin Mohrke, Ruben Neugebauer, Lorenz Schramm, Fabian Warnatz. All interviewees but one are white European; three are female and nine male. In the text that follows they are referred with their names only, with the exception of two Fabians.

when there are hundreds of volunteers in an NGO, it happens that "people get forgotten about" (Ruben). On the other hand, there is a larger sea rescue community that one can find in places like Berlin, and talk to someone with similar experiences even if they were not on the same mission or even same ship and organization; while in the early days of Sea Watch, composed hundred per cent of volunteers committed to the cause, people would "push each other into self-exploitation" (Ruben).

Two interviewees (Alexandra and Fabian Melber) mentioned appreciation and respect for one's work – for work of each and every person on the ship – as an important pillar in the caring culture of Sea Watch; Fabian considers it to be key for the social system of Sea Watch. Much of the relationships of care seem to grow around work as collaborative effort, where a crew member is open to learning new skills and using them to contribute to the common goal. Others are appreciated for the contribution they bring. If the work is to be done safely, one has to look after fellow crew members, pointed one interviewee (Kim). Several interviewees mentioned skill-sharing as one of the key values and practices on board.

Most of my interviewees brought up the buddy system as an important mechanism of crew care and a hallmark in evolution thereof. The buddy system is practiced during missions, where crew members paired as buddies keep a check daily on each other's psychological well-being. This mechanism takes into account that in the context of a community of activists, the "marginalized" from the above-cited quote of Akwugo Emejulu, can mean those individuals who do not make friends easily, and who do not get their ideas heard. It is seen in a very positive light by all of the interviewees who talked about it. In the words of Ariane, everyone gets support, nobody is alone, and everyone has at least one person they are comfortable with even when they don't click well with the crew. However, care oriented structures such as the buddy system have been lagging behind the fast-growing organization, according to Ruben.

Another structural element of crew care are mission pre-briefings and de-briefings, done by psychologists. These are not regarded as highly (some interviewees noted that quality of psychological briefings varies a lot, depending on who is doing it) but one interviewee (Lorenz) observed that a pre-briefing tends to be the first moment when the entire crew gets together and shares this "emotional start of the mission", and is therefore useful. Heads of departments also de-brief those in their department, and together with Head of Mission and captain are persons to go to in case of individual grievances. To what extent and how this mechanism is used and useful heavily depends of personalities involved, according to Lorenz.

Most of care among crew happens more organically, such as bringing someone food, taking over someone's watch, noticing that someone has not slept, making oneself available to listen to others. After-work beer during shipyard time and after-mission beer after a stressful mission are reported to be "quite a thing" (Lorenz).

Almost all interviewees described the social structure on board as hierarchical at first, but when prompted to explain,[9] they described a goal-oriented and highly though not fully horizontal system where roles and responsibilities are allocated based on knowledge, skills and competences, each crew member makes decision within their domain of competence and trusts that others know what they are doing. Two interviewees (Kim and Fabian Melber) see it as a "natural hierarchy", as opposed to an enforced one, based on specific knowledge sets required of specific functions on board; and as as "flat" as it gets. Kim pointed out that everyone's voice is heard – although whether one would voice an opinion is up to an individual crew member – and that this has been "built into the organization from the beginning, and not something that grew organically on the ship. It was consciously decided to have as flat a hierarchy and as inclusive environment as possible." Such a structure he sees as a "sign of mutual respect and mutual respect is basis of care." Daniel spoke of "hierarchy of skills and experience, not hierarchy of rank." Fabian Melber emphasized domain specific knowledge as the organizing principle on the ship that is fundamentally "community operated," explaining that, for example, it will be the engineers who know best about engines and will thus make decisions concerning engines. In the words of Ariane: "On the ship you need people who know what they are doing, that is why I accept authority of others, because they have knowledge that is useful." I observed skills and experience shaping division of labor and responsibility in a way that is not cleanly hierarchical – as in the relationship between a captain and a doctor, for example, where doctor does not decide what course the ship takes, nor does the captain decide which treatment to apply to a certain person. Different skills, knowledge and experience correspond to responsibilities in different domains. However, since decisions of most experienced and thus most responsible sailors (captain, chief engineer, bosun) and those of the Head of Mission affect all crew, they are made in a way that communicates a degree of hierarchy. Functional allocation of responsibilities includes the captain and the Head of Mission, functions borne by persons whom the crew trusts to make decisions that affect everyone on board, based on their best knowledge. (Unlike the crew of a pirate ship, not everyone on the Sea Watch 3 is a sailor and there is no general council that could overrule a captain.) Everyone is invited to voice concerns, ask questions, and propose approaches, both on board and on the online platform (Discourse), and nobody is "beyond question after the fact" (Daniel). In the words of Kim, it "comes down to equality. The concept of equality is why the ship was there in the first place, pushing politically and operationally in the central Mediterranean," in contrast to the inequality of the system where white persons would not be let to drown. However, certain structures such as the layout of morning meetings reveal hierarchy: captain, head of mission and bosun always have a word, while other crew members may raise a point if they ask to speak, irrespective of whether there are updates or not (the reason why morning meetings were established) and who has the information. Formally, crew members are informed rather that partaking in decision-making, not only in matters where specific knowledge and quick decision-making are required. I have also

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9   My choice and drive to value, seek out, practice and theorize horizontal structures as opposed to those based on
    domination certainly influences the way I approach research.

observed an instance where specific knowledge based decision making in small groups of "experts" was over-ruled by a person and/or a group of persons on land. Informally, persons carrying the functions of the captain, head of mission and bosun welcome and take suggestions of all or some crew members into account, to varying degrees. There is a wide range of differences between understanding of how the system works among the individual crew, professional and permanent staff. One interviewee (Lorenz) observed that opinions and proposals of crew members who are shy or disliked are less likely to be heard. Lorenz also noted that skill-sharing acts as an equalizing mechanism: everyone is invited to learn new skills. Another, whose function has been that of a captain (Anne Paul), declares himself in favor of strong hierarchy on board, and fears that it is "impossible to keep the balance, compromise between hierarchy and being friends and caring for other." One interviewee (Caroline) explained the difficulties of decision making affecting persons one knows closely and cares about, where it is "difficult to detach yourself" and make your decision not be colored by your personal relationship, typically a close friendship. The mechanism that is most helpful in such cases consists in awareness that this is going on, and turning to group decision making. Off the ship, the organizational decision making body was born out of the commitment to "decide together and not have a hierarchy and that was how we created the worst hierarchy you can have" (Ruben). Due to the large number of people participating in the weekly teleconference call, so-called Monday Telco, which is the decision making forum, discussions are difficult and decisions are *de facto* made about ideas that had been discussed first in small circles of friends. One interviewee (Anne-Paul) spoke about "high amount of meetings, talks, I found sometimes this a bit excessive but I see that it works and therefore I accept it...Sitting together and talking contributes to the feeling of being together and prevents from excluding people." Since the ship has been reclassified in 2019 and thus new standards and mandatory requirements apply, it has become a lot more professional, "less hippie" (Anne-Paul) and there have been concerns about the changing culture of Sea Watch. Two interviewees (Alexandra and Phillip) observed occasional tensions between professional seafarers and non-professional crew. In the early days of Sea Watch, the approach was entirely experimental, by a small group of activists that got a ship before they knew what to do with it and learned by doing. Over time and under changing political circumstances, organization has been going through growth, institutionalization, (re)structuring[10] and professionalization. Some of the mechanisms established for the ship were a reaction to a conflict, such as the one between the photographer on board and the rest of the crew, and they have nurtured more empathy and understanding between them, according to Fabian Melber. More generally, the impetus to constantly be proposing changes, as improvements, and always-in-the-move dynamics that comes with it and strongly marks the culture of Sea Watch, can be seen as an expression of care.

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10 For example, there was an experimentation with a centralized way of working as an organization, one that turned out disastrous and was replaced by autonomous groups working as teams, each on one of the core tasks. At the moment (April 2020), the organization is undergoing a new process of integrating agile learning and considering modifications to its system in terms of communication, coordination and decision making.

Concepts of reliance and responsibility spring out of the interviews. The context of search and rescue and survival shapes the atmosphere of relying on each other and the ship, which, according to Daniel, "brings best in people. You get intensely close even with people who if you met them in different circumstances you would not be great friends." Daniel also noted a "natural selection" of those who would join the ship for glory, "because there isn't much." Anne Paul emphasizes that "on a ship, everybody is responsible for everybody", not just a certain chosen circle, and "on board you say thank you for keeping me safe."

One interviewee (Kim) noted five similarities between pirate crews of the Golden Age of piracy and the crew of Sea Watch 3: intolerance of abuse of the authorities, posing a problem for them, inclusive attitudes among the crew, a "trailblazing anarchic example-setting" way of doing things, and loyalty to the cause. Abuse was "the main motivating factor" for piracy, Kim observed, where "crews decided that there is no reason why they should be abused by people who had more money than them. Expand your idea of self further out (…) and if you recognize that somebody withing the human race is being abused in the most vile way (…), you go out and do your own thing." Sea Watch crews see abuses of people in Lybia (torture, slavery, rape, etc.) as intolerable, human life and freedom of movement as valuable irrespective of race, and it runs the ship in their own way, operating "outside of the wishes of the states, not outside of the law." Which leads to trailblazing: it is "where we say fuck it we are going to set up and operate in our way. We are going to make that work. Create an organization amongst ourselves that does operate properly and does operate to high standards. How things could be. This is maybe lost in the narrative of piracy. (…) What Sea Watch is saying is that there is other way, going against the state in a hard way, not on a theoretical level. Getting into ports where we are told by states we are not allowed. Forcing Europe to recognize the reality of the situation." Similarly, Daniel spoke of "the opportunity to establish your own rules away from land", and Fabian Melber pointed the "our way" approach, the fact that Sea Watch never collaborated with any government, loyalty to each other among crew members, and "go for it" recklessness and short-term planning, as pirate elements of the Sea Watch 3 crew culture. However, among the interviewees, several saw no mutual grounds with pirate crews, given their understanding of pirates as brutal, "quite unpleasant people taking ships" (Daniel), "very desperate people doing whatever to feed their families" (Anne-Paul), their perception of crew members that embrace the pirate symbols as kids who do not was dishes (Carolin), and/or pirates' focus on themselves (Ariane).

Regarding the inclusiveness, Kim mentioned Mary Reed, Anne Bonny, and Grace O'Malley, who were pirates equally respected among their pirate crews as male pirates, and former black African slaves who were offered to join pirate crews as equals to whites. He pointed to mariners' world – especially commercial shipping – of our day, which is "hugely biased to white male crew" and stated that "Sea Watch has definitely the most inclusive crew among the various crews I sailed with." However, if one compares Sea Watch crew not with structurally sexist systems such as the one commercial shipping, but with some other communities with radical politics, then the picture is that of a less inclusive one, as observed

by one interviewee (Lorenz). Although male crew members still outnumber the female ones, I have observed that opinions of female crew members carry as much weight and are given as much attention as those of male crew members. Lorenz observed that female crew members "feel more responsible for care work and get more care work jobs, and men get more screwing and lifting jobs," reflecting the wider society. Similarly, Daniel sees poor gender balance on Sea Watch to be a "wider world problem, not Sea Watch problem. Female crew members tend to be guest coordinators, cultural mediators, cooks, not RHIB drivers, bridge officers nor engineers" and this is no surprise given the sexist system of formal education of seafarers. However, care in this aspect can entail what Daniel explains as follows: "I try to catch myself and make sure that I'm giving equal chance to everyone to learn stuff, give people experience so they are more able to do their job. I hope and I don't think there is a culture of restricting women to specific roles. It's a deeply rooted problem you will every where if you look for it." Crew is composed of white persons from rich countries; there are nearly no people of color among crews.

Loyalty to the cause connects pirate crews to Sea Watch crews as well as Sea Watch activists in general, in the sense of putting the cause above individuals and the organization and being collectively held to account for one's actions. Looking after each other in this context is understood as a prerequisite for looking after our guests (rescued survivors), which in turn is (part of) the mission and part of the cause. However, as pointed above, this doesn't always play out without difficulties.

Caring for the ship translates into caring for the guests. In the words of Daniel: "Without the ship being in good order, we'd be in trouble. That focuses people on being a good community, cleaning, being responsible." There is a common understanding that consequences of lack of care for the ship can mean a "a bad rescue, where our actions could contribute to people dying" (Daniel), or inability to stay operational, if the organization fails to comply with legal standards regarding the condition of the ship.

V. Here and now, we value care

First, a word on "we". It should be already clear from the above that the Sea Watch crews are not homogeneous. What one interviewee (Lorenz) finds precious on Sea Watch 3 is exactly the width of age range and backgrounds of crew members. On the flip side, there is no one single political understanding, commitment and aim shared by all. This is also true when it comes to perception and interpretation of what a crew does and how they do it. [11] For some of us at least, what we do is "staying with the trouble", in the words of Donna J. Haraway: an

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[11] As I write these lines on board of the Sea Watch 3, there is a proposal to introduce evening plenum get-together-s where individual concerns can be voiced in a way that is not viable in morning meetings. This was triggered by an incident where a crew member spoke to someone coming to the ship as himself, but was misunderstood as representing the crew or the organization.

ethical and political commitment and action starting from our specific ability to respond amidst the mess of the central Mediterranean: our response-ability.

One interviewee (Fabian Warnatz) described the life on ship as "living the utopia, the world as it should be." This takes place in extraordinary situation of being far out on the open sea, in a confined space and with a clear goal, aware that one has to live with the other crew members for three weeks (or more). In the words of one interviewee (Alexandra): "Socially, you have to behave more carefully than at home." Another (Carolin) stated that a lot of the notion of living the world one wants to see "is romanticized and heightened by external difficulties you have, but yes, that is how working together and living together should work, caring for the well being of a person standing next to you." According to Kim, "I don't think Sea Watch is consciously doing it but there is a better way and we are going to live out that better way. (…) Living out the value of equality, the whole point of the mission, and that is care." My own experience points to living an utopia, albeit a very imperfect one: the point is not that it is working smoothly or fully aligned with all (my) values and desires, but that it is a model of doing things differently which has gone beyond theory, a living and learning one too.

VI. And we laugh

An important ingredient in pirate care (and any resistance movement for that matter, for it is a sloppy revolution if one cannot dance) is laughter. Describing Atlantic pirates of the Golden Age, aware of deadly dangers, Rediker writes: "They looked this grim reality in the eye and laughed." My personal experience on the ship, rolling terribly and carrying survivors of horrors who will keep facing grim structural violences in Europe, survivors who became my friends, is one of much laughter. Not only does it have potential to "liberate from fear and thus destroy death" (Eco 1980:511, translation mine), it implies reciprocity and respect, nourishes us and enables us to look the grim reality makers in their eyes and show them how we care for each other. It also happens around stories about silly things crews have done on the ship being told, and this is the glue of crew loyalty.

More generally, joy of life – pirates would use the word "merry" here – is about spirit of dissidence itself. Atlantic pirates of the Golden Age would presumably be appalled by the lack of rum on board of Sea Watch 3, but they would likely be impressed with good food, warm friendships, music, and kitchen-towel duels in the galley. What joy of life is not, however, is dissidence itself. Especially not when practiced by a group of privileged white Europeans. Ashen Ruins (2002) reminds us that "a constant quest for fun will not bring down capitalism and the State." Just like fire dancing, dumpster diving, shoplifting, and trying to drop out are not revolutionary strategies, merriment on the high seas is not one either, and it is exercising white privilege that makes them all possible. We laugh so that we can fight – and care. We want to see the structures of class, racist and sexist violence burn, and it is not because we

were tied to heaters as children and beaten up by mobs in dark alleys. We want to see pain they bring fade away and fill the space with care.

VII. And we learn-teach

Crew and guests, we sit together and listen to stories of each other. We do not cut off personal from political or intellectual from emotional. We converse, we dialogue. We don't turn a blind eye when fear appears, no matter what our skin color might be, fear that triggers white supremacist beliefs we had all been socialized to accept. Do we actively unlearn racism? For there is a long way to go from recognizing the equal value of a human life to practicing rejection of notions of inferiority of people of color that are implicit in our culture. I have witnessed and participated in several discussions regarding sexism, and observed both personal and organizational commitments to recognizing and not tolerating sexism.

VIII. We do not eschew violence, or do we?

Practicing thoughtful care and analytically focusing on care as a political and ethical approach to organizing should not be read as an argument for lifestylism or against violence as such. Laughter with not abolish particular forms of state-organized and state-backed violence. Caring and solidarity can be much more than stand-alone issue-based relational practices. We care for each other so that we can carry out our missions and we care for each other because care is what we want to see in the world. But our utopia is not a hippie one.

When Carola Rackete entered Italian waters and the port of Lampedusa without permission on 29 June 2019, taking 40 survivors to a place of safety as was her duty as captain under international maritime law, her (violent?) act remained within the boundaries of the law. What if there was no other way to protect health of survivors but engaging in less ambiguous and illegal violence? What if, in order to prevent loss of human life, violent disobedience was necessary? For Sea Watch, the strategy of strictly following the law is backed by the rationale of being able to stay active. However, the ship has spent most of the recent few years captured in ports of Italy and Malta. Its captains have to deal with court system but not terrorism charges. Within an ever changing environment, what actions aimed at opposing racism are considered violent, and which violent actions are appropriate tactics remains to be evaluated according to particular circumstances.

IX. We are visible, confrontational and controversial

At the cost of spending much time effectively detained in ports, Sea Watch participates in media discourses and fights open political battles. It dances a troubled and delicate dance between advocacy and resisting border policy, drawing attention to "racism, freedom of movement, history of colonialism, capitalism, fighting a small corner of something really big" (Daniel). However, several interviewees pointed to low profile solidarity networks on the shore, "welcoming the refugees and helping them be accepted in their town...They are pirates fighting in the open, not hiding. We do something good with this ship, but we go home to our lives." (Ariane) Daniel said that it is easy to attract attention being "super sexy when you have a ship, but what we do is simple and there is much more newsworthy projects making more real differences in people's lives..I visited some projects in Italy, you never heard of them and you never will."

X. We value care, defend it and find defensible, not because it is legal

Whether one identifies as humanitarian, activist, or neither, persons and organizations participating in search and rescue and similar acts of supporting basic human rights tend to publicly communicate about their actions referring to legal frameworks. For example: "Saving lives is not a crime", and "Humanitarian aid is always legal". What I find dangerous about this discursive tactic is that laws can be and are changed, by the very same structures of institutionalized power (state) whose main produce is exclusion and murder. Many historic atrocities were committed within legal frameworks existing at the time. Another danger lies in the implicit distancing from everything that is "a crime". Such as sitting on a bus in the USA if you are a black person, in 1955. Or, engaging in consensual sex with another person of the same sex, in 68 countries in the world in 2019.[12] On the other side, even those supporting the status quo legal orders do not always consider all laws to be just and necessary, and have little trouble disrespecting them, if logistically viable. Sea Watch is calling upon the (re-)establishment of legal and safe routes of passage because their absence is deadly.

XI. Where do we go from here

While Sea Watch 3 will neither rescue all those in distress at sea nor it is likely to change the murderous EU border policy, what it does is show that a different world is possible. If "politics is the praxis of taking up distance with regard to the state, (...) within and upon state's

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12   See https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2019.pdf

territory" (Critchley 2012:112-113) and of weaving small affinity groups "together into a common front, a shared political subjectivity" (*idem*, 114) and if there is hope that political imagination of our generation or of those to come can proceed beyond demands for political representation, then articulating this world emerging from relationships of care can be an ethical and political commitment. Perhaps we figure out how to construct an overarching political subjectivity without blinding ourselves to our differences - for revolution is also "becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change in established, outgrown responses, for instance, it is learning to address each other's differences with respect." (Lorde 1984:140). If the public sphere is dead along with its subject, the public, whose place is taken by an impersonal structure of capital whose "centre is missing, but we cannot stop searching for it or positing it. It is not that there is nothing there - it is that what is there is not capable of exercising responsibility" (Fisher 2009:71), and if reviving the public sphere might be a way toward the alternative to capitalism that does exist, why not start with care for those beyond what is considered to belong to the private sphere? Perhaps we can put care (again) in the public sphere. Perhaps we can treat with care those in great need, try to make ourselves responsible for everybody, and grow strong and inclusive communities anchored in a place. It is hard work, for "to build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination." (hooks 2003:36). A group of people acting in care-full solidarity provide a model of society that cares about well-being of everyone. Perhaps it is true that without survival focus, practices of Sea Watch are not reproducible. Perhaps in exceptional situations such as the close-downs due to COVID-19, some become instructive. Perhaps we learn to mix and remix, try and succeed. If not, well, fellow pirates, may we then go to hell together.

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