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# Awareness campaigns to deter migrants: A neoliberal industry for symbolic bordering

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## Introduction <sup>1, 2</sup>

This chapter starts from the assumption that borders are no longer located at the margins of nation-state territories. Their shifting localisation within the political space (Balibar 2003), and within the bio-psycho-social, carnal, and digital experience of human beings, is the result of constant processes of construction (bordering), deconstruction (debordering), and reconstruction (re-bordering) of the border itself operated by different social actors through several means.<sup>3</sup> Within this framework, in which borders construction, representation, and policing coincide in the concept of *borderscape* (Brambilla 2015), we intend to explore European and Australian awareness-raising campaigns as symbolic bordering practices aimed at regulating the mobility of selected people towards the Global North. We adopt a holistic approach to human mobility in dialogue with critical border studies and media and migration studies, capable of considering the imbrication of symbolic and material practices in shaping (the governance of) migratory processes. Such an approach necessitates a focus on the discourses, practices, and infrastructures that allow awareness campaigns targeting refugees to act as neoliberal tools of a global regulatory regime (McNevin et al. 2016) aimed at governing ‘who and what can move (or stay put), when, where, how, under what conditions, and with what meanings’ (Sheller 2018:11).

Defined as purposive attempts to inform, persuade, and motivate behaviour by reaching audiences through organised communication activities (Atkin and Rice 2013), awareness campaigns are based on behaviour change theories and enact their bordering power through recurring storytelling strategies, visual politics, and social mobilisation activities implemented by governmental, inter-governmental, or non-governmental organisations. This chapter shows how, in the end, these campaigns operate as symbolic instruments contributing to the extension of the power of Australian

or European state(s) beyond their sovereign borders. This is despite being formally aimed at raising awareness of the threats of irregular migration, the danger of human trafficking, the challenges faced by the returnees, or the difficulties of living in destination countries. Hence the ultimate aim of these awareness campaigns can be understood as ‘to contain migrant lives at the threshold between Europe and the world of “others”’ (Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2020:25).

By highlighting the narratives that criminalise migration while normalising moral geographies of the world (Musrò 2019), our objective is to unveil and deconstruct the ‘theatrical’ dimension (Cuttitta 2014) of these bordering practices. First, an overall analysis and reflection on European and Australian awareness campaigns enables us to identify recurrent elements of what can be interpreted (also) as a media ‘genre’ of a migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013) set up in recent decades by organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on behalf of Western governments. Second, we aim to understand to what extent the success, rather than the failure, of these externalised migration control measures is functional for even more state or supra-national agencies control (McNevin et al. 2016; Watkins 2020). Finally, this chapter offers a contribution to the hypothesis that awareness campaigns, rather than acting on their explicit audiences’ perceptions, i.e. refugees and the communities in countries of origin, act more and more by narrating the process of bordering to body politics across receiving communities (Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2020). In doing so, these campaigns contribute to the legitimisation of bordering power itself and aim to orient Western public opinion and policy debates around migration issues, thus definitively shifting their role towards the government of European and Australian populations (Rodriguez 2019).

### **The spirit of the times: (in)securitised borderscapes**

The governance of mobility is certainly one of the crucial issues at the heart of globalisation processes. The facilitation of the movement of capital and goods has not been accompanied by the same unconditional freedom and capabilities for movement for all persons,<sup>4</sup> neither by equal rights to stay or to dwell in a place (Sheller 2018). The social construction of space (Lefebvre 1991), including the practices of production and reproduction of borders, is a long-

standing process in human history. Although there is a cyclical strengthening or loosening of borders, the transition from the 20th to the 21st century has been marked by border exacerbations (Sassen 1999). The securitisation of national borders through various measures, as well as their outsourcing or insourcing, ‘contribute to a simultaneous blurring and reassertion of categories of migration’ (Menjívar 2014:255), so that one can assert that ‘the state creates illegal immigrants by making and enforcing the laws whose infraction constitutes illegality of residence’ (Fassin 2011:217). According to Wonders (2006), the social construction of the illegal and the ‘securitisation of migration’ through a border control industry clearly show that ‘borders are intentionally performed in ways that encourage some to cross them and to restrain others from doing so’ (2006:65). The way the mobility of socially undesirable people was framed from the 1990s onwards led migrants to be seen as security threats and the mobility from the Global South to the Global North as an emergency whose management ‘easily falls within the province of the exception, in the name of sovereignty’ (Fassin 2011:217).

The securitisation of migration is one of the outcomes of the social and political construction of neoliberal insecurity (Castel 1991) which has become concerned with risk and unease (Bigo 2008) in late modernity. Beck (1999) highlights that the transition to late-modern society is marked precisely by the shift from a society in which the problem of wealth distribution predominated to one in which the problem of risk distribution (and production) predominates. As Castel notes, the risk

does not arise from the presence of particular precise danger embodied in a concrete individual or group. It is the effect of a combination of abstract factors which render more or less probable the occurrence of undesirable modes of behaviour. (1991:287)

This shift towards risk management involves new forms of control and surveillance (systematic pre-detection) and gives rise to new preventive strategies of social administration, innovative in that they ‘dissolve the notion of a subject or a concrete individual, and put in its place a combination of factors, the factors of risk’ (Castel 1991:281). Bigo (2008) calls this contemporary form of governmentality the *ban-opticon*, deployed at a transnational level

and aimed at the management and surveillance (at a distance in time and space) of a minority profiled as ‘unwelcome’ (often, in Europe, also racially criminalised with an African-centred focus). The *ban-opticon*, according to Bigo (2008), is composed as a *dispositif* of discourses, specific architectural facilities (such as detention zones and reception centres), regulatory decisions, administrative measures, ‘scientific’ discourses about the reasons behind migration and asylum and relies on the field of ‘professionals of the management of unease’ at a supra-national level, which requires governments to strengthen their collaboration. This *dispositif* is characterised by

the exceptionalism of power (rules of emergency and their tendency to become permanent), by the way it excludes certain groups in the name of their future potential behaviour (profiling) and by the way it normalises the non-excluded through its production of normative imperatives, the most important of which is free movement. (Bigo 2008:32)

Whatever one may want to call it, this form of governmentality sets up a new relationship with space, time, and individuals. The risk factor opens up a temporal space of possibility (Armstrong 1995) within which undesirable modes of behaviour could materialise. Within this time frame, both coercive and less direct strategies that ‘rely on individuals’ voluntary compliance with the interests and needs of the state’ (Lupton 2013:118) are mobilised to regulate populations, mostly directed at how people move in space. Regulatory measures and policing activities increasingly take place at a distance and are put in practice not only by the state but also by other agencies and institutions, including in the mass media. Within this (in)securitised borderscape, externalisation measures thus appear as safe-distance tools, allowed by increased technological innovation, aimed at the Global North’s immunisation from the contact with undesired ‘others’, without renouncing to their (remote-control) management.

The goal of keeping people out is actually ‘to keep citizenship, resources and privilege “in”’ (Wonders 2006:79). This goal is achieved first by externalising responsibilities related to the adoption of repressive measures, such as detention and deportation, often in contrast with human rights regulations, which are increasingly discharged on the so-called neighbours countries

(usually non-European transit countries); and second by adopting measures aimed at preventing certain people from enjoying the right to apply for asylum, pushing away in time and space the possibility that they could set foot in a Western country. These externalisation policies encompass measures such as the implementation of checkpoints in transit countries, waiting zones and border officials deployed in airports, detention centres, inter-governmental agreements between destination and transit nation-states (such as the EU-Turkey agreement on March 2016 and the Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Libya on February 2017, among others), bureaucratic, biometric (i.e. EURODAC), and technological measures to screen visa requirements even before potential migrants start their journey. Finally, they also include symbolic measures, such as awareness-raising campaigns targeting potential migrants in sending (and transit) countries, and xenophobic narratives vehiculated by the media in receiving countries.

As highlighted by Mountz (2020), externalisation policies have thickened over time, starting from the 1990s, passing through an increased diffusion in the 2000s, and showing heavy adoption in the 2010s both in Europe and in Australia. The techniques of control which nation-states or supra-national institutions practise to externalise their borders thus act at a physical, symbolic, and imaginative level (Collyer and King 2015) and contribute to the reconfiguration of concepts such as sovereignty, territory, and citizenship (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles 2013). The production of this new transnational space should be, in all cases, best understood as ‘produced by the interplay of the activities of international migrants and the control practices of states intent on disciplining or harnessing those activities’ (Collyer and King 2015:6). In the next section, we will shed light on the characteristics that allow us to identify awareness campaigns as symbolic tools complementing the management of transnational (im)mobility.

### **Features and actors of the awareness campaigns multimedia industry**

Starting from the 1990s, Australia, and the European Union and its member states started to implement awareness campaigns (also called Public Information Campaigns) with the stated objective of informing potential migrants, in their countries of origin, about the risks of irregular migration, smuggling, or trafficking (Nieuwenhuys

and Pécoud 2007; McNevin et al. 2016; Watkins 2017). Such campaigns thus assume that the path of irregular migration is undertaken by people based on ignorance or skewed narratives (Schans and Optekamp 2016), and proper information could change would-be migrants' attitudes towards migratory decision-making (Pécoud 2010; Fiedler 2020).

Usually funded by migrant-receiving countries, awareness campaigns are designed and implemented through the cooperation of governmental, non-governmental, or inter-governmental organisations. Notably, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) operates as the leading service providers in this field. Despite little evidence of the effectiveness of campaigns (Browne 2015), the mentioned organisations, as well as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), also provided toolkits<sup>5</sup> offering 'methodological guidance' to improve the expected impacts of awareness campaigns. These toolkits give guidance on: carefully selecting the target audience; providing clear and accurate information based on evidence specific to the local situation; taking into consideration the language, culture, communication networks, and tools for effective design and implementation, and the specific push-pull factors that motivate migration in each local community. Furthermore, the toolkits encourage a balance between positive and negative messages, the inclusion of information for would-be migrants about the legal channels of international migration, and the combination of different media channels through iterated messaging. Finally, campaign monitoring and evaluation processes should be given special attention to refine the 'science' of campaigning and thus improve the effectiveness of campaigns (Schloenhardt and Philipson 2013).

An overview of awareness campaigns produced and disseminated in the last decades shows that the narratives conveyed are often stereotypical. These narratives highlight the violence and suffering of the journey, portray smugglers as villains and profit-driven criminals, and portray migrants as vulnerable and naive victims. Yet, the strategies used to spread them rely on several digital and non-digital dissemination channels. These channels range from community-level social events, public talks, workshops, capacity-building training, television shows and radio broadcasts, film and television advertisements, pages and posts on social media platforms, caravan tours, posters, leaflets, stickers, and so on. IOM



coordinates, provides technical assistance, trains, and funds local NGOs and civil society organisations to spread its message more than other actors. The production of these awareness campaigns engages lay people and celebrities, local religious or political leaders, journalists, returnees, and other social actors as multipliers and amplifiers of the key messages. As shown by Rodriguez (2019), the involvement of local actors in the implementation of awareness campaigns often represents an opportunity for potential income and employment for local populations.

During the last three decades, IOM established an operational presence in numerous migrant-sending or transit countries through the so- called ‘country offices’. This presence has been aimed at implementing an extensive range of programmes addressing, for example, Migrant Protection and Assistance, Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration, Counter-Trafficking, Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants, Immigration and Border Management, Labour Mobility and Human Development, and Migration Health. As we can read in one of IOM country offices webpages (i.e. The Gambia), ‘IOM also works closely with the Government of The Gambia to strengthen migration governance through national coordination frameworks and evidence-based policy design, particularly through research and collection and analysis of data to inform policymaking’ (IOM The Gambia 2021). As already highlighted, data collection of the population and analysis are crucial to screen selected people in order to assign them a risk factor, monitor and prevent their potential mobility even before this is envisioned. Awareness campaigning is in fact aimed at perception management and aspires to change migratory behaviours’ reshaping (or, at least, acting on) the migratory imaginary.<sup>6</sup>

The approach of awareness campaigns underlies the assumption that narratives can be identified among the cultural drivers of migration, as factors that can facilitate, limit, or trigger potential migrants’ decision to move, by increasing or decreasing the desirability of the act of migration, the likelihood of particular migration patterns, or the attractiveness of destinations. Narratives about risks and opportunities connected to migration and about migrants’ countries of origin or destination are produced and disseminated by a wide variety of social actors: migrants themselves, migrants’ families and communities, the diaspora, the returnees, host communities, organisations, policymakers, media, academics, and so on through different communication channels and

technologies. Interpersonal communication through ‘word of mouth’ still plays an essential role in transmitting this kind of information (Fiedler 2020).

What awareness campaigns appear to underestimate is that people’s aspirations to mobility are counterbalanced by their capability to do so and by the contextual and situational geometry of migration infrastructures (Fiedler 2020). Migration infrastructures are defined by Xiang and Lindquist (2014:122) as ‘the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility’. It is also worth noting that the scope and resources of IOM, its established experience, and the research and training activities it carries out at the international level have all contributed to creating a trademark. This trademark is not only about migration management as related to inter-governmental policy and practice advisory but is increasingly concerned with the building of a media industry in the strategic communication of (and for) (im)mobility. Despite the variety of practical applications (and the enumerable reception possibilities) of the production and dissemination model of IOM campaigns, a single tool, the C4D toolkit, shapes the way awareness campaigns are built internationally (as well as their evaluation). Moreover, thousands of social workers, journalists, laypeople, and members of government agencies are trained every year to the IOM vision. These elements give an indication of the extent to which the IOM ‘multimedia and migration industry’ is potentially able to colonise the global imaginary on migration and mobility. This is particularly true if one considers research on Gambian journalists’ perceptions of information campaigns, which found that professionals associate no-matter-what awareness campaigns to IOM. These findings reflect the visibility and the leading role of the IOM in the implementation of sensitisation activities, and this is not necessarily a plus point for their reception in some sending countries.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, there are numerous examples of alternative ways of campaigning (as the innovative project Radi-Aid demonstrates), as well as numerous individual and collective actors who may reappropriate, reinterpret, or even oppose the campaign’s original messages. However, the reach of these counter-narratives, in terms of means and resources, is far less than that of a giant like the IOM. In the next section we will focus on how these campaigns act as symbolic bordering practices through an overview of the recurring

visual and narrative elements of a sample of Australian and European awareness campaigns.

### **Visual rhetoric and narrative tropes in awareness campaigns**

According to Bishop, asylum deterrence campaigns ‘constitute a unique convergence of political media, visual rhetoric, and international communication’ (2020:1093). We have already discussed to what extent, behind these unique features, one could glimpse a unique pattern, mainly derived from IOM’s imprinting and its status as a reference in this sector. Awareness campaigns addressed at migrants and asylum seekers frequently show common traits, from both a visual and a textual point of view, even though they are adapted to local contexts and regardless of whether they are designed and implemented by IOM or other organisations. They thus constitute a media genre that nowadays acts as a production model for the source and probably also as a system of expectations for the target audiences.

In this chapter, the examples discussed offer a partial view of the corpus of awareness campaigns globally produced since the 1990s,<sup>8</sup> chosen for their recurring elements across two continents (Europe and Australia). These examples are taken from campaigns addressing human trafficking and smuggling,<sup>9</sup> as well as irregular migration. As we will show, trafficking and smuggling are often targeted interchangeably in information campaigns. In addition, the messages disseminated by antitrafficking campaigns could be interpreted as preventing all forms of migration (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007), blurring the distinction between people who have the right to ask for asylum and economic migrants who cross the border without a regular visa. The campaigns we will be mainly referring to are the following:

1. Swiss and European awareness campaign targeting Cameroon and Nigeria (2006-2007). The Swiss Federal Office for Migration, together with the contribution of the European Union, and IOM launched a campaign relying on video clips screened on sending countries national TV, printed posters, radio debates and announcements, articles in newspapers, and debates in schools. We will mainly analyse a video clip and a poster, formally aimed at ‘pointing out the risks and negative consequences of illegal migration’ (Switzerland 2007).

2. 'No Way' campaign (2014-2016), launched within Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), is funded by the Australian Government (Department of Immigration and Border Protection and Australian Customs and Border Protection Service). The campaign includes videos, radio announcements, and printed materials disseminated in strategic international settings, such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. The campaign, targeted at 'potential illegal immigrants in source and transit countries for people smuggling activity', is directed both offshore, with the aim 'to deter migrants considering illegal maritime travel as a method of arrival to Australia', and onshore 'to inform relevant diaspora communities of the changes to Australia's asylum seeker policy and to reinforce the offshore communication activities' (Department of Finance 2015). The target audiences are diaspora communities representing the highest proportions of maritime arrivals (Afghans, Pakistanis, Iranians, Iraqis, Tamils, Bangladeshis, Sudanese, Somalis, Nepalese, Rohingya, and Vietnamese).
3. 'Aware Migrants' (2016-ongoing) is funded by the Italian Ministry of Interior and managed by IOM. The campaign is aimed at raising awareness among potential migrants 'on the risks they could face along the journey and on irregular migration along the main routes from East/Western Africa across the desert and the Mediterranean' (IOM Italy 2016). As of 2017, other European countries started contributing to the campaign, with Germany the first in line. The campaign, targeting 16 African countries, was launched in English, French, and Arabic. It combines online and offline communications tools: a multilingual website with videos of real testimonials and information, pages on social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, a set of TV and radio spots, billboard and print advertisements, a song, and a short film.
4. 'Zero Chance' campaign (2019 ongoing), within Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), funded by the Australian government (Australian Home Affairs Minister), is aimed at deterring 'anyone who attempts to come to Australia illegally by boat' by informing that 'all illegal boats to Australia will be stopped and turned back' (Australian Government 2019). The campaign consists of TV, radio, press and digital advertisements, and a website containing videos and online games, predominantly targeting potential asylum seekers from Sri Lanka.

The campaigns mentioned have been produced in different historical moments for different audiences, with varying visual constructions across the multiplicity of formats and channels of dissemination. However, they show recurring traits that can be summarised as follows:

- They portray sending countries as safe and worthy to stay, while migration as dangerous and destined to fail; generally, campaigns avoid portraying receiving countries, or they portray them as impenetrable and securitised.
- They portray migrants and asylum seekers as naive victims of their ignorance and smugglers' lies.
- They evoke familial responsibility (including economic ones) to deter departures.
- They highlight migrants' regrets and frame their mobility as a moral or religious sin.
- They focus on the opposition between truth and lie, objective information versus inaccurate rumours.
- They semantically confuse trafficking, smuggling, and undocumented migration.
- They rarely provide information about regular channels of migration and only as a secondary issue.

When examining the aforementioned campaigns, produced between 2006 and 2019, the first element of particular interest to our analysis is the (re) production of the same visual landscapes, or the banishment of destination countries landscape from would-be migrants' view (both from the audience's view and from campaign characters' view, which are imagined to be the same target group). In all the videos or posters, we observe that the same desolate and scary landscape recurs: a ship in distress, personal effects or even human beings lost, or death in the waters of a more or less stormy sea, with no land in sight on the horizon. The transnational space represented through the rough waters is a space of death, tragedy, fear, and hopelessness.

As Watkins (2017) highlighted, the Australian landmass is crossed out in the *No Way* campaign posters clearly indicating that the viewer cannot reach this place. The mainland does not even appear in the video disseminated during the same campaign, in which Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, in full fatigues, reads out the same messages written in the posters, with no other background than the

campaign's red logo above the image of a boat trashed about in a stormy sea.

In *Zero Chance* posters, Australia is not crossed out but displays a symbol of reverse gear. Here, the ocean surrounding Australia appears so securitised and militarised that the idea of being able to land on some coast is (made) even more unimaginable. Also, the video produced within *Zero Chance* (which has the new commander of Operation Sovereign Borders, Rear Admiral Mark Hill, as a speaker) appears increasingly focused on the securitisation of borders through marine or aerial interception, both at a narrative and at a visual level: 'Australia's borders are patrolled all day, every day. Our borders are stronger than ever, if you attempt an illegal boat journey to Australia, you will be intercepted, returned and will face the consequences', states the Rear Admiral, while images of helicopters and navy boats patrol Australia's coasts. In the Swiss campaign's poster, we only see the sea and a lost shoe (State Secretariat for Migration 2007; see also Heller 2014:308). In *I remember*, the video that launched *Aware Migrants*, no destination appears on the horizon because the protagonist's journey (and the video) ends with his death at sea. Similarly, no mainland landscape appears in the short videos available within *Aware Migrants* website section 'Testimonies in Italy', where the personal stories of migrants who had to endure physical and sexual abuse from human traffickers along their way towards Italy are provided through a close-up shot of the person on a dark and empty background (IOM Italy 2016).

Two complementary slogans accompany these images throughout the different campaigns: 'Every year, illegal migration causes thousands of deaths. We can make it in Cameroon' (Switzerland), 'No way. You will never set foot in Australia' (*No Way*), 'Don't risk your life on an illegal boat journey. You have zero chance of illegal migration' (*Zero Chance*), 'Thousands of migrants die or were killed during their journey. Be aware' (*Aware Migrants*). Emphasis is placed on death as a foregone conclusion of these journeys, on the risk that the migrant individually takes in the face of a zero chance/no way of making it, and on his or her illegal and irresponsible conduct. In this way, the migrant is not only illegalised, but he/she is also made responsible/ culpable for his/her own death, criminalised, and preventatively invited to stay at home.

On the one hand, the message is clear: you have no right to set foot on 'our' land even in the domain of the imaginary, so do not even

(imagine to) leave, unless you want to meet death or deportation *en route*. On the other hand, the only option proposed in these messages as an alternative is immobility and the invitation to make it at home. While evoking a negative image of migration as a harmful and life-threatening initiative, the root causes of irregular migration are never tackled. Nor is attention drawn to the fact that what is suggested as a life-saving alternative or rebranded as an arena for social and economic becoming, i.e. staying at home, may conceal human-rights violations, abuse, and exploitation in countries of origin.

There is no mention of the dangers or threats that occur prior to migrants' journey.

Financial risk is another narrative trope used within the selected awareness campaigns to deter potential migrants, mostly linked with familial responsibility on the one side and with the supposed fraud committed by smugglers on the other. 'Don't waste your money and don't risk your life on a pointless journey', asserts *Zero Chance* video, completing the message with a poster drawing crying mother and daughter, where we can read: 'Before you lose everything and hurt your family: Stop. Think. Turn back! Illegal migration could lead to financial ruin. Don't make your family pay for your mistake'. Other posters depict sad, desperate, and regretful migrants saying 'My whole family had to suffer because of my wrong decision' and 'In the end, I lost every hard earned penny that my father had saved'. Following a similar approach, the *No Way* campaign video states: 'Do not believe the lies of people smugglers. These criminals will steal your money and place your life and the life of your family at risk for nothing', and the poster reinforces the message with 'Think again before you waste your money, people smugglers are lying'.

The *Aware Migrants* website, in the section 'Stories', opens with the picture of Tchamba, a 36-year-old man, and the written sentence: 'Smugglers take your money and you just become a slave. Be aware, brother'. In the *I remember* video within the same campaign, we listen to the (dead) protagonist saying 'I remember my family convinced they were giving me a better future. Mama told me take this, it's everything we have', omitting the suggested end of the story, which is that he threw away both his own life and his family's money. Subtler is the message conveyed by the video produced within the Swiss campaign, showing a young man calling his father in Cameroon from a Western city's phone booth, lying about his living and working conditions while his father appears to be in a much more comfortable living room. The clip's final message is the

slogan, ‘Leaving is not always living: don t believe everything you hear’.

Migration-related decisions do not rely only on individuals but extend to would-be migrant s community and connections both in the country of origin and in diasporic networks. Moreover, these decisions are often prompted by political, economic, or social circumstances. The way these campaigns highlight financial and familial responsibilities is aimed at triggering feelings of shame and regret strong enough to dissuade potential migrants from leaving, suggesting that they are betraying their loved ones to face certain failure. A well-known additional example is the Australian campaign targeting Sri Lankan migrants *Don t throw your money in the water* (2014 2015), where shame, regret, and financial responsibility were narrated in a comic storyboard.

The diversity of migration experiences is rarely mentioned,<sup>10</sup> so that ‘leaving one’s country systematically leads to failure, misfortune and exploitation’ (Pécoud 2010:193). In addition, the way these campaigns narrow the focus on the (Western understanding of the) family unit not only fails to address the migrant s community at large, which should be the target audience of these campaigns, but also obscures the socio-economic and political context of the countries of origin, in which migratory decision-making takes place and which often drives people to seek asylum elsewhere. By interchanging smuggling and trafficking (as in *Aware migrants*, by linking smuggling to potential slavery), these campaigns portray smugglers as profit-driven criminals solely responsible for the deaths of migrants, and migrants as stubbornly gullible and naive victims ‘fooled by the lies of people smugglers’ (*Zero Chance*). Yet, as Lupton reminds us, in late modern societies, not to engage in risk-avoiding behaviour is considered ‘a failure of the self to take care of itself a form of irrationality, or simply a lack of skilfulness’ (Lupton 2013, 122).

These campaigns attribute the responsibility for deaths at sea to the mere opportunism of smugglers, or to the stubborn persistence of migrants in not complying with the sedentary behaviour that the Western states urge them to adopt. In doing so, the campaigns avoid recognising that ‘trafficking and smuggling are indeed partly the product of tight border policies, which prompt migrants wishing to enter a country to rely on the help of third parties’ (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007:1687). This lack of responsibility obfuscates the fact that receiving countries are obliged to provide rescues at sea, to



protect human rights, and that they are ‘legally obliged to provide a means for successful asylum cases’ (Bishop 2020:1160). As stated in the toolkits provided by UNODC and IOM, awareness campaigns should inform of significant alternatives for legal migration. However, the section on alternatives to undocumented migration is usually the most scarce and inadequate on campaign websites. The *Aware Migrants* website provides a short and very generic description of the procedures on how to apply for a visa, followed by warnings on illegal presence and expulsion. *Zero Chance* does not even list this section on its website, directing the user to the official website of the Australian Department of Home Affairs, where the first sections appearing are ‘About Us’, ‘Reports and Information’, and ‘Corporate information’, whereas the ‘Immigration and Citizenship’ section, lower down the page, opens a labyrinth of drop-down menus. In addition, the messages sent by a campaign such as *No Way* assimilate undocumented migration to human trafficking, potentially confusing and also deterring persons fleeing from prosecution, torture, and human rights abuses from exercising their right to seek asylum (Musrò 2019). On the *No Way* posters, we can read, ‘No matter who you are or where you are from, you will never set foot in Australia’, or ‘If you get on a boat without a visa, you will not end up in Australia’. With Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud (2007:1689), we could argue that information campaigns are deeply ambiguous in this respect: ‘On one hand, they rely on the principle that trafficked persons are, unlike undocumented migrants, victims rather than lawbreakers; on the other hand, they tend to include all forms on unauthorised migration in their fight against trafficking’. Finally, an element across all campaigns, through which they justify themselves, is the insistence on true and reliable information. These narratives assume that potential migrants are ignorant or misinformed and that once provided with objective knowledge they would act accordingly in a causal relationship that completely underestimates the process of information reception and interpretation, the existence of other more trusted sources, and, most of all, the weight of journey’s risks against the life opportunities offered by migration (Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011; Rodríguez 2019). Governments of the Global North become the obvious judge of what is ‘true’, which operates to discredit migrants’ life stories, in which perhaps smuggled or undocumented journey sometimes led to emancipating opportunities in receiving countries.

## **Conclusions: What do awareness campaigns serve for?**

Despite the effort IOM seems to have devoted in recent years to evaluating the impact of its awareness campaigns, this is largely unpredictable due to the dynamics of the audience reception, since it appears ‘virtually impossible to control all influencing variables and construct a chain of causality between exposure to awareness-raising measures and migratory behaviour’ (Rodriguez 2019). As highlighted by Browne (2015), factors such as the presence of social networks in destination countries and the perceived opportunities abroad play a stronger role in determining whether people migrate. Moreover, ‘the literature is fairly clear that the causes of irregular migration are not lack of information about the dangers, as information interventions assume, but poverty, conflict and lack of opportunities, which information interventions do not address’ (Browne 2015:3).

On the one side, both in Europe and in Australia, increased periods of using awareness campaigns has corresponded with periods of increased boat arrivals to the Australian coasts (i.e. 2009-2013) or tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea (i.e. 2013-2015), always coupled with their politicisation in the receiving country’s public debate. On the other side, as Watkins (2017) notes, even where boat arrivals decreased, corresponding to an increase of awareness campaigns, this drop was accompanied by the implementation of other border securitisation measures. These encompass actions such as the removal of asylum seekers to offshore detention in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, the refusal to resettle in Australia asylum seekers processed in those countries and found to be refugees, or the pushbacks operated by neighbouring countries in the case of Europe. Relying on methods that have less to do with law and order than with media or advertising (Pécoud 2010), awareness campaigns thus appear as tools aimed at legitimising and justifying migration control and externalisation policies mostly in receiving countries. We have shown how at a symbolic level, these campaigns reshape the ‘inside’ of sending countries (mainly by silencing their difficult conditions and reframing them as places of opportunities), the ‘inside’ of receiving countries (as impenetrable and militarised forts), and the ‘outside’ of nation-states as buffer zones where violence, exploitation, detention, and death find their legitimacy in the interstices of (trans)national sovereignty (Musarò 2019). Making the borders of nation-states figuratively appear, disappear, or displace at will, awareness campaigns perform physical borders in a complementary

way. On the one side, they transmit the idea of the territoriality of space (essential to any control strategies, according to Collyer and King 2015), for example showing the patrolling of receiving countries coasts by military boats. On the other side, they depict transnational space, such as the Mediterranean, as a ‘liquid’ zone in which they externalise responsibilities for protection obligations, except when a military-humanitarian operation can function as a spectacle for gaining consensus from the domestic electorate and neighbours in the international political arena (Musrò 2017). Indeed, the media are a crucial tool in Global North’s arsenal in determining when, where, and how a border is performed (Wonders 2006).

By reiterating, as in the *No Way* or *Zero Chance* campaigns, that the crossing of ‘our’ border is prohibited and that foreigners ‘will not make Australia home’, and silently legitimising the difference between the ‘us’ (the figure of the citizen) and the ‘them’ (the figure of the foreigner), migration management governs not only non-citizens but is aimed at ‘serving as domestic state-building, nation-building, and citizenship-building projects’ (Watkins 2020:15). As stated by Oeppen (2016), awareness campaigns allow governments to be seen to be doing something to control their borders. Meanwhile, these tools clearly illustrate to what extent physical borders have become performances, ‘in the sense of an act where the message it conveys comes to stand in for the work it achieves’ (Collyer and King 2015:10).

The medium of the awareness campaign is very much the message, and their still current use appears to be linked on the one hand to the reproduction and expansion of a proper industrial sector concerning ‘media and migration’. On the other hand, their use appears to be the product of four interrelated rationalities of governance, security, humanitarianism, managerialism, and colonialism, which ‘‘make sense’’ of a campaign that otherwise can be read as indicative of circular and misdirected strategies of border security’ (McNevin et al. 2016:223). Indeed, the neoliberal drive of nation-states in the Global North to outsource awareness campaigns ‘service delivery’ to IOM (or other private and non-governmental actors), and the standardisation associated with IOM campaigns implementation and evaluation measures (of which the C4D toolkit is but one example) seem enabling of the international transfer of a ‘science’ of symbolic regulatory regimes addressing (im)mobility.

## Notes

1. This chapter was conceived jointly by the authors. However, for the purposes of acknowledging authorship, Section ‘The spirit of the times: (in)securitised borderscapes’ should be attributed to Pierluigi Musarò; Sections ‘Features and actors of the awareness campaigns multimedia industry’, and ‘Visual rhetoric and narrative tropes in awareness campaigns’ should be attributed to Valentina Cappi; introduction and conclusions to both.

2. The research behind this publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. It has been realized within PERCEPTIONS project, which has received funding from the European Union’s H2020 Research & Innovation Action under grant agreement no. 833870. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Valentina Cappi and Pierluigi Musarò, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

3. This is not to underestimate the brutal and physical reality of some borders and the violence committed to prevent their crossing. The background consideration of this chapter is rather that ‘crossing the border remains a very difficult proposition for much of the world’s population’ (Cunningham 2004:333) and that the Global North is trying ever more subtle ways to deter the mobility of undesired people.

4. This can be easily assessed by consulting the different powers of the passports on the Passport Index website (<https://www.passportindex.org>).

5. Among others: IOM X C4D Toolkit (2018); UNODC Toolkit to Combat Smuggling of Migrants (2010).

6. Migratory imaginary can be described as t’he science of individual and collective representation of the act of migrat - ing: it is inspired by migratory reality but at the same time contributes to its construction. [ ] It feeds on descriptions and mythologies, fantastic tales and documentary reconstructions, explicit statements and tacit knowledge in continuous evolution’ (Turco 2018:16).

7. This research was conducted in the framework of the European H2020 project Perceptions (<https://project.perceptions.eu>), and is being published in the paper ‘Gambia’s back way migration: the role of journalists in disseminating symbolic bordering practices about Europe’ (Jinkang, Cappi, and Musarò, *forthcoming*).

8. The first IOM awareness campaigns targeted the population of sending regions mostly in Central and Eastern Europe, South-East Asia, and Central America: Romania (1992-1996), Albania (1992-1995), the Philippines (1997-1999), Vietnam (1998-1999), and Ukraine (1998). Since 2000, major focus was devoted to Northern and sub-Saharan African countries such as Morocco, Gambia, Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria (Pécoud 2010; Musarò 2019). In Australia, migrant smuggling became a major political issue in 1999, paving the way to the production of several campaigns addressing asylum seekers from the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq) or Sri Lanka (Schloenhardt and Philipson 2013).

9. The official definition of the smuggling of migrants comes from the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which has been ratified by 141 states. It describes smuggling as ‘the procurement, in order to obtain directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident’ (UN 2000). Therefore, smuggling is seen as a crime against the state, not against a person (Musarò 2019). By contrast, trafficking is defined as ‘the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, or fraud or deception’ (UN 2000), thus expressing a non-consensual relationship that involves the ongoing exploitation of another human being.

10. *Aware Migrants* could represent an exception since it is explicitly constructed through the video testimonies of several migrant survivors. Nonetheless, the final aim of the different stories is always to emphasise the risk of dying in the desert or drowning in the sea.

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