

**Memories, normative ideals and empathic solidarities
in Europe in the aftermath of refugee arrivals in 2015–16**

Humboldt University of Berlin, 19–20 October 2018

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Narrating the humanitarian border: Moral deliberations of territorial borderworkers on the EU's Mediterranean border

The European Union's external border is the quintessential 'humanitarian border'. It is presented as a humanitarian and caring enterprise, while concealing its border control and exclusionary elements. Territorial borderworkers are the frontline fieldworkers tasked with implementing the laws and policies underpinning this humanitarian border, making them foremost actors in its construction. They present a defensive façade which may be interpreted as critical but which actually merely oscillates within the humanitarian vs security debate, thus reproducing the basic tenets of the 'humanitarian border'. However, intertwined in the intricate fabric of these personal narratives as well as in the form of their narratives there is an emergent sense of discomfort with the dominant humanitarian-security framework. These elements suggest an ongoing search for a normative reference which is based on simple humanist ideas, human dignity and draws on their encounters and observations of these newcomers. In this rudimentary search for a 'normative humanism', I argue that we can detect a desire for a more 'humane border' rather than the current 'humanitarian border'. This article draws on multi-sited and long-term ethnographic work and is based on the personal narratives of territorial borderworkers located on the European Union's external border in Sicily, Italy.