ANTONIO DE LAURI

Humanitarian militarism and the production of humanity

The limits and consequences of humanitarian military operations continue to be major issues in Western public debates on global security, democracy and human rights. This article focuses on the intersection of war and humanitarianism, situating the study of humanitarian militarism within a European context in which a reinvigorated proliferation of the military ethos coexists with ongoing transformations in European military culture and a resurgence of nation-state ideologies. Building on a reflection of the historical consolidation of humanitarian militarism and interviews conducted with soldiers, the paper explores the politics of humanity produced by humanitarian militarism.

Key words humanitarianism, military intervention, humanity, soldiers, military culture

Introduction

Throughout the past three decades, the limits and consequences of humanitarian military operations have been major issues in Western public debates on global security, democracy and human rights. In the extensive academic literature produced in this framework, considerable attention has been paid to the circumstances in which humanitarian military operations were justified and whether they were considered successful (Seybolt 2007). However, the importance of studying contemporary European military culture in light of its interconnection with humanitarianism has somehow gone unheeded. While the notion of 'new wars' (Newman 2004; Munkler 2005) has been gradually replaced by geopolitical considerations in recent interventions, the broader notion of an ethos of humanism and humanitarian action defining national and multilateral assistance programmes and the way UN agencies work is clearly essential for understanding contemporary transnational governance and security policies. In this perspective, humanitarian militarism is to be understood as a crucial element in a much larger conceptual, legal and political landscape, one in which different forms of transnational governmentality and a plurality of political and economic actors coexist with the territorialised expression of nation-state sovereignty. Through this framework, military politics and strategic cultures (Zaman 2009) become an integral part of 'humanitarian reason' (Fassin 2011). This article combines a reflection on the consolidation of humanitarian military interventions with in-depth interviews conducted with soldiers in Italy and France.[1] It thus situates humanitarian militarism in a European context in

---

1 I conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews with men and women currently in the military who, in the past two decades, have been deployed in humanitarian military interventions in Afghanistan, Africa and the Middle East. Conducted between 2016 and 2017 in Rome, Livorno, Milan, Paris and Lyon, interviews focused on a set of questions that aimed at understanding issues such as 'How do soldiers perceive themselves in the military humanitarian framework?'; 'How do they motivate their participation in humanitarian missions?'; 'What impact does participation in

which a reinvigorated proliferation of the military ethos coexists with ongoing transformations in European military culture and a resurgence of nation-state ideologies. Against this background, the article addresses the issue of the production of humanity by means of humanitarian militarism.

Humanitarianism and militarism

Humanitarianism and militarism have traditionally represented two distinct fields of inquiry for anthropologists, shaping bodies of literature that until very recently have rarely been in dialogue. In the humanitarian sphere, the critical voice of anthropologists has stimulated important reflections on the causes and implications of humanitarian actions and discourses (Fassin 2011; Redfield and Bornstein 2011; Ticktin and Feldman 2010). The studies of anthropology of the military, on the other hand, have produced insights illuminating the interlinked dynamics of war and peace as well as the ambivalent proximity of anthropology to the military throughout the history of the discipline (Gusterson 2007). More recently, ethnographic studies of and among soldiers (Grassiani 2013; MacLeish 2013) opened new research paths by addressing the everyday forms of violence, trauma, vulnerability, identity and alterity in conflict zones and military headquarters. However, while the historical convergence of humanitarianism and militarism has solicited an extensive amount of scholarly debate in political science and legal studies in the past 30 years, anthropology has addressed this historical shift only marginally (see, for example, Fassin and Pandolfi 2010). Yet, the overlap of benevolent actions with military force has generated what Ross Parsons has defined in the weighty ironies of phrases such as 'low intensity civil war', 'compassionate militarisation', 'emancipatory imperium', to name but a few (Parsons 2010). Along with the social and political dimensions of these paradoxes, the notion of humanity appears as an object of both inquiry and intervention. In their 2010 'Statement of the Editorial Collective' inaugurating the journal *Humanity* (University of Pennsylvania Press), the editors argued:

> The global politics of humanity legitimates itself not on the old foundation of international humanitarian law or the more recent elaboration of international human rights; rather, it derives its legitimacy from its promise to generate new legal and political orders, to shape new social realities and relations, to establish new economic imperatives and interests, and to forge new cultural connections and values. And while the global politics of humanity is emphatically a politics of redemption, at least in its urge to mend, ameliorate, or even transform circumstances of disorder and atrocity, the very aspirational quality of the politics of humanity that lends it appeal often immunizes it from critical inquiry.[2]

military humanitarian operations have on soldiers' lives?'; 'Does their participation in humanitarian operations impact other military activities?' I had the opportunity to interview 20 soldiers of different ranks on several occasions. In this article, I refer to some of these interviews with the aim of developing a pathway to thinking about humanitarian militarism in a more comprehensive way. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms. I am particularly grateful to those soldiers who, aside from their cooperation in interviews, opened the doors of their homes, introduced me to their families and spent part of their free time having conversations with me on the scope and implications of war in the contemporary world.

2 http://humanityjournal.org/issue-1/statement-of-the-editorial-collective/

What politics of humanity does humanitarian militarism produce? In a critical and provocative vein, Danilo Zolo (2009) has described, for example, the military intervention in Afghanistan as a form of 'humanitarian terrorism'. In April 2016, I discussed Zolo's idea with Mario, a sergeant of the Italian army (Esercito Italiano) who spent nine months in Afghanistan between 2003 and 2004 (Kabul), and six months in 2005 (Herat region). The father of two sons, Mario was conscripted to the army at the age of 18, and then decided to continue a military career. While disagreeing with Zolo's view, Mario's opinion is important in attempting to understand the politics of humanity produced by humanitarian militarism.

> I totally disagree with the notion of humanitarian terrorism. Terrorism is something else. To call it humanitarian terrorism means comparing soldiers to terrorists. And that's not correct at all. The goal of terrorists is to destroy, to create terror. The objective of the ISAF[3] mission in Afghanistan, for example, was to help Afghans rebuild their country, to give hope to the Afghan population. In fact, not only to the Afghan population. Everybody was concerned about the Taliban. And yes, we know that in all military interventions civilians also die. But what happens if we don't stop regimes like the Taliban? What happens if we don't fight terrorism? These are questions not only for Italians or Afghans, but for everybody.[4]

The moral dimension of humanitarian militarism is what makes a war not a war (Atanasoski 2013), and yet humanitarian militarism remains open to the fundamental question, 'what if?' In this sense, Mario's perspective resonates with the capacity of humanitarian militarism to offer, at the same time, violence and promise, cruelty and caregiving. Soldiers' narratives represent an important source from which to advance our understanding of the overlaps between humanitarian morality and military governance due to their capacity to address humanitarian militarism on the ground. Although significant contributions in recent decades have enriched academic and expert knowledge of contemporary humanitarianism and – to a lesser degree – of humanitarian militarism, soldiers' narratives deserve further study (Basham 2013; Grassiani 2013; MacLeish 2013; Ruffa 2014). The scholarly literature on humanitarianism has looked mainly at NGOs and international organisations. The realm of soldiers, on the other hand, has been portrayed in mainstream media as polarised between two opposite views: (1) soldiers as merely 'perpetrators' of war violence, the emblems of the 'disciplined body', the pure expression of political power and (2) soldiers as 'global saviours' and guarantors of democracy and human dignity. One way to reconnect these two binary-alternative views is to integrate the narratives of soldiers into moral histories of the present at the nexus of global spectacles of suffering and the global display of aid (Fassin 2011).

   Whether 'traditional' or 'humanitarian', war cannot be simply described as the by-product of political decisions from above; it is also determined by participation and initiatives from below (De Lauri 2013). For this reason, soldiers' perspectives are needed in order to examine humanitarian militarism more closely. 'You want to understand what's going on in the largest humanitarian theatres in the world today?' asked

---

3 The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan was a NATO-led security mission established by the United Nations Security Council in December 2001 by Resolution 1386, concluded in 2014.

4 Interview no. 2 with Mario, Rome, June 2016.

Sylvie, a French corporal who served in Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010. 'Then just talk to soldiers.'[5] Sylvie married in 2007 and by the time we met had one daughter who just turned three.

> If you had asked me when I was a teenager, I would never have said I would be in the military one day. But serving my country is the only thing I would like to do now, especially, you know, these days, with terrorism and all the problems we have, worldwide and also in Europe. When I was in Afghanistan, well, things were complicated. It is never as you expect. But what is clear is that something needs to be done to keep everybody safe. And when I say everybody I mean it. Europeans, Afghans, Americans. Look at Syria now. I don't know how it will end. But the world is not safe.[6]

The consolidation of humanitarian militarism

The role of humanitarian intervention as the main instrument framing freedom, protection, aid and democratisation at the global level has been increasing in relative importance since at least the mid-19th century (Barnett 2011). This process accelerated rapidly after the Second World War, and even more quickly in the wake of the Cold War, by the end of which humanitarianism had begun to appear as a sort of 'next page' in the history of international relations and in the reconfiguration of human relations. During the course of these developments, humanitarian intervention gained something of a monopoly on the definition of concepts such as aid, solidarity, freedom and human dignity (De Lauri 2016). To an extent, the humanitarian impulse represented the organised and bureaucratised expression of global *pietas*, offering to cater for the needs of the suffering and downtrodden – increasingly represented as they were in the hyper-mediated world of the second half of the 20th century (Pandolfi and Rousseau 2016).

One of the most significant developments in humanitarianism over recent decades, particularly since the 1998–1999 Kosovo war, has been the political and ideological affirmation of humanitarian war as a 'necessary evil', needed to protect human rights, avoid genocide, confront fundamentalism, promote democracy and fight terrorism. Humanitarian assistance has been increasingly included in counter-insurgency activities, in interventions for political stabilisation and in peacekeeping operations (Barakat *et al.* 2010; Bellamy and Williams 2010). At the same time, UN peace interventions have been implemented under multi-dimensional mandates that have included political, military and civilian actions. David Chandler (2001) has noted that humanitarian militarism, widely advocated in Kosovo, was an oxymoron before the 1990s, while it then became a tautology (see also Roberts 1993). Counter-insurgency, reconstruction projects and aid programmes have all emerged as important elements of contemporary military strategy, drawing on ideologies and instruments of emergency and socioeconomic development. At the same time, benefits associated with both humanitarianism and development (in terms of healthcare, shelter, food, welfare) were increasingly framed as imperatives for achieving security. Given this practical and strategical overlap in goals and operations on the ground, militarism and humanitarianism have become inextricably linked (Gilman

---

5 Interview no. 1 with Sylvie, Lyon, August 2016.
6 Interview no. 2 with Sylvie, Lyon, August 2016.

2012). Humanitarian militarism can thus be understood through the framework of military operations as other than 'traditional war': operations that are represented as unilateral interventions by democratic powers, which deploy their professional forces between the oppressive forces of a non-state actor or unstable state and their helpless victims (local populations, aid agencies, etc.) (Roderick 2016).

By the dawn of the 21st century, expressions such as 'humanitarian war' and 'preventive war', along with related debates on 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) and 'Right to Intervene' (Chandler 2004; MacFarlane *et al.* 2004), were common in both political jargon and mass media communication, with major implications for the reconfiguration of the role of soldiers (Mannitz 2013; Vegič 2007) and of civil–military relations (Bessler and Sek 2006; Gourlay 2000; Pugh 2002). In a historical perspective, the overlap between humanitarianism and militarism can be thought of as an evolution of the traditional just war approach (*bellum justum*) as it developed over the centuries (Farrell 2013; Fixdal and Smith 1998; Walzer 2006). During this time, it has undergone important moments of consolidation – especially in the second half of the 20th century with Roosevelt's foreign policy, the creation of NATO, the Truman Doctrine and European policies of post-colonial transnational governance.

In the Middle East and Africa, humanitarianism has historically complemented militarism (Nesiah 2004), and to a great extent, humanitarian agencies have been seen by local populations as extensions of the military and political agendas of donor countries and big corporations (Abiew 2012; Kamat 2004; McMichael 2010). In the case of Afghanistan, there was a clear connection between the conspicuous activities of international agencies involved in the post-2001 process of reconstruction/democratisation and military interventions. The inclusion of military contingents in the programmes of international agencies is perhaps the most visible sign of such a relationship. Two examples are the work of the Italian Provincial Reconstruction Team in Herat, and the participation of US military forces in the reconstruction of the justice sector. During the 2003 Iraq war, military invasion, counter-insurgency operations and attempts to export democracy merged. As expressed in an analysis by Human Rights Watch one year after the military invasion, 'The result is that at a time of renewed interest in humanitarian intervention, the Iraq war and the effort to justify it even in part in humanitarian terms risk giving humanitarian intervention a bad name' (HRW 2004). In fact, in a relatively short time span, actors and agencies involved in Iraq, such as MNF (Multi-National Force – Iraq), ORHA (the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance of the US Department of Defense), UNAMI (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq) and OCHA (the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) have all implemented humanitarian mandates. The 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) resolution of the United Nations Security Council was inserted into the duties of the UN in 2005. Invoking R2P, more than 40,000 NATO bombings in Libya during March 2011 were justified as human rights interventions (Nader and Savinar 2016). The multi-national military intervention against ISIL (2014–present) has also seen a combination of military operations and humanitarian efforts (for example, air-dropping thousands of meals and thousands of gallons of drinking water to Yazidi refugees).

Contemporary humanitarian-armed interventions have displayed their obverse, complementary side by providing the 'free world' with sites in which the fruits of its military humanitarian action can be represented. One of the consequences of this military humanitarian attitude was the identification of an enemy who was not simply to be killed and was not an irreconcilable 'other'. Rather, the enemy represented a

different configuration of humanity, a continually malleable one that can be reconfigured by means of the 'humanitarian technè': techniques of standardisation introduced by humanitarian aid and the application of targeted force (Pandolfi and Rousseau 2016). Interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya are clear examples of humanitarian military interventions supported by important moral assumptions. However, while the transnational promotion of democracy was a fundamental source of inspiration for these forms of *bellum justum*, humanitarian militarism is often considered one of the main factors threatening the consolidation of democratic transition at a national level in unstable contexts (Beetham 2009; Lischer 2003; Whitehead 2009).

Convergences

Historically, there have been important differences in the way different armies behave in international interventions and peace operations (Ruffa 2014). Furthermore, the contexts in which military operations are conducted are different, and this is certainly relevant to understanding humanitarian militarism as an ethos and a *modus operandi* that tends to reproduce itself but, at least to a certain extent, needs to adapt to local circumstances.

However, beyond the different varieties of interventions and contexts, the broader framework of humanitarian mission has been able to create transnational convergences among armed forces. As Philippe – a French soldier who has been on service in Africa and the Middle East – told me:

> French, Italian, British, American soldiers are different. You know, we have different traditions, different training. But I believe our goal is very much the same. At the end of the day, no matter whether you are French or Polish, you go to Afghanistan to fight with the Taliban.[7]

Both the idea of a common 'enemy' – whether a non-state political actor, a criminal organisation or a terrorist network – and the humanitarian impulse permeate military and strategic culture among European armies. Pietro, an Italian lieutenant colonel who was on service in Lebanon and Iraq for a total of three years, also emphasised this aspect by saying:

> There are international phenomena such as terrorism, piracy and smuggling that require joint interventions from different governments, and because of the risks they present, they require military intervention in addition to transnational policing and borders control. […] The idea that the military has to provide humanitarian assistance is part of our military culture today, not only here in Italy, but everywhere democratic governments participate in global security and democratisation.[8]

It is on the axes of these convergences – oriented towards universalising humanitarian military culture – that democracy promotion and democratic governance become intelligible in terms of security regimes. Pietro added:

7   Interview no. 1 with Philippe, Lyon, August 2016.
8   Interview no. 2 with Pietro, Rome, June 2016.

> I joined the army with the idea that soldiers fight in war. But this idea reduces the role of the military today. […] Of course you need soldiers if you want to deliver aid. Look at what happens in the Middle East. You can see it this way: in this world, soldiers are expendable for the sake of democracy. They fight for security. Our own security. […] Soldiers have always had duties that implied protecting populations or rescuing people. But the idea of being directly involved in humanitarian activities is a rather new strategy in security policies.[9]

Philippe had a more critical view of it, but he also underlined the shifting role of soldiers in response to changing humanitarian goals.

> Peace operations, humanitarian missions and so on are part of our activities. Soldiers carry out a number of different military activities in their career. […] If you want my opinion, those who make political decisions don't really care about peace or democracy or whatever. […] I think that fifty years ago European soldiers looked at each other as potential enemies. Today we have very much in common and we often work with the same goal.[10]

The combination of 'traditional' military activities with the direct involvement of soldiers in delivering aid has historically created vast margins of ambiguity. Certainly, changes in the role of the military transnationally reflects an increasing militarisation of the civil sphere and the consolidation of armed regimes of governance. This calls for a critical approach in contemporary military studies, not only in terms of international relations and cooperation, but also in consideration of the connection between the expansion of a military ethos and the development of a class-based army (Basham 2016) at the European level. The lacerating precariousness of a large proportion of the young population across Europe feeds – more than since the Second World War – the call to arms in a manner that comparatively resonates with the US model of raising soldiers from the margins (Green 2013). 'Humanitarian soldiers'[11] are not only useful in depicting the image of contemporary wars as humane wars (Kotilainen 2011), they are also attractive in terms of recruitment and the proliferation of war ideologies. As Philippe argued:

> Going to war today often translates as going to implement aid and reconstruction and help victim populations. Of course the photos of soldiers surrounded by joyful kids do not really represent the work of external armies in Afghanistan, but they are good for people watching news from home.[12]

In *The Routledge companion to military research methods*, the editors note that there is room to influence change in the military via research and collaboration (Williams

---

9 Interview no. 3 with Pietro, Rome, June 2016.
10 Interview no. 2 with Philippe, Lyon, August 2016.
11 'The most visible key figure in ISAF imagery is arguably the figure of the gentle and humanitarian ISAF soldier. Images of soldiers engaging in functions, which can be broadly termed as humanitarian, are strikingly common in the imagery. These images constitute the visual narrative of the humanitarian soldier. The figure of the humanitarian soldier is most commonly pictured with local people – especially children. The soldiers are pictured playing, giving gifts, and in many photographs interacting with the locals: handing out toys and sweets as well as relief supplies' (Kotilainen 2011).
12 Interview no. 2 with Philippe, Lyon, August 2016.

et al. 2016: 10). I believe this should imply a critical approach in military studies based on a bottom-up perspective, in which the point of view of soldiers is crucial. Soldiers' narratives are situated in a space between the empirical dimension of military humanitarian practice and the way humanitarian militarism is conceived of and evolves at a more strategic and political level. The consolidation of humanitarian militarism and the parallel expansion of the military ethos are salient features of contemporary political discourses on global security and democratisation. The imperative to help, in today's political arenas, is deeply woven into military intervention. Liisa Malkki has maintained that:

> When we (in the academy but also in the aid world, the media, and policy circles) talk about humanitarian intervention, we tend to imagine it as always already global (it being understood that the world capital of need is Africa). […] And yet these apparently 'global' and 'cosmopolitan' figures and projects must always begin somewhere in particular. (2015: 206)

While this is certainly true, we should not forget that in order to understand contemporary humanitarianism, the *particular* perspective we have to take into consideration is not only that of the humanitarian agency but also that of the military.

Soldiers and sacrifice in the logic of becoming

Through historical processes that have worked towards the consolidation of an 'empire of humanity' (Barnett 2011), humanitarian militarism has developed into a constitutive force able to affirm a specific universal moral culture (Asad 2015) and a certain idea of what constitutes a 'good, normal life'.[13] This force has informed a politics of humanity achievable through normalising projects. In international interventions and humanitarian programmes, notions of emergency, development and progress have been supported by an illusory and aggressive promise of normality: the normality that can be imposed on others in order to model the world according to specific patterns. Normality often takes on a medical connotation and is constructed in opposition to an idea of abnormality that includes the psychopathological deficits attributed to the person considered unable to design a world of his or her own. Via a semantic transposition, this idea of abnormality is extended from the individual to collectivities: to populations or nations not yet considered ready to govern themselves, embrace democracy, implement a rule of law system, or achieve civilised standards of life (De Lauri 2016).

Although many authors have emphasised that humanitarianism is the expression of moral progress, Michael Barnett (2011) has acutely reminded us that humanitarianism has undergone its most impressive gains in moments of radical inhumanity. The perspective of soldiers allows for an examination of the link between inhumanity and humanitarianism in a way that takes into consideration the contingency of humanitarian military operations on the ground. At this level, we see the emergence of the complexity of a new politics of soldiering at the intersection of diverse forces, between

---

13 This expression was used in a speech delivered at the University of Milan-Bicocca in December 2010 by a decorated lieutenant colonel of the Arma dei Carabinieri, who spoke about his past missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

'the need to help' (Malkki 2015), on the one hand, and the expansion of a military ethos on the other. Francesco, an Italian soldier based in Livorno who has been on missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, told me:

> Fighting can be devastating for your soul. The only way to keep your mind safe in certain circumstances is to be aware of the ultimate goal of your duty. I think Afghans needed us to be there. Of course our government also needed us to be there, for reasons that do not deserve to be mentioned in history books. But the fact remains that the situation in Afghanistan was out of control. I believe we helped Afghans but I don't know what will happen in the future.[14]

Humanitarian military operations are at the forefront of many operational and moral challenges that raise questions on the interplay of war, 'moral dissonance' (French 2011) and the production of universal patterns of humanity. Talal Asad (2015) has noted that one of the meanings of humanity that goes back to antiquity is treating others kindly (humanely). However, being kind is not always understood as being nonviolent. This consideration is consistent with the way an Afghan primary court judge described the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission in the country: 'This is not anymore the era of altruism and bureaucratized solidarity. It is the era of intervention. And here they are, not simply soldiers, but saviours with rifles.'[15] But what do European soldiers think about their role in humanitarian military interventions? Michel is a French soldier who spent almost one year in Afghanistan in 2009 and used to patrol with a VAB (véhicule de l'avant blindé). He told me:

> I didn't like being in Afghanistan. […] What we see today in the world, especially in France, calls for strong action from the side of democratic countries. I don't know the best way to help Afghanistan to become a democratic country; what I know is that many Afghans improved their lives thanks to us. […] In certain cases, soldiers do the dirty job, something that is necessary so that others can say 'now Afghanistan is free' and so on. Of course I know that there's a lot of pain behind that. One loses pieces of oneself during missions, and sometimes it is difficult to say what is good and what is bad. […] Soldiers are soldiers. You know, you have certain rules of engagement, operations, goals … But soldiers are soldiers, they fight for their country; indeed they are their country. Of course it is not only about their country. In Afghanistan, for example, the world was there. As Europeans, we did a good job.[16]

Soldiers' voices are meaningful in exploring the consolidation of a new European military culture (Libel 2016), in regard to which there are at least two important points to be raised. First, an emergent pan-European military culture can be better understood only if observed through the prism of global humanitarianism – that is, in terms of humanitarian militarism as the expression of global *pietas* and a means to achieve a 'good, normal life'. Second, both nationalism and Europeanism are key drivers of contemporary military and strategic culture. Today that international experience is considered helpful, even necessary, for a military career (Graeger and Leira 2005), national sentiments and patriotic forms of belonging remain relevant in motivating and justifying soldiers'

14 Interview no. 1 with Francesco, Livorno, July 2016.
15 May 2013, Kabul.
16 Interview no. 1 with Michel, Lyon, August 2016.

participation in conflict. In the European context, characterised by increasing militarisation of borders and political and military tensions between states (for example, Ukraine–Russia), the resurgence of nation-state ideologies and practices coexist with up-down attempts to shape a European identity. The European Union apparatus is currently caught in a dynamic that sees policies propagated in Brussels being confronted by reinvigorated nationalisms. Europe is currently being walled up. Recent events, like the financial crisis, the revivification of populist political and social movements, the humanitarian emergencies in the Middle East and the 'refugee crisis', have resuscitated the use of walls and fences as securitarian devices in the political discourse of several European leaders, thereby raising historical and theoretical tangles that address the intersections of geopolitics and identity, racial and post-colonial issues. One of the most renowned examples is Hungary, where in July 2015 its president announced the construction of a four-metre-high fence along its border with Serbia to prevent refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan trespassing across Hungarian national borders. Consistent with that, the Hungarian parliament has recently approved a controversial law enabling all asylum seekers in the country to be detained in 'transit areas' (camps) and forced back into neighbouring Serbia. As of June 2016, nearly 146 km of the 166 km planned barrier had been constructed on the border between Bulgaria and Turkey as a response to increased migrant flows. Economic concerns and welfare stability, security issues and politicised cultural identities are the movers behind the current biopolitical governance of 'migrant multiplicities' (Tazzioli 2017) and the politics of externalisation of the EU border. This implies an extension to the management of flows of refugees and migrants to neighbouring non-EU countries, for example, Morocco and Tunisia (Boswell 2003). According to Wendy Brown (2010), what characterises border walls and fences globally is that these fortifications are reactions to a singularly contemporary phenomenon: the decline of sovereignty in the nation-state. Even when they demarcate nation-state boundaries, the majority of walls and fences today target non-state transnational actors – individuals, groups, organisations, industries. It is true that migration, organised crime, terrorism, smuggling, political movements – all subject to the materiality of walls – are today inscribed in a post-Westphalian world in which forms of sovereignty and governance are contested among a plurality of political and economic actors. However, it seems that the rapid reproduction of border barriers reflects three main aspects. First, they signal a renewed prevalence of nation-state ideologies in public discourse. Second, they confirm that territorial governance is a field in which state sovereignty and humanitarian sovereignty become inextricably linked in their capacity to manage transnational mobility and exercise coercive force over borderlands simultaneously. Third, they clearly illustrate the strict nexus that exists between the state apparatus and its theatrical manifestations: whether a border wall or fence is useful or not, its spectacle can (and must) be seen by everybody. Clifford Geertz (2004) famously maintained that in studying the different forms of performing state sovereignty, we need 'less Hobbes, more Machiavelli'. In fact, in the context of contemporary political concerns over territory, rather than a Leviathan, the state appears as a political force multiplier incorporated into a broader transnational and humanitarian space. Wendy Brown (2017) has more recently argued that walls and 'irregular zones' are not merely backdrops but 'active, multiply signifying agents' in a new theatre of sovereignty struggles.

A key issue is the convergence between practices of humanitarian rescue and processes of sovereign capture more traditionally associated with border policing

(Pallister-Wilkins 2017), with the consequent convergence of state agents and humanitarian workers. What are now 'humanitarian borders' (Ticktin 2016; Walters 2011) reflect the political and legal shift whereby policing operations become articulations of politics of compassion and repatriation. The merging of humanitarian search and rescue operations with state-sovereign performances on European borders reproduces, on European territory, a dynamic that humanitarian militarism around the world has best embodied: the overlapping of rescue and global policing. The genealogy of humanitarian militarism, in this regard, needs to be considered in light of the historical transformations that established the USA and Europe as the 'world policemen' preparing the groundwork for the condition of 'perpetual war for perpetual peace' (Vidal 2002).

The realm of soldiering itself has gone through a major reconceptualisation in this context, but although the history of European international interventions and military politics has been increasingly studied in the light of an evolving geopolitical landscape beyond nation-state politics (Mérand 2008), a crucial question remains: is there a soldier ready to die for Europe today? This question implicitly interrogates the sentiments of belonging and patriotism that emerge at ground level in connection with a European military culture produced at the level of policy-making. It addresses the dimensions of sacrifice, morality and humanity as they appear in the realm of humanitarian discourses and practices, as well as suffering as witnessed, inflicted, experienced and described by soldiers. In an article entitled, 'Why Italian soldiers are able to fight for peace', published in the online edition of the Italian national newspaper *Il corriere della sera* on 2 June (Italy's Republic Day) 2017, the journalist Aldo Cazzullo praises the role of the Italian military world-wide. He argues that its prestige has increased in the past years because Italian soldiers have demonstrated in their missions that they are ready to die, and to this end he lists the names of the military personnel who died in Nassiriya, Iraq on 12 November 2003. This reminded me of an earlier conversation I had with another Italian soldier in Livorno, Claudio, who commented on the idea of sacrifice:

> In the world we live in democracy needs to be defended. And where people live under the oppression of regimes of terror, we have to help them. Does this mean we are the good ones? I don't think so. But that's the world we live in. We may say that, for our future, we have to sacrifice the good in order to fight the evil.[17]

Claudio has been in the military for more than 20 years, building his career with a number of missions abroad. Although lucid in his reflections on military interventions, Claudio emphasised several times that the impact of missions on his life 'had effects that I cannot even fully understand'.[18]

Literature on the de-humanising effects of war is extensive (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), as is the literature on the long-term wounds of conflict (Green 2009; Last 2000). Soldiers' voices suggest that sacrifice and violence be contextualised as fundamental elements of an imperative to help, shaped by the idea of humanity as the result of nation-state democratic intervention. Danilo Zolo (2003) has contested this line of reasoning and described contemporary humanitarian wars as collective executions based on the presumption of the criminal responsibility of all citizens of a state.

17 Interview no. 2 with Claudio, Livorno, July 2016.
18 Interview no. 2 with Claudio, Livorno, July 2016.

Within the framework of military humanitarian interventions, sacrifice lies at the core of the process of establishing a universal moral culture by the use of force. Sacrifices are made in terms of lost lives, and securitarian regimes are enacted to meet a vision of a world that must be attained (or protected) at all costs. In this vision, the expendability of the soldier follows the path leading from necessary evil to the promise of a forthcoming world, the promise of a better future for humanity at large. Costas Douzinas (2007) has argued that ideologies sacrifice individuals for the future of humanity. According to Faisal Devji (2009), in a world in search of a global political expression, even radical forms of militancy and terrorism eventually follow the humanitarian ethos, while worldwide politics addresses humanity as its object of intervention. Talal Asad (2015) has noted that, in military humanitarianism, violence serves at once as defence (as in traditional war) and as punishment (as in criminal justice). Thus, humanitarian militarism systematically reiterates a political vision of global order that sees the exercise of violence as intrinsic to the modern concept of the human. At the intersection between humanitarian ideologies and the fragility of international relations, the military ethos emerges as an inalienable tool in the hands of democratic powers. Pietro, the Italian lieutenant colonel, argued that:

> Humanitarian wars have produced a radically different way of understanding the role of soldiers. Their moral duty is no longer fostered by the idea of expanding empires. Nowadays, soldiers feel a moral duty towards humanity at large. Military interventions in the Middle East and Africa are part of a system of co-operation and governance that aims to create a more connected and safe environment, not only where instability dominates but also here in Europe. […] Soldiers are at the frontline in the global struggle to establish the rule of law to the detriment of the law of the jungle. There's a dramatic human cost in achieving this goal.[19]

In their analysis of the role of International Criminals Tribunals, Luigi D.A. Corrias and Geoffrey M. Gordon (2015) affirm that these institutions act as representatives of humanity understood as a global public. Pietro's idea of soldiering as a moral duty towards humanity at large is consistent with this logic, yet it goes beyond it. If international tribunals judge in the name of humanity, to quote Corrias and Gordon, soldiers do not simply make war in the name of humanity. Rather, they are agents of a specific configuration of humanity, defined by humanitarian priorities and beliefs, such as the undeniable advantage of a universal and inflexible idea of progress and development, the imposition of the Western rule of law as the only remedy against injustice, the glorification of positive science as the only possible way of exploring human nature and emancipating humans, the deification of the free market as *the* 'humane economy' (Röpke 1960).

Conclusions

Talal Asad (2015) has identified a twofold attitude regarding what we can call humanity and, in a different temporal and processual extension, potential humanity, which is possible to achieve by providing charity and chastisement to those who need it. The

---

19 Interview no. 3 with Pietro, Rome, June 2016.

mutual relationship between compassion and violence is thus at the core of this concept of humanity. Militarised aid encompasses values of benevolence and military ethos, and marks a historical trajectory in which potential humanity came to overlap with humanitarian goals. Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya were crucial steps in this process: their populations needed to be saved (from the Taliban, from Saddam Hussein, from Gaddafi), punished (for supporting terrorism, discriminating against women, violating human rights) and educated ('We have taught the Afghans to wash themselves with soap' said the lieutenant colonel in his speech[20]). Legitimised in the framework of the *bellum justum*, humanitarian militarism can be considered, in the contemporary global scenario, a grand narrative in a double sense: as a metanarrative (a particular history of the history of humanity) and as a universal narrative (a teleological narration of global order).

Antonio De Lauri iD
Chr. Michelsen Institute
P.O. Box 6033
N-5892 Bergen
Norway
antonio.delauri@cmi.no

References

Abiew, F. C. 2012. 'Humanitarian action under fire: reflections on the role of NGOs in conflict and post-conflict situations', *International Peacekeeping* 19: 203–21.

Asad, T. 2015. 'Reflections on violence, law, and humanitarianism', *Critical Inquiry* 41: 390–427.

Atanasoski, N. 2013. *Humanitarian violence. The U.S. deployment of diversity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Barakat, S., S. Deely and A. Zyck 2010. 'A tradition of forgetting: stabilisation and humanitarian action in historical perspective', *Disasters* 34: 297–319.

Barnett, M. 2011. *Empire of humanity. A history of humanitarianism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Basham, V. 2013. *War, identity and the liberal state: everyday experiences of the geopolitical in the Armed Forces*. London: Routledge.

Basham, V. 2016. 'Raising an army: the geopolitics of militarizing the lives of working-class boys in an age of austerity', *International Political Sociology*, http://ips.oxfordjournals.org

Beetham, D. 2009. 'The contradictions of democratization by force: the case of Iraq', *Third World Quarterly* 16: 443–54.

Bellamy, A. J. and P. Williams 2010. *Understanding peacekeeping*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Polity.

Bessler, M. and K. Sek 2006. 'Civil–military relations in armed conflicts: a humanitarian perspective', *Liaison – A Journal of Civil–Military Humanitarian Relief Collaborations* 3: 4–10.

Boswell, C. 2003. 'The external dimension of EU immigration and asylum policy', *International Affairs* 79: 619–38.

Brown, W. 2010. *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. Cambridge: Zone Books.

Brown, W. 2017. 'Interventions on the state of sovereignty at the border', *Political Geography* 59: 1–10.

Chandler, D. G. 2001. 'The road to military humanitarianism: how the human rights NGOs shaped a new humanitarian agenda', *Human Rights Quarterly* 23: 678–700.

Chandler, D. G. 2004. 'The responsibility to protect? Imposing the "liberal peace"', *International Peacekeeping* 11: 59–81.

20 December 2010, University of Milan-Bicocca, Italy.

Corrias, L. D. A. and G. M. Gordon 2015. 'Judging in the name of humanity: international criminal tribunals and the representation of a global public', *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 13: 97–112.

De Lauri, A. 2013. 'Introduction', Special Issue 'War', *Antropologia* 16: 7–23.

De Lauri, A. (ed.) 2016. *The politics of humanitarianism. Power, ideology and aid*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Devji, F. 2009. 'The terrorist as humanitarian', *Social Analysis* 3: 173–92.

Douzinas, C. 2007. 'The many faces of humanitarianism', *Parrhesia* 2: 1–28.

Farrell, M. 2013. *Modern just war theory: a guide to research*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Fassin, D. 2011. *Humanitarian reason. A moral history of the present*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Fassin, D. and M. Pandolfi (eds.) 2010. *Contemporary states of emergency. The politics of military and humanitarian interventions*. Cambridge: Zone Books.

Fixdal, M. and D. Smith 1998. 'Humanitarian intervention and just war', *International Studies Review* 42: 283–312.

French, P. 2011. *War and moral dissonance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Geertz, C. 2004. 'What is a state if not a sovereign? Reflections on politics in complicated spaces', *Current Anthropology* 45: 577–93.

Gilman, N. 2012. 'Preface: Militarism and humanitarianism', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3: 173–8.

Gourlay, C. 2000. 'Partners apart: managing civil–military co-operation in humanitarian interventions', *Disarmament Forum* 3: 33–44.

Graeger, N. and H. Leira 2005. 'Norwegian strategic culture after World War II. From a local to a global perspective', *Cooperation and Conflict* 40: 45–66.

Grassiani, E. 2013. *Soldiering under occupation. Processes of numbing among Israeli soldiers in the Al-Aqsa Intifada*. New York: Berghahn.

Green, L. 2009. *Coming home: the reintegration of Yup'ik soldiers/veterans into their rural communities*. Alexandria, VA: National Science Foundation.

Green, L. 2013. 'Betwixt and between: Yup'ik combat soldiers and the burden of wars', *Antropologia* 16: 113–32.

Gusterson, H. 2007. 'Anthropology and militarism', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36: 155–75.

HRW 2004. 'War in Iraq: not a humanitarian intervention', www.hrw.org

Kamat, S. 2004. 'The privatization of public interest: theorizing NGO discourse in a neoliberal era', *Review of International Political Economy* 11: 155–76.

Kotilainen, N. 2011. 'Humanitarian soldiers, colonialised others and invisible enemies', FIIA Working Paper 72.

Last, M. 2000. 'Healing the social wounds of war', *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 16: 370–82.

Libel, T. 2016. *European military culture and security governance. Soldiers, scholars and national defence universities*. London: Routledge.

Lischer, S. K. 2003. 'Collateral damage. Humanitarian assistance as a cause of conflict', *International Security* 28: 79–109.

MacFarlane, S. C., C. J. Thielking and T. J. Weiss 2004. 'The responsibility to protect: is anyone interested in humanitarian intervention?', *Third World Quarterly* 25: 977–92.

MacLeish, K. T. 2013. *Making war at Fort Hood: life and uncertainty in a military community*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Malkki, L. H. 2015. *The need to help. The domestic arts of international humanitarianism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mannitz, S. 2013. 'The democratic soldier: comparing concepts and practices in Europe', SSR paper 9, DCAF.

McMichael, P. (ed.) 2010. *Contesting development. Critical struggles for social change*. New York: Routledge.

Mérand, F. 2008. *European defence policy. Beyond the nation state*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Munkler, H. 2005. *The new wars*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Nader, L. and S. Savinar 2016. Humanitarianism as pretext. Defining what is moral and just, in A. De Lauri (ed.), *The politics of humanitarianism. Power, ideology, and aid*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Nesiah, V. 2004. 'From Berlin to Bonn to Baghdad: a space for infinite justice', *The Harvard Human Rights Journal* 17: 75–98.

Newman, E. 2004. 'The new wars debate: a historical perspective is needed', *Security Dialogue* 35: 173–89.

Pallister-Wilkins, P. 2017. 'Humanitarian rescue/sovereign capture and the policing of possible responses to violent borders', *Global Policy* 8: 19–24.

Pandolfi, M. and P. Rousseau 2016. Governing the crisis. A critical genealogy of humanitarian intervention, in A. De Lauri (ed.), *The politics of humanitarianism. Power, ideology and aid*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Parsons, R. 2010. Review of 'Contemporary states of emergency', *Somatosphere*, http://somatosphere.net

Pugh, M. 2002. 'The challenge of civil–military relations in international peace operations', *Disasters* 25: 345–57.

Redfield, P. and E. Bornstein (eds.) 2011. *Forces of compassion: humanitarianism between ethics and politics*. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press.

Roberts, A. 1993. 'Humanitarian war: military intervention and human rights', *International Relations* 69: 429–49.

Roderick, I. 2016. Studying military image banks: a social semiotic approach, in A. J. Williams *et al.* (eds.), *The Routledge companion to military research methods*, Chapter 24. London: Routledge.

Röpke, W. 1960. *A humane economy: the social framework of the free market*. Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company.

Ruffa, C. 2014. 'What peacekeepers think and do: an exploratory study of French, Ghanaian, Italian, and South Korean armies in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon', *Armed Forces and Society* 40: 199–225.

Scheper-Hughes, N. and P. Bourgois (eds.) 2004. *Violence in war and peace. An anthology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Seybolt, T. B. 2007. *Humanitarian military intervention. The conditions for success and failure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tazzioli, M. 2017. 'The government of migrant mobs. Temporary divisible multiplicities in border zones', *European Journal of Social Theory* 20: 473–90.

Ticktin, M. 2016. 'Thinking beyond humanitarian borders', *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 83: 255–71.

Ticktin, M. and I. Feldman (eds.) 2010. *In the name of humanity: the government of threat and care*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Vegič, V. 2007. 'The effects of previous deployment on soldiers' attitudes to peace operations', *International Peacekeeping* 14: 298–313.

Vidal, G. 2002. *Perpetual war for perpetual peace: how we got to be so hated*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.

Walters, W. 2011. Foucault and frontiers: notes on the birth of the humanitarian border, in U. Bröckling, S. Krasmann, and T. Lemke (eds.), *Governmentality: current issues and future challenges*. New York: Routledge.

Walzer, M. 2006. *Just and unjust wars: a moral argument with historical illustrations*. 4th edn. New York: Basic Books.

Whitehead, L. 2009. 'Losing "the force"? The "dark side" of democratization after Iraq', *Democratization* 16: 215–42.

Williams, A. J., N. Jenkings, R. Woodward and M. F. Rech (eds.) 2016. *The Routledge companion to military research methods*. London: Routledge.

Zaman, R. U. 2009. 'Strategic culture: a "cultural" understanding of war', *Comparative Strategy* 28: 68–88.

Zolo, D. 2003. Fondamentalismo umanitario, in M. Ignatieff (ed.), *Una ragionevole apologia dei diritti umani*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

Zolo, D. 2009. 'Il terrorismo umanitario in Afghanistan', *Il Manifesto* 24 September.

Militarisme humanitaire et production d'humanité

Les limites et les conséquences des opérations militaires humanitaires restent des questions majeures dans les débats publics occidentaux sur la sécurité, la démocratie et les droits de l'homme à travers le monde. Axé sur l'intersection de la guerre et de l'humanitarisme, cet article situe l'étude du militarisme humanitaire dans un contexte européen dans lequel l'ethos militaire se propage avec une nouvelle vigueur, en même temps que se transforme la culture militaire européenne et que ressurgissent des idéologies de l'État-nation. À partir d'une réflexion sur la construction historique du militarisme humanitaire et d'entretiens menés auprès de militaires, l'article examine la politique de l'humanité produite par le militarisme humanitaire.

Mots-clés humanitarisme, intervention militaire, humanité, militaires, culture militaire