Substantive Citizens at High Sea: Crossing the Formal Borders of Citizenship by Performing Acts of Rescue on the Mediterranean

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Abstract. By offering some insights into how a critical citizenship framework can be applied in the investigation of the civilian search and sea rescue cause, this paper introduces and sets the character of substantive citizens. Navigating on the tumultuous waters of the Mediterranean Sea to conduct search and rescue (SAR) operations of migrant boats, volunteers and humanitarian workers are not only activists and vigilantes, but they are also practitioners of a substantive dimension of citizenship that is more oriented to a normative and civic logic. At times disobedient to European authorities, members of SAR organizations operating on the Mediterranean Sea cross the formal borders of citizenship by embodying a civic ideal of solidarity and resistance. In doing so, they distance themselves from the legal category of citizenship and transform the Mediterranean space into an arena of politics. Ultimately, all of this comes together in a critical view able to provide an alternative research program on migration issues that gives proper attention to practices of making citizens. For this, it is imperative to interpret citizenship less as a national and given formal status and more as a practice of resistance through political action and struggle for rights.

Keywords: *critical citizenship framework, substantive citizens, SAR organizations, Mediterranean Sea, arena of politics*

1. Introduction

The notion of citizenship has been a major subject of discussion in the political and social academic debates since the end of the Cold War. After Thomas Marshall (1992) exposed the classic theory of citizenship, which is state-centric in its essence, a considerable number of studies reinforcing or refuting his work were carried out (see Habermas, 1992; Lehning & Weale, 1997; Delanty, 2007). This paper takes, therefore, a more critical stance towards Marshall's theory. This is because when it comes to exploring the notion of citizenship as practice in non-governmental humanitarian borderwork, the argument should be designed around normative and

civic frameworks. In citizenship studies, acts of solidarity like those of rescuing migrants in overcrowded boats at the high seas of the Mediterranean could only be looked at through subjective and empirical lenses, rather than objective and juridical ones. Considering this assumption, the paper revolves around the purpose of explaining how the classic theory of citizenship can be refuted on the basis of the sea rescue cause.

The first section outlines the proposed critical framework that, by introducing ideas that go beyond the state-centric notion, could be used for broadening the studies on citizenship. Thereafter, by moving beyond the legal and formal understandings of citizenship, the second section explores collective actions undertaken by members of SAR organizations as integral parts of a substantive dimension of citizenship. Whereas these members of SAR NGOs are targets of toxic narratives created by nationalist politicians and reproduced by some media outlets, this paper takes a different stance that considers them as disobedient actors who, by rescuing people in distress, tend to contest and remake the traditional notion of what is understood to be a citizen. Such a stance is not original to this paper. What is new is actually the notion that ordinary people might also be able to exercise citizenship by intervening in a space that not so long ago was reserved for sovereign states only.

The fact that ordinary people now intervene in the Mediterranean space by playing a humanitarian role still receives little attention within citizenship and migration studies. Thereby, in the attempt to fulfill this gap, the argument does not address acts of rescue by reproducing positionalities of saviors and victims or the heroification of the rescuers and the invisibilization of the rescuees. Instead, it is intended to draw on critical and revisionist investigations of citizenship by exploring empirical evidence that are supported by the insightful contributions of authors and practitioners with an intensive knowledge and background in the fields of citizenship, migration and humanitarianism.

2. Citizenship as practice: challenging the traditional conception

In the European tradition, the conception of citizenship comes to be primarily defined by reference to rights that states are required to uphold. What is legitimate in this traditional conception is the inseparability of the transformation of the state and the transformation of citizenship (Delanty, 2007). Yet there are fatal
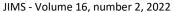
flaws in this state-centric conception of citizenship. Eventually the most important flaw is the absence of the normative and civic aspects. The traditional conception based primarily on the rights that states are required to uphold lacks the capacity to problematize the normative and civic implications that are embedded in the concept of citizenship. Even though citizenship continues to be mostly circumscribed by a state-centric conception, it is imperative to challenge the notion that citizenship only ties people to their legal status and membership.

The traditional conception of citizenship underpinned by membership and a sort of strict participation within the confines of a pre-established community (i.e., the nation state), definitely make this notion inappropriate today (Papa & Milioni, 2013). Unlike Thomas Marshall's (1992) classical theorization of citizenship, the argument here suggests that citizenship should not be reducible to the state. This is because citizenship also upholds a substantive dimension that resists reduction to a narrow, formal, and purely legal category (Delanty, 2007). In his attempt to (re)define the concept, Engin Isin says that "citizenship is about conduct across social groups all of which constitute a body politic" (Isin, 2009: 371). Being a citizen, according to Engin Isin's argument, "[…] almost always means being more than an insider – it also means to be one who has mastered modes and forms of conduct that appropriate to being an insider" (Isin, 2009: 371-372). For him, "this creates an actor both in the sense of a person (law) but also a persona (norm)" (Isin, 2009: 372).

Rather than being too tied to the legal category and within a defined community, citizenship could be practiced and enacted outside territorial confines. This opens up a critical and necessary understanding that citizenship would be less as a legal and more as a normative subject (Papa & Milioni, 2013). The EU citizenship, for example, was designed to bring the Union closer to ordinary people, providing it with a certain popular legitimacy that post-Maastricht debates confirmed it sorely lacked. But even so, citizenship continued to be consisted of a passive acceptance of a pre-constituted package of rights (Bellamy, 2001). Claiming cultural values and privileging proximity, the EU citizenship classifies people as belonging to a territorial community (Aradau, Huysmans & Squire, 2010).

Citizenship is more than that. It goes beyond the formal status and the acceptance of rights associated with states. Citizenship is a product of a more complex process that include normative and civic dimensions. In this sense, critical studies of citizenship taught us that, borrowing Engin Isin's words, "[…] what is important is not only that citizenship is a legal status, but that it also involves

practices of making citizens – social, political, cultural, and symbolic" (Isin, 2008: 17). In the last couple of years, many scholars have been trying to differentiate what Engin Isin referred to as "[…] formal citizenship from substantive citizenship" (Isin, 2008: 17), and they tend to "[…] consider the latter to be the condition of possibility of the former" (Isin, 2008: 17). But for this logic to work, it is required to bring forward an analysis that looks at citizenship from a locus on mobilizations, rather than an institutional and/or a representational angle (Andrijasevic, 2013).

This also requires informal than formal qualities capable of reshaping the way individuals would acknowledge themselves as citizens. Yet in this reading, participation is redefined because it is no longer related only or primarily to formal political process. Participation is extended by the attempt to include fundamental civic aspects like voluntary organization, community associations, and new social movements. These aspects represent forms of civic participation (Norris, 2007; Papa & Milioni, 2013). This suggests that, more than just a pre-established set of rights related to the state, citizenship performs an independent role in the constitution of a polity through citizens who formulate, deliberate, and dispute different viewpoints of justice and rights. Instead of assuming a given ordering of politics, a critical approach of citizenship is focused on the ways citizens renegotiate politics to determine the rules and processes that govern their public life (Bellamy, 2001).

In advancing this critique, it is possible to shift to the question of what makes the citizen. Consequently, an emphasis is placed on what the individuals do, namely on those claims and actions that citizenship is enacted (Andrijasevic, 2013). In doing so, an alternative research program that promotes a critical and different knowledge of citizenship based on a new vocabulary is able to flourish. Engin Isin (2009) created this new vocabulary of citizenship, whereby rights (civil, social, political, sexual), sites (bodies, streets, borders), scales (from urban to international), and acts (volunteering, protesting and resisting) contribute to the enactment of a renewed way to interpret citizenship. For Engin Isin, "when we use already existing categories such as states, nations, cities, sexualities and ethnicities, we inevitably deploy them as 'containers' with fixed and given boundaries" (Isin, 2009: 370).

This new vocabulary created by Isin allows citizens to identify with issue-related politics according to their personal interests that could go from ecology to migration and mobility. Eventually this became a political activity less dependent on traditional organizations associated with the state and more oriented to personal values (Papa & Milioni, 2013). According to this critical perspective, citizenship

becomes contingent, contested and in flux (Isin, 2009; Andrijasevic, 2013) rather than a formal status (Andrijasevic, 2013). In general words, the notion of citizenship is being rethought as an unofficial and subjective practice taking place in different sites and as performative actions. The emphasis is rather on the interaction between actors and the development of common experiences that go beyond the formal practices attached to a defined community (Papa & Milioni, 2013).

By shifting to the question of what makes the citizen and placing an emphasis on what the individuals do, scholars, educators, public officials, practitioners and journalists sought to encapsulate the multiple interlinked facets of citizenship with political and social activism. Because of that, they engendered the concept of 'civic engagement' (Arvanitidis, 2017). Broadly speaking, the meaning of engagement refers to as forms of citizenship that are constructive. That is to say, forms of citizenship that are essentially acquired by being more engaged in political actions, which is closely associated with a sense of 'political efficacy' rather than with a formal duty (Papa & Milioni, 2013). Also, civic engagement could be interpreted as efforts to directly address public concerns through individual work, collective actions, mobilizations and involvement with activist causes. This includes wide ranging activities (carried out either alone and/or together with other citizens) that are designed to identify and deal with issues of public concern (Arvanitidis, 2017).

The focus on civic engagement contributes to the shift from citizenship as the possession of civil and political rights to citizenship as practice. This has been a crucial theoretical and political move to help unravel the historical construction and contestation of the citizenship conception. Likewise, much of the literature that challenged a 'static' and nationally bound conception of citizenship emphasized practice through the establishment of norms, civic engagement and the emergence of activist citizens (Aradau, Huysmans & Squire, 2010). Following this line of thought, civic identity comes to serve as a prerequisite for citizens to become socially and politically active by engaging themselves as social members within the public life (Papa & Milioni, 2013). This prerequisite also became central to the aforesaid alternative research program able to promote a critical knowledge of citizenship.

By introducing the notion of acts of citizenship, Engin Isin shifted the focus in citizenship debates from subjects and their status to the acts that political subjectivities are conceived (Aradau, Huysmans & Squire, 2010). To be more precise, thinking about citizenship through acts means for Engin Isin "[…] to implicitly accept that to be a citizen is to make claims to justice: to break habitus and act in a way that

disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses" (Isin, 2009: 384). What is particularly interesting to note in this notion is that it is through acts that 'actors' transform themselves from subjects into citizens. The key issue is, therefore, not to think of the 'doer' prior to the 'deed' but rather to investigate the process as well as the acts through which actors emerge (Andrijasevic, 2013).

Engin Isin argued that "acts of citizenship are those acts through which citizens, strangers, outsiders and aliens emerge not as beings already defined, but as beings acting and reacting with others" (Isin, 2008: 39). In this sense, acts of citizenship are struggle for rights which should be seen as political forces that expand the frontiers of citizenship (Balibar, 2009; Andrijasevic, 2013). These struggles for rights are secured through participation and civic engagement in collective arrangements that do not reflect the underlying general norms common to legitimate the democratic systems. What is particularly important to grasp about these struggles is that they are products of ordinary citizens organizing themselves so as to contest the traditional ways the polity is structured (Bellamy, 2001). In other words, these struggles are social expressions and collective actions that open up spaces to voices and aspirations that contest what is traditionally understood as citizenship.

From a general perspective, Engin Isin defined acts of citizenship as those acts that "[…] transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being new actors as activist citizens (claimants of rights and responsibilities) through creating new sites and scales of struggle" (Isin, 2008: 39). In this context, activism and voluntary associations also serve to create new sites of struggles and resistance. Activism and voluntary associations offer opportunities for groups of citizens to conduct public work through collective action outside the control of government (Galston, 2000; Theiss-Moise & Hibbing, 2005). For example, knowing that citizenship should be enacted and practiced at a variety of sites, humanitarian activists tend to invoke civic engagement to perform acts of citizenship, keeping the boundaries for participation fluid. Conciliating a plurality of subjectivities, civic engagement goes beyond the traditional delineations of citizenship, like voting or paying taxes (Papa & Milioni, 2013).

Activism and voluntary associations are useful vehicles towards the promotion of acts of citizenship. Besides their political nature, they carry the possibility of redefining politics and citizenship in contexts where there is a partial
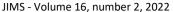
retreat of the state from providing care to vulnerable and minority groups, such as refugees. As a matter of fact, the negligence or withdraw of the state (to varying degrees) across Europe makes civil involvement a central issue in destabilizing the limited imagination of a defined community associated with state-centered politics (Cantat & Feischmidt, 2018). In this reading, acts of citizenship through activism serve as practical foundations of an alternative research program that changes the dominant figure of citizenship which has been persisting since the French Revolution. Once again, Engin Isin reminds us that "the focus is shifted from what people say (opinion, perceptions, attitudinal surveys) to what people do" (Isin, 2009: 371).

What is also particularly interesting to highlight is that citizenship outside the activism from social movements risks to become reduced to weak and minimal forms of participation. The sites outside these social movements provide the citizens little control and little ability to address new issues and concerns or challenge dominant discourses (Papa & Milioni, 2013). Contrarily, the sites inside the social movements allow citizens to actively reimagine the boundaries of community and of belonging through civic engagement. As a consequence, representations of social and political communities premised on a highly strict and narrow dichotomy between the 'Self' and the 'Other' are challenged (Cantat & Feischmidt, 2018). Considering activism and voluntary associations as vehicles for the promotion of acts of citizenship, it is possible to think of citizenship through an activist framework, whereby humanitarian actions and maneuvers undertaken by ordinary citizens could be described as substantive practices that carry a contingent production of contested power.

As the next section of this paper intends to demonstrate, activism within social movements appear to constitute a site where citizenship upholds alternative meanings and translates to alternative practices. These practices are articulated by civic identities 'unbounded' from the nation state and its official agents. They represent activities taking place in a variety of sites according to performative actions (Papa & Milioni, 2013). Bearing this in mind, the Mediterranean Sea becomes a major site of analysis. As a place where the states often fail to protect vulnerable groups of people on the move, the Mediterranean became a site where ordinary citizens decided to navigate by showing through practices of SAR operations that a renewed and alternative form of thinking citizenship is possible.

3. Taking on the role of substantive citizens

In the last two decades, thousands of people drowned and disappeared as they attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea in overcrowded boats to reach a safe haven in Europe. From January 2000 to June 2018, it was estimated more than 20.000 recorded deaths at high sea (Olmedo & del Miño, 2019). In 2016, for example, a record number of migrant deaths was witnessed, with more than 5.000 lives lost (UNHCR, 2016; Stierl, 2017). Besides, those travelers who survive the journeys have constantly been met with tear gas, high fences, militarized national border patrol and myriad xenophobic performances (del Valle, 2016). Crudely put, the emergence of a securitized regime along the Europe's maritime borders indicates that the Mediterranean Sea became a site of human suffering, where SAR organizations have to deal with security measures of containment undertaken by border authorities and that undermine their acts of rescue at high sea.

In a report that covered the period from January 2019 to December 2020 and was based on research and interviews with several migrants, visits to detention centers and meetings with officials and UN experts, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supported the idea that such security measures of containment adopted by European border authorities "[…] prevent or obstruct the work of humanitarian SAR organizations and other migrant human rights defenders" (OHCHR, 2021; 27). The report added that these measures, "[…] together with political and media rhetoric linking SAR organizations with criminality, have contributed to undermining the humanitarian nature of SAR and to creating a hostile environment" (OHCHR, 2021; 27). For OHCHR, this hostile environment is based on acts of "[…] xenophobia, discrimination and exclusion against migrants and those who advocate on their behalf" (OHCHR, 2021; 27).

By investing in sealing its borders to unwanted people on the move, and setting legal, administrative, and practical obstacles to halt them, Europe proves the inconsistency of its migration policies (del Valle, 2016). What could be conclusive about it is that the more European nations like Italy attempt to deter the Mediterranean migration flows, the more desperate border crossers will find ways to circumvent these controls. Within this context, illegal smuggling and human trafficking became a problem, given that legal pathways were closed (Hasian, Olivas & Muller, 2017). However, the key role played by the so-called
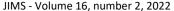
security/mobility nexus in the formation of the border regime is far from being a smooth assemblage: its securitized frame is also subject to contestation (Stierl, 2017).

SAR organizations and the struggles of their members to perform acts of citizenship and solidarity beyond the formal borders of nation states have been crucial to contest the way the European border regime is structured. As convincingly argued by Engin Isin, "acts of citizenship stretch across boundaries, frontiers and territories to involve multiple and overlapping scales of contestation, belonging, identification and struggle" (Isin, 2009: 371). According to his argument, "such contestations stretch across nations and towards urban, regional, transnational and international scales" (Isin, 2009: 371). And the Mediterranean maritime zone is precisely a place of contestation, where ordinary citizens have been empowered to act against securitizing measures adopted by border authorities, such as deterrence, militarization, policing, surveillance and expulsion.

In the face of new challenges that democratic societies experience today (specially the migration challenge on the Mediterranean Sea), it is necessary to consider not the 'received dimension' of citizenship, which is supported by a state-centric vision. Rather than that, it is necessary to consider what is known as 'achieved dimension' of the civic, which comes into being through the achievement of human agency according to specific practices (Dahlgren, 2009; Papa & Milioni, 2013). In order to turn the Mediterranean Sea into a contested place through humanitarian and collective practices of solidarity, SAR organizations and their members considered the 'achieved dimension' of the civic. The humanitarianization of the European maritime border was not a linear but a contested political process, particularly because of the involvement of a range of actors (Stierl, 2017).

A vibrant tradition of activism and advocacy concerned with witnessing and rescuing was coordinated by a range of non-state actors in the Mediterranean zone. The commitment to witnessing means to speak out on behalf of people who suffer. The commitment to rescuing means to alleviate suffering and protect life and health. With these commitments in the foreground, the members of SAR organizations take a firm stance on the unacceptability of deaths at sea, specially when caused by EU policies (del Valle, 2016). Eventually these commitments also open space for debates about how the meaning of citizenship can be redefined within social movements like the SAR civil society groups. Together with their

demands for safe passage and legal routes, the members of SAR organizations evoke certain understandings of what it means to become a substantive citizen. Following Engin Isin's argument, "theorizing acts of citizenship means to recognize that acts produce actors that become answerable to justice against injustice" (Isin, 2008: 39).

Due to the proliferation of non-states actors at work in the Mediterranean maritime zone throughout the past few years, a space previously out of reach for civil society, there exists greater possibility for acts of 'disobedient observation' (Heller et al, 2016; Stierl, 2016), potentially capable of countering the state monopolization of the sea (Stierl, 2016). The emergence of acts of 'disobedient observation' goes in line with Engin Isin's explanation concerning acts of citizenship. Pursuant to Engin Isin, "for acts of citizenship to be acts at all they must call the law into question and, sometimes, break it" (Isin, 2008: 39). Similarly, he added: "for acts of citizenship to be acts at all they must call established forms of responsibilization into question and, sometimes, be irresponsible" (Isin, 2008: 39). This is exactly what the members of SAR organizations do when they enter a European port with rescued passengers who do not have correct paperwork.

SAR operations are protected by the maritime law, however there is also the European immigration law, which punishes the conduct of facilitating what is often called as 'illegal entry' into the territory of a state. The Italian authorities, for example, had proven adamant to use prosecution as deterrence in this case (del Valle, 2016). The first remarkable case of prosecution as deterrence occurred in July 2004, when the German humanitarian ship Cap Anamur rescued 37 people in distress at 100 nautical miles south of Lampedusa. With all passengers on board, Cap Anamur had to wait for permission to land at the border of Italian waters for more than two weeks. Only after the master declared state of emergency because some passengers threatened to throw themselves overboard that the Italian border authorities escorted the ship to the port of Empedocle. Immediately upon landing, the captain, the first officer and the head of the NGO Cap Anamur were detained and prosecuted by the Italian authorities under the charge of facilitating illegal immigration (Cuttitta, 2017).

After entering the Port Empedocle without obtaining permission and being escorted by the authorities, Elias Bierdel (president of Cap Anamur), Vladimir Dachkevitce (captain of the ship), and Stefan Schmidt (first officer) found themselves in an Italian court staying trial for allegedly helping and abetting smugglers (Hasian,

Olivas & Muller, 2017). In the last years, many other cases of prosecution as deterrence occurred when captains and heads of NGOs decided to rescue people in distress. The latest case that made the headlines of all media in Europe was the detention of Carola Rackete, captain of the SAR vessel Sea-Watch 3. The detention occurred in June 2019 at the Port of Lampedusa when the Sea-Watch 3 (a vessel bearing the same name of the NGO) was accused of breaking the Italian laws.

The Deutsche Welle informed that "Carola Rackete was arrested by Italian authorities for resisting a warship after her ship hit a customs and border police motorboat in the port of Lampedusa" (DW, 2019). In his statement about this incident, the Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini described it as 'an act of war,' though there were no injuries (DW, 2019). Besides, the Deutsche Welle reported that Rackete faced "[…] a fine of up to € 50,000 for bringing rescued people into Italian docks without permission" (DW, 2019). Sicilian prosecutors also opened, according to the Deutsche Welle, "[…] an investigation against Rackete for supporting human trafficking" (DW, 2019). This procedure of prosecution as deterrence created a sort of official meta-narrative, whereby sailors who perform SAR operations are lumped together with NGO rescuers and both dissenting groups come to be vilified for saving lives at high sea (Hasian, Olivas & Muller, 2017).

Aiming to contest this meta-narrative, SAR organizations increased their presence on the Mediterranean waters. Since 2014, NGOs have been gradually changing the SAR scene. Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Sea-Watch Organization all refuse the idea that migrants should die for trying to reach Europe. By denouncing the absence of governmental vessels from the SAR zone, the Sea-Watch Organization, for instance, took up the role of the watchdog (Cuttitta, 2017). Describing themselves as "ordinary people who were lucky to be born in Central Europe," Sea-Watch members (most of them laborers, educators, and engineers) came together as they were not willing to just sit back and watch how people are dying at high sea because there is no legal way for them to come to Europe (Sea-Watch, 2015; Stierl, 2017). Having this in mind, Sea-Watch members decided to take a more political stance and activist role towards forced migration and the increasingly violent European border policies.

Apart from the practical work of rescuing and assisting migrants, Sea-Watch carries out fundamental acts of documentation and denunciation of the violence along the European maritime borders. This is because Sea-Watch members regard these acts as tools of transformation of the Mediterranean space into an arena of

politics (Heller, Pezzani & Stierl, 2017). Sea-Watch seeks to mark its presence by conducting SAR operations, as well as documenting and denouncing violence in the borderzone to hold accountable the European naval forces that sporadically engage themselves in media-effective rescue missions (Stierl, 2017). MSF takes a similar stance by stressing that SAR operations cannot be kept separated from the critique of the causes that make them necessary (Cuttitta, 2017).

MSF believes that saving lives also needs to be coupled with pointing at those European authorities who had the power and responsibility to solve the migration problem. Besides providing food, water, blankets and medical help, the MSF's message is twofold: first, the European states have the capacity and responsibility to deploy rescue ships, and second, they should create safe and legal routes for those trying to reach Europe. Aiming to make this message reach the popular masses, MSF also agreed to facilitate access for journalists to file their own reports (del Valle, 2016). On the other hand, MOAS decided to take a softer stance, giving proper attention to the rescue of migrants only. In this sense, the physical survival of distressed migrants is the MOAS stated aim. What comes before the sea journeys or after disembarkation is secondary. From a purely operational perspective, there is something objectionable in this softer stance, when, in the end of each year, thousands of people are rescued out of life-endangering situations at high sea (Stierl, 2017).

MOAS privileged an attitude of prudence by avoiding confrontations and complex political evaluations. Its members follow the slogan "save lives first and sort out the politics later." Broadly speaking, MOAS sees the Mediterranean as a natural stage for SAR operations, whereas Sea-Watch and MSF aim to turn it into a political stage from which they can make their voice heard (Cuttitta, 2017). However, apart from the discussion about neutrality and impartiality that the work and aims of MOAS, Sea-Watch and MSF open up, it is crucial to argue that these SAR organizations share practices and ideas of solidarity based on common humanity that are political in their very nature. Even MOAS – which seems to have adopted a less rigorous approach in the contestation of the European border policies – refused the idea that border crossers should die at high sea, thus opting to act in favor to the most vulnerable people affected by the political decisions taken by the border authorities.

The choice for the 'most vulnerable groups,' or those people often 'neglected' implies, by definition, a political reading (del Valle, 2016). From this

perspective, one should note that, regardless their different stances and aims, the SAR organizations play altogether a political role by rescuing people whom European states do not seem to be willing to help in the first place. In doing so, their humanitarian work assumes a political relevance, even if practiced without the natural intention to be political (Cuttitta, 2017). This political relevance also embraces the elements of civic engagement by cultivating a fertile ground for a substantive meaning of citizenship to grow. Engaged in a political action of rescuing, members of SAR organizations exercise a form of citizenship less oriented to a formal duty.

Citizenship can be seen as a starting point for civic engagement, which comes to be a prerequisite for any kind of activity in voluntary association. In this reading, citizenship acquires a substantive character underpinned by actions for equality, liberty, justice and solidarity. These actions are also followed by procedural values, such as openness, responsibility and tolerance (Dahlgren, 2009; Papa & Milioni, 2013). Apparently, the humanitarian initiative Alarm Phone, which was created and put into practice by the project called Watch the Med in 2014, reflects these actions and procedural values that support the substantive character of citizenship. Taking into account the fact that European border authorities have been failing to respond in a more humane manner to the massive migration flows on the Mediterranean Sea, ordinary citizens that were already involved in a wide humanitarian network decided to develop the Watch the Med project.

The members of this project decided to be in charge of an Alarm Phone that offers a number, working 24/7 and covering the sea corridors. The main idea of this initiative is to localize overcrowded boats and contact the European coast guard and other SAR organizations responsible to perform rescue operations. First and foremost, the Alarm Phone provides important details that the European border authorities can no longer say that they were not aware of (Kynsilehto, 2018). This initiative also functions as a tool to listen to and support migrants moving through dangerous spaces, operating day and night and offering advice to precarious travelers. As a result, by making the emergency situations at high sea publicly known, the Alarm Phone monitors whether authorities adequately respond to distress calls (Stierl, 2016). In 2019, for instance, an outstanding report was released to celebrate the five years of the Alarm Phone, where members of the Watch the Med project came together to expose and discuss the practical implications of this initiative.

Beyond showing the continuing and necessary interest to voice solidarity

with those on the move who, before and after their arrival, still face a range of forms of excessive violence (Edding & Stierl, 2019), the report also exposes some of the cases that the Alarm Phone was able to save lives. Just to have a better idea of it, on 3 April 2019, 64 people in distress were rescued after reaching out the Alarm Phone. On 4 July 2019, 54 people called the phone after surviving the night in distress and were later rescued. Other 80 people in distress dialed the number and were rescued on 9 August 2019 (Stierl & Kopp, 2019). Properly speaking, the struggles of the Alarm Phone activists to save lives are not only claims for rights and responsibilities, but also enactments of substantive citizenship.

In their very manifestation, the struggles of the Alarm Phone activists challenge the formal category of citizenship that is reductive in a national-legal-settlerist frame. In this sense, it is through mobilization like the Alarm Phone initiative that citizenship cannot simply be understood as national citizenship 'scaled up,' but as something that (re)signifies and escapes from border control (Nyers, 2015; Stierl 2016). Engin Isin explained, for instance, that "citizenship is enacted through struggles for rights among various groups in their ongoing process of formation and reformation. Actors, scales and sites of citizenship emerge through these struggles" (Isin, 2009: 383). Moving beyond sovereign scripts, the activists' struggles acquire the ability to create an underground world of knowledge, in a way that subjects of escape and those in solidarity with them enact substantive citizenship by claiming for the fundamental rights to move, cross, survive and arrive. As a consequence, these struggles challenge and assign responsibility to governments (Stierl, 2016).

In this conflict between state and non-state actors on the Mediterranean waters, the latter has been increasing its securitizing role to undermine the performance of the former. To have a better idea, the already mentioned report released by OHCHR pointed out that "during the reporting period, SAR vessels and aircraft operating in the Mediterranean continue to be prevented from monitoring, searching for, assisting and rescuing migrants in distress" (OHCHR, 2021: 25). The report also indicated that "this led to periods in which no humanitarian SAR NGOs were present at sea, leading to tragic and preventable loss of life" (OHCHR, 2021: 25). However, regardless of the increased securitizing role played by state actors, members of SAR organizations tend to create possibilities for acts of disobedience, either by creating a phone or entering a port without permission.

Although prevented from conducting their activities in large-scale, the

ordinary citizens working for the sea rescue cause found alternative ways to transform the European maritime borders into a civic space. The Alarm Phone, for instance, revealed to be a model of a trans-border solidarity coalition not commissioned by anyone, and that responded entirely to the plight at sea by intervening in a space that is reserved for states (Stierl, 2016). While unimaginable not so long ago, interventions performed by NGOs helped make disobedient actions in sea spaces conceivable. This also paved the way for those who seek to rescue not subjects of compassion but support, in solidarity, as well as enactments of the freedom of movement (Stierl, 2017). In today's world, it is quite impossible to imagine border zones without actors who appear to be challenging the very nature of citizenship.

4. Conclusion

The European borders are still sites where security policies of containment get played out. However, this paper intended to demonstrate that the European maritime border, more specifically the Mediterranean zone, also became a site where a new form of citizenship is enacted. By practicing alternative ways that contested the increasing securitization of the borders, members of SAR NGOs transformed the Mediterranean into a space where a substantive category of citizenship as practice could be claimed. In a more critical way of thinking about the civilian search and sea rescue cause, it was possible to associate the Mediterranean zone with the new vocabulary of citizenship created by Engin Isin (2009), whereby rights (in this case those of moving, crossing, surviving and arriving), a site (the maritime border), a scale (European), and acts (volunteering, rescuing and resisting) helped contribute to the enactment of a renewed way to interpret citizenship.

Notwithstanding their different aims, attitudes, interests and stances, all SAR organizations explored in this paper share an ideology that embraces a humanitarian ethos of saving lives regardless of the cost of doing so. The fact that all these SAR organizations are victims of securitization and considered by governments and authorities as perpetrators of irregular migration make them be seen as disobedient actors navigating on European waters. But following a more critical thinking, this paper invited the reader to look at these disobedient actors as comprised by ordinary citizens who, through their activist behavior, aim to remake their relationship with state authorities, thus contesting the traditional notion of

citizenship exclusively linked to the legal status. In other words, identifying these citizens as people working towards a more substantive form of citizenship as practice enables to focus not only on the acts of solidarity, but also on how these citizens are capable of creating alternative solutions by consciously breaking the law to make sense of their acts.

All this said, it is worth closing this paper by pushing a theatrical metaphor which considers Engin Isin's argument that "acts of citizenship include subjects becoming activist citizens through scenes created" (Isin, 2008: 38). Bearing this in mind, it is possible to argue that entering a European port without the permission from authorities to save the lives of the passengers or creating an alarm phone to assist migrants in distress are acts performed in a created scene where the climax is the revelation of a form of citizenship that is no longer associated with a legal status. Scenes like these are for Engin Isin "[…] momentous acts that require the courage, bravery, and righteousness to break with habitus" (Isin, 2008: 18).

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