

29/03 – 31/03/2023

SOCIAL IMAGINARIES OF EMERGENCY SITUATIONS AT SEA SINCE 1800

Programme

Conference venue

Mines Paris – PSL
Building A, Room E112
1, rue Claude Daunesse
06904 Sophia Antipolis

Organisation

Nebiha Guiga (ZfL),
Aurélien Portelli (Mines Paris – PSL),
Henning Trüper (ZfL)



Wednesday 29/03/2023

19:30 Welcome dinner (optional, included) Hotel Omega

Thursday 30/03/2023

9:00 Welcome at Mines Paris – PSL

9:15–9:30 Introduction

Chair: Henning Trüper

9:30–10:30 **ILYA BERKOVICH** *Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna*

Between Fascination and Primordial Fear: Old-Regime Soldierly Accounts of Sea Travel

10:30–10:45 Coffee break

10:45–11:45 **JOHANNES LEHMANN** *University of Bonn*

Humanity and the Public Sphere:

On the Conflicting Relationship between Private and State Rescue at Sea

Chair: Nebiha Guiga

11:45–12:45 **NARVE FULSÅS** *University of Tromsø*

The Humanization of Fatalities in Norwegian Fisheries 1850–1950

12:45–14:00 Buffet lunch

14:00–15:00 **MICHELLE O'TOOLE** *University of Edinburgh*

Control, Identity and Meaning in Voluntary Lifeboating Work:
A Case Study of the RNLI

Chair: Lukas Schemper

15:00–16:00 **CAROLINA KOBELINSKY** *CNRS*

Honouring Border-Crossers Who Have Died in the Mediterranean:
When the Imaginaries of Emergency Situations Meet those of
Foreign and Anonymous Deaths

16:00–16:30 Coffee break

16:30–17:30 **NEBIHA GUIGA** *ZfL Berlin /*

AURÉLIEN PORTELLI *Mines Paris – PSL*

Imaginaries of Lifeboating in the BBC Series 'Saving Lives at Sea':
narratives and visual constructions of danger and heroism in historical perspective

19:30 Dinner Hotel Omega

Friday 31/03/2023

Chair: Aurélien Portelli

9:00–10:00 HENNING TRÜPER *ZfL Berlin*

Naval Emergency as Bad Luck: The Loss of HMS “Nimble,” 1834

10:00–11:00 FRÉDÉRIC CAILLE *Université Savoie Mont-Blanc*

A Birth of Modern No-Border Humanitarianism:

Inventing the Moral Signification of Lifesaving at Sea in the 19th Century

11:00–11:15 Break

Chair: Alexandra Heimes

11:15–12:15 JEAN-PHILIPPE MILLER-TREMBLAY *EHESS*

Holding the Line:

Military Imaginaries and British Shipwrecks during the First World War

12:15–13:30 Buffet lunch

13:30–14:30 LUKAS SCHEMPER *ZfL Berlin*

Moral Shipwreck: Emergency Situations at Sea during Naval Confrontations of the Second World War

Chair: Jonathan Stafford

14:30–15:30 UGO CORTE *University of Stavanger*

Saving Lives for a Living: Lifeguarding Approaches in Hawai'i and Beyond

15:30–16:00 Break

16:00–17:00 ALEXANDRA HEIMES *ZfL Berlin*

The Situation of Shipwreck and the Philosophy of Situation.

Dilemmas and Crises of Decision-Making in Mid-Twentieth-Century

Philosophers (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Adorno)

17:00–17:15 Conclusion

18:00 Transfer to Nice

20:00 Dinner, Restaurant Le Terre del Sud

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

“But every man naturally, or rather necessarily, familiarizes his imagination with the distresses to which he foresees that his situation may frequently expose him. It is impossible that a sailor should not frequently think of storms and shipwrecks, and foundering at sea, and of how he himself is likely both to feel and to act upon such occasions.” (Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759)

Human activities at sea – from shipping to fishing or off-shore mining – incur specific risks and produce specific types of emergency situations (shipwreck, oil spills etc.). As Adam Smith notes in the quoted passage it is ‘impossible’ for those who are frequently exposed to these hazards, not to think about these risks and emergencies, to imagine these situations and ways of reacting to them. Societies thus generate social imaginaries that interfere with the necessity – and also with the moral obligation – to intervene and provide relief. While dealing with extreme situations, such as shipwreck, is always a matter of very concrete practical demands, possibilities and abilities, such occurrences are also subject to symbolic representations and require negotiating between these representations and the features of the situation at hand.

Since the late eighteenth century, a particular addition to imaginaries of marine emergency has occurred: the advent of humanitarian organizations for saving lives from shipwreck. These organizations, aiming to institutionalize responses to the distress situation of shipwreck, generated a peculiar idiom of moral language and practice that countered the ordinary existential risk of shipwreck with the novel existential risk of lifesaving action. The emergency situation thus became a competition of existential risks. From this period onward, it seems that marine emergency has been increasingly subject to extremely exacting moral imperatives. The conference is based on the assumption that the advent of this humanitarian morality had ramifications for the imagination of emer-

gency situations, and it seeks to explore these ramifications.

We do not assume that the moralization of shipwreck entirely upended existing imaginaries, nor that the history of imagined emergency can be reduced to it. Rather, we intend to fully take into account the fragmented and sometimes inconsistent nature of social representations, which endows them with their own complex dynamics. The question is then twofold: How did these imaginaries unfold? And what role did moral language and practice play in this process?

In order to get a on the complexity of the social imaginaries of emergency situations at sea, an appropriate scale of study is needed, which neither over-simplifies the question by only addressing abstract generalization, nor dissolves it in the overly particular.

We plan to focus on the median scale of the emergency situations, which will serve to render visible the inherent heterogeneity of the imaginaries in question. This is the case because situations are always in some sense pre-imagined. Otherwise they would hardly be recognizable as identifiable situations. Even if their identifiable character is constructed only on the spot, this is done departing from available imaginary resources.

Lifesaving at sea, for instance, can be sacrificial; it can be transactional; it can be agonal; and it can be bureaucratic and technological. These, and other, possibilities co-constitute the situation. We will be interested in finding out more about these and other co-constituents of emergency situations.

We will ask what is the specificity of marine space and the symbolic and cultural representations associated with it have in the construction of the associated imaginaries; what were the types of narratives surrounding emergencies at sea, and how did they in turn influence social actors’ perceptions of these events. We will also address the problem of the various ways in which technological changes affect the social imaginaries of

emergency and rescue at sea. Not only do new technological developments alter the temporal and spatial frames of emergency situations (in terms of response speed and the understanding of distance); they also impact social imaginaries of agency in general. The effect of technology on social imaginaries should not however be thought of as a linear process, and the endurance in modified forms of some symbolic patterns – such as figures of the ‘heroic’ – should also be focused on. Another crucial question concerns the increase of the scale of technology-induced maritime risk in contemporary times. If in the context of shipwreck relief / search and rescue, the imaginary of technology has generally been benign, in the context of industrial capitalism (e.g. oil spills), modernizing warfare, and finally global warming, the imaginary of technology has become more complex, even, to some, overwhelmingly malign. The urgency of the question of the layering of different, morally infused imaginaries of emergency, and of ‘rescue’, in the marine context is really only fully apparent in light of this consideration. The competition of risks, the ‘risk society’ at sea, cannot be understood, we contend, without taking into account the full genealogy of this problem over the course of late modern history.

PARTICIPANTS' ABSTRACTS

ILYA BERKOVICH

Austrian Academy of Sciences

Between Fascination and Primordial Fear: Old-Regime Soldierly Accounts of Sea Travel

Other than sailors, soldiers were the largest group of eighteenth-century European commoners who regularly travelled far away from their place of birth and home communities. Their writings offer a valuable perspective from below, which complements what was typically elite social imageries of exotic new cultures, unfamiliar institutions, and astonishing natural phenomena.

Colonial expansion meant that more and more troops were sent across the ocean to Africa, the Indian subcontinent and – most of all – to North America and the Caribbean. Men, many of whom have never seen the sea before, now found themselves in the landless vastness of the Ocean. What happened in their minds?

Drawing on the writings of about two dozen common soldiers this paper tries to identify general trends among their thoughts and their experiences while travelling the sea. One of the first sentiments mentioned was genuine curiosity inspired by new things never seen before, from the technical aspects of seafaring to marine wildlife. But beyond these amusing sometime humorous descriptions lay deep primordial fear of the totality of the new environment. Being at sea was seen by itself as an extremely dangerous situation. Risk of death was omnipresent even on fair weather days, let alone when an emergency played out. Storms are described as terrifying experiences with authors telling how these demonstrated the impotence of humans vis-à-vis the power of nature and/or the wrath of God. This encouraged further contemplation as immediate fear for one's life challenged existing rules and could easily prompt reconsideration of established norms. We also have several accounts of shipwrecks, with rather frank descriptions about what human character is capable in such des-

perate conditions: panic, breakdown, and betrayal.

FREDERIC CAILLE

Université Savoie Mont-Blanc

A birth of modern no border humanitarianism: inventing the moral signification of life saving at sea in the 19th century

In the genealogy of modern humanitarianism, rescue at sea occupies a special place. It marks the birth of a specific moral economy, that is, of a new emotional, practical and normative regime to assistance to people in danger. The spectacle of suffering from a distance, for the first time, calls for a form of collective mobilization and anticipated and prepared action. New boundaries of the tolerable and the intolerable are defined and shift throughout the century. They are correlated with the two increasing curves of financial and intellectual investment focused on the material dimensions of relief, and the moral crusade valuing personal exposure to risk to save others. We will present and discuss the historical sources available to continue to understand and analyse the origins and social diffusion of this moral evolution.

UGO CORTE *University of Stavanger*

Saving Lives for a Living: Lifeguarding Approaches in Hawai'i and Beyond

Based on ethnographic and interview data conducted on the North Shore of O'hau, Hawai'i, this talk will address the following questions: How has the invention and implementation of specific technologies affected lifeguarding styles in Hawai'i and beyond? Lifeguards talk about having progressed from "reactive to proactive approaches". Which kinds of small group dynamics do each of these strategies entail? How can these two styles of lifeguarding be best described and conceptualized while taking into consideration how the "patients" to be served, and possibly those individuals who pursue this occu-

pation, have changed since the 1950s? How do lifeguards train for the unexpected? The first part of the presentation will be historical and primarily focused on Hawai'i. The second part will briefly introduce sociological theories of risk-taking from different levels of analysis: from risk society and acceleration theories, to work on action, edgework, and on fateful moments. The third section will illustrate through analytical concepts two particularly challenging and iconic rescues that took place at Waimea Bay on the North Shore of O'ahu representing reactive and proactive approaches of life-guarding.

NARVE FULSAS *University of Tromsø*
The Humanization of Fatalities in Norwegian Fisheries 1850–1950

Along the coast of Norway family households would combine small scale subsistence farming with fisheries. Merchant capital operated on the outskirts of the production system and connected peasant households to international markets where a surplus of fish products was exchanged for grain and other necessities in shortage at home. Fishing was done in open boats, with the most important seasonal cod fisheries taking place in winter/spring. By the middle of the nineteenth century Eilert Sundt conducted demographical studies demonstrating that in some communities one in three adult men would die by drowning. He sounded alarm about what he perceived to be a fatalistic attitude towards the hazards of the fisheries and suggested boat reforms, swimming education and a system for determining the exact causes of every accident, particularly whether human error was to blame. From the late nineteenth century, a series of new technologies made fishing safer while at the same time transforming the representations of and discourses on fatalities: statistics made them into objects of knowledge, telegraph and newspapers made them into national news events, obligatory insurance was introduced, combustion engines replaced sails, and by 1920 daily weather forecasting was introduced. Together these

changes transformed the construction of fatalities from one of danger to one of risk. They were no longer just products of threats emanating from the environment, they were primarily about human technologies, institutions, and decisions.

NEBIHA GUIGA / AURELIEN PORTELLI

ZfL Berlin / Mines Paris – PSL

Imaginarities of lifeboating in the BBC Series Saving Lives at Sea: narratives and visual constructions of danger and heroism

Since 2016, the BBC has broadcast six seasons of a TV documentary series following the volunteers of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) their lifeboating activities. That institution, founded in 1824 is charged with saving lives at sea in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The series mixes footage from cameras fixed on the helmets of lifeboat crew and interviews of both volunteers and those they saved. In this paper we will analyse the representations of lifesaving at sea that are constructed in this series. In particular we will look at the ways in which the imaginaries of danger and heroism present in the series interact with the history of the institution, and how they vary depending on the social actors.

ALEXANDRA HEIMES *ZfL Berlin*

The Situation of Shipwreck and the Philosophy of Situation. Dilemmas and Crises of Decision-Making in Mid-Twentieth-Century Philosophers (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Adorno)

Shipwreck as an event prompts questions concerning action and agency in the midst of conditions of crisis which restrict them both. Such concern, my paper suggests, can be explored more deeply under the philosophical rubric of 'situation.' From the early 20th century on, the concept of situation – along with correspondent notions such as crisis, attitude, decision – was subject to extensive philosophical interest, ranging from phenomenological

and existential philosophy to prominent representatives of critical theory like Theodor W. Adorno. Whereas everyday language refers rather vaguely to the context-bound nature of human actions, situation as a philosophical concept questions the conditions of agency in more fundamental ways. As “the concept par excellence of topicality” (A. Haverkamp), it designates a state of an imminent or acute crisis that is characterized by both the demand for resolute response on the one hand, and the lack of stable guidelines for decision-making and action on the other. Situations, as I will argue in my paper, expose an inherently dilemmatic structure, which will be discussed by drawing on some exemplary, albeit quite divergent positions on the topic, namely by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Adorno. On this basis, it will be possible to shed light on shipwreck as a specific type of situation – and thereby to engage in a critical dialogue with the now dominant discourses of risk calculation and security techniques which seemingly have absorbed the questions and aporias that were raised before.

CAROLINA KOBELINSKY CNRS
Honouring Border-Crossers Who Have Died in the Mediterranean: When the Imaginaries of Emergency Situations Meet those of Foreign and Anonymous Deaths

In 2014, Mare Nostrum, the Italian Navy's military and humanitarian operation to save the lives of migrants in danger in the Mediterranean, was stopped and replaced by an operation funded by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, that was focused on border control. It was at this point that humanitarian organisations became involved in rescue at sea. Boats were chartered and sent out to locate and rescue the often very unstable and overcrowded vessels of border crossers.

The moral imperative of saving lives at sea has a correlate in caring for those who have died at sea, once they are on dry land. The material and symbolic treatment of the dead is often handled by people

who are sensitive to migration issues or even involved in defending migrants' rights. But in coastal cities, it is also handled by people who are particularly attached to the sea and for whom it becomes necessary to show 'respect' to those who have lost their lives there.

Between 2015 and 2018, Catania, in the east of Sicily, was one of the main arrival points for border crossers trying to reach the European Union without the necessary authorization from nation-states. In 2017, a small group of locals involved with the Red Cross in migrant reception in the port came together to create an initiative designed to 'care' for the dead bodies that were arriving on European territory, alongside the living, during the Search and Rescue operations. Together, these people from different backgrounds and with different motivations turned their aim of respecting the deceased into a project to develop a database for identifying the unnamed bodies buried in the 'migrants' square' of the local cemetery. Drawing on ethnographic material collected by tracking this initiative, I propose to explore in this paper (1) how the imaginaries of emergency situations at sea are shaped and unfold in this particular context and (2) how, for those who make a commitment on land to honour those who have died at sea, these imaginaries relate to representations of border death, which is an 'unknown' and very often 'anonymous' death.

JOHANNES LEHMANN

University of Bonn

Humanity and the Public Sphere. On the conflicting relationship between private and state rescue at sea.

The “Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Rettung Schiffbrüchiger” advertises on its website that it is independent of state funding. In response to my enquiry as to the reasons for this striving for state independence, the press spokeswoman replies: “It is based on the conviction that it is only possible to go out when others come in if there is voluntary participation on all sides, that the state cannot order anyone to undertake a dangerous mission, but

that courageous people are only prepared to do so if their service is not financed by anonymous taxes, levies or fees, but many people throughout the country consciously donate to it and in this way motivate them to selfless commitment.” Rescue, it can be concluded, according to the idea formulated here, only works as a non-political relationship from person to person. In my lecture, I would like to explore the question of how this statement can be explained discourse-historically and how state and private engagement of rescue relate to each other. How and why was it possible for an un-political or anti-political form of the humanitarian norm of rescue to develop in the field of sea rescue? The mobilisation of the public by exposing the plight of non-state shipwrecked people is in tension with the immediate state biopolitical interest in rescue. I would like to shed light on this biopolitical-humanitarian tension between the rescue of human lives and the role of the public by examining three areas:

1. The discussion of the *jus litoris* in the 19th century. For this purpose, I analyse the comedy “Das Strandrecht” (1808) by August von Kotzebue.
2. The transfer of the neutrality requirement of rescue, as stated by William Hillary in his call for the foundation of rescue stations (1824), from sea rescue to military medical care in war. For this purpose, I analyse von Eschsch's text: “Ueber den Kampf der Humanität gegen die Schrecken des Krieges” (1869).
3. The current problem of private sea rescue in the Mediterranean. I ask about the social imaginary of scenes of rescue/non-rescue and about what is made invisible by these scenes.

**JEAN-PHILIPPE MILLER-
TREMBLAY** *EHESS*

Holding the line: Military imaginaries and British shipwrecks during the First World War

This paper will be guided by the following questions: why and how were traditional military formations employed to urgently assemble troops as well as civilians on British sinking ships during the First World

War? What core impetuses were at the heart of this phenomenon? Firstly, and following in the footsteps of historians such as Lucy Delap¹ who wrote on chivalry at sea, we could analyse it as an embodiment of courage and heroism, echoing the heritage of a Napoleonic style of warfare according to which “holding the line” made the difference between life and death on the battlefield. There was at least one important difference though: when a ship sank, the enemy was not only, or even not at all, human. Indeed, nature also became part of the equation, deeply changing the protagonists of the struggle as well as their relation. Furthermore, we will consider the rationality behind the choice of this method of ordering bodies. For example, on the small space of a bridge, this could have helped sailors to prepare lifeboats more quickly, as their passengers were not getting in the way. We thus cannot limit ourselves to the sole proposition that “holding the line” in such a way was just a symbolic expression of a will to survive. In the most basic sense, passengers staying still while others were at work for their rescue could also have made the difference between life and death.

MICHELLE O'TOOLE

University of Edinburgh

Control, identity and meaning in voluntary lifeboating work: A case study of the RNLI

Drawing together work from an empirical case study of the Royal National Lifeboat institution (RNLI), a voluntary organisation which has been saving lives at sea in the UK and Ireland since 1824, this presentation takes an organisational studies perspective of ‘life on the front line’ of danger. The presentation reports on the following research questions: How are volunteers controlled by their organisation and what effect does this have on organisational relations? How do the interactions between the organisation and unpaid volun-

¹ Lucy Delap, “Thus Does Man Prove His Fitness to Be the Master of Things”: Shipwrecks, Chivalry and Masculinities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain, *Cultural and Social History*, janvier 2006, vol. 3, n° 1, p. 45-74.

teers create and shape meaning and identity for actors, and what happens when expectations collide? Can the practice of volunteering ever truly be imagined as fully agentic? And what role does place play in the development, formation and maintenance of identity?

LUKAS SCHEMPER *ZfL Berlin*

Moral Shipwreck: Emergency Situations at Sea during Naval Confrontations of the Second World War

Besides a massive physical rupture – the destruction of military and civilian vessels, resulting in the shipwreck of 3500 merchant ships, 175 Allied warships, and 765 U-boats – the period of the Second World War also represented a moral rupture, namely a change in norms regarding the treatment of the shipwrecked. The moral norm for sea captains to aid those in danger had existed for centuries. An increase in maritime casualties in the 19th century, coupled with a new humanitarian sensibility, also led to the incorporation of this principle into international law. While the 1910 Brussels Convention on Assistance and Salvage at Sea excluded war ships from the obligation to save life at sea, the Hague Convention of 1907 did prescribe how to treat shipwrecked combatants. And yet, within the scope of unrestricted submarine warfare, a situation developed in which even official orders prohibited the saving of survivors.

The so-called Laconia Order, forbidding the rescue of Allied survivors and given by Grand admiral Dönitz, and problematized at the Nuremberg trials, was exemplary of this new reality. Based on research in German and British archives, this paper investigates what happened to the imperative of assisting individuals in situations of distress at sea during the war: how do we explain the transgression of such a universal norm? Were orders in contravention of this norm obeyed? In what situations did belligerents come to the aid of drowning combatants and non-combatants and in which not? What legal, strategic, propagandistic, or moral justifications were given?

HENNING TRÜPER *ZfL Berlin*

Naval Emergency as Bad Luck: The Loss of HMS “Nimble,” 1834

The Nimble was a Royal Navy schooner engaged in the so-called fight against the slave trade. Having recently captured a Spanish slaver and taken on board 272 slaves, it ran ashore at nighttime in bad weather on the Cuban coast in November 1834. While all crew were saved, several dozens of their African passengers lost their lives in the various mishaps that unfolded over the course of the accident, which according to Nimble’s master, Lieutenant Charles Bolton, had only occurred because of the “uncontrollable noise of these savages” had made it impossible to hear the breaking of the waves on the beach. The court-martial conducted on the accident cleared Bolton and his crew of all culpability.

I will reconstruct the case with a view to working out some of the structural features of the way in which rather ordinary naval emergencies were imagined, both as they unfolded and as they were described afterwards. The clustering of unnecessary mishaps renders the accident an affair pervaded by what one might call cruel ironies, a feature that is common to the description of naval disaster. The accident created a “scene of horror” that “may be imagined but cannot be described” (Bolton); and in these topoi, it aligns not least with a recognizable nineteenth-century idiom of the tragic. At the same time, however, the event was suffused with features that point to a distinctly modern aesthetic of the comical as based on a profound lack of human mastery over the moving parts of a situation, natural, technical, and social. I will argue that this aesthetic is intimately related to the moral language that emerged around humanitarianism; and that in the case of the Nimble it added to the brutalization of the enslaved people that were supposedly being “rescued” (Bolton’s expression, once more).