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The Multiple Movements of the Humanitarian Border: The Portable Provision of Care and Control at the Aegean Islands

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ABSTRACT

The “humanitarian border” that emerged at the Aegean Islands of Chios and Lesbos during the so called “refugee crisis” arose out of various engagements with care and control. A humanitarian border can be said to consist of the entanglements between humanitarianism and securitization. But how do care and control materialize in practice and how can they move from one place to another? By combining the notion of the “humanitarian border” with the concept of “viapolitics” and an actor-network lens, and based on interviews with state authorities, volunteers and NGOs, this article brings in three claims. First, by studying the “missing masses”, the humanitarian border can be said to arise out of “conjoint actions” that concern engagement with peoples and objects of all sorts. Second, the humanitarian border is not only of a composite nature but of a mobile nature as well. Third, the interstructure of the humanitarian border is generated by a productive relationship between the fluidity of network configurations on the one hand and emerging frictions on the other. By studying the situated tensions between humanitarianism and securitization and focusing on the circulation of materialities of all sorts the movements that make up a humanitarian border can be displayed.

KEYWORDS

Borders; migration; politics; social history; international relations

Introduction

Borders and movement are intimately related as borders are often regarded as the political instruments par excellence to organize international mobility. Movement, however, is not just the object category borders are concerned with. Borders display movements of all sorts themselves. As such, they allow for navigating particular forms of interactions that compose border configurations and particular forms of border politics. Borders have been characterized as mechanisms of intervention able to zoom in and out by conducting “remote control” (Zolberg 2003) or “policing at a distance” (Guild and Bigo 2010, 258) and as decentered and dispersed entities (Parker and Vaughan Williams 2012, 728). But borders are not just objects of political decision-making or avatars of policies that can

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be moved as pieces on a chessboard. Instead, borders appear in configurations consisting of all kinds of state authorities, international organizations, local and regional actors and technologies and materialities of all sorts. One of such configurations is the “humanitarian border” (Walters 2011).

In this article we will focus our lens on the Aegean Islands of Lesbos and Chios. The combination of EU hotspot policies and the migration management of Greek authorities at the Aegean Islands on the one hand with the humanitarian support provided by NGOs and volunteers on the other have been described as the coming into being of a humanitarian border, a configuration consisting of both care and control, of humanitarian action as well as security policies. Pallister-Wilkins (2017) who also investigated the coming-into-being of humanitarian borders at the Aegean islands has argued that the “humanitarian borderscape” results out of the “im/mobility of migrants as they are channeled through ‘corridors’ and ‘narrow bands’ structured by border controls and transport infrastructures” (Pallister-Wilkins 2017, 8). In this article we aim to further explore these various forms of im/mobility that contribute to the configuration of humanitarian borders (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015; Perkowski 2016; Van Reekum 2016; Xiang and Lindquist 2014; Walters 2011). The particular aspect we will engage with is the way care and control and projects of humanitarianism and securitization are enacted and inter-related by movements. We aim to do so by combining the notions of the “humanitarian border” and “viapolitics” with an actor-network lens.

The politics of mobility is a theme that occurs throughout the study of borders in general and in analyses of the refugee “crisis” (Álvarez-Velasco et al. 2015) in particular. However, we suggest that transportations of materials of all sorts, the transformations of care and control and the translations of the roles of various humanitarian and security actors perform an even more intimate internal relationship between borders and movements. For that reason, we will pay specific attention to the different modes of distribution, circulation and delegation of goods, food, medical care, legal assistance and the way associations and networks emerge that can be understood as humanitarian borders. Conceptually, we are particularly interested in the relationship between the transformational fluidity of networks and the frictions that occur between various sorts of interactions, such as between state authorities, volunteers and NGOs. Humanitarian borders consist of movements of all sorts via which translations and associations take place that connect and disconnect actors and things, but they are far from tension-free.

In order to study the relation between fluidity, friction and movement this paper engages with the *internal* intermingling of care and control, with the *interstructure* of the humanitarian border so to say. The analysis is based on a series of thirty interviews with Greek authorities and with various national and international NGOs and local volunteer groups at the Aegean Islands Chios and Lesbos as well at Athens that were conducted February 2016 – May 2016.¹ The interviewees were asked to reflect on the various tensions as well as different entanglements between border control policies. Examples are Hellenic Coast Guard patrols and Frontex operations at sea and a hotspotting policy to register migrants at land. Or the humanitarian aid that was offered by numerous initiatives by national and international NGOs, local grassroots organizations and volunteers. We focus on the period between spring 2015 when the influx of migrants strongly increased and April 2016 when the Balkan route as closed and the EU-Turkey deal was arrived at and the number of migrants declined. The methodology that was

applied aimed at identifying the coming into being of various “actor-networks” and “associations” (Latour 2005; Mol 2010) in processes of humanitarianism and securitization (Pallister-Wilkins 2016; Rozakou 2016a; Trubeta 2015).

The Movable Humanitarian Border

In *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom* Hagar Kotef (2015, 11–14) suggests politics and movement are intimately related. The word “movement” not only denotes social movements or political movements such as the civil rights movement but may also refer to politics of all sorts as a kind of movement. Similar to how Latour and Weibel (2005) have argued the gathering and assembling of objects, ideas and human actions can be regarded as resulting in “things” with a political connotation, the humanitarian border may be said to arise out of various movements. In the following we will therefore explore how these movements compose a humanitarian border and what kind of frictions they contain.

In his description of the humanitarian border Walters (2011) explained it combines border control policies and the presence of state agents with the provision of medical expertise, medical care and legal know-how such as concerning human rights issues and interpretation and translation services (Walters 2011, 146). The emergence of humanitarian borders is not just a next step of a linear process in which borders constantly relate and penetrate other domains of life and of governance. The notion of the humanitarian border

is not just to insist on the emergence of a domain which deserves to be taken seriously in its own right. It is also to complicate the linear narrative; to suggest that at the same time that borders seem to become more like this, they are also taking other forms, materializing along other lines whose trajectory is difficult to predict. (Walters 2011, 146)

The relationship between humanitarian borders and the movability of borders is arguably even more intimate when we navigate these borders with a concept Walters (2015) introduced subsequently, namely the notion of *viapolitics*. The coming into being of a humanitarian border is unquestionably a political event as it emerges out of international conflicts and intensified human mobility. However, a border is not just an instrument of politics or an avatar of migration policies. A humanitarian border in particular consists of all kinds of internal movements that organize the relationships between care and control. The notion of *viapolitics* creates awareness for these interactions as it not only refers to the infrastructures that are required to organize the provision of care and control but also emphasizes that humanitarian action and security policies only express themselves *via* all kinds of combined efforts and the circulation of things, goods and devices.

According to Walters, the term “*via*” emphasizes three issues. First, it “refers to the in between, the en route, the places on the way”. Second, “*via* draws our attention to the specific means of transportation and communication in question”. Third, recalling that *via* is the Latin word for road or way “*via* reminds us that the road and the journey are remarkably powerful and recurrent motifs in the cultural imagination of the West”. For that reason, “vehicles, routes and journeys matter not just because they shape migration worlds; they matter because the ship as well as the city, and the road as well as the agora have provided a locus for problematizations of the human and for the possibility of politics” (Walters 2015, 471–2). Following these remarks on *viapolitics*, we suggest

the humanitarian border is a locus for problematizations of the human *and the nonhuman* for the possibility of politics.

To study the internal friction of the humanitarian border and the specific kind of politics that comes with it, the relationship between care and control, between securitization and humanitarianism deserves attention. Instead of a sharp contrast, processes of securitization and humanitarianism display a reciprocal relationship. In border, migration and security studies two arguments circulate as to *why* there is such an entanglement. Both arguments center on the observation that the discourses and practices of humanitarianism and securitization increasingly overlap (see e.g. Casas-Cortes et al. 2015; Pallister-Wilkins 2016; Perowski 2016; Walters 2011, 2015). First, the terminology of “crisis” in itself is said to link humanitarianism and security, as “crisis” resonates with both mechanisms (Perowski 2016). Second, security actors legitimize their work in terms of humanitarianism and the discourse of humanitarianism is appropriated to justify military operations (Perowski 2016) or mobilized to stop the “crisis” (Walters 2011, 2015). The visibility of rescue at sea then functions as border spectacles as to naturalize migration politics (Van Reekum 2016). These arguments then point to politically invoked *images* of tragedy as well as a *language* of humanitarianism, which are used in order to justify security politics (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015).

However, there is a third way to consider the overlap between humanitarianism and securitization. As borders are said to materialize where the migrant is, by “following the migrant” it becomes possible to distinguish particular overlaps (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015; Nyers 2012; Walters 2011). The daily practices of migrants arriving at the Aegean Islands, of the organizations and volunteers that offer them support and of the various agents who aim to manage migration are interlaced with things of all sorts. These things concern for instance the ships the migrants arrive with; the cell phones they use; the housing, food, clothes and medical care they are provided with; the fingerprinting machines that are used to register them; and the busses, camps and centers that are deployed to detain them. The notion of viapolitics emphasizes that these things are not just the objects actors are concerned with. Instead, it highlights that interaction and organization are mediated via these things. For instance, at one point migrants are interacting with the Hellenic Coast Guard, who is charged with detecting smugglers; at another point they collect shoes and clothes from Médecins du Monde.

Not only is the humanitarian border of a composed nature, it is also of a movable nature. Or, to be more precise, the humanitarian border can be said to consist of multiple movements. Borders are not just composed configurations but contain all kinds of connections and tensions provoked by movements of different sorts. As Nyers (2012) argued, “the migrant is not the only mobile agent at the border. The border, too, moves”. Borders materialize where migrants are (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015; Nyers 2012; Walters 2011). In line with Walters (2015), this point of view points to “visual tropes” that lead from migrants to the diversely assembled networks of humanitarianism and security. The entanglement of care and control exists by virtue of migrants interchangeably interacting with both categories of networks.

The idea that borders follow migrants is not to be mistaken for the view that the materialization of borders simply crystallizes where the migrant is. Following the migrant in understanding the configuration of care and control fails to capture the coordination *between* NGOs, grassroots organizations, the police, the coast guard, and the local and

national authorities. Instead, humanitarian initiatives are to be understood *in relation* to security measures, as they materialize in mutual interaction. For that reason, it seems important to acknowledge with Xiang and Lindquist (2014) that “it is not migrants who migrate, but rather constellations consisting of migrants and non-migrants, of human and non-human actors”.

Grounded on their research on low-skilled labor migration from China and Indonesia Xiang and Lindquist (2014) argue that “more than ever before labor migration is *intensively mediated*. The notion of “migration infrastructure” – the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility – opens up such spaces of mediation to analysis” (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 124, emphasis in original). Following Latour’s (1999, 182) saying that “B-52s do not fly, the U.S. Air Force flies” they state “it is not migrants who migrate, but rather constellations consisting of migrants and non-migrants, of human and non-human actors” (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 124). The notion of “migration infrastructure” thus refers to the conditions that facilitate and fuel movement as well as to the mobility of such infrastructural configurations themselves. For the purposes of our analysis we mainly focus on the second element; the movability of migration infrastructures and the emergence of humanitarian borders that is inseparably related to the flow and concentration of refugees and various kinds of migrants together with medical professionals, local volunteers, legal assistance, border guards and national and international authorities that aim to register people. As an infrastructure, the configuration of the humanitarian border contains another ingredient as well, namely a particular kind of *interstructure*.

Like Xiang and Lindquist (2014, 124) “we are interested in the internal constitution and modular components” – not so much of migration, in this case, but of the emergence of a specific kind of border entity. The “boom” of humanitarian initiatives in Greece (Cabot 2018, 2) that emerged in response to the mediatized spectacle of the “refugee crisis”, prompted a field of relations (and the lack thereof) *between* these initiatives, in an ongoing process of *becoming*. The notion of infrastructure allows of an openness to such processes of becoming; not only in terms of the categorizations what the infrastructure itself is generative of, but also in terms of the sticky materiality (Tsing 2005, 1) as well as repellent elements that internally constitute the infrastructure’s pulse. Moreover, the very movement that this border entity consists of, in itself is a political navigation. In studying movability, the interstructure’s *ordering capacities* are laid bare; not with reference to enacting categories of migrants, but rather in terms of the different modes of circulation and delegation that accommodate movability.

The study of borders allows for developing theories of movement and for deciphering the politics of movement. As a point of departure, all kinds of enactments that can be characterized as referring to types of humanitarianism, responsabilization or securitization are not just transfers of tasks. Instead, they imply processes of translation that, as Latour (2005) has claimed consist of transportations as well as transformations, i.e. they movements as well as metamorphoses. In order to unravel the relationships and interactions between care and control that display such movements and metamorphoses we aim to open the various engagements by actors of all sorts.

To study humanitarian initiatives in relation to security measures in the following we will present two steps of our analysis. In the next section we will describe how the intermingling of care and control takes places by analyzing the various actions so as to clarify

how humanitarianism and securitization interrelate. The section will describe how the humanitarian border can be said to arise out of “conjoint actions” that concern engagement with peoples and objects of all sorts. Thereafter, we will trace the “movable missing masses” of the humanitarian border by emphasizing the role of things and entities of all sorts.

The Entanglements of Care and Control

The humanitarian border, we argued, is composed of humanitarianism and security, of care and control. But how do these compositions hold and how are they brought together? In the following, we will explore these questions by analyzing the entanglements of care and control at Greek Aegean Islands, in particular the Northern Aegean Islands of Lesbos and Chios in the period between Spring 2015 when the influx of migrants strongly increased and April 2016 when the EU-Turkey deal was arrived at and the number of migrants declined. Lesbos, the third largest island in Greece, is only 5.5 kilometers from Turkey at the narrowest point of the Mytilini Strait. Chios, the fifth largest of the Greek islands, is situated 7 kilometers from the Turkish coast. The reason the islands of Chios and Lesbos (like other Aegean islands) became one of the main stages of the humanitarian border is unquestionably related to their geographical position at the edge of continental Europe not far from the coast with Turkey. However, it would be misleading to reduce the situating of this Gordian knot of care and control to its location. The geographical borders of Greece coincide with the external borders of the EU. EU policies deliberately defined the Aegean islands as the frontier of the EU and as the place where the registration practices according to the Dublin regulations were to take place. Human mobility does not “naturally” come to a halt at the islands because of the isolated location or their position in between the mainland of Greece and Turkey, but rather because the administrative, regulatory, political and technological apparatus of the EU defined the islands as the entrance to the EU.

Acts of care for migrants arriving at the Aegean Islands – here conceived of as practices that seek to relieve discomfort, unsafety and precarity – and acts of control over these migrants – here conceived of as practices of containment, surveillance, policing, conservation, enforcement, and repression – materialize in mutual interaction. As an *effect* of these apparently distinct practices, the humanitarian border thus embodies both the projects of humanitarianism and security. Konrad (2015) conceives of the very motion between such opposing forces as generative of borders in itself. Against this background of the border as landscape of movement, in which humanitarianism and security are dialectically exercised, residents living in the borderland – as well as, on Lesbos and Chios, those entering it temporarily or practice their borderwork (Rumford 2009; Pallister-Wilkins 2015) from a distance – have a pivotal role in making the border.

An example of the ways in which Greek residents volunteer in solidarity initiatives towards refugees, and of how these solidarity initiatives are entangled with acts of control, is found in the ethnographic work of Rozakou (2016b), who did fieldwork on Lesbos in 2015. She notes that such initiatives overtly challenge the “dominant dehumanization of newcomers” by introducing “sociality as a rehumanizing process” (Rozakou 2016b, 195). She observes that solidarity initiatives deliberately position themselves in

opposition to hierarchical discourses and bureaucratic practices in which newcomers are classified in the realm of nature.

Both on Lesbos and Chios, grassroots organizations say that their conduct has taken shape in iteration with the activities of the coast guard. An interviewee of Lathra?, a grassroots organization that acts as a Solidarity Committee at Chios to support refugees, for example pointed out that, in the 15 years that Lathra? is present on Chios, several disagreements with the coast guard had emerged, which now keeps Lathra? from actions that may provoke problems to the authorities. Lathra? thus tunes to the coast guard in order to define their possibilities to act.² Another example is provided by an interviewee of Starfish Foundation, a registered Greek NGO that started as an informal voluntary local group “aiming to meet the basic human needs of food, clothing and hygiene for refugees who were arriving by boat at the village harbor or being transported there by the Coast Guard Police who had rescued them at sea”.³ The interviewee said that “StarFish started as a local initiative, just as people from the village were searching to help out”. Over time, “local discussions also became more intense ... The village became divided. ... [It] started polarizing in a sense”. As resistance against their initiative grew, “someone started with a Facebook page in order to unite the different people helping in the area and to promote collaboration and attention and that is how the seed for StarFish was planted”.⁴ Here, care and control thus develop in mutual interaction; the resistance against StarFish reinforced the materialization of the organization.

In the moments that residents confront and contest borders it may be so that the role of (some) NGOs and local volunteer groups is most obvious; the fuzz created by challenging the established conduct stands out and appears clearly *visible* as resistance. Deleixhe (2018) for example emphasizes that “migrants themselves” engage in “organized gestures of disobedience” (Deleixhe 2018, 12). Much in line with Rumford’s (2013) take on borderwork and the subsequent account of Pallister-Wilkins (2017) of humanitarian borderwork, the role of ordinary people in doing borderwork is perceived of mainly as resilience against the border regime (Deleixhe 2018) – or, in Rumford’s account, not linked to securitization at all (Rumford 2013, 169).

But what if the border is not only the securitized border, but instead a configuration of acts of both care and control, in order for the conceptual distinction between securitization and humanitarianism to blur? What if local volunteer groups and NGOs not only distance themselves from the authorities’ bordering activities, but also position themselves in collaboration and coordination with these authorities? And what if the authorities’ bordering activities – and those elements of “the border” that are an effect of their conduct – are neither univocally securitized or the only thing out of which border consist? With a collection of excerpts from interviews, we demonstrate how not only actors that are conventionally seen as humanitarian actors perform acts of control, but also and vice versa, that security actors perform in acts of care. As such, we examine the shifting role of local volunteer groups and NGOs and their positionality towards border authorities on the Aegean Islands.

The interviewee of StarFish pointed out that they work “very closely together with the coastguard – they are just two doors down”.⁵ From their vessels, the coastguard in fact calls a local Starfish Foundation volunteer on-shore, in order for her to prepare the handing-out of clothes to those that the coastguard picked up at sea. And not only the grassroots coordinate with institutes and practices of security. The NGOs that we consulted all say to have

a good working relationship with Frontex. For example, the interviewee working for the Norwegian Refugee Council on Chios, remarked that Frontex is “extremely positive vis à vis NGOs”.⁶ In fact, NGOs happen to work in collaboration with the border authorities. This has similarly been pointed out by Papataxiarchis who, in his “testimony of the ethnographer’s aporia” (Papataxiarchis 2016, 5) that resulted from his observations in Skala Sykamnias – a village where he had earlier conducted fieldwork – noted that, “[s]ince the beginning of the crisis in the summer [*sic*] of 2015, the Greek government delivered important aspects of the management of the refugees to the more than 100 NGOs which [*sic*] operate on the island” (Papataxiarchis 2016).

This shifting of tasks, duties and obligations to non-state actors in the field of international migration partly resonates with processes of responsabilization. The dynamics in which liability of migration regulation is partly shifted to non-state actors, meets a process of responsabilization, i.e. the mechanism by which non-state actors – such as individuals and communities, but also societal and business actors – are rendered responsible for tasks that earlier fell under the state’s domain. Studies on responsabilization largely deal with either the policy domains of safety and criminality (Garland 2001; O’Malley 1992; O’Malley and Palmer 1996; Schinkel and Van Houdt 2010) or healthcare and social services (Muehlebach 2007; Newman and Tonkens 2011). The process of responsabilization is particularly interesting as they speak to analyses that position the actions of NGOs and local volunteer groups as unambiguously countering the border authorities.

However, two issues need to be emphasized. First, care and control within a humanitarian border involve two-way traffic. Second, responsabilization can be regarded as a process, in accordance with the kind of viapolitics Walters (2015) described. Like humanitarianism and securitization, responsabilization is not just a concept that refers to the intentions of the actors involved but something that materializes and moves in practice by the deployments and rearrangements of all kinds of objects, things, devices and goods. At the Aegean Islands, the strategy of responsabilization, which comprises the charging of private actors with public tasks, enabled both humanitarian and security actors to fill in the gap left open by the authorities. In this paradoxical configuration of regulation through deregulation, actors, things and ideas materialize and become political in the sense that they, as the consultant working for the Ministry of Migration said, try to “use [the] provisional structures”.⁷ In a context of responsabilization and securitization, materialities of all sorts *challenge* the existing relationships between care and control.

The observation that humanitarian actors perform acts of control aligns with Walters’ observation that security practices and effects materialize within practices of humanitarian government (Walters 2011). For example, an interviewee working at the Norway Refugee Council remarked that “in Souda and Dipethe [former refugee camps] we did vulnerability profiling using the registration list of the police”.⁸ A consultant working at the Ministry of Migration commented on this practice, saying that “in any case the logic is that at the first stage we register, identify, detect the vulnerable groups and the asylum seekers, and at the same time we detect the people who should be sent back”.⁹ An actor primarily charged with the responsibility to perform care, here thus at the same time performs practices of control – a finding that resonates with Bigo’s observation that

discourses concerning the human rights of asylum seekers are de facto part of a securitization process if they play the game of differentiating between genuine asylum seekers and illegal

migrants, helping the first by condemning the second and justifying border controls. (Bigo 2002)

But what should be emphasized here is that security actors similarly perform acts of care. The interviewee of the Norwegian Refugee Council, an independent humanitarian organization helping people forced to flee that works in crises across 31 countries¹⁰, noted that the coast guard and the police “push for solutions [that are in] the best interest of migrants. .. [T]hey have a positive approach. ... [Although] they are not supposed to be that positive.” When it comes to patrol at sea level, the interviewee was

sure that they have saved a lot of lives and I’m sure that they were doing their job properly. ... My feeling is that this [i.e. doing pushbacks and treating migrants improperly] is not what they want to do. There is a good spirit at least here in Chios.¹¹

An interviewee working at the Chios Coast Guard commented that, “if you are in the borderline, the only thing you can do is to rescue people”.¹² The focus therefore should not solely lie at practices of security that either materially or temporally precede practices of humanitarianism. Both emerge and function in interaction, and (re)enforce each other.

Indeed, some informants perceive the materialization of care as prompting control. Because of the manifest provision of care, the argument goes, solidarity on the island was perceived to be put under pressure, which in turn cued opposition to care practices and induced the police to get into action. For example, two interviewees working for Lathra? on Chios noted that Chian residents, who initially valued the solidarity groups for providing care, over time changed position and instead portrayed these solidarity groups as “something dangerous, something which creates problems, something suspicious and selfish.” The interviewees pointed out that this negative image affected the perception towards NGOs as well – “who were accused too.” The interviewees observed that this shift in public perception on the island “has cultivated an ambient which allowed the opposition to be created.”¹³ In this case, practices of repression thus *follow from* initial acts of care. Other informants, however, perceive the materialization of control as prompting care. Because of control, the argument goes, border crossing (to some) becomes life threatening, and the precariousness thus created is addressed by humanitarian actors.

The point is not that those actors that engage with migrants operate in a single overarching network in which the fundamental tensions between humanitarian actors and security actors are smoothened over by reciprocal adjustments of conduct. Instead, as Mol notes, “different ‘networks’, simultaneously interdependent and in tension, coexist” (Mol 2010, 259). The networks of actors that engage in activities of care and control may seem juxtapositioned but are at the same time intertwined and overlapping. Moreover, actors, who themselves may circulate in both networks, *mediate* between different networks in mutually coordinated conduct. The composition of the humanitarian borders emerges out of the movements of these various actors.

Since Latour formulated the motto of actor network theory as “follow the actors” it is evident that movement is an intrinsic part of the empirical and conceptual layout of this approach. The actor-network approach emphasizes mediation is a central mechanism in connecting and disconnecting different forms of borders works. The “via” aspect of viapolitics and the “following” aspect of actor-network are not only engaged with the variety of instruments, technologies and things that allow movement but with the different forms of circulation and delegation that mediate between the means, the practices and the

techniques of movement. By using this lens it is possible to detect the various forms and shapes of mediation, such as distribution, circulation and delegation. In doing so, it appears specific actors perform these different forms in different networks and constitute different ways of what Brown (2015), elaborating on the various technopolitical direction of actor-network theory, calls “world-making”.

The internal movements humanitarian borders consist of are nor friction-free. However, frictions are not necessarily conflicts that prevent interaction. As Tsing (2005) explains, “as a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (Tsing 2005, 5). At first glance, this note on frictions addresses an interesting contrast with the presumed fluidity of networks. However, the tension between frictions and fluidity might also generate movement, accommodate it and facilitate it. In that sense, friction and fluidity are not opposed, but mutually conditional. As Müller and Schurr (2016) argue “fluid spatiality ... suggests that the relations can change, often gradually, without the actor falling apart as a result; that they can ‘transform themselves without creating difference’ (Mol and Law 1994, 641).” According to them, this explains actor-network approaches’ emphasis on “blurred boundaries and shifting topologies that are so integral to assemblage thinking” (Müller and Schurr 2016, 222). These blurred boundaries are an intrinsic part of a humanitarian border.

This world-making, the mutual taking over of roles and responsibilities with regard to caring for and controlling migrants, accompanied with frictions and tensions of all sorts, suggests the humanitarian border is not only of a movable but of a highly vibrant nature as well. This vibrancy of the border not only concerns the movements of peoples and organizations. The next section aims to show the humanitarian border is also composed of “vibrant matter” (Bennett 2010).

The Movable Missing Masses of the Humanitarian Border

People and objects of all sorts are intricately combined within humanitarian borders. The categories of “care” and “control” are containers of actions, interventions and all sorts of means, things and instruments. The movability of these objects is not just a logical consequence of their use and application at various locations but points at a more intimate relationship between borders and movement. Movement is not just a category politics is concerned with but the channel, route or the corridor (Kasperek 2016) in which and through which political navigations and maneuvers take place. Papataxiarchis for example makes the claim that “everyone and everything else goes where the refugees go” (Papataxiarchis 2016), based on his observations “at the front line of the ‘European Refugee Crisis’”. This observation was confirmed by various of our interviewees. An interviewee on Chios noted that humanitarianism “creates niceness where refugees are”.¹⁴ And a coast guard on Lesbos remarked that “the expertise on registration, fingerprinting and identification processes” – i.e how he characterizes what a “hotspot” is – is helpfully concentrated where people arrive.¹⁵

The statement that “everyone and everything else goes where the refugees go” suggests it is important to take the role of both humans as well as nonhumans into account in the composition of borders. In “Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts” Bruno Latour (1992) argued that associations are held together by

human as well as nonhuman elements. According to him, “What appears in the place of the two ghosts—society and technology—is not simply a hybrid object, a little bit of efficiency and a little bit of sociologizing, but a *sui generis* object: the collective thing” (Latour 1992, 175). How does this apply to the humanitarian border? In the following we will describe how the humanitarian border does not only display various transitions of roles and tasks but that these tasks are often pursued via or with the help of various entities. In other situations, it is these entities that prevent things from taking place or form obstacles for the deployment of care and control. As such, our analysis of the vibrancy and movability of the humanitarian border resonates Bennett’s use of John Dewey’s notion of “conjoint action” i.e. “the agency behind the emergence of a public”, that might originate not only from human but from nonhuman action as well (Bennett 2010, 95). Again, the goal of the analysis is twofold, namely to analyze the various sorts of movements that are at stake at the humanitarian border as well as the particular form of politics that is involved.

The previous section described the emergence of various overlapping networks of care and control, and most importantly: the active role of mediators of all sorts. But besides the different degrees of mobility between networks, there are different degrees of mobility between specific *things*. For example, a Lesbos coast guard noted that they “received vessels from other areas, as well [as] from Frontex”.¹⁶ Ships, then, appear to easily circulate and moved for different purposes by different actors. And so does the staff. The interviewee attended to the fact that Coast Guard personnel staffs vessels they lent from NGOs, and that personnel of the Hellenic Coast Guard staffs the vessels they lent from Frontex. These things and people – i.e. vessels and personnel – may durably circulate in different networks. By contrast, Social Kitchen, a grassroots organization that provides meals in the central park on Chios, depends on food and ingredients provided by both residents and professional suppliers.¹⁷ Although anyone can donate food – allowing for the travel of “food things” to be quite flexible in one respect – in yet another respect such circulation is restricted by the banal fact that food is gone after being consumed. This perishability also holds for the grassroots organization that delivers “non-food things” such as shoes, clothes, napkins and hygiene kits. The nature of the work of a particular organization and the capacity of things and people involved to circulate then affects materialization.

The grassroots organizations thus typically have a different relation to the objects they “move” than the NGOs; whereas the grassroots relate to these objects in terms of reciprocal circularity in communities, NGOs relate to them in terms of distribution. The objects also function differently as “mediators” in interaction with refugees; whereas the objects for grassroots translate in their aim at promoting mutual respect and equality, the objects NGOs relate to are not attributed such symbolic function whilst from the Greek national authorities and mayors’ point of view, grassroots initiatives are considered dysfunctional, as they do not allow for preliminary provisions to then be “used” by the authorities themselves.

The relationship between matter, things, infrastructures such as humanitarian borders and states has been analyzed previously, for instance in Schouten’s actor-network approach to state failure in Congo (Schouten 2013). The author draws attention to situations in which there is a relative absence and progressive disintegration (Schouten 2013, 554) of infrastructures. At the same time, what makes his analysis particularly

interesting for being reviewed in dialogue with our current investigation, is that such relative absence and progressive disintegration do *not* imply a matter of missing stuff. Rather, he quotes from the work of anthropologist Aretxaga (2003), writing that it is chiefly a matter of “an *excess* of statehood practices: too many actors competing to perform as state” (Aretxaga 2003, 396, quoted in Schouten 2013, 569, [emphasis added]). Schouten goes on with clarifying that, in Congo,

There are hardly any socio-technical systems of rule to monitor and account for them; as a result, nobody knows how many individuals constitute this choreography of bureaucrats and security forces, nor would it be possible to keep track of them. (Schouten 2013, 569)

The parallels with the accounts from our interviewees on Chios and Lesbos are intriguing. “We have the infrastructure, the materials and the medications”, the interviewee from *Médicins du Monde* stated¹⁸ when referring to the things that the interviewee considered central to doing her job – the use of the verb “have” suggesting ownership, repertoire, secured supply and durable instrumentalization. How different is the way in which the interviewee from the grassroots initiative in Ag. Ermioni referred to the things relevant to their mission. At the beginning, the volunteers from Ag. Ermioni narrated, there was a “local association’s small house” which they were accepted in to store clothes and allow migrants to get changed. Then, when more migrants arrived and the house became too small, they built two more sheds, and thereby used the wood from the refugees’ boats.¹⁹ The volunteers thus related to the things that make up the material side of their initiative as rather temporary and improvisatory. Unlike the NGOs, the grassroots initiatives generally do not have an established system of operation that can be transferred to any location relatively easy. Instead, they go along with whatever comes around in the informal economy of private donations and volunteers’ bodies and time.

The movable missing masses of the humanitarian border compel various actors to express their relationship with objects – or the lack of them. In their respective researches, Theodossopoulos (2016) and Cabot (2016) came to the conclusion that solidarity initiatives are inspired by and inextricably tied to austerity. But it is not only the solidarity initiatives that are faced with shortages; the regional authorities and mayors similarly needed to improvise, but for different reasons. The mayor of Chios said that “The main problem that the municipality encountered was the lack of a plan which should foresee what we should do and the lack of infrastructures”.²⁰ The interviewee working for the regional authority on Chios told us that “I believe that we were surprised and didn’t have the time to realize what happened. ... We didn’t know who was responsible for doing what. We improvised at that period.”²¹ The regional authorities on Lesbos also emphasized the need to improvise, but not because a strategy was lacking, but because people were. “We need personnel”, the interviewee narrated. “We don’t have personnel to staff the different committees”.²² The director of the First Reception Centre on Lesbos also iterates to Kalir and Rozakou (2016) that facilities are typically lacking.

People and things are intimately related because the objects that circulate within a humanitarian borderscape are not just instruments of politics or avatars of policies but the media *via* which politics and policies take shape. For that reason, the lack of things is not compensated for automatically by the abundance of NGOs and volunteer groups. The interviewee working at the Regional Authority on Lesbos observed that “there are

too many NGOs on the island”. “They help”, he continues, “although the situation is out of control. I asked directions by the Ministry in order to have control on NGOs”.²³ To the police on Chios, it is not the NGOs that are hard to manage with, but rather that “the independent solidarity people and volunteers” are “the ‘non-controllable’ ones”.²⁴ The interviewee working at Lathra? however held the NGOs responsible: “Greece provided NGOs a huge area to play, not just to exist, but to play a central role, to create incidences, for good or for bad. In Lesbos the NGOs created a mess”.²⁵ The interviewee who works for the Norway Refugee Council noticed in more general terms how different networks work by indicating cross purposes: “[O]n Chios you have oranges which are distributed to refugees for free and in parallel you have people who don’t want potable water to be delivered in Vial [a refugee camp].”²⁶

The aforementioned analysis of the relations between objects, politics and movement is in accordance with Schouten’s (2013) analysis of the composed nature of states and infrastructures of all sorts under precarious conditions. Again, the notion of “via” (Cf. Walters 2015) seems crucial. Schouten notes that “redistribution of agency over networks” is required to “assemble a modern state” (Schouten 2013, 561). The point that the lack of agency distributed over a network with a proliferation of actors – with each a different relation to the soil, to objects, to each other, to ideas et cetera – does prompt the question of what makes such infrastructure “work”. The multiple movements of the humanitarian border can also face resistance and opposition. The notion of “viapolitics” underlines the process of becoming, of movement, and transition. In other words, via does not just express the means of transportations but adds a Latourian connotation of *transformation* to it. However, not everything moves or is movable, at least not in the same way at the same time. The interviewee working at the StarFish foundation emphasized the way in which this organization emerged very locally. The specificity of the events at a *particular* stretch of coast near a *particular* village, informed the materialization of the initiative and remained their focus over time. The interviewee said that “we are not like other organizations who come here to help and when it is getting difficult they will be like ‘ok now we are going help somewhere else’. This is our place”.²⁷ Similarly, the Mayor of Chios comments that “the local self-organized initiatives, mainly on the coasts, were set up because people arrived in front of their doors”²⁸, again stressing the hyper-local context that directly shapes materialization. The interviewee of StarFish in her quote critiqued the approach upheld by NGOs, who often travel around the islands. The NGO Médecins du Monde for example has a “mobile unit”. The interviewee working for this organization on Chios said that “[the] mobile unit moves to places where there are needs of medical care. ... The goal is to cover some more points. ... It’s not necessary to be properly settled”.²⁹

Although StarFish Foundation narrated that the hyper-locality of their work has advantages in terms of sensitivity to a highly particular context, it also turned out to be an obstacle at some point. As the interviewee noted

In the end of August the area of the bus stop was closed down, because the school was going to open and people wanted the refugees out of the village. So the refugees were arriving here on the coast and then this is the road you have to walk to Mytilene [the capital and port of Lesbos], so in the village here, first village they would arrive, they would all spread everywhere; it was impossible to give out food, clothes; it was a really big disaster actually.³⁰

National authorities are not particularly enthusiastic as care materializes as a result of local initiatives. An interviewee who works as a migration consultant for the ministry, said that “our planning, the central planning is to have dispersion and not concentration in one area”. “We try to use [the] provisional structures,”³¹ he comments – thereby tellingly suggesting a reified infrastructure to be instrumentalized as opposed to an unstable configuration of actors, things and ideas in flux. In any case, the specificity and locality of grassroots initiatives then does not configure easily with the configuration sought by the Greek government. In the same vein, the Mayor of Chios explicitly said that he did not coordinate with grassroots initiatives.³² In fact, both grassroots organizations and NGOs were forced to get registration and accreditation, which then puts barriers to the associations these initiatives can form with other networks. “Lately it feels a little bit like that the state tries to exclude us,”³³ the interviewee of the StarFish Foundation commented.

The inner organization of a humanitarian border not only consists of movements but also of reluctance or resistance towards movability. The provision of care and control nor the delegation of tasks to different actors take place via paved roads. Borderwork requires the mobilization of subjects *and* objects. Objects will have to be activated and put into motion so as to mediate between opposing ideas and interests and confliction concepts of humanitarianism and security. As such, the movements that can be said to be involved denote the mediations and translations that take place as to materialize humanitarian and security configurations into conjoint acts of care and control.

Conclusion

The provision of care and control at the Aegean Islands of Lesbos and Chios between Spring 2015 and April 2016 arose out of various overlapping networks. By combining the notions of the “humanitarian border” and “viapolitics” with an actor-network lens, it becomes manifest that acts of humanitarianism and securitization are the corollary of various actors, as well as of shifting roles, delegated tasks, circulating goods and composed things. The humanitarian border turned out to originate from “conjoint action” and to be composed of various entities, things and materialities *via* which the aforementioned tasks could be transferred.

Humanitarian borders consist of a variety of moves and movements and may be said to be portable entities themselves. The content of a humanitarian border is composed of the intermingling of care and control, of the entanglement of securitarian and humanitarian aspects. Characteristic of the *interstructure* of humanitarian borders, as our analysis aimed to demonstrate, is that the bringing together of security policies with acts of care requires a huge amount of traffic and traveling and of circulation, distribution, delegation and even transformation of tasks and roles. Humanitarianism and securitization are material as well as mobile processes. By detecting the movable missing masses of the humanitarian border it became manifest the provision of care and control not only travels along the roads of humanitarian actions and security policies. Instead, goods and devices function as mediators *via* which the humanitarian border takes shape. Only by paying attention to the circulation of goods and devices and the various entanglements they have with different groups of people the multiple movements of the border can be exposed and

the various conflicts and compromises between care and control they consist of can be displayed.

Combining the notions of the “humanitarian border” and “viapolitics” (Walters 2015) with an actor-network lens (Latour 2005) also displays a particular relationship between the networks these borders consist of and the frictions (Tsing 2005) they contain. In the practices and processes of world-making, the associations of actors and things, the apparent friction between practices of care and control becomes fluid, as both have become part of what is constituted as humanitarian border. Tensions and friction in the constitution of the humanitarian border – which includes asymmetries between actors and things in their capacity to circulate, the entangled enactment of care by conventional security actors and vice versa, the excess of actors and things or instead their absence altogether – are productive to the composition of the humanitarian border itself. Rather than disrupting the emergence of a humanitarian border, they stimulate its development. These asymmetries, entangled enactments, excesses and absences are not to be seen as obstacles that prevent action and interaction, which then have to be overcome. Instead, they are inevitable elements to the production of interactions at the humanitarian borderscape.

Notes

1. The interviews were conducted and translated by Ermioni Frezouli.
2. Interview with two members of Lathra?, Chios, 19 May 2016.
3. See <http://www.asterias-starfish.org/en/our-journey/>.
4. Interview with a member of StarFish Foundation, Molyvos, Lesbos, 24 February 2016.
5. Interview with a member of StarFish Foundation, Molyvos, Lesbos, 24 February 2016.
6. Interview with the area manager of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Greece, Chios, 12 May 2016.
7. Interview with a consultant who worked for the Ministry of Migration, Athens, 12 February 2016.
8. Interview with the area manager of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Greece, Chios, 12 May 2016.
9. Interview with a consultant who worked for the Ministry of Migration, Athens, 12 February 2016.
10. See <https://www.nrc.no/who-we-are/about-us/>.
11. Interview with the area manager of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Greece, Chios, 12 May 2016.
12. Interview with the former deputy head of the Chian coastguard, Chios, 2 March 2016.
13. Interview with two members of Lathra?, Chios, 19 May 2016.
14. Interview with a freelance journalist who worked on Chios for an extended period of time, Chios, 8 May 2016.
15. Interview with the commander of the Lesvian coastguard, Lesbos, 25 February 2016.
16. Interview with the commander of the Lesvian coastguard, Lesbos, 25 February 2016.
17. Interview with a volunteer working for Social Kitchen, Chios, 17 May 2016.
18. Interview with an employee of Médecins du Monde, Chios, 4 May 2016.
19. Interview with a volunteer working in the fishing port Ag. Ermioni, Chios, 10 March, 2016.
20. Interview with the mayor of the municipality of Chios, Chios, 7 March 2016.
21. Interview with the deputy head of the Regional Authority of the North Aegean, Chios, 2 March 2016.
22. Interview with the deputy head of Administrative and Financial Services of the Regional Authority of North Aegean, Lesbos, 26 February 2016.

23. Interview with the deputy head of Administrative and Financial Services of the Regional Authority of North Aegean, Lesbos, 26 February 2016.
24. Interview with the general police director, Chios, 1 March 2016.
25. Interview with a member of Lathra?, Chios, 19 May 2016.
26. Interview with the area manager of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Greece, Chios, 12 May 2016.
27. Interview with a member of StarFish Foundation, Molyvos, Lesbos, 24 February 2016.
28. Interview with the mayor of the municipality of Chios, Chios, 7 March 2016.
29. Interview with an employee of Médecins du Monde, Chios, 4 May 2016.
30. Interview with a member of StarFish Foundation, Molyvos, Lesbos, 24 February 2016.
31. Interview with a consultant who worked for the Ministry of Migration, Athens, 12 February 2016.
32. Interview with the mayor of the municipality of Chios, Chios, 7 March 2016.
33. Interview with a member of StarFish Foundation, Molyvos, Lesbos, 24 February 2016.

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