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Borders as Infrastructure

The Technopolitics of Border Control

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6 The Portable Provision of Care and Control

The Mediating Humanitarian Border

Greenpeace and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) running joint rescue operations; volunteers and humanitarian professionals working on land and water; workers with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) cooperating with Greek police to run reception and detention centers; Greek coast guards and ships from European Union (EU) member-states joining a Frontex operation; cooperation between Frontex and NATO—the emergence of border infrastructures on the Aegean Islands during the so-called migrant crisis of 2014–2016 consisted not only of state initiatives to patrol the border, but the provision of food, shelter, medical care, and legal assistance. Local villagers and foreign volunteers offered acute medical care. Others entertained the children after their long journey. Still others helped migrants get to the buses that would transport them to the reception centers. Along with the support from these volunteers, organizations, and agencies, clothing, goods, and other necessities, ranging from infant formula and sleeping bags to rucksacks and raincoats, were sent from Greece and all over the world to Lesbos and other places.¹

Whereas chapter 5 analyzed the technopolitics of EUROSUR, the hotspot approach, and the way that various territories are blended by surveillance activities, this chapter turns to the fusion of providing care and enforcing border control and the compromises made between security and humanitarian care that underpin them. The particular manifestation of the border that this chapter will analyze is the humanitarian border as it materialized at the islands of Chios and Lesbos during the migrant crisis of 2014–2016.

A humanitarian border combines border control policies and the presence of state agents with the provision of medical expertise, medical care, and legal know-how (such as seeing to human rights issues and providing interpretation and translation services).² Humanitarian initiatives and initiatives to regain border control—often under the umbrella of a security agenda increasingly interwoven with migration policy—have a reciprocal relationship. To a certain extent, the combination of humanitarian support and security policies can be seen as a merging of national security and human security approaches.³ A humanitarian border emerges out of particular peramorphic mediations that can be classified as “borderwork” or “humanitarian borderwork.”⁴

Humanitarian borders existed before they were coined as such. Sangatte, for instance, a transit center run by the Red Cross in the north of France near the port of Calais, where many migrants on the way to the United Kingdom were stranded, could already be considered a humanitarian border. Calais is an important location for migrants who aim to reach the United Kingdom, by boat via Calais or by train and motortruck via the Chanel Tunnel. After the French minister of the interior (and future president) Nicolas Sarkozy closed the refugee camp in Sangatte in 2002, migrants started to build encampments in the woods, often referred to as the “Calais Jungle.” The situation at Sangatte and in the camp at Calais was the scene of much tension between “securitization” and “humanization,” between “repression” and “compassion.”⁵ The transit center itself reflected this tension: it was a place of “indeterminate status,” as it was neither a proper reception center nor a detention camp. The center was staffed by the Red Cross and the French police.⁶ Although the circumstances are different, there are many similarities with the hotspots in the Aegean Islands, and these will be discussed in this chapter, particularly the intermingling of care and control.

Humanitarian action by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is based on two interrelated meanings of the concept of “humanity.” First, this concept suggests that humanity consists of an indivisible collective of humans. Second, it contains a certain willingness of people to show humanity to others who suffer. This unity between humans, consisting of recognition, compassion, and solidarity, is not free of friction or devoid of distinctions or inequalities. On the contrary: “as one gets deeper into humanitarianism a

series of dimensions of what may be called a complex ontology of inequality unfolds that differentiates in a hierarchical manner the values of human lives."⁷

The tensions that vibrate within humanitarianism are foreshadowed by three characteristics of humanitarianism as it arose in the nineteenth century. Humanitarianism is distinct from previous forms of charity, compassion, and philanthropy in three respects. First, it aims to cross boundaries. Second, it has transcendental significance. And third, it implies a certain form of governance that connects compassion with control.⁸ The humanitarian border at the Aegean Islands, which will be discussed in the following, particularly reflects the last point.

The connection between compassion and control that results in the emergence of humanitarian borders entails specific forms of peramorphic translation work. The humanitarian border shares some specific similarities with the border infrastructures that have been described in previous chapters of this book. These similarities concern the compromises that are required to connect various political ideas, actors, institutions, and technologies to make a border, and the mechanisms that underpin the creation of a technopolitical entity that is a border.

The particular peramorphic mediation that will be examined in this chapter is the relationship between humanitarian aid and security—between care and control. As the previous chapter explained, the emergence of EUROSUR at the Greek Aegean Islands during the so-called migrant crisis can be considered an example of an infrastructural compromise, a compromise between security and humanitarianism. The following discussion will explore the intermingling of care and control as an example of an infrastructural compromise. It focuses on two issues in particular. First, the humanitarian border will be conceived as a movable configuration that arrived with the migrants that went to the islands of Lesbos and Chios. Second, the analysis will show how this humanitarian border is only precariously attached to the Aegean Islands, requiring all kinds of exchanges with local authorities, inhabitants, officials, and volunteers.

The analysis provided in this chapter is partly based on a series of interviews. In order to gain insight into the entanglements between care and control, thirty interviews with various Greek authorities, representatives of Greek and international NGOs, grassroots organizations, and local

volunteers were conducted on the islands of Chios and Lesbos between February and May 2016.⁹ The interviewees were asked to reflect on the tensions and entanglements between border control (e.g., Hellenic Coast Guard patrols, Frontex operations, and the hotspotting policy to register migrants) and humanitarian aid and rescue (by NGOs, local grassroots organizations, and volunteers) at the height of the local migrant crisis between the spring of 2015 and early 2016. Excerpts of the interviews are employed in this chapter to illustrate the mobility of all kinds of goods, things, and devices, the interactions between the various organizations, and the tensions that arose as a result.

The Making of Movable Borders

One way to reconstruct the emergence of the humanitarian border is to follow the migrants and to analyze how, step by step, they became part of a configuration that can be called a humanitarian border. “Becoming part” does not mean that this border constellation is already a fixed entity. To a certain degree, migrants contribute to the shaping of a humanitarian border, as their movements already shape particular form. For instance, the volunteers, professionals, and coast guards who follow the routes of migrants can be said to form a kind of “corridor.”¹⁰ This is not the same as claiming that migrants carry the border with them. The statement that borders are somehow attached to migrants may prompt comparisons with the Titan Atlas carrying the world, drawn with borders, on his back—or worse, Sisyphus rolling an immense boulder up a hill over and over again, unable to escape this punishment. But unlike these mythological metaphors, borders and migrants are not inseparable; theirs is a dynamic relationship. Nor are migrants the sole actors involved in the traveling of borders. Solely focusing on migrants would be overstating the role of one kind of actor in a field crowded with organizations, legislations, institutions, and materialities. Nevertheless, placing migrants as the center of attention provides a counterweight to state-centric perspectives and may open up novel ways to analyze the border infrastructures they are part of. Then again, the study of *who* travels must be accompanied by the study of *what* travels. Migrants arrive by boat; and once on the islands, they are provided with food, medical care, and documents. They must be

transported, sheltered, and taken into detention. The provision of care and control consists of the circulation of all sorts of things, technologies, and materialities.

Underlying this analysis is the idea that borders are not only created by the authority, sovereignty, and jurisdiction of states. First, Greece is part of the European Union, and many of its border policies are in fact EU policies—or even European policies, as argued in the opening chapter, because these policies are not restricted to EU member-states or members of the Schengen Area. Second, states are but one actor in a variegated landscape of international NGOs, volunteers, and UN agencies. Third, and most important for this chapter, borders arise out of various and often overlapping or even contradicting infrastructures. Care and control, fixation and motion, centralized and dispersed: all of these opposites apply.

The border infrastructures that arose on the islands of Lesbos and Chios can aptly be seen as a kind of “archipelago.”¹¹ As a group of islands, the Aegean Islands indeed form a particular kind of border area. On the other hand, borders are not only about isolation, but also about connection. In addition, islands can point to flows of people, movements among islands, the relations between water and land and between islands and the mainland. The comparison of borders with islands can be understood more intimately if we emphasize the isolation and connections between islands, as Peter Sloterdijk did in chapter 3 when speaking about foam structures. Once again, the “border as island” requires us to consider the movements of both people and things; and again, applying Latour and Sloterdijk’s perspective leads to a blurring of dichotomies. The emerging borders on the Aegean Islands neither isolate events nor encourage continuous flows; rather, they lead to the coming-into-being of all kinds of pop-up border infrastructures on location. Following the notion of immanence espoused by Latour and Sloterdijk in chapter 3, the border as island will not be studied from the outside in, but from the inside out.¹² The border as island and the island as border do not lie on the boundary between the inside and outside of Greece and Europe, or between the European mainland and the Mediterranean. Instead, the traveling border arrives on the island with the migrants and organizations and people engaged in the various provisions of care and control.

Care and Control at the Humanitarian Border of Lesbos

A rectilinear reading of the events on Chios and Lesbos, when the number of migrants seeking to reach Europe peaked in 2014–2016, would be that the Greek authorities, encouraged by EU policies and Frontex assistance, tried to get the situation under control, while international NGOs, refugee organizations, local residents, and volunteer groups tried to provide the migrants with humanitarian care. But in practice, things turned out to be less obvious and, most of all, less dichotomous. After the Greek elections of January 25, 2015, the Coalition of the Radical Left, Syriza, formed a government with the nationalist conservative Independent Greeks Party, known colloquially as ANEL. Although before the elections, Syriza championed the opening of borders, taking down the Evros River fence, ending the pushback operations, abolishing detention centers, reformulating national asylum policy, and instituting safe passage for refugees, the new government quickly changed track. In the meantime, the presence of national and international NGOs and volunteer groups was gradually growing on the Aegean Islands.

The combination of EU hotspot policies, migration management by the Greek authorities, and support provided by NGOs and volunteers can be regarded as an emergent humanitarian border. It must be stressed that the notion of the humanitarian border is not just an invention of scholars. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN migration agency, states on its website:

IOM observes a strong need to protect the human rights of migrant populations during any crisis, particularly in those that results in cross-border movements. Officials at the border are usually the first to be confronted with such unusual movement dynamics and border security can become affected. Well-prepared and managed crisis response at borders can improve humanitarian action and protect vulnerable migrants while maintaining the security of states and borders. Through its humanitarian border management approach, IOM assists governments and their border institutions to more effectively prepare for and manage crisis-induced displacement and mass movements.

An example of such a humanitarian border is a reception center, such as the ones on Chios and Lesbos. Not only is the term almost a combination of the functions it houses (namely, registration and detention), it also presents them in the name of hospitality. My first encounter with the humanitarian

border in a reception center was in 2014.¹³ The hotspot policies, as described in the previous chapter, had not yet been implemented, but with the assistance and support of EU and Greek funding, the Moria refugee camp on Lesbos had taken shape on a former military base. When we visited the place, only the small camp was open, although a larger camp that would open under the hotspot policies had already been built. The architecture and spatial organization of the camp reflected the division of roles of the people working there. One part of the camp housed the NGOs: *Medicins du Monde* (Doctors of the World), UNHCR and Meta, the translators. In another part of the camp, Greek police and Frontex officials kept an eye on the detained migrants, mainly Syrian refugees.

The peramorphic mediations that lead to the coming into being of a humanitarian border are not a step in a linear process, in which borders penetrate other domains of life and governance: as Walters (2011) says, “to focus only on new developments in surveillance and control risks a rather linear and developmentalist narrative.” 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.”¹⁴

Part of this materialization is due to “humanitarian borderwork” which “introduces explicitly humanitarian actors into the borderwork assemblage.”¹⁵ But borderwork consists of more than human actions. According to Jones et al. (2017), “As humanitarian borderwork introduces new actors, it also works to produce new types of border spaces constituted around practices of rescue and the provision of basic needs while introducing new categories of life and consolidating socio-political hierarchies.”¹⁶ This borderwork takes place not only in the registration and detention centers, but also outside these hotspots. Moreover, there is a clear chain of associations that connect the inside with the outside. See, for instance, this description of the situation outside the Moria camp in October 2015:

Volunteer organizations set up an “exterior” camp in October, on a sloping olive grove immediately adjacent to Moria. Though the infrastructure of this overflow area is considerable—featuring a clinic, child-friendly area, enclosed restrooms, mosque, kitchens, and tea distribution center—problems are legion. Human Rights Watch Emergencies Director Peter Bouckaert, in a November visit, observed asylum

seekers sleeping outside, surrounded by squalor, crowds jostling and fighting for access to the registration center, and parents and pregnant mothers fearing for their safety and that of their children. For want of rigid-structure shelters, asylum seekers in the exterior camp are housed in tents of varying size and quality that provide limited protection from wind and rain and little insulation from winter temperatures. In late December 2015, Starfish Foundation began distributing firewood to give residents an alternative to burning garbage in order to keep warm.¹⁷

Hotspots are but one node in the network of dispersed humanitarian borders in the Aegean Islands. The humanitarian border—and its attendant humanitarian borderwork—are highly mobile; they do not create a fixed infrastructure. An example of this mobility is how migrants arriving on Lesbos might encounter MSF at different times and locations:

In December 2015, migrants arriving in Lesbos would have first encountered MSF at sea as they engaged in what can best be described as pre-emptive SAR missions. Here, MSF along with partners from Greenpeace worked from a rigid-hull inflatable boat to monitor and guide the rubber dinghies and other small vessels making the 10 – 12km crossing from Turkey to safe places of disembarkation on the beaches. Migrants would then encounter MSF again when they took one of the MSF-contracted buses from the village of Skala Sikamineas on the north-east shore. After a 20 km drive, they could wait, sleep, get warm, pick up blankets, receive information or use the Wi-Fi network at the MSF-run transit point at Manatamados, from where they caught another bus to the Moria “hotspot” to register with the Greek police and Frontex. At Moria, people may have received basic medical triage from MSF medical practitioners working inside the hotspot.¹⁸

If it is true that borders materialize where the migrant is, it should be possible to distinguish particular entanglements by “following the migrant.”¹⁹ The daily practices of the migrants arriving on the Aegean Islands, the organizations and volunteers supporting them, and the various agents trying to manage migration are interwoven with things of all sorts. These include, for instance, the ships on which the migrants arrive; the cell phones that they use; the housing, food, clothes and medical care that they are provided; the fingerprinting machines used to register them; and the buses, camps, and centers deployed to detain them. At one point, migrants interact with the Hellenic Coast Guard that is charged with detecting smugglers; at another, they collect shoes, clothes, and baby things from Médecins du Monde. The humanitarian border consists of all kinds of materialities and is woven together by discursive as well as material engagements by a variety of actors.

A telling example of such intermingling is the site of the volunteer- and refugee-run PIKPA camp near Mytilene Airport on Lesbos. I visited PIKPA in September 2014.²⁰ While PIKPA is under the umbrella of the *Xorio tou oloi mazi* (“All Together Village”), in which several other local grassroots and NGOs participate, it has ties to the authorities as well. The Municipality of Lesbos pays the water and electricity bills, while some of its volunteers are registered so they can enter the detention center at Moria. PIKPA volunteers provide daily dinners in the Moria detention center, while refugees who stay in PIKPA cook their own food in a kitchen supplied by a donation from an organization. PIKPA volunteers are also active on the coasts. In an interview, a member of PIKPA told us how relations with the Greek authorities are dispersed around the island:

The regional authority doesn't exist; they're completely absent. There were tensions in the south of the island where centers were planned, mainly in Molyvos . . . We proposed to build a registration center in the southern part of the island, as half of the refugees arrived in that area. They didn't want it. Community people's assemblies were held and Molyvos' residents rejected the proposal . . . Then the Petra²¹ ex-military camp was proposed to be turned into a registration camp, located at the entrance of the village. They tried to transfer some small houses there, although the residents blocked the road. The residents were on shifts for three nights . . . We also proposed Molyvos municipal campground, which is close to Molyvos, and it's been closed for several years . . . At first, in May–June, they started to host refugees in the parking lot next to the school and the residents chased the refugees; they also closed the school for a day, arguing that their children were there and they'd get sick. Several refugees stayed there and volunteers tried to help despite the big pressure they had from the residents. Then the tourist season started. The residents rejected having a structure built there, saying that if you create the infrastructure, then it's as if you invite them.²²

Meetings between voluntary organizations and state authorities often feature discussions about the moving of concrete things such as centers, camps, and campsites. This adds another dimension to peramorphic politics, as this kind of politics is apparently concerned not only with objects that move, but also with things and places that all of a sudden become involved in the policies of movement.

While care and control are infrastructurally interwoven, how can the resulting configurations be said to be movable? Objects are usually not granted any agency. Instead, they “are almost always ‘used’ or guided by human actors,

assumed to possess full agency.”²³ The commander of the Lesvian coast guard told us in an interview that “the expertise on registration, fingerprinting, and identification processes” (i.e., how he characterizes a hotspot) is helpfully concentrated where people arrive.²⁴ But the focus on *who* and *what* travel should not prevent us from considering the relationships with other agents, institutions, and technologies. “Following the migrant” as a strategy to understand the configuration of care and control would fail to capture the coordination between NGOs, grassroots organizations, the police, the coast guard, and local and national authorities. Humanitarian initiatives are thus best understood in relation to security measures as they materialize in mutual interaction. A strict focus on materialities would keep the practical engagements that actors have with these materialities out of sight.

Cooperation, Coordination, and Conflict on Chios

Focusing on the materialities and the movements that constitute a humanitarian border is not only a means to detect the shaping of infrastructural compromises; it also allows a view that center-stages the movements of migrants themselves. As the previous discussion clarified, this view does not claim that migrants should be the only actors that get followed, nor should they be regarded as the cause of the creation of a border. The idea that borders travel with migrants is not to be mistaken for the view that the border simply materializes where the migrant is.²⁵ To a certain extent, migrants and the borders they carry with them work as magnets.²⁶ A freelance journalist on Chios similarly told us that humanitarianism “creates niceness where refugees are.”²⁷ But the point of the traveling borders perspective is to emphasize that actors engaging with migrants do not operate in a single overarching network, in which tensions between humanitarian actors and state officials are smoothed over by reciprocal adjustments of conduct. Instead, different networks exist simultaneously. They coexist.²⁸ Focusing solely on migrants is too narrow a perspective.

The networks of actors engaged in activities of care and control may seem to exist side by side. But they actually intertwine and overlap, with actors who can circulate in both networks, mediating between them in mutually coordinated conduct. The mayor of the municipality of Chios told us that most of the coordination is done voluntarily. This willingness is important to him, as it emphasizes the flexibility of many of the organizations and

volunteers—a flexibility that state agencies lack. But this flexibility does have its limits; at a certain point, said the mayor, you have to “ensure stability.”²⁹ But ensuring stability often leads to tensions with international NGOs, grassroots organizations, and local volunteers.

Voluntary actions begin as soon as migrants arrive. A volunteer from Agia Ermioni, a fishing port 10 kilometers southeast of Chios town where many refugee boats arrived, explained:

The volunteers started welcoming the refugees, providing them with dry clothes and shoes, food, mainly biscuits and so on, tea and baby milk, for as long as they were waiting for the buses to transfer them to the registration center. The boats were arriving during the night as well, at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, and the volunteers were there helping them. The refugees were mainly families with children and babies. On some days, more than 300 refugees arrived. In each boat there were more than 60 people. Men were sitting on the sides of the boat, the women and children on the boat’s floor. The majority of them were wet when they arrived, as the boats were overloaded. At the beginning they were using the local association’s small house, but as the flows increased, they built a changing room and another small house, using the wood from the refugees’ boats. They needed space to put the clothes in order and to dress the children, especially when it was raining.³⁰

The mutual dependencies between volunteers, organizations, and state agencies were emphasized by a volunteer at Chios Solidarity, a group that arose out of the initiatives in the central gardens of Chios town: “We cannot work completely independently. We don’t have close cooperation, but a basic communication and exchange of information on needs that we cannot cover which they could cover, and some others that they cannot cover and we provide.”³¹

The configuration of the practices of humanitarianism and security materializes out of two-way traffic. A member of Lathra—a grassroots refugee solidarity committee on Chios launched in 2001—told us that their activities have taken shape in iteration with those of the coast guard.³² In the years that Lathra has been present on Chios, there have been several disagreements. Lathra now refrains from actions that may create problems with the authorities and works with the coast guard to define possibilities to act.³³ The entanglement of the practices of humanitarianism and security also materializes in humanitarian actors performing acts of control and security actors performing acts of care. The area manager for Greece of the Norwegian Refugee Council,³⁴ an independent humanitarian organization that helps people forced to flee in various countries, stated: “The idea is to

put a bit of oil in all the mechanisms. It's to push the different authorities to work together." He went on to explain:

Sometimes the police is not working with the Greek Asylum Services; sometimes you have one decision taken at the national level which doesn't really fit with the local environment, although the objective . . . cannot be reached in the way the order has been given. So the authorities always have to find a way to be pragmatic in order to reach this objective, but maybe also to take into consideration the overall environment which includes different services, Greek public services, European services now that we have EASO, Frontex, etc., and of course the interests of Chios civil society and the interests of the migrants.³⁵

The Norwegian Refugee Council provides many kinds of care—water, waste management, a shuttle bus, the distribution of clothes, and information about legal frameworks and the management of camps. Its representative told us that they try to “connect the dots between the authorities.” For example, “in Souda and Dipethe [former refugee camps] we did vulnerability profiling using the registration list of the police.”³⁶ A consultant for the Ministry of Migration commented on this practice: “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.”³⁷ An actor whose primary responsibility is providing care thus simultaneously performs practices of control, in part confirming the 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.”³⁸ These shifts in roles and positions also occur at sea, such as by NGOs that rescue migrants from their boats:

By cooperating with Frontex and Eunavfor Med, as well as by transferring people and handing them over to the Italian police authorities, NGOs are not only relieving governmental actors from their responsibilities. They are also providing operational support and humanitarian non-state legitimation to the border regime they declare to contest. Like those aid workers who “become logisticians in the war efforts of warlords,” they thus become part of a hybrid border management system that results in limiting the freedom of asylum seekers in Europe through the Dublin Regulation, in either forcibly returning or illegalizing those who are denied protection, in arresting and prosecuting purported smugglers, as well as in enhancing cooperation with countries of departure with the aim to prevent people from reaching Europe.³⁹

Security practices and effects often arise out of humanitarian governance. Many humanitarian actors perform acts of control. But security actors similarly perform acts of care. The manager from the Norwegian Refugee Council also noted that the coast guard and the police “push for solutions in the best interest of migrants . . . they have a positive approach . . . [although] they are not supposed to be that positive.” When it comes to patrols at sea, he 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.”⁴⁰ This was confirmed by the former deputy head of the Chian coast guard: “If you are in the borderline, the only thing you can do is rescue people.”⁴¹

Nevertheless, conflicts seemed unavoidable, such as when the provision of care came to be seen as undermining solidarity on the island. This occurred when, according to a member of Lathra, “solidarity groups, the people who were helping, were suddenly presented as something dangerous, something which creates problems, something suspicious and selfish.”⁴² And there are also limits to what NGOs can and will do. While MSF’s decision that it will no longer accept funds from the European Union and its member-states following the EU-Turkey Statement⁴³ has received the most attention, volunteers at the Chios Social Kitchen had already refused to distribute food in the Vial detention center.⁴⁴

From this discussion, we can conclude that apprehending the coming-into-being of the border from the inside out requires a more variegated repertoire than Latour’s associations and Sloterdijk’s foamy configurations. The tensions, frictions, contradictions, and consequences of the various border events result in highly dispersed configurations that appear and disappear. The following engages with the question of how conflicts and controversies in these border infrastructures can be understood in greater detail.

The Becoming of a Border

Border infrastructures bring together a number of actors, including migrants, state agents, and people working with NGO programs to monitor, register, and surveil with humanitarian support. A symmetrical point of view entails unpacking the institutional structures, technological and material assemblages, and emerging migrant configurations simultaneously. This

perspective would suggest that migrants, while not the only subjects on the move, provoke the coming-into-being of border infrastructures as all kinds of other actors, organizations, and institutions respond to their arrival. It would also question entrenched dichotomies, such as between nonstate actors providing humanitarian support (care) and state actors addressing migration as a security issue (control). Finally, symmetrical treatment may allow a more nuanced view on the scale and scope of the agentic capacities of actors and help unravel all kinds of tensions among the various actors, institutions, materialities, and technologies.

The emphasis on materiality is not meant to reduce border infrastructures to their material components, but rather to inform *becoming*. The emphasis on materiality adds specific content to the notion of *work* in humanitarian borderwork.⁴⁵ While materialities may accelerate or slow down these processes of becoming, they are inextricably linked to spatial and temporal processes of circulation. A symmetrical perspective on border infrastructures privileges neither stable border infrastructures nor migrants as actors. Instead, it seeks to unpack the movability of border infrastructures by revealing the interactions among institutions, technologies, and migrants. One consequence is that neither technology nor materiality is a sufficiently suitable starting point. Instead, border infrastructures must be studied at the moment of their making. Moreover, the emphasis on networked technologies or the state's border infrastructures tends to neglect the things that matter most to migrants, including the materials they are equipped with or confronted by in daily life.

Among the characteristics of the humanitarian border, one is of particular importance: "the humanitarian border is not a fixed border but something which fluctuates. Its geography is determined in part by the shifting routes of migrants themselves."⁴⁶ The close examination of various technologies and materialities indeed reveals that things move in different ways, and sometimes they do not move at all. For instance, a member of the Starfish Foundation on Lesbos emphasized the organization's local roots. The specificity of events on a *particular* stretch of coast near a *particular* village informed the materialization of the initiative and remained its focus over time: "We are not like other organizations who come here to help and when it gets difficult they will be like, 'OK, now we are going to help somewhere else.' This is our place."⁴⁷ The mayor of Chios similarly told us that "the local self-organized

initiatives, mainly on the coasts, were set up because people arrived in front of their doors,⁴⁸ again stressing the local context that directly shapes the materialization of the humanitarian border.

In contrast, Médecins du Monde is an independent humanitarian movement working to empower excluded people to access health care around the world. Through 400 programs in eighty countries run by more than 3,000 volunteers, it provides medical care, strengthens health systems, and addresses the underlying barriers to accessing health care.⁴⁹ Médecins du Monde has a mobile unit, which a staff member on Chios described as follows: “The mobile unit moves to places where there are needs of medical care . . . The goal is to cover more points . . . It’s not necessary to be properly settled.”⁵⁰

An interviewee from Starfish was critical of NGOs that hop between locations. But although she claimed that the locality of its work makes the foundation more sensitive to its immediate context, its focus on the local at times proved to be a weakness: “At 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 this is the road you have to walk to Mytilene [the harbor and capital of Lesbos]. So, in the village here, the first village they would arrive at, they would all spread everywhere. It was impossible to give out food, clothes. Actually, it was a really big disaster.”⁵¹

National authorities are not particularly enthusiastic when care materializes as a result of local initiatives. A consultant for the Ministry of Migration whom we interviewed in Athens stated that “our planning, the central planning, is to have dispersion and not concentration in one area.” He continued, “We try to use provisional structures,”⁵² suggesting a preference for instrumentalizing a reified infrastructure over relying on an unstable and fluctuating configuration of actors, things, and ideas. In any case, the specificity and locality of grassroots initiatives sits uneasily with the Greek authorities. The mayor of Chios explicitly told us that he did not coordinate his efforts with grassroots initiatives.⁵³ In fact, both grassroots organizations and NGOs were forced to register and get accredited, which then limits the associations they can form with other networks. Our interviewee from Starfish reflected: “Lately, it feels a little bit like the state tries to exclude us.”⁵⁴

In addition to differences in the mobility of networks, the circulation of things illustrates some of the characteristics of the humanitarian border. Things are not just objects; often they are inscribed with messages. In other cases, they exemplify the compromises that a humanitarian border consists of on a very material level. This focus on the circulation of things, technologies, and materialities has increasingly gained scholarly attention. The conversation among security studies, international relations, and science and technology studies approaches has, among many other things, resulted in a particular interest in the materiality of security and humanitarianism, as well as in the various ways that technologies aim to combine both care and control. This led to the identification of “humanitarian technologies” such as biometrics, genetically modified food aid and vaccination programs, and “non-human humanitarians” such as dogs, drones, and diagrams of particular forms of tents in refugee camps.⁵⁵

In the case of this particular humanitarian border, specific things reveal different degrees of mobility. The commander of the Lesvian coast guard recounted how they “received vessels from other areas, as well as from Frontex.”⁵⁶ Ships appear to circulate easily, as do personnel. He recalled how coast guard personnel staffed vessels on loan from NGOs, and personnel of the Hellenic Coast Guard staffed vessels borrowed from Frontex. But although vessels and personnel may durably circulate in various networks, Solidarity Kitchen, a grassroots organization that provides meals in the central park of Chios, depends on food and ingredients provided by residents and local suppliers.⁵⁷ The grassroots thus have a different relation to the objects that they move than the NGOs. The former relates to these objects in terms of reciprocity in communities, and the latter in terms of distribution. Objects thus also function differently as mediators in interactions with refugees. For the grassroots organizations, objects translate their aims of promoting mutual respect and equality, while for NGOs, objects are not attributed such symbolic functions. For their part, the Greek national authorities view grassroots initiatives as dysfunctional, as they divert control over provisions from the authorities themselves.

Simultaneously studying “the forms of circulation and the circulation of forms” also keeps us from too easily attributing deficits in policymaking and humanitarian support to chaos and disorganization.⁵⁸ Instead, studying the forms of circulation and the circulation of forms is likely to create

awareness of the patchwork nature of border infrastructures and the central role of provisions and improvisations within them. Emphasizing this patchwork of interactions and transactions relativizes the importance of stabilized infrastructures. “We have the infrastructure, the materials, and the medications,” stated the interviewee from *Médecins du Monde*.⁵⁹ But these infrastructures work only when coordination and cooperation keep people and things circulating on the inside. The mayor of Chios stated that “the main problem encountered by the municipality was the lack of a plan which could foresee what we should do and the lack of infrastructures,”⁶⁰ while the deputy head of the regional authority on Chios admitted: “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.”⁶¹ The regional authorities on Lesbos also emphasized the need to improvise, not due to lack of strategy but to lack of people: “We need personnel . . . we don’t have personnel to staff the different committees.”⁶²

On Lesbos, a deputy head in the regional authority said that “there are too many NGOs on the island.” “They help, but the situation is out of control. I have asked directions from the Ministry [of Migration] in order to have control over NGOs.”⁶³ But for the general director of the police on Chios, it was not the NGOs that are hard to manage; it was “the independent solidarity people and volunteers” who are “the uncontrollable ones.”⁶⁴ In counterpoint, a member of the grassroots organization *Lathra* pointed her finger at the NGOs: “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.”⁶⁵ How different networks can more generally work at cross-purposes was reiterated by our interviewee at the Norwegian Refugee Council: “On 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.”⁶⁶

If there is any truth to the saying that the border goes where migrants travel, infrastructures in the context of international mobility are shaped as much by the people on the move, the vehicles they use, the routes they take, and the people and organizations (from smugglers to banks) that support them as by agents of the state. Selection mechanisms do not only function at the border. The mediation of the borders continues. This can

be illustrated by an account of researchers following the consequences of the legal and technological networks of the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database (Eurodac) to Igoumenitsa, the last Greek port town before Albania. There, they visited an informal settlement of almost all male migrants, who have since been evicted by the police. They observed that “because many of these migrants carried the border even on their bodies (many of them already had registered fingerprints), they weren’t able to completely cross the border that was literally embodied in the shape of their own fingers . . . they carried the border further themselves and, at the same time, transgressed it.”⁶⁷

Death, too, follows the border. As researchers have noted, a tragic aspect of the material culture of border crossings concerns the crypts within trucks used to hide migrants. As noted by Galis, Tzokas, and Tympas (2016), “Compared with the high-tech devices used to detect them (. . . [such as] electronic thermal cameras that function as scanners of crypts), crypts represent a low technology.” The study of migration and mobile borders is usually restricted to technologies used by governments to block access to Europe. To change this, materials need to be studied “not only in connection with the rhetoric of those who introduce it but also in light of how it is materialized in human bodies through clandestine border-crossing practices and material configurations (artifacts).”⁶⁸

While border infrastructures often travel with migrants, not everything travels in the same direction or reaches the planned destination. This applies to humans as well as to things. Some things are left behind or lacking. An employee of Médecins du Monde on Chios told us that provisions were stolen from their shed almost every night. To protect these items, they hired a private security company that now protected not only the shed, but also those living in the camp.⁶⁹ The arrival of objects on the islands thus created new and expanding networks, some of which also were irritating. The former deputy head of the coast guard fumed about the garbage left on the island: “There were complaints by the residents and professionals in the port of Chios, mainly due to the issue of cleaning public space . . . They come here, we help them, we provide them with clothes and food, but they don’t respect the place where they came.”⁷⁰

On Lesbos, garbage similarly became an issue, as abandoned life jackets were “painting red the shores of the ‘red island.’”⁷¹ Whereas for the coast guard, the abandoned objects were “garbage” and expressed disrespect,

the meanings of such objects differed in the eyes of different publics. The coast guard's annoyance with the garbage left behind reveals yet another dimension of the relation between people and objects. Control over space is often central within disputes. On Chios, the activity of making meals for migrants in the central park has transformed it into a provisional camp, provoking reactions from villagers. A member of the Starfish Foundation on Chios told us that "during the summer, when more and more volunteers were coming, we start getting more and more criticism from the village."⁷² A journalist on Chios pointed to the underlying dynamic: the more visible the "international presence" on the island, the more political the island becomes.⁷³

Traveling Infrastructures

Chios and Lesbos are among the Aegean islands that received large numbers of migrants in the period of 2014–2016. The traveling of migrants and borders was explored in this chapter by describing the interaction and coordination—or lack of them—between Greek central and local authorities, international NGOs, the European Union, volunteers, local villagers, grassroots groups, and migrants. More specifically, this discussion described how border infrastructures—as a combination of humanitarian and security initiatives—can be said to travel. Rather than being the result of clear design, borders pop up at locations, being the result of the actions of various groups, organizations, and institutions, often with different, if not opposed, agendas.⁷⁴

In these networks of social, political, material, and humanitarian tensions, borders may be said to travel with migrants. But although humanitarian border infrastructures involve all kinds of actors, there was no general planning or central overview. What our interviewees on Chios and Lesbos agreed on was the lack of any national or European government presence. According to our interviewee from Lathra, "the government left the NGOs to play their game."⁷⁵ This was confirmed by the mayor of Chios: "to a great extent, self-organization has covered the lack of state intervention and coordination."⁷⁶ A journalist working on Chios explained that "it was very convenient for them [the national government] that the local societies were self-organized at the beginning. It was our fault [referring to the local people on Chios] that we showed such willingness to deal with the

problem. We sent a wrong message to the government; we showed that the issue is addressed on the islands. So, the government withdrew."⁷⁷ Another journalist working on Chios pointed to the gulf between the realities on the island and the place where decisions are taken. About the local authorities on Chios, he said:

They are the authorities that everybody turns to when something is happening here, but they are also the authorities who are the least involved in creating all of this . . . Most of the decisions are taken elsewhere, and most of the information is also kept elsewhere. They are as much in the dark of the problem here, even more in the dark than the local volunteers. They seem to be just completely out of the loop.⁷⁸

Although many grassroots volunteers were not shy about their ideological sympathies, both grassroots initiatives and NGOs tend not to see themselves as political actors. An employee of Médecins du Monde on Chios commented on her organization's stance toward the authorities: "I'm not sure if I can comment on this. I cannot say what the right thing to do is, and Médecins du Monde does not concern itself with policy issues."⁷⁹ A member of the Starfish Foundation on Lesbos told us that "we are born out of wanting to help here . . . basically, we've always seen ourselves as just helping and staying out of the political side of it."⁸⁰ This was also the understanding of a journalist working on Chios: "It is all very nonpolitical, and some people are really proud that they are not political. But refugees have increasingly asked us to focus on the political as the political situation deteriorates."⁸¹

The hotspot approach at Lesbos does not solely concern the blocking and obstructing of migrants by fencing them. Instead, a form of "containment through mobility" is at work, which aims to govern migration movements via channels and infrastructures.⁸² The humanitarian border is not a case of spontaneous generation. The provision of care and control on the Aegean islands of Lesbos and Chios and the infrastructures that were required in 2014–2016 arose out of overlapping networks. Acts of humanitarianism and securitization necessitated moving various materialities and creating novel spaces for diffuse agentic capacities to emerge. To a certain extent, the arising networks can be seen as a border infrastructure that travels *with* the actors. But following only one category of actor does not generate a comprehensive picture of these configurations. The imperative to

“take objects of security as the starting point rather than the end result of an act of securitization” proves useful, so long as objects and subjects are seen as parts of peramorphic mediations.⁸³ Following migrants, migrant organizations, volunteers, international NGOs, and a diversity of state officials simultaneously helps to prevent a state-centric perspective on borders, while considering humanitarian and security approaches in tandem gives migrants, movements, and materialities their due in terms of the composition of border infrastructures and the compromises that underpin them.

The humanitarian border can be considered a compromise among security, migration, and humanitarian approaches. Technopolitical compromises are proposed neither at the level of the exchange of political ideas nor at the level of the construction of objects and things. Technopolitical compromises occur in between. The previous analysis shows that compromises tend to be contagious. Once a connection is established among the different programs of care and control, this alliance is likely to be peramorphically reproduced in all kinds of practices and techniques. Meanwhile, compromises are vulnerable. Compromises with regard to the technopolitics of borders easily become compromised themselves, as the fate of the detention centers at Lesbos and Chios has shown. A long-lasting lack of proper housing, food, clothing, and medical care has turned the camps into daunting examples of vulnerability and lack of humanitarian aid. The intended mechanism of the EU-Turkey Statement, which would allow refugees with a valid asylum request to enter and also return migrants to the other side of the Aegean Sea, has come to a halt. Infrastructural compromises are similar to regular social and political compromises that they are easily contaminated and run the risk of becoming compromised. To detect the compromises that constitute border infrastructures, the morphological shape of the technopolitics of borders has to be unpacked so as to distinguish the relationships between the composing parts.

The analysis clarified that humanitarian reason is not translated fluently into humanitarian technologies. In that sense, this chapter has confirmed the classic lesson from science and technology studies—namely, that technologies are not mere instruments that express the intensions or the will of their makers without getting “lost in translation,” so to speak. Various authors have described biometrics, vaccination programs, and tents in refugee camps as humanitarian technologies or “non-human humanitarians.”⁸⁴

The analysis in this chapter showed that tensions of humanitarian reason resonate in these humanitarian technologies. Food, shelter, and medical and legal services were provided in an ambivalent atmosphere where care and control are closely intermingled, and where the blending of security and humanitarianism via all kinds of things and technologies create novel compromises and novel compromised associations.

The humanitarian border arose from the materialities that were mobilized by actors engaged with care and control, in a continuous redistribution of roles and responsibilities. From the perspective of mediation, a humanitarian border can be conceived of as an entity that constantly undergoes shifts—translations of its composing elements into novel infrastructures. The particular morphological notion of technopolitics that was developed in the discussion between Sloterdijk and Latour conceives it as a world-making endeavor, a bubble-blowing and atmosphere-creating machinery. The inner radar work of that machine consists of all kinds of specific material and movable infrastructures. From time to time, the translations among actors, institutions, and technologies of all sorts lead to particular solidification points—“collectives” of humans and humans. The vibrant relations and interactions that shape a reality result in a much less dichotomous situation than one that can be explained in terms of subjects and objects.

The humanitarian border is a hybrid construction consisting of materialities and movements of all sorts. However, the solidification of a humanitarian border always comes with a proviso: underlying tensions, ongoing conflicts, new contestations, or the creation of competing entities can herald another hybridization of the situation. The engagements of actors concerned with care and control result in shifting border infrastructures. At certain points, a border infrastructure arises in which a clear delegation of security and humanitarian tasks takes place. At other moments, an intermingling of roles and functions is at stake. The creation of an entity, even a precarious and temporary one, is also the moment at which this entity can be deployed. Not only does an entity give a certain materiality to a particular configuration by momentarily “black-boxing” the underlying tensions and contestations, as an entity, it can also be put into motion by other entities and become an instrument itself.

However, this chapter has already showed that the technopolitical movements that transform a humanitarian border from a policy concept into a thing and a network, and vice versa, leave many gaps. Compromises between

care and control do not result in seamless infrastructures; rather, they create tensions and gaps. These gaps are not only material and spatial—they also contain an aesthetic dimension that make some tensions visible, whereas others remain invisible. In what way can this interplay be understood? How does the aesthetic dimension relate to the material and spatial aspects of border infrastructures, and what are the consequences for the actors, institutions, and technologies involved?

Chapter 7 redirects the gaze toward various infrastructural investigations, actions, and projects run by artists, activists, and academics that look at the politics of border infrastructures. In doing so, the actors conducting these infrastructural investigations not only contest border infrastructures or denunciate their consequences, they also turn the technopolitics of borders into a public issue. As such, infrastructural investigations add yet another dimension to the technopolitics of borders: the media and mediations that create borders.



Bulgaria surveillance, September 2015.
Source: Henk Wildschut.