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7 'Delay and neglect'

The everyday geopolitics of humanitarian borders

Elisa Pascucci, Jouni Häkli, and Kirsi Pauliina Kallio

Introduction

18 March 2017 was a day of mobilization across Greece. Nearly 8,000 people took to the streets of Athens. In Mytilene, Lesbos, over 2,000 migrants, volunteers, activists, and local residents gathered to demand the end of the 'EU-Turkey Statement' on refugees – as the European Commission refers to it. According to the organizers of the march, the agreement had transformed Greece into 'a trap'. In an open letter¹ released few days earlier by the 'People's Assembly in Lesbos', refugee community leaders in the Aegean island described the EU-Turkey deal as part of a broader policy of 'delay and neglect' through which the European Union governs its external borders.

A few months earlier, in November 2016, in the Bekaa Lebanon, local efforts to assist Syrian refugees who had crossed the nearby border appeared similarly chaotic and slow. Not far from the city of Zahle, Syrian informal settlements abounded, some of which were already over four years old. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including groups led by Syrian expatriates and Lebanese activists and professionals, from social workers to architects, were working frantically. Lebanese authorities, on the other hand, were seemingly playing a marginal role. Although not directly related to the EU-Turkey deal, the condition of Syrian settlements in Lebanon's Bekaa resembled the situation on the Aegean islands in its fragmented, partially 'informal', and often contradictory character.

These vignettes highlight two aspects of the contemporary entanglements of humanitarian aid and bordering practices. First, they point to the *enduring centrality of the refugee camp form*, including both spatial technologies 'of care and control' (Malkki, 1992, p. 34) set up and managed by states and established humanitarian actors, and informal and precarious refugee settlements in urban and rural spaces. The EU 'hotspots' – inter-agency processing centres located in Greece and Italy, aimed at identifying incoming migrants and expediting asylum procedures – offer a prime example of the former, while the latter kinds of camp arrangements can be found in many Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cities and beyond. In some cases, such as those of Palestinian camps in Lebanon, the distinction between the two is blurred by the incremental evolution and urbanization of what were originally

created as formal refugee camps. Secondly, the vignettes reveal the *intersection of different agentic capacities* in the constitution of the border constellation, including those of migrants, activists, states and supra-national bodies, private sector and corporate actors, new volunteers, and established non-governmental humanitarian actors and organizations.

Drawing on fieldwork conducted by one of the authors between 2016 and 2018, in this chapter we trace these two intertwining elements of the 'humanitarian border' (Walters, 2011) in the Eastern Mediterranean, focusing on the cases of Greece and Lebanon.² We argue that these multifaceted spatialities and agencies are better understood as *emerging mundane geopolitics of the humanitarian border* – geopolitics characterized by everyday configurations of bordering, care, and transgression. As such, we argue, they constitute governance configurations that work by mobilizing fleeting alliances and emerging solidarities in spaces of proximity and coexistence, but can also operate 'negatively', that is, through apparent absences of government as well as acts of withdrawal and neglect (Rose, 2014).

In what follows, we first synthetically review existing literature on humanitarian borders, identifying aspects that have so far remained less explored. We also discuss how recent work in the fields of everyday and urban geopolitics can contribute to our understanding of contemporary intersections of humanitarianism and borders. We then move on to examine the delayed temporalities, and omissions and withdrawals of care, in the context of post-EU-Turkey Statement hotspot governance in Lesvos, Aegean Greece. In Lebanon, we look into how new and emerging humanitarian actors – Syrian and Lebanese NGOs, but also what Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2016) has called 'refugee-to-refugee' humanitarianism – negotiate control and care provision in Syrian settlements. In conclusion, we discuss the ethical implications of the two cases as examples of localized, 'polymorphic' humanitarian borders (Burridge et al., 2017), where multiple agentic capacities constitute heterogeneous models of 'negative governance'.

The everyday geopolitics of humanitarian borders

Less than ten years after the publication of William Walters's (2011) influential essay, humanitarian borders have become a well-established field of study in critical political geography (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, 2017, 2018; Stierl, 2017; Williams, 2015 among others). Pallister-Wilkins (2018, p. 3) defines humanitarian borders as spaces 'where practices of border control and border policing elide with or use humanitarian concerns for life in the policing of mobility'. Existing research has interpreted the 'practices' and 'concerns' that constitute humanitarian borders in a somewhat limited manner, with attention devoted mostly to visible forms of 'policing of mobility'. The main focus has been on phenomena akin to what De Genova (2013) has called 'spectacles' of exclusion – in this case exclusion through 'humanitarian inclusion'. These typically take place around migrant acts of crossing territorially-demarcated borders – from search and rescue at sea, to emergency relief and medical aid in land border zones (see, for example, Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Stierl, 2017; Williams, 2015).

Yet, as recently highlighted by Jones et al. (2017), the merging of humanitarianism and borders has led to a global expansion of 'borderwork' (Rumford, 2008), a notion that points to a diversification of the actors, practices, and discourses involved. Walters (2011, p. 153) himself has addressed this aspect by writing that humanitarianism 'has made the policing of borders a much more complex, polymorphous and heterogeneous affair', to the point that it renders 'transactions and imbrications between official governance and certain moves which contest it' commonplace. Pallister-Wilkins's (2018) recent work on Greek hotspots borrows Laleh Khalili's (2012, p. 239) image of 'machines of many moving parts', thus highlighting the constitutive heterogeneity of these spatialized assemblages.

These arguments resonate with broader theoretical discussions in border studies. Burridge et al. (2017) move from Parker and Vaughan-Williams's (2009, p. 584) reflection on the ubiquitous nature of contemporary borders – on 'what does it feel like to exist as a border' (emphasis in the original). In doing so, they contest 'top-down' conceptualizations of the 'everywhere border', which afford states and other governmental actors a level of coherence that they do not necessarily possess. Instead, they build on feminist geographies to advance a theory of borders as 'polymorphic'. Such a theory is 'catholic and eclectic in its use of spatial metaphors', attuned to both networked social ontologies and to feminist scepticism on the 'inescapability or omnipotence' of control (Burridge et al., 2017, pp. 244–245). In proposing a critical topology of global borders, Mezzadra and Neilson (2012, p. 59; also, 2013) argue that accounts of their proliferation should not see borders as mere 'devices that obstruct or block global flows', but as 'parameters that enable the channelling of flows and provide coordinates within which flows can be joined or segmented, connected or disconnected'. In doing so, they stress the centrality of temporality, a dimension that has historically characterized the constitution of borders (Tazzioli, 2018; Walters, 2011).

While we fully incorporate the temporal element into our approach, in this chapter we take a slight departure from existing literature. Rather than focusing on the temporality of border *enforcement*, we wish to highlight the peculiar and salient temporalities of the *aid and care* elements in the humanitarian border. As Feldman (2012, p. 160) remarks, 'humanitarianism is not the same humanitarianism all the time', just as it varies significantly across space (Pallister-Wilkins, 2018). Its heterogeneous character mirrors, intersects with, and reinforces the polymorphism of contemporary borders. In this paper we thus foreground the polymorphic nature of humanitarian border governance – its spatial and temporal multiplicity and ambivalences between control and transgression, inclusion, and exclusion. In doing so, we build on insights from our previous work on the performative, emotional, and spatial character of refugee political agency (Häkli et al., 2017; Kallio and Häkli, 2018; Kallio et al., forthcoming). Here, however, we shift our focus from the subjectivity of asylum claimants to the other side of the humanitarian border, namely the agencies through which care and control are performed and enacted,

also by refugees themselves, and particularly in the case of aid provision in Lebanon (cf. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016).

Concurrently, we consider it essential to remain attentive to the 'imbrications' between border governance and its countering acts (Walters, 2011, p. 253). In this regard, reiterating our commitment to epistemologies rooted in the 'political mundane', we see the work on everyday geopolitics as an essential ally. Its emphasis on 'affective landscapes' and the 'encounters that circulate therein' (Williams and Boyce, 2013, p. 912) brings forward the motion of feelings, positionalities and agentic capacities that inform contemporary border spaces. Although these insights have already been applied to the study of humanitarian borders (Jansen, 2009; Williams and Boyce, 2013), these efforts have so far been limited to border crossing environments, mostly at the territorial peripheries of Western and Mediterranean Europe, and North America. Our contribution mobilizes the potential of everyday geopolitics for grasping the spatialities and temporalities of humanitarian borders beyond territorial border crossing and enforcement (see also Kallio et al., forthcoming).

As already introduced, the first element that our approach wishes to highlight is the *displacement, expansion, and recasting of the camp form* (see, for example, Agier, 2011). This is evidenced by the growing policy attention to the urban dimension of refuge (which has undergone surprisingly little scrutiny in critical border scholarship) and the urbanization of camps, as well as the emerging camp-assemblages through which the EU hotspot approach operates. Overall, the camp – in both its spontaneous and institutionalized forms – seems to have grown ever more central in the governance of refuge within territorial Europe. In our previous work on the urban geopolitics of refuge in the 'global south' we have argued that, in these emerging spaces of care and control, 'human sociality and political agency are embedded in materialities and forms of incremental presence' (Rokem et al., 2017, p. 257). Through these everyday relations, 'connections at multiple scales between different geographies of violence and coexistence' make refuge an eminently geopolitical phenomenon (Rokem et al., 2017, p. 257).

This attention to the displacement of borders taking place through the emergence of new 'camp geographies', is also an important move beyond the 'Eurocentric humanitarian imaginations' that mark much existing scholarship on humanitarian borders (Pallister-Wilkins, 2018, p. 9). We consider this as central because, as Pallister-Wilkins (2018) has argued, the so-called 'refugee crisis' has challenged humanitarian geographies based on the provision of aid to distant strangers in far-away lands, 'displacing' refugees to the beaches, supermarkets, train stations, hospitals, and makeshift camps of Europe (see also Schindel, 2019). Moreover, as a result of border externalization policies, displaced people find refuge primarily within Africa, the Middle East, and Asia – Turkey being the country that hosts the highest number of refugees in the world according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2017a). In this regard, recent geographical scholarship has convincingly documented the role played by south-based actors, refugee communities, and Muslim religious groups, among others, in refugee aid (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011, 2016). We thus

consider it ethically imperative to look at how these non-Eurocentric forms of aid provision contribute to or challenge bordering practices that unfold in the everyday.

The second, related element guiding our exploration of the everyday geopolitics of the humanitarian border is *political agency*. We define this as the human individual and collective capacity to influence or change matters of importance that are contextually and intersubjectively negotiated. This capacity involves performative, strategic, and emotional elements, which we have explored in our previous work (Häkli et al., 2017; Kallio et al., forthcoming). In this chapter, we want to advance this operational definition by highlighting the conditioning effects of the intertwining of agencies through which bordering spaces are constituted. In the humanitarian border, we argue, political agency is exerted within networks of heterogeneous and dispersed, yet at the same time closely related actors. As already remarked, these include migrants and refugees involved in aid provision, both through institutional NGOs and more or less informal community networks, as well as supra-national governmental bodies like the European Commission and Frontex (as in the case of Greek hotspots), local state authorities, established humanitarian organizations, and private contractors – among others.

Building on recent analyses of the mechanisms of care provisions around and within border spaces in the Mediterranean (Mitchell and Sparke, forthcoming; Pallister-Wilkins, 2018), we deem it essential to examine the ways in which these actors exert their agentic capacities in a highly interrelated manner. While in some cases this is evidenced by the presence of formal institutional coordination, in others the interconnection is produced through promixity, coexistence, and the shared necessity to provide care and in conditions of both political uncertainty and material precarity. By arguing for a geopolitics of the humanitarian border that is grounded in the everyday (Pain and Smith, 2008), and located beyond formal camp spaces or immediately visible European border zones, we propose a methodological approach that traces these interconnected capacities.

The use of the phrase 'agentic capacities' is particularly significant in our approach. Through it, we highlight how the capacity to act in humanitarian border spaces does not mean unconstrained agency and certain efficacy, nor does it necessarily imply *the intentionality or possibility of the act*. As the next two sections will show, negotiated limitations, strategic omissions, delays, absences, lack of access, and progressive withdrawal of care – all well documented elements of contemporary humanitarian (Dunn, 2012), migration (Belcher and Martin, 2013; Davies et al., 2017), and postcolonial governance (Rose, 2014) – are constitutive elements of contemporary humanitarian borders. As we further discuss in the conclusions, this polyphony of negative agentic capacities has important implications for the ethics and morality of contemporary borders.

Greece

Between August and October 2015, as De Genova (2017, p. 12) writes, 'the apparent front line of European border struggles was repeatedly dislocated' by

the dramatic confrontation between 'migrant and refugee autonomies' and 'tactics of bordering' that came to be known as the 'European refugee crisis'. Many countries were interested by this dislocation of border struggles and humanitarian practices, and many resorted to the reintroduction of temporary border controls within the European space in order to face 'the emergency' (De Genova, 2017).

As we have argued elsewhere, some aspects of the humanitarian border can only be grasped by looking more closely at their spatial and temporal 'intensities': the nodal points where the encounters and conflicts that constitute the border are experienced as particularly vivid by the actors involved (Kallio et al., forthcoming). Located at the European entry-point of the so-called 'Balkan route', Greece is undoubtedly one such point. According to the UNHCR, by October 2015, over half a million people had arrived in the country, the vast majority crossing the sea from Turkey and landing on the small Aegean islands of Kios and, more frequently, Lesbos. An unprecedented humanitarian effort thus focused on Greece – according to estimates, one of the most expensive in the history of modern humanitarianism (Howden and Fotiadis, 2017). This intervention was marked by delays and a striking lack of coordination, with repeated conflicts between local authorities and international non-governmental actors over the division of emergency labour, the usage of funds collected through international donations, and the management of space for the copious number of volunteers who were reaching the Aegean from all over the world (Howden and Fotiadis, 2017).

While this chaotic outlook may be seen as the result of emergency dynamics, exacerbated by the fact that international organizations and the NGO sector were engaging for the first time in such a large-scale operation in a fully sovereign European country, the measures immediately adopted by the 'international community' did not curb the confusion that marked Greece's 'humanitarian spectacle'. Following the action plan adopted in October 2015, the 28 EU member states drafted the statement of their well-known agreement with Turkey. The statement established the immediate return of all migrants irregularly crossing the border to Greece, and the 'one to one principle', according to which, for every refugee returned to Turkey from Greece, the EU committed to resettle another one, selected among the refugee population residing in camps (which excluded non-Syrian refugees), as well as financial aid and accelerated visa procedures for Turkey.

The agreement did not amount to a binding international legal treaty: its value was exclusively political. The concrete effects on border and humanitarian infrastructures within Aegean Greece and beyond, however, were immediately highly visible. The statement enhanced and expanded the regulation of identification, registration, asylum claiming, assistance, and repatriation through the hotspot approach that, as such, had a complex and long genealogy in EU border governance (Pallister-Wilkins, 2018). This resulted in a reorganization of the camp geographies of Lesbos, and a dramatic precarization and immobilization of migrant life on the island, as the statement made transfer to the Greek mainland a very selective and slow procedure.

During our visit in October 2016, local aid workers in Lesbos described Moria – the camp functioning as the hotspot's main identification and containment facility – as so infrastructurally precarious that it would experience regular water shortages due to the municipality's inability to settle its bills on time, as well as repeated fires and protests by residents. By then the other main camp in Lesbos, Kara Tepe – the 'hospitality centre' for families and asylum seekers in conditions of vulnerability, managed by the municipality – had already seen a decrease in the number of international and local NGOs involved in assistance and infrastructural improvement within its premises. Residents' everyday lives in Kara Tepe were settling into ingrained precarity. According to local NGOs, the site, originally built to host 1,000 people, was accommodating over 3,000. Due to overcrowdedness, the bathrooms were often in such dire conditions that residents used the surrounding bushes as toilets. 'Positioned on a hillside with steep inclines', as the internal note of an international NGO working on shelter improvement described it, Kara Tepe had 'no basic rain-water run-off drainage system in place, putting some lower areas at risk of flooding'. Residents, the organization concluded, were 'having their living spaces inundated during heavy rains'.

Many families had modified the flat-pack housing units in iron and plastic assigned to them, produced by the Swedish firm Better Shelter, partner of the IKEA Foundation, by adding or taking away components, or opening new windows on the walls to find relief from the heat. Many among locals and camp residents engaged in small economic activities and commercial transactions, from working as barbers to setting up small grocery shops around the camp. These had given rise to a local informal economy of transit and precarity, regarded suspiciously by local authorities, yet mostly tolerated. Although the camp management had arranged a system of meals delivery and formally prohibited the use of stoves, cooking, in the words of a local volunteer, 'happened all the time', allegedly increasing safety risks for residents.

In early 2017, the UNHCR replaced the Better Shelter-IKEA Foundation housing units in use in Kara Tepe with containers, apparently citing fire risks. The new containers came with pre-installed heating units, which, however, could not be put to use in the winter due to the infrastructural set up of electricity provision on the island (personal communication, Greek NGO worker, 2018; see also Rantsiou, 2017). In March 2017, Dimitris Christopoulos, the head of the International Federation for Human Rights (known by its French acronym, FIDH), described the situation on the island as one of 'absolute precarity', which would work as a powerful deterrent for migrants intending to cross the border from Turkey (Kingsley, 2017).

In September 2017, UNHCR issued a press briefing calling for urgent action to 'ease conditions on Greek islands', which achieved very little. A few weeks later, the coordinator for the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, Maarten Verwey, visited Kara Tepe and demanded that 300 people be transferred from Moria, which was then hosting twice the number of migrants it could accommodate. According to Fotini Rantsiou (2017, p. 1), Verwey suggested that 'they be housed in empty containers in a new extension lying empty and without any

electricity in Kara Tepe'. The transfer would thus further integrate the municipality's camp into the most securitized section of the hotspot. In early 2018, Greek NGO workers and public officers in Lesvos expressed their fear that the final transformation of Kara Tepe into 'a detention facility, like Moria' in the context of the proposed expansion of the hotspot, might be imminent. Meanwhile, reports by international NGOs were continuing to document the deterioration of security and infrastructural conditions in the island's camps, and the dramatic rise in mental health problems among migrants, including post-traumatic stress disorder, self-harm, and suicide, among migrants (MSF, 2017).

For Pallister-Wilkins (2018), the Greek system of containment through camps entrenched by the EU-Turkey Statement rationalizes and regulates the compassion animating the wide range of humanitarian actors – both professional and volunteer – who have been active in Greece in 2015–2016. It thus works on two levels. On the one hand, it limits and controls the circulation of migrant bodies that are to be included into the European political and social space highly selectively, and always only partially and temporarily. On the other hand, it acts on European society by 'taming' acts of aid and emerging solidarities, making them governable and even allies to government. While these observations are important, it is also essential to highlight how, on the Greek humanitarian border, 'control' does not equate coherence and efficacy, but repeated failures – in knowing, acting in a timely manner, and coordinating.

The conditions in Kara Tepe, outlined above, demonstrate how the agentic capacities at work in this system include centralized initiatives to govern migration by national and supra-national bodies, but also less coherent efforts to manage the humanitarian crisis by local authorities and international non-governmental actors, all the way down to actions by volunteers providing care to the migrants struggling to survive in conditions of political uncertainty and material precarity. While the system admittedly is flexible in the face of constantly changing situations, for migrants it constitutes a highly uneven and unpredictable landscape of 'neglectful care' that no one takes responsibility for. It is these unstable negotiations across a range of actors and agentic capacities, including migrants who counter the reduction to embodied abjection by clinging on daily activities that are formally forbidden within camp spaces, which we wish to foreground as a dynamism constitutive of the humanitarian border. In many instances, these agencies appear to repeatedly fail to act, or progressively withdraw. The gaps in infrastructural provision that they engender, such as lack of electricity and water in camps, produce geopolitical effects that unfold in the everyday, while having resonances on a wider scale. Through the inefficacy of humanitarian care that characterizes places like Moria and Kara Tepe, even the movement of people across borders is effectively slowed down, and even deterred.

Lebanon

According to the UNHCR (2017a), between April 2011 and December 2017 altogether 1,015,500 Syrians sought asylum in Europe. At the end of 2017,

approximately the same number of Syrian refugees were hosted by one single country in the Middle East: Lebanon. While figures have dropped slightly since the introduction of restrictive border policies and the stop to official registration procedures in 2015, Lebanon remains the country with the highest number of refugees per capita in the world (Boustani et al., 2016; UNHCR, 2017b). A state in which violent conflict³ 'is embedded in national boundaries, social and economic organization and political administration', Lebanon has suffered serious financial losses as a result of the Syrian crisis (Boustani et al., 2016, p. 9). The condition of refugees in the country reflects this historically entrenched precarity. According to a survey published by the UNHCR (2017b, p. 8), in 2017 over half of Syrian families had no members with legal residency, '87% of refugees report(ed) having borrowed money', and '77% of Syrian refugee households reported having experienced a lack of food or lack of money to buy food during the 30 days prior to the survey'. The inadequacies of humanitarian delivery have been blamed on the lack of coordination between governmental, international and, non-governmental actors. The Lebanese government has tried to harmonize existing responses by establishing ministerial coordination offices, with limited results (Boustani et al., 2016).

The informal, seemingly inefficient nature of the response is particularly evident in the question of refugee shelter. Discussions on the topic started immediately after the beginning of the crisis. They were marked by a sharp conflict between the government (backed by public opinion), categorically opposing the creation of 'Syrian camps', mostly on security grounds, and the UNHCR and NGO partners, for whom these kinds of 'managed' refugee settlements were the only viable solution (Boustani et al., 2016). Such security narratives, however, hid a far more complex reality. In 2016, UN officers in Beirut described their work in facilitating refugees' access to the local rental market as 'adaptation' to a system of governance historically based on a loosely regulated market economy, as well as on networks of patronage that closely bind the state and private capital. Their actions in this field were classified under the agenda of 'humanitarian innovation'. However, the narratives of UN officers in Lebanon stressed the role of localized dynamics and historical continuities in limiting the agency of aid organizations to the mediation between landlords and tenants, and the promotion of private sector involvement in refugee housing provision – from local letting agencies to international 'sharing-economy' actors like Airbnb.

Despite the border and visa restrictions introduced in 2015, and although EU member states' cooperation does influence humanitarian responses within the country, the Lebanese 'governance-scape' is not marked by externally regulated border enforcement facilities and practices (as in Greece). Lack of coordination, informality, and market laissez-faire attitudes are rather the product of a system that has worked through decentralized governance at least since the late Ottoman period. Municipalities have a prominent administrative role, so-called networks of clientelism and patronage shape policy practices, and sectarian and religious groups are fully institutionalized (Hamieh and Mac Ginty, 2010).

Even in such a decentralized socio-political system, however, the incorporation of Syrian households in local market circuits did not loosen the barriers between refugees and local societal and political institutions. Rather, it contributed to the constitution of a temporally protracted humanitarian border that worked through informality, infrastructural precariousness, and the creation of informal encampments – despite the policies aimed at avoiding formal refugee camps. According to UN Habitat and UNHCR (2014), in 2014 82% of Syrians in Lebanon were settled in private apartments and ‘substandard shelters’ including ‘garages, worksites and unfinished buildings’, while the remaining 18% were living in informal tented settlements, mostly in peri-urban settings (see Boustani et al., 2016, p. 21). During winter months, conditions were particularly critical, also in the capital Beirut (UNCHR, 2018).

Some of the Syrians families settled near Jarahieh, Bekaa, in 2016, used recycled UNHCR cloths and advertising billboards to cover and repair their provisional shelters. In the surroundings of temporary school buildings, clinics, and NGO offices, small stacks were sprawling where street vendors, some of whom underage, were selling clothes, telephone covers, and snacks. Humanitarian agencies had no other choice but to invest resources for infrastructural improvement in schools and playgrounds projects, since local authorities did not allow substantial interventions on the infrastructure of existing refugee shelters that would risk making them ‘permanent’. As one of the interviewed aid workers observed, even the approved projects were made difficult by the lengthy, complex negotiations with local municipalities, whose administrators and politicians expected the resources spent on refugee settlements to be spread among local communities that, in some cases, shared similarly precarious livelihoods. Small contractors in the construction sector who lost a bid to bigger companies based in the capital, a relatively common occurrence, could seek protection from local notables, and attempt to disrupt projects in order to benefit from the need for further works. This negative and decentred governance, which functioned by withdrawing action and dispersing responsibility, produced a ‘neglectful humanitarian landscape’ where bordering practices worked by compounding the condition of refugeeeness through social provisionality and infrastructural precarity, entrenching immobility.

At the same time, refugees and migrants played an increasingly active role in this diverse landscape of humanitarian bordering. At the end of 2016, NGOs founded and led by Lebanese professionals and volunteers, but also by young Syrian expatriates, were increasingly prominent in the Lebanese refugee aid milieu. One of them, Basmeh & Zeitooneh, had started operating also in Turkey, and had just received a pro-bono management consultancy from the leading US-based multinational AT Kearney,⁴ aimed at diversifying and expanding their international operations and relations with donors. Soon after its foundation, in 2012–2013, Basmeh & Zeitooneh had opened a community centre in one of the historical refugee camps of Beirut, Chatila, where long-term Palestinian residents had years of experience in welcoming new displaced people: first poor Lebanese displaced by political violence and the Beirut housing market, then Palestinians in search of a new refuge after the violent destruction

of the Nahr el Bared camp, and finally Syrian refugees (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016). ‘For refugees from Syria,’ Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2016, p. 2) writes, ‘arriving in the camp . . . and sharing its increasingly cramped space and limited resources’ has meant experiencing ‘a space of solidarity’. However, just as for Nancy ‘togetherness and being together are not equivalent’ (Nancy, 2000, p. 60 quoted in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016, p. 2), solidarity here does not mean absence of hierarchies and divisions. Spaces of ‘refugee-to-refugee hosting’ and community-based humanitarianism are not exempt from the reproduction of everyday borders (Pascucci, 2017). On the contrary, the precarious coexistence of shared or antagonistic histories of violence and exile can work to perpetuate exclusionary boundaries of political belonging. Through them, the everyday geopolitics of humanitarianism and borders contribute to the reproduction of the nation-state.

Conclusions

Examining the politics of refuge and bordering in Greece and Lebanon in the months following the application of the EU-Turkey Statement on refugees, this chapter has shed light on the ‘materials that connect and conjoin geopolitics and everyday life’ within and through humanitarian borders (Pain and Smith, 2008, p. 2). The ‘hotspot machine’ at work in Aegean Greece, we have shown, is one of the most poignant examples of contemporary humanitarian bordering, operating as a negative system of governance and diluted responsibility (Rose, 2014). While the migration regime behind these unsafe and agonizing conditions is less coherent than it appears, any acts of resistance contesting it have only succeeded in disturbing but not changing the precarious situation for the thousands of refugees still trapped in the camps. Shadowed by meagre possibilities for resettlement in the EU, the affective landscapes of the hotspot appear despondent from the everyday geopolitical perspective.

To further discuss how Syrian refugees shape and are shaped by the humanitarian border, we have described a number of localized responses to the prolonged refugee crisis in Lebanon. In this context, the aim of the refugee aid regime to govern the situation by means of formal camps has not succeeded as the national and local governments, as well as some sectors of the Lebanese society, are not supportive of them. This contradiction has, perhaps paradoxically, led to the creation of informal encampments, compounding informality and infrastructural precariousness. The local and transnational grassroots organizations working with and for migrants have gained only limited success in improving their housing situation, largely in fear that this would serve to establish their presence in the society. Also, divisions between different migrant groups pose obstacles to creating mutually supportive networks and infrastructures. Hence, the solidarities at play in Lebanon have not succeeded in building a ‘safe zone’ to the humanitarian border, even with more leeway for migrant agentic capacities than in the Greek context. The mundane geopolitical struggles carried out by individual and collective actors in Lebanon – be they asylum seekers, local

people, refugees from previous generations, or transnational aid workers – are not meaningless or triumphant, but produce subtle shifts in the constitution of the always contextual and fluctuating humanitarian border.

We hope to have shown that the notion of the humanitarian border can be diversified and deepened by looking into how the regime and its counter forces enact it in different geographical contexts. A parallel comparison between the Greek and Lebanese situations brings to the fore the spatial and temporal variabilities of the border, as well as the numerous agentic capacities embedded in it. Our discussion also shows how the improvised and provisional system of crisis governance effectively obscures the question of responsibility in how the situation is managed in different locations and socio-cultural settings.

Our account of the humanitarian border thus aligns itself with calls for a theorization and practice of international ethics that, while acknowledging the enduring relevance of the national, goes beyond 'statist imaginaries' (Bulley, 2017 quoted in Paasi et al., 2019). Such ethics, we believe, can only counter the blurred accountabilities produced by these modalities of border governance (Schindel, 2019) if founded on an understanding of political agency that is localized, contextualized, and pluralistic. By grasping the multifaceted spatialized agencies at play in the merging of humanitarianism and borders, well beyond territorial border-crossing environments and governmental apparatuses, it is also possible to impact on the precarities and inequalities produced by global borders.

Notes

- 1 Available at: <https://peoplesassemblylesvos.wordpress.com/> [Accessed 06.02.2018].
- 2 Fieldwork for this paper has been carried out by Elisa Pascucci between October 2016 and February 2018, in the context of a broader project on humanitarian economies in responses to the Syrian refugee crisis (Academy of Finland SA 295297).
- 3 Including the 34-day long war with Israel of 2006, which caused over 1,000 Lebanese deaths.
- 4 www.middle-east.atkearney.com/news-media/news-releases/news-release/-/asset_publisher/00OIL7Jc67KL/content/a-t-kearney-conducts-pro-bono-project-to-support-syrian-refugees?inheritRedirect=false&redirect=http://www.middle-east.atkearney.com/news-media/news-releases/news-release%3Fp_p_id%3D101_INSTANCE_00OIL7Jc67KL%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dnormal%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26p_p_col_id%3Dcolumn-2%26p_p_col_count%3D1 [Accessed 22.02.2018].

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