



‘Wir schaffen das’: Hope and hospitality beyond the humanitarian border

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Abstract

This article examines how hope for a different culture of hospitality has been articulated during the long summer of migration of 2015 in Germany by juxtaposing Angela Merkel's 'Wir schaffen das' speeches with the cross-border migrant March of Hope. The article suggests that while Merkel's rhetoric opens the horizon to a more hospitable Europe, her policies of humanitarian securitisation ultimately redistribute hope away from migrants and towards a German nation imagined to be in need of protection from them. Subsequently, the article turns to the March of Hope to see how the gesture of hospitality embedded in Merkel's rhetoric was reinterpreted and resisted. It shows that cross-border marches reveal affective infrastructures of care and hospitality that extend beyond the humanitarian border enacted by the state. These infrastructures provide the space for intimate negotiations of citizenship in which the relationality of social life is not framed through the racialised emergency logics of biopolitical control.

Keywords

affect, borders, Germany, hope, hospitality, humanitarianism, migration

The question of migrant hospitality has become of increasing importance in the context of the European border regime governed by racial capitalism and the legacies of colonialism. Critical migration scholars have complicated easy celebrations of hospitality in the context of contemporary border securitisation. They have shown how humanitarian acts of hospitality can exacerbate racialised, gendered and classed distinctions of deservingness (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016), serving to eschew historical responsibility (Bhambra, 2017) and justify paternalistic state interventions (Oliver, 2017). Given these

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considerations, Miriam Ticktin (2016: 255) suggests that we need to think ‘beyond humanitarian borders’ in which hospitable acts of care are directly entangled with securitising measures of deterrence. She argues that such a project not only necessitates new social institutions but also a different ‘affective politics that moves beyond a state of emergency, beyond feelings of pity for the innocent’ (2016: 286). This article responds to the call for new affective politics by interrogating how hope for a different culture of hospitality has been articulated in Germany. Bringing together queer, feminist and post-colonial theories of hope with critical accounts of humanitarianism and hospitality, I conceptualise borders not merely as territorial or symbolic structures but also as affective borders that work on the intimate level of emotion and attachment.

To track different articulations of hope, I (re-)turn to the summer of 2015 when the European border regime was momentarily brought to a halt. While the ‘long summer of migration’ was born out of war, economic destitution and environmental collapse, it also entailed the hope for the emergence of transnational solidarities and new forms of hospitality (Hess et al., 2016). Turning to these different articulations of hope, I begin by interrogating Angela Merkel’s ‘Wir schaffen das’ (‘We can do it’) speeches and her associated policies that have often been heralded as the principle of hope for a more welcoming German nation. I then analyse the March of Hope, in which migrants defied the restrictive policies of the European border regime by walking from Hungary to Germany to see how the gesture of hospitality embedded in Merkel’s ‘Wir schaffen das’ was reinterpreted, resisted and reclaimed.

Tracing hope across these interrelated scenes, I break with moral accounts that aim to define different affects as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and instead focus on the political work they (can) do (Ahmed, 2014). I follow Ghassan Hage’s (2003) notion that hope is best understood as a socially distributed resource in that I identify cruel forms of hegemonic reattachment (Berlant, 2011) and also read potentiality into more quotidian acts of survival (Bloch, 1954; Muñoz, 2009). Based on this analysis, I posit that cross-border marches reveal infrastructures of care and hospitality that extend beyond the humanitarian border enacted by the state. Whereas Merkel’s rhetoric and policies redistribute hope from migrants to a nation imagined in need of protection, cross-national marches create spaces for the intimate negotiation of citizenship and belonging. These negotiations, I suggest, are not without racial tensions or gendered inequalities but point to the value of collective infrastructures as enabling social life to flourish and persist.

Hope as ethical imperative

Accompanied by images of refugees being welcomed at train stations around the country, Merkel’s ‘Wir schaffen das’ became the slogan for a new culture of hospitality in Germany. Over the summer 2015, several hundred thousand migrants made their way from northern Africa and the Middle East to Germany and the European border regime was momentarily brought to its knees. When, at the end of August, 71 migrants were found dead in a truck in Austria and several thousand people were stranded at the train station in Budapest, prevented from continuing their journey by the local authorities, Germany, as the economically most powerful country in the European Union (EU), saw

itself forced to react. It is at this point that Merkel stepped in front of the cameras for her yearly summer speech and declared:

I say simply . . . the motive with which we approach these things must be: we have accomplished so much — *Wir schaffen das!* We can do this and what stands in our way needs to be overcome, needs to be worked at. (Bundesregierung, 2015: para. 26)

In this speech, Merkel defended the right to asylum, arguing that: ‘universal civil rights have so far been deeply intertwined with Europe and its history [. . .] and are one of the founding impulses of the European Union’ (Bundesregierung, 2015: para. 27). As she promised Syrian refugees in particular access to political asylum, Merkel’s statement was often read as an act of ‘opening Germany’s doors to refugees’ and a humanitarian slogan focused on alleviating the hardship of migrants coming to Europe (e.g. Hill, 2015).

Yet, from the beginning, Merkel’s approach was contested. She was assaulted by right-wing activists who called her a ‘traitor of the people’, and even political allies like the head of her sister party the CSU (Christian Social Union), Horst Seehofer, refused to take on her slogan. Similarly, far-right figures like Viktor Orbán attacked her rhetoric for encouraging migrants to come to Europe and for forcing her policies on less powerful countries within the EU. Most liberal and leftist commentators, however, celebrated her approach. *Time Magazine* named her the ‘chancellor of the free world’ (Vick, 2015: 1). She was repeatedly discussed as a favourite for the Nobel Peace Prize and even some of the harshest critics of her austerity policies of recent years, which eroded the social welfare systems of the European South, rallied to her defence. Étienne Balibar (2015: 1) declared that Merkel’s actions ‘deserve the greatest respect’ as they defend a vision of ‘the right of asylum and against Fortress Europe’. Even the former finance minister of Greece, Yanis Varoufakis (2015: 1), argued that in Merkel’s statement, he ‘found hope that Europe’s soul hadn’t disappeared completely’. He praised ‘one of Germany’s grandest gifts to humanity: the philosophy of Immanuel Kant’ and argued that the spirit of ‘*Wir schaffen das*’ carries the vision for a more humane Europe.

Narratives of national exceptionalism

Merkel defended this vision in important public speeches of 2015, such as at the annual CDU (Christian Democratic Union) party conference and in her New Year’s address. What makes her statement so remarkable is its temporality of hope. Different from classical hopeful slogans like Obama’s ‘Yes we can’, which paints the image of a bright future in which the American dream will flourish, Merkel mobilises hope from the lessons and hard work of the past. Stating that ‘We have done so much, we can do this’, she highlights the stable economic position that Germany is in, identifying getting through the banking crisis, stopping the use of nuclear energy after the disaster of Fukushima and coming together after natural catastrophes as recent moments of disaster management that her government had successfully negotiated (Bundesregierung, 2015).

Most importantly, across her speeches, Merkel refers to the post-war achievement of rebuilding Germany after the Second World War and reunifying East and West Germany

after the fall of the Berlin Wall as the two monumental efforts in modern German history whose hands-on spirit, she suggests, need to be reactivated in the current moment of crisis. In responding to critics within her own party as to how she can be so hopeful in the face of the ‘refugee crisis’ at the CDU conference in December 2015 she posits that:

I can say ‘Wir schaffen das’ because it is part of the identity of our country to do great [things], to build the country of the economic miracle out of the rubble [of the Second World War] and to become a highly regarded country of unity and freedom after the division [into East and West Germany]. (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2015: 29)

Gabriele Dietze (2016: 1) has referred to this narrative of Germany building a successful capitalist democracy out of its fascist and socialist past as one of ‘exceptional historical atonement’. She suggests, that, specifically the memory of the Holocaust and the Third Reich have long been a crucial mobilising force for hospitable stances towards migration as it was in response to the histories of Nazi persecution and expulsion that the right of political asylum was enshrined in the German constitution. Drawing on the affectively laden narrative of national atonement, Merkel argues that: ‘the CDU is a party, that from the beginning knew that after the horror of the Second World War and the Holocaust our Germany could only come back to its feet politically and morally if we overcame separations and built bridges beyond the borders of our own country’ (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2015: 37). In doing so, ‘Wir schaffen das’ becomes a moral imperative, moving a critical, even hostile, party to give her standing ovations.

While Merkel’s rhetoric opens up some links of historical responsibility, it forecloses others. As Fatima El-Tayeb (2016) argues, in German public discourse post-fascist and post-socialist narratives have been fused into a national progress narrative, while the legacies of colonialism have attracted little attention. This has the effect of explaining phenomena such as transnational migration through an ‘internalist narrative’ of Europe, in which ‘Europe is able to produce from within its own borders and resources, both material and spiritual, the conditions for the next phase of social development’ (Hall, 1991: 18). Merkel does mention the war in Syria, alluding to Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan, and framing the current refugee migration as a ‘rendezvous with globalisation’ (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2015: 38). Yet any more complex engagement with the reasons why people migrate, and Germany’s role in destabilising the Middle East (for instance through weapons sales to Saudi Arabia or the deployment of US drones from German military posts) are eclipsed. Similarly, trade policies that keep countries of the Global South from having equal access to the world market, or Europe’s central historical responsibility for causing the climate crisis, remain unmentioned (see El-Tayeb, 2016). These omissions are further exacerbated through the ‘emergency logics’ in which Merkel narrates the ‘refugee crisis’ as an unexpected event that ‘poses an enormous challenge’ (Bundesregierung, 2015: para. 12). By invoking migration as a problem that comes to Europe from outside, her speeches disconnect ‘connected histories’ (Bhambra, 2017: 404) and evade historical responsibility by appearing to claim it.

The humanitarian framing of migration helped to evade responsibility within Europe as well. As *Éric Fassin* and *Aurélié Windels* (2016: 1) argue, Merkel’s humanitarian gesture allowed the German government to reframe their reputation in European politics

from that of a 'technocratic tyrant' to that of a 'benevolent protector'. It stifled international criticism of Germany's role in the European debt crisis and of its support for the Troika's imposing of austerity politics on European countries like Greece. The latter destroyed social welfare systems and eroded the material ground from which migrant hospitality could be mobilised in the European South. Bernd Kasperek and Marc Speer (2015: 1) further wonder how, 'regardless of its role as architect and driving force of [the European border] regime, [Germany] wins worldwide acclaim for its humanitarian stance'. After all, Germany was one of the key drivers in implementing the Dublin system, playing a crucial role in financing FRONTEX (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), and has long been at the forefront of securing deals that further the externalisation of borders to regions outside of Europe (Baumann, 2008).

The most troubling aspect of the narrative of exceptional national achievement, however, might be the affective tone through which it is articulated. Invoking 'a new country born from the rubble of the past', Merkel presents the process of coming to terms with the past as a relatively finished process rather than an ongoing struggle with a still festering wound. This reframing of a history of violence, guilt and shame into one of national pride forges a dubious relation between Germany and its ongoing histories of fascism and racism. Across her speeches, Merkel praises civil society efforts in helping migrants settle in Germany and speaks out against the 'prejudice', 'coldness' and 'hatred' that she herself encountered when she was attacked and insulted by the right (Bundesregierung, 2015: para. 9). Yet any more thorough engagement with the structural and institutional racism that, among others, was so blatantly highlighted in the recent NSU-murders and the cover-up by the police, state and legal apparatus remains unaddressed.¹

Instead, we can discern how within Merkel's rhetoric migrants are positioned as potential threats to the exceptional achievements of the German nation. In her speech to the CDU-delegation, Merkel asks:

What effect does our way to live have on the many people that are coming to us from the Arabic world, from Muslim countries? What effect does their cultural character have on us? Will we [. . .] with so many people coming from a different cultural circle than ours, still be the Germany that we know, the Germany that is strong and has made us strong? (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2015: 36)

Merkel answers this rhetorical question with the vision of 'a Germany with equality between man and woman and without any form of antisemitism, xenophobia or discrimination against homosexual people'. While she invokes this vision to anticipate and counter the fears of her critics, she simultaneously stirs them by alluding to orientalist discourses that position migrants as particularly misogynist and homophobic (e.g. Farris, 2017; Puar, 2017).

Congruently, Merkel adds 'whoever seeks refuge with us, needs to respect our laws, values and traditions', continuing 'to say it crystal clear, our laws are above honour codex, tribal and family rules [. . .] Multikulti leads to parallel societies and remains a living lie' (Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, 2015: 40). What begins as a call for a more tolerant and open society, ends as a call for tighter rules for integration and assimilation. Terms like 'parallel societies', 'honour codex' and 'Multikulti' use the vocabulary and

‘paranoid nationalism’ (Hage, 2003) of the far right. While Merkel’s ‘Wir schaffen das’ rhetoric seems to open the ‘we’ of the nation to subjects that so far have not counted as part of it, it delineates the idea of a harmonious and homogeneous German nation – a family or Volk, with concrete values, traditions and laws that need to be defended against migrants troubling its exceptional achievements. In some ways, then, the collective ‘we’ in ‘Wir schaffen das’ is not far from the ‘we’ that is mobilised in right-wing populist mobilisations ‘We are the people’ (Wir sind das Volk) by anti-migrant groups like PEGIDA.² It also plays into the ominous ‘feel[ing] that the nation’s consented-to qualities are shifting away’ and recreates an intimate bond – a familial ‘we’ – between the state and its national citizenry (Berlant, 1998: 287). Offering entry into the nation to subjects that have so far been excluded from it, Merkel’s rhetoric simultaneously reproduces affective borders between exceptional citizens – who have created a country of economic wonder, sexual and religious tolerance – and migrants coming to trouble these national achievements.

Deportations with a ‘friendly face’

The force of these affective borders becomes most tangible in Merkel’s discussion of asylum and deportations. Merkel starts her iconic summer speech by referring to ‘situations and fears that refugees have to face, under which we would probably simply collapse’ (Bundesregierung, 2015: para. 7). Referring to the right of asylum enshrined in the German constitution, she argues that German citizens need to contribute to a ‘national task’ of helping migrants overcome these difficult situations (2015: para. 13). Yet, she then continues that this ‘national task’ is about establishing ‘who has a high chance of staying’ just as much as it is about declaring ‘who has nearly no chance of remaining with us’ (2015: para. 20). In line with Hage’s (2003) suggestion that the state operates as a key node for the redistribution of hope, we can see how in this rhetoric hope works as a mobile affect. In one moment, ‘Wir schaffen das’ stands for humanitarian action based on alleviating the hardship of migrants; in the next, it encompasses the securitisation of borders based on alleviating the hardship of the nation.

This cruel logic of humanitarian securitisation becomes even more tangible in Merkel’s discussion of deportation. She declares that ‘asylum seekers need to stay in reception centres for up to six months, if they come from secure sending countries . . . so that at the end of their trials they can be better repatriated if their asylum cases are denied’ (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2015: 32). As these conditions constitute the enforcement of an asylum system implemented for the protection of the most vulnerable subjects, she suggests that we ‘can also do this with a friendly face’ (2015: 32). These deportations ‘with a friendly face’ point to the securitising underside of humanitarianism, in which the ‘very vulnerability of particular populations becomes the ground of their regulation and control’ (Sabsay, 2016: 281). In the context of the European border regime, William Walters (2010: 146) has documented the emergence of a ‘humanitarian border’ – which the humanitarian efforts of non- and intergovernmental organisations do not necessarily resist but often work hand in glove with the securitising logics of migration control, separating the deserving few from the undeserving many. In this logic of the humanitarian border, deportations become framed as caring acts that, as Ticktin (2011) has

similarly shown in her analysis of French deportations of the *sans-papiers*, are not committed in opposition to but in the name of humanity.

Merkel further tied this humanitarian logic to the economic benefits that migration promises to bring for Germany. Reminding the audience that any ‘country profits from successful immigration’, she argues that ‘no other country needs Schengen as much as Germany’ (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2015: 34, 40). She suggests that Germany needs to be open to immigration to stay internationally competitive while warning of the economic burden that unskilled migration might cause. Lurking underneath Merkel’s invocation of a universal Kantian imperative is a conditional hospitality that splits deserving from undeserving refugees according to their cultural fit and evaluates migrants according to their economic contribution to the nation (Holzberg et al., 2018). This conditional hospitality is structured by a double imperative: while the right of refuge is universal, there also needs to be some limitation on who can be granted residence in the first place. It works according to the logic of ‘this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home’ on the condition that you respect the ‘being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am’ (Derrida, 2000: 14). In this conditional construction of the nation as a clearly bounded yet precarious home, the nation-state is evoked as an ‘institution of intimacy’ that works through affective attachment and needs to be shielded from strangers disrupting the fantasy of the ‘good life’ envisioned in its collective embrace (Berlant, 1998: 283).

Given this logic, it is not surprising that it was mainly securitising measures that were implemented in the wake of the ‘refugee crisis’. Already in August 2015, Merkel declared a list of policies that would need to be implemented so that Germany could fulfil its ‘humanitarian duty’. Within this list, she names assistance measures – from more funding for municipalities to increased investment in social housing – yet mainly calls for policies of border securitisation. These securitising policies (many of which were implemented within the next two years) included national procedures for making deportations a priority, changing financial support for asylum seekers to non-cash benefits and the suspension of family reunifications. Also included were foreign policies such as declaring the countries of the West Balkans safe, implementing a refugee deal with Turkey and expanding Europe’s outer border controls through border police and coastal guards (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2015: 31–4). Rather than constituting a diversion tactic or position that contradicts her humanitarian stand, the humanitarian and securitising elements of Merkel’s approach are mutually reinforcing. It is a convergence that she never conceals. Her fellow party-member Guido Wolf referred to this policy duality as ‘two sides of the same coin’ when introducing her in his welcome speech at the CDU-delegation (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2015: 17).

Ultimately, then, Merkel’s rhetoric offers hope to migrants while simultaneously eroding the material and ideological ground that such hope is built on. While seemingly opening the national ‘we’ to subjects that have so far been excluded from it, her rhetoric distributes hope away from migrants and towards a nation imagined to be in need of protection from them. This reveals how the Kantian appeal to hope as an act of establishing universal laws of morality embedded in universal civil rights falters as those rights are tied to citizenship. As Hannah Arendt (1973) has pointed out, the system of civil rights is based on the exclusion of those who fall outside of the logic of the Westphalian

nation-state order: the stateless, the undocumented and racialised migrants with no nation (able or willing) to uphold their rights. With Hage (2003), we might add that a Kantian ethos redistributes hope to those who are historically assumed to be the subjects of hope, citizens as the promised benefactors of the nation. In contrast, even though they seem to be the benefitting subjects, migrants, positioned as strangers – pitiful yet suspicious – are the first to be materially, as well as ideologically, cut out from hope's promise of futurity.

This is not to say that Merkel's policies made no difference or that they did not stand out in relation to those of other European governments. Instead, this analysis points to the cruel reattachment (Berlant, 2011) to the humanitarian border which links hospitable practices of help and assistance to securitising frames of assimilation and deterrence. It shows how humanitarian borders are legitimised on the intimate level of affect and attachment, and reveals the temporal logics of national exceptionalism through which they are justified. While images of German citizens welcoming migrants at train stations went around the world, the first securitising restrictions were already being put into place and, in less than two years, the once relatively encompassing right to asylum was hollowed out to a point never before seen in Germany's post-war history.³ Given that Merkel's statement began with a caring gesture of hospitality, the question emerges of what an invocation of 'Wir schaffen das' might look like that does not end up folding back into the biopolitical regime of the humanitarian border. In the following, I want to engage with this question in more detail by examining how the 'spark of hope' (Bloch, 1954) inherent in Merkel's slogan was engaged by people most affected by her border policies: migrants on their way to Europe.

The March of Hope

When Merkel stepped in front of the cameras for her summer speech, thousands of migrants had already made their way from Turkey through Greece and via the Balkan route towards Germany. While the Balkan route had for several months provided a relatively safe and invisible path towards Central Europe, at the end of August the Hungarian government put an end to this. As the first Schengen country in the south-east,⁴ Hungary started barring migrants from boarding trains in Budapest and tried to forcibly relocate them to refugee camps instead. As a result, several thousand migrants were stuck at Keleti station in Budapest. Within days of Merkel's original 'Wir schaffen das' speech, a number of migrants opted for a simple yet surprisingly effective plan: they would walk to Germany and Austria on foot (Kasperek and Speer, 2015). The march, which was joined by several thousand people, became known as the March of Hope.

While the March of Hope was born in relation to Merkel's humanitarian politics, it varied in its political demands and shifts the focus from the 'we' of the nation-state to collectives of people making life in the face of adversity. Those who so often are denied the right to the public – racialised migrants, the undocumented and stateless – enacted what Butler (2015: 11) calls the 'right to appear that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field'. Probably the most dominant political demand voiced in this public appearance was the claim to the right to asylum. As Kasperek and Speer (2015) document, many people made their way over the border after the rumour spread that

Syrian migrants might be granted asylum in Germany. Most news stories focused on this aspect of the March of Hope and presented the movement in line with Merkel's policies. Their stories were accompanied by the now iconic image of an injured man on crutches leading a migrant march on a highway towards Germany while carrying an image of Merkel around his neck (e.g. *Der Spiegel*, 2015). In this image, movement was portrayed as an act of necessity and struggle. Accompanied by captions like 'the march of the desperate' (*Der Spiegel*, 2015), the image was presented in the genre of empathy that demands suffering and vulnerability as a feature of deservingness and plays into the logic of the humanitarian border in which the state – in the figure of Angela Merkel – is framed as a benevolent protector.

Other representations of the March of Hope focused on more radical political demands. Activist migrant and migrant solidarity blogs and media outlets demanded not only asylum but also the 'right to move'.⁵ Tweets, stories and images of the marches shared by migrant solidarity organisations were occasionally accompanied by hashtags such as #overcomingthefortress and #openborders, and called for an overhaul of restrictive EU policies. Within these accounts, movement was represented as a heroic act of defiance that resists the restrictive border policies of the EU. Crossing the border between Hungary and Austria, a border that for most EU citizens is no longer a boundary, people on the move question the regimes of (im)mobility that allow some bodies to cross freely while denying others this possibility. The unequal distribution of hope was laid bare, substituted by the egalitarian demand for redistributing the right to move, including to people beyond the border.

What gets lost in both the humanitarian and the more outright activist interpretation of the march, are the quiet frequencies of people simply moving, waiting, eating or resting. As Muñoz (2009: 91) points out in his work on queer futurity, often these 'quotidian gestures [are] laden with potentiality'. We get a sense of this potentiality in the novel genre of 'refugee selfies'. Smiling into the camera, refugees positioned themselves in front of scenic views like that of the bridge over the Danube in Budapest. Images like these evoked the most furious public reactions and led to people being labelled 'economic migrants' in opposition to 'real refugees' who would never have access to technologies of the selfie. Given these reactions, scholars have conceptualised the refugee selfie both as a technology of symbolic bordering (Chouliaraki, 2017) and an act of self-presentation (Risam, 2018) that can reverse the gaze and hold the state accountable through literal face-to-face encounters – such as in the now iconic selfies that migrants took with Merkel upon arrival in Germany. Most importantly, however, these photos portray the wrong affective comportment. The seemingly careless act of smiling into the camera troubles the imperative of suffering that needs to be conveyed in order for people to be read as deserving refugees. Rather, in these images, movement becomes reframed as an act of travelling, an arduous travel that nevertheless also entails moments of pleasure, excitement and laughter.

Such selfies extend the binary understanding of movement as either an act of violent necessity or one of heroic resistance to a more complex and less spectacular form of living life in conditions of (im)possibility. They momentarily break the temporality of emergency into that of a non-deferred present tense in which life, and its pleasures, continue under and despite conditions of hardship (Edelman, 2004). In the following section,

I want to suggest that these less spectacular registers gesture and reach beyond the humanitarian border. In other words, while hope is clearly articulated in the collective enactment of free movement and the resistance to border violence, it primarily emerges in the infrastructures of care and hospitality that enable this movement to be enacted in the first place.

Mobile commons and public mourning

As Kallius et al. (2016: 9) point out, the March of Hope only came about through the material and affective infrastructures of assistance, exchange and sharing that migrants created on their way to Europe. Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013: 192) call these forms of self-woven infrastructure the ‘mobile commons’, defined as ‘resources and paths for surviving the pressures of sovereignty and capitalist exploitation’. They suggest that mobile commons are ‘neither private nor public, neither state owned nor part of civil society; rather [they] exist to the extent that people share [them] and generate [them] as they are mobile and when they arrive somewhere’ (2013: 190). The mobile commons include invisible knowledges of mobility and informal economies, and entail the creation of new communities of justice and politics of care (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013: 191). Here relations of sharing and assistance were created between groups of people who often did not know each other before so that as many people as possible could participate in the movement (Kasperek and Speer, 2015).

This practice is probably best exemplified in the ‘migrant occupation of [parks] and other seemingly neutral nonplaces, such as highways . . . where people forged horizontal political solidarities’ (Kallius et al., 2016: 9). Public parks like Pope John Paul II Square in Budapest ‘evolved into hubs of habitation, smuggling, and communicative action’, where people on the move shared food and shelter and exchanged maps and resources about the safest and easiest routes through the Balkans and over the border to Germany (Kallius et al., 2016: 9). Dadusc et al. (2019: 521) conceptualise such temporary migrant squats as ‘essential parts in the “corridors of solidarity” that are being created throughout Europe, where grassroots social movements engaged in anti-racist, anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics coalesce with migrants in devising non-institutional responses to the violence of border regimes’. In these spaces, migrants excluded from political membership in the nation develop alternative forms of intimate citizenship in which acts of care and horizontal assistance become the ground for collective political action. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Butler (2015: 88) reminds us that the freedom for political action does not ‘come from me or from you, it does happen as a relation between us, or indeed among us’. The question of what politics is enacted in the March of Hope, therefore, is not simply about the claim for positive rights (in the sense of recognition by the state) or the claim for negative freedom (articulated in a call for freedom from the violence of the border). Instead, it emerges in the conditions that enable people to partake in political action in the first place.

This is not to say that the mobile commons are free of racialised tensions and gendered divisions of labour. Many of the people on the move to Europe organised along national lines and tensions between different ethnic and religious group erupted at different points in their movement (Kallius et al., 2016). In her critique of idealised

invocations of the mobile commons, Carla Angulo-Pasel (2018) further points out how most of the reproductive and emotional labour during migrants' travel, especially child-care, continues to be done by women. Moreover, these spontaneous infrastructures can put women, queer and trans people at increased risk of violence and sexual abuse. Nevertheless, in the mobile commons, there are ruptures in traditional relations of care that separate care as a private endeavour apart from public political action, and engender new affiliations and solidarities. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 58) suggests, a feminist attention to care is a crucial part of the project of developing 'a more radically democratic way of listening to neglected things'. It shows how seemingly uneventful practices of everyday survival carry the seeds for radically transformative political projects.

Another revealing example of the politics of care during the March of Hope is the vigil that migrants held before the march at the main train station in Budapest. After 71 people died in a truck that tried to cross over to Austria on 27 August, several hundred people came together in front of Budapest railway station. People lit candles and put up a large banner reading: 'Europe your hands are covered in blood'. Even after the official event was over, people kept joining the vigil, including a group of Muslims who started praying and chanting in Pashto and Urdu (Kallius et al., 2016: 28). Like Antigone, who insists on the burial of her fallen brother, migrants here rewrite the parameters of who counts as a subject worthy of mourning (Butler, 2002). In doing so, these acts of public mourning operate as acts of communal care in the face of pervasive violence. They provide a sense of solidarity as, while faced with destruction from all sides, collectives of people create the infrastructures that sustain life and care in the face of death and adversity.

What makes these acts of public mourning so powerful is how they break the public/private divide and bring intimate matters of grief and bereavement into the political sphere. Migrants claimed and appropriated public space and refused to comply with the temporalities of emergency that would require them to move on and to let go of the dead. Instead, the vigil retains memory while engaging the ongoingness of historical violence in the present. After all, it was at the vigil that daily protests against the state began, demanding that refugees be allowed to cross the border. Christina Sharpe (2016: 33) has described such temporality in relation to blackness and histories of transatlantic slavery as 'being in the wake' – a state of being in which 'the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present'. This temporality, she suggests, also applies to the 'current refugee crisis' in which the killing of racialised bodies cannot be separated from 'the continuation of military and other colonial projects of US/European wealth extraction and immiserating' (2016: 126). Acts of public mourning, then, might be described as 'wake work' in which care is moved away from 'state-imposed regimes of surveillance' and instead enacted laterally (2016: 20).

What Sharpe's work shows is how turning to the past is not about moving onwards from the past, but that staying with the ongoingness of political violence is a necessity for subjects marked and produced by its histories. This temporality of the wake troubles Merkel's temporal logics. Stating that 'we are all shocked by the awful news', Merkel's government framed the deaths of migrants in the truck in Austria as a sudden state of emergency to be solved through humanitarian securitisation – assisting migrants in need

while decreasing future migration through taking harsher action (i.e. by punishing ‘human smugglers’). To the contrary, the act of public mourning staged by migrants ‘insists on going beyond the temporality of emergency to include the haunting of the dead, and to demand accountability and responsibility’ (Ticktin, 2016: 268). It does not replace ongoing histories of violence through narratives of national exceptionalism but, in Avery Gordon’s (1997: 195) words, brings the ‘ghostly matters’ of border violence and postcolonial inequalities to the centre of public attention. Doing so, it highlights ‘the living effects, seething and lingering, of what seems over and done with, the endings that are not over’ (1997: 195). Forms of backward-looking affects like mourning and grief do not emerge as antidotes but as part and parcel of an invocation of hope that insists that a different world is only possible if we care for the wounds of the past.

Hospitality beyond the humanitarian border

The March of Hope was constituted by two interrelated groups: migrants on their way to and across Europe and European citizens engaged in hospitality actions. The March of Hope would not have been possible without ‘unexpected horizontal solidarities involving private citizens working with migrants, standing with them in their protests, sheltering people, and transporting them to the Western border’ (Kallius et al., 2016: 3). Migrant solidarity organisations in Hungary assisted with legal aid and resources like tents and blankets, and provided places to sleep so that ‘along their way, the marchers found food and water bottles waiting for them’. A variety of civil society organisations further organised car convoys and the #MarchofHope hashtag was quickly followed by the hashtags #carsforhope and #busesforhope that people from Austria, German and Hungary used to organise private bus and car transport over the Hungarian border. Here people took on the position of one of the most vilified figures of the ‘refugee crisis’ – that of the human smuggler. In doing so, they reversed the relations of law and morality and left the position of innocence that so commonly accompanies humanitarian politics (Ticktin, 2016).

Their efforts created pressure on European governments to take action. After one day, bus convoys were organised by the German state. While many of the marchers were hesitant about this offer that, before, had resulted in migrants involuntarily being placed in asylum camps, with the public media attention upon them, they entered the vehicles. In these moments, the humanitarian actions of the state and large non-governmental organisations merged with the grassroots solidarity actions. Nevertheless, differences between the logics of humanitarianism and the solidarity actions could be observed. Whereas major humanitarian organisations mainly confined themselves to charitable action by providing blankets, food and water to migrants and pointing out human rights abuses, the more grassroots organisations like MigSzol Csoport also focused on providing alternative infrastructures of mobility by organising places to sleep, travel routes, and the said car convoys. As Kallius et al. (2016) argue their horizontal solidarities went beyond charitable action constricted by the parameters of the law and instead focused on creating the conditions for collective action that question ‘distinctions between citizen and migrant or refugee and the way political agency is constricted’.

They also differed in the organisations’ approach towards other marginalised groups within Hungary. While most humanitarian organisations refused to offer assistance to

homeless or Sinti and Roma populations within Hungary, groups like MigSzol framed the migrants' struggle and their own as a shared one, united against structural racism and regimes of inequality created by the Orbán regime (Kallius et al., 2016). In the context of ongoing austerity regimes, mobile commons consequently operated as a nexus for rethinking social welfare systems and as meeting points for migrant, labour and anti-austerity efforts. Here new intimate affiliations were created between subjects whose political interests are often framed as mutually exclusive in nationalist neoliberal rhetoric. These more holistic efforts often overlapped with, but also stood in contrast to, humanitarian actions that primarily focused on the alleviation of the suffering of particular subjects.

This short comparison underlines that, while hospitality activism overlaps and is easily incorporated into the humanitarian border, it also gestures towards forms of collective organisation that go beyond it. Whereas the humanitarian border evoked in Merkel's rhetoric harnesses care out of an impetus to reduce suffering while keeping intact the basic biopolitical logic of its political reason, the mobile commons reframes the racialised structure of citizenship by rebuilding infrastructures of care beyond biopolitical reason. Examples of such solidarity institutions could be observed in the march from Budapest and all around Europe, from the migrant squats in Athens (Squire, 2018) to collectively organised search and rescue 'alarm' phones in the Mediterranean (Stierl, 2015), and sanctuary cities and initiatives in the UK (Bauder, 2017). These aim to disentangle care from the familial 'we' of the nation-state and its racialised conceptions of European citizenship, and instead provide alternative public and intimate spaces for the negotiation of citizenship and belonging. Here social relationality is not framed as a threat to be managed and contained but as a potential site for new forms of sociality to emerge.

Being part of a mobile commons, most of these infrastructures were, however, temporary. After the media attention had faded and most of the migrants had left Keleti station, the Hungarian government built a fence on its border. Germany pushed the buffer zones of its border further out by declaring Serbia a safe country of residence. As a result, only few months later, the train station in Budapest resembled a ghostly place, in which only faint traces of the mobilisations of the summer could be identified. What remains in these traces is what Berlant (2016: 414) describes as the horizon of 'common infrastructures that absorb the blows of our aggressive need for the world to accommodate us [and that] . . . hold out the prospect of a world worth attaching to that's something other than an old hope's bitter echo'. The March of Hope continues to work as a simple reminder that no one suffers from a lack of care without the social failure to organise such hospitality. More than that, it highlights that such failure is not a biopolitical necessity – the spirit of 'Wir schaffen das' does not need to fold back into paranoid nationalism and biopolitical control – but rather, as a collective negotiation, could also be remade otherwise.

Conclusion

In this article, I have approached the intimate life of borders through an analysis of borders as affective borders. Drawing on feminist, queer and postcolonial theories of affect, I have analysed different articulations of hospitality during the long summer of migration in Germany through the lens of hope, and shifted attention from moral and ontological considerations of hope to the political question of how hope is invoked and distributed in

contemporary migration politics. By reading for ‘sparks of hope’ (Bloch, 1954: 1) within and around Merkel’s ‘Wir schaffen das’ speeches, I have shown how critiques of hegemonic reattachments can be enriched by reading practices that are open to encountering potentiality in the quotidian registers of everyday survival.

More concretely, I have suggested that the enactment of mobile commons in migrant marches offers glimpses into infrastructures of care and hospitality that extend beyond the biopolitical regime of the humanitarian border. A particular focus of my analysis lay on the temporalities of these different registers of hopefulness. Whereas Merkel’s ‘Wir schaffen das’ speeches work through narratives of exceptional national achievement that erase the histories of transnational inequalities and racialised border regimes, the March of Hope enacts temporalities of hope that do not cut off but emerge out of and stay with the wounds of the past. It forges infrastructures of care and hospitality that go beyond racialised emergency logics and provides new spaces for the creation of care, pleasure and the intimate negotiation of citizenship. Such negotiations, I have illustrated, are not without racialised conflicts and gendered injustices but, nevertheless, gesture beyond biopolitical regimes in which life is enabled for some at the expense of others.

A focus on affect is particularly crucial for current sociological scholarship on borders and migrations, in which scholars are aiming to decipher a politics that extends beyond the humanitarian border. It highlights how the humanitarian border is reproduced through hopeful attachments to the nation-state yet also reveals how such attachments might be reconfigured by shifting our focus to collectives of people making life in conditions of adversity.

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Notes

1. Between 2000 and 2007 a Neo-Nazi terrorist cell, the National Socialist Underground (NSU), targeting the Turkish-German and Kurdish-German community, killed ten people in different cities in Germany. As the police suspected ‘foreign’ organised crime networks, the murders

- were only cleared up accidentally in 2011. The case revealed police and media bias, as well as state complicities of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Von Der Behrens, 2018).
2. The term 'Wir sind das Volk' links back to the protest movements of the late 1980s that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today it has been appropriated by groups like PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident), whose use of the term is closer to racial definitions of the Volk during the Nazi era.
 3. The basic right to asylum that was enshrined in the German constitution after the Third Reich was first eroded after racist attacks on refugee shelters in the early 1990s, when it was defined that asylum cannot be claimed by people from countries that the German state defines as 'safe states of origin'. It was further dismantled in 2015 and 2016 when the Asylpakete I and II were passed that, next to declaring a wide range of countries 'safe', also saw harsher enforcement of deportations, cuts and changes to social provisions, and stricter rules for family reunification (Pro Asyl, 2015, 2016).
 4. Greece, as the actually outermost south-eastern state of the EU, had effectively given up enforcing the Dublin regulations months before (Kasperek and Speer, 2015).
 5. For a collection of these accounts see the compilation by the network Moving Europe (March of Hope, 2016: 5).

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