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Borders

Humanitarian action has a fundamental cosmopolitan essence. From the abolitionist movements against slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries, to transnational aid and interventions in contexts of conflict and disasters, humanitarianism has always dealt with borders. Since its inception, Western humanitarianism has not only transcended national borders but also directly challenged them through the concept of universal humanity. The human, as a formative category, was considered beyond any racial or national boundaries (Calhoun 2008). The creation of Médecins Sans Frontières is an example of a humanitarian organization that directly refutes borders and challenges national sovereign power (Redfield 2013).

More recently, the term "humanitarian borders" was introduced by William Walters (2011) to depict the reinscription of the border as a space of humanitarian government. The humanitarian border is defined as "a complex assemblage, comprising particular forms of humanitarian reason" (Walters 2011: 142) and is dedicated to the processes of governing borders and populations on the move. It includes a disparate array of governmental, non-governmental and supra-governmental actors, such as national police forces and coastguards, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, international and local humanitarian organizations, and diverse technologies of monitoring and control. According to Walters, the humanitarian border is a recent development that is closely related to the securitization and advanced migration control that prevails in the contemporary world.

The academic discussion on it cuts across disciplines such as anthropology, geography, and migration and border studies, among others.

Humanitarian practitioners themselves can be described as mobile cosmopolitans who travel across borders to provide assistance in humanitarian crises. However, such activity does not eradicate borders, but is in fact grounded on historically inscribed hierarchies of mobility and their underlying imperial logics, which determine freedom of mobility for some groups and restrictions for others. Humanitarianism itself delves into processes of reterritorialization through the demarcation of specific territories as "humanitarian zones." Humanitarian government, therefore, performs sovereign power in contexts of "emergency," and redefines borders as zones affected by humanitarian crisis (De Lauri 2019).

Nowadays, border areas globally are increasingly humanitarianized, as the proliferation of border control and the emergence of humanitarian hubs illustrate. The increased securitization of borders and the emergence of a complex surveillance apparatus are key elements of contemporary repressive and restrictive migration regimes (Fassin 2011). The humanitarian border emphasizes precisely the nexus between humanitarianism and securitization, protection and surveillance, care and control. The humanitarianization of the borders illustrates that the violence of sovereign borders coexists with the governing logics of humanitarianism. The case of the European reception migration/refugee "crisis" is an example of how the crisis frame has become the ground for even more restrictive and punitive border practices, exemplified in the "hotspot approach," introduced by the European Union (EU) in 2015 to address "exceptional migratory flows" (European Commission 2015) and the expansion of processing and registration centers on the borders of the EU and its neighboring countries. The crisis has thus been a critical point both for the harshening of the EU migration and border regimes and the humanitarianization of the European borders. Another example is United States President Donald Trump's mobilization of humanitarian categories to legitimize his politics of bordering along the United States–Mexico border (Dunn 2019).

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Camp

The camp is a technology of care and control that has been historically used in connection with a variety of forms of confinement, examples being concentration camps for soldiers and other prisoners and quarantine camps to prevent the spread of disease or pests. More recently, camps have become the critical device in the management of modern humanitarian crises, "temporary" solutions to accommodate either refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). Some scholars emphasize the historical transition at the end of World War II, when "certain key techniques for managing mass displacements of people first became standardized and then globalized" (Malkki 1995: 497). Of the approximately 70 million individuals forcibly displaced worldwide, around 2.6 million people live in official camps (UNHCR 2019). Camps are set up as the most suitable solution for the management of the displaced, especially those who cannot find alternative accommodation elsewhere. Even though host states and the large network of humanitarian organizations involved in the management of camps often have different and even contradictory mandates, organizational cultures, and interests, all seem to converge on the idea that disenfranchised people are best managed and controlled in camps. As such, two major premises seem to underlie their functioning and determine the objectives of this spatial regime: (1) displaced populations are a transitory phenomenon of crisis and disorder and are thus only temporarily relevant, and (2) human nature is best served in a sedentary setting.