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Migration control entangled with local histories: The case of Greek–Turkish regime of bordering

Zeynep Kaşlı
International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

Abstract

Migration and border studies have reconceptualized and examined borders as sites of contestation, stressing the productive effects of (illegalized) migration control on established notions of citizenship. These accounts have predominantly focused on illegalized migration and on contemporary contestations around these mobilities. This article expands these efforts by suggesting that migration control and contestations (and the limits thereof) can be understood only by considering the dynamic yet historically and geographically specific modes of any given border, which I aim to capture through the concept of *regime of bordering*. This concept refers to the fact that contemporary borders against illegalized migration are founded on pre-existing regimes of citizenship, bilateral relations, and migration. My historically informed ethnographic research on both sides of the Greek–Turkish border in Thrace demonstrates the continuing impact of unresolved bilateral disputes and centralized state power in a highly militarized region to align state and nonstate actors with migration control at an "external border" of the EU. Studying politics of migration control from a *long durée* perspective and as part of a composite regime of bordering takes us beyond a "presentist" view on recent contestations around illegalized migration, deepening our understanding of (the lack of) local acts of citizenship.

Keywords

Mobility, migration control, border regime, bordering, citizenship, Greek–Turkish relations

Corresponding author:
Zeynep Kaşlı, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Kortenaerkade 12, The Hague, 2502 LT, Netherlands.
Email: kasli@iss.nl

Introduction

Triggered by the “March of Hope” along the Balkan Route in summer 2015, around 3000 people, seeing no prospects for permanent legal status in Turkey and aiming to avoid the deadly sea crossing, organized themselves on Facebook under the slogan “Crossing No More”, and reached the Edirne province, bordering Greece. The Greek–Turkish border in Thrace—drawn in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty—has been highly militarized in the last half-century, with recurring de-/re-escalations due to the Cyprus and Aegean disputes (Rumelili, 2019). In the 2000 s, this conflictual border has been a key transit point for illegalized migration into the EU, which, through further militarization, turned migration into a new security referent (İşleyen, 2021; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). Against this background, as the group of marchers arrived in Edirne, most were stopped at the highway kilometers away from the town center and from Kastanies-Pazarkule, the nearest border crossing. The governor of Edirne visited them several times to show solidarity, joining them for Friday prayers along the highway as reported in national and international news. Local civil society organizations and politically active citizens mainly watched from a distance and let the officials do their job of containing and stopping further movement across the border.[1] Activists from across Europe joined local communities along the route to support migrants crossing borders, re-routing, or waiting along the route, leading to scholarly debates on the potential of these new forms of solidarity and resistance to unsettle established notions of citizenship (Benzec and Kurnik, 2020; El-Shaarawi and Razsa, 2019; Kasparek and Speer, 2015). But why the inertia among Edirneans, especially when local officials showed solidarity with those on the move? If, as Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins’ (2016) suggest, moments of so-called “crisis” are not the opposite of routine bordering work, but play a performative “ordering” role, what does the 2015 “crisis” tell us about the routine work of bordering along the Greek–Turkish border? More generally, how can we account for locally specific contestations (or the lack thereof) around illegalized migration control and their longer-term role in ordering politics?

Critical migration and border scholarship has so far drawn attention to the relationship between space, imagination, and interactions, and particularly the power of agency on “bordering, ordering, and othering” (Rumford, 2012; Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002). Others have stressed the fact that the encounters between actors of control and illegalized border-crossers are productive moments, beyond mere socialization into Western/European norms and practices (Andersson, 2014; Ataç et al., 2017; Papadopoulos et al., 2008; Squire, 2011; Tsianos et al., 2009). However, these bottom-up and “decentering” perspectives have overly focused on present practices and/or on contestations solely around illegalized migration. Post-colonial accounts have recently shed light on the ways in which historical path dependencies and decolonization processes continue to shape contemporary migration politics, fixating on the global, regional, or national level (cf. El-Enany, 2020; El Qadim, 2017) and largely forgoing locally grounded analyses (for an exception, see El-Shaarawi and Razsa, 2019).

Inspired by these critical efforts, this article aims to show that understanding local expressions of solidarity or silences in such moments of “crisis” requires attention to the entanglement of illegalized migration control with other areas of cross-border relations. Greece and Turkey share a long history of conflict (Karakatsanis, 2014; Rumelili, 2019), shaped by landmark events, namely Greece’s independence from the Ottoman Empire (1821–1829), Balkan Wars (1912–1913), First World War and the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), and the subsequent Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923) and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Following the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and

Turkish Population signed during the Lausanne Peace Conference, about one million Orthodox Greeks from Anatolia and the Turkish controlled-part of Thrace and some 400,000 Muslims from Greece were resettled across the new border, except the Greek-Orthodox population of Istanbul, Imbros, and Tenedos, and the Muslim population of "Western Thrace"[2] (Hirschon, 2003).

From this perspective, local responses to transit migration at the Greek–Turkish border ought to be analyzed as embedded in a dynamic and composite Greek–Turkish *regime of bordering* (re)shaped through disputed regimes of citizenship, regional and bilateral relations as well as migration control. This analysis indicates that two factors are decisive in determining the level and the direction of both migration control and resistances in today's border town of Edirne. First, at the local level, migration control has been interpreted through a militarized sense of border established through escalation and de-escalation of bilateral conflicts for almost a century. This sense of border contours both cross-border cooperation (CBC) among state actors against illegalized migration and citizens' attempts toward local or cross-border collaboration to support illegalized migrants transiting through their towns. Second, the affinity between local experiences and national historiography is reinforced by a highly centralized state power. Although Greece has adapted its governance structure to the EU's regional policies to some extent, local accounts show that the state's reach remains very similar in both Greek and Turkish Thrace when it comes to regional authorities' jurisdiction and influence on cross-border experiences on the ground.

Attention to historical and geographical entanglements is especially pertinent when we look at territorial spaces with unresolved disputes, such as the Greek–Turkish border. Here, individual and collective identification, affect, and sentiments are shaped through collective memory and grievances situated in what Guillaume and Huysmans (2013) call the "interstice between security and citizenship". Such an approach considers the materiality, representations, and performances of and around existing borders; what Green (2012) calls the different "senses of border". It also considers the "geoinfrastructuring of unequal mobility" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2019)—the assemblage of physical, material, and political geographies that shape im/mobility practices.

By taking the Greek–Turkish border in Thrace as a zone of contact *and* transit, this article strives to simultaneously address two key points raised in this journal by Brambilla and Jones (2020). It pays attention to "the multifaceted and ambiguous relationship between borders, violence and conflict" and "a reconsideration of any exclusive focus on so-called undocumented, irregular migration, in favor of considering other experiences of crossing, acting and living borders" (Brambilla and Jones, 2020: 9–13). Studying a seemingly new migration and border regime situated in a wider regime of bordering is a concrete step towards "a multiperspectival border studies" (Rumford, 2012).

The analysis is based on my two-year ethnographic research (2013–2015) and ongoing follow-ups (October 2021–) conducted on two sides of the Greek–Turkish border in Thrace, namely in Evros (Greece) and Edirne (Turkey).[3] The research followed Baud and Van Schendel's (1997) comparative historical approach in tracing changing power relations on both sides of the Thracian border over the course of a century, particularly focusing on transformations in the 2000 s. It is also informed by debates on the use of ethnography in international relations (Aradau and Huysmans, 2014; Salter and Mutlu, 2013), in which ethnographic methodology is defined as the endeavor to make sense of how others make sense of the world. Utilizing the Bourdieusian notion of a field as a "network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97), I observed the changes in cross-border mobilities and exchanges in the interrelated fields of security, economy, and culture which helped me capture the conditions of change and

continuity in a highly militarized regime of bordering. During my fieldwork, I analyzed leaflets, local periodicals, and reports, local and national newspapers on both sides of the border from a discourse-historical approach (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009).[4] I conducted around 200 open-ended semi-structured and unstructured interviews with local officials, civil society organizations, professionals and business owners, leaders and members of ethnic and religious minority communities, journalists, and a small number of smugglers and irregular migrants with the aim of mapping cross-border practices of formal/informal cooperation and authorized/unauthorized mobility.

In the remainder of this article, I explore the historical and geographical entanglements of im/mobility along this border. First, I introduce the regime of bordering approach as a step forward in theorizing border regimes to account for the fact that current border and migration control are embedded in enduring conflicts and frictions between neighboring states and societies. Next, I present regime of bordering in the Thracian borderland from a *long durée* perspective. Lastly, I show how this regime of bordering has shaped local state and nonstate actors' takes on illegalized migration control. My objective is to understand the specific conditions under which local state and nonstate actors from below may (re)produce, comply with, or defy state power manifested in control over human mobility. I, therefore, contend that an approach to borders focused on a single issue such as migration is not sufficient. Instead, I adopt a holistic approach, that of a regime of bordering, and I show how cooperation and/or contestation over migration control on the ground can be understood only in relation to other functions of states' borders as barriers, bridges, resources, and symbols of identity.

From border regime to regime of bordering

In recent decades, regime analysis has been widely used in different ways in international relations and in migration studies to account for excess movements and the concomitant border and migration control in multiple sites and levels of governance, revealing, in Mezzadra and Nielson's (2013) terms, the multiplication of borders internally and externally (for a comprehensive review, see Vigneswaran, 2020 and Horvath et al., 2017). Critical accounts on governmentality of migration have drawn attention to the frictions around illegalized mobilities and stressed the fact that "security apparatuses operate within sites and situations where political beings have the ability to contest, negotiate, struggle over, or twist these apparatuses and their governmental practices" (Guillaume and Huysmans, 2013: 9). A prime example of this critical approach is Hess and her colleagues' consecutive ethnographic projects, conducted in the 2000s in the Balkan route whereby they identified a multitude of actors whose practices relate to each other in a space of conflict and negotiation, not ordered by a central logic or rationality. They not only developed a theory of "border regimes" that sees regulation of (illegalized) migration as an effect of people's movements (Tsianos et al., 2009), but also proposed an "ethnographic regime analysis" approach to explore the specific legal, social, and economic infrastructures comprising "precarious transit zones of stratified rights" from the perspective of migrants in transit (Hess, 2012).

Nonetheless, even such critical accounts have yet to overcome (a) what Walters (2015: 3) rightfully called the "presentist approach" which overemphasizes the current state of border and migration control and (b) what Stierl (2017: 229) labelled the "ontological primacy of migration" in studying techniques of control to prove mobilities' productive power to escape control. To address these two points, I suggest analyzing excess of movement and control as part and parcel of a wider *regime of bordering* from a long durée perspective. This means,

seeing the dynamic migration and border regimes in relation to changes and continuities in existing citizenship and minority regimes as well as regional and bilateral relations of the respective countries. What I propose is an ontological move that expands our analytical gaze towards the legacies of pre-existing national (and, in many cases, post-imperial) borders and their local actors. Looking at the Greek–Turkish border from a regime of bordering perspective, hence considering the border as a zone of contact *and* a zone of transit that is embedded in these dynamic, co-constitutive and interrelated regimes, allows us to deepen our understanding of how conflicts and negotiations around illegalized migration unfold today at one of the EU's external borders. Such a historically-informed analysis of migration control—embedded in a composite regime of bordering—also upsets the clearly demarcated and ahistorical inside/outside distinction that is not yet overtly tackled within critical migration scholarship on the EU and its external borders (cf. Dijstelbloem et al., 2017; Gökalp-Aras, 2019; İşleyen, 2018; Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins, 2016; Karadağ, 2019).

The regime of bordering approach that I suggest here relies on the growing field of border studies, which, by taking border*ing* as a process, have adopted a more actor-oriented and dynamic outlook on the processes of (de-/re-)bordering (see Johnson et al., 2011; Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012). As stressed mainly by anthropologists and human geographers, this dynamic process is shaped through the lived experiences of borders that leave their marks on people's conscious and unconscious worlds and shape the everyday lives of "borderlanders" or border communities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Baud and Van Schendel, 1997; Bryant, 2010; Green, 2012; Migdal, 2004; Navaro-Yashin, 2005; Paasi, 1996; Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002). *Longue durée* analyses show that the precise location of the border and the nationalities and ethnicities of the people living in many post-imperial or post-socialist border zones may remain disputed in local accounts (Özgen, 2007; Pelkmans, 2006; Şenoğuz, 2017). As a "landscape of competing meanings" (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007: xv), some borders are acknowledged by some people but not for others. In addition, the physical geography, combined with material and political circumstances, conditions different routes and journeys of migration and mobility (Pallister-Wilkins, 2019). We can "see[ing] like a border", in Rumford's (2012) words, if we, following Green (2012: 574), replace the "border-as-line" with "border-as-place." This approach allows us to attend carefully to the "sense of border" and be able to "recognize the borders as borders" (Green, 2012: 580–585) and capture whether and "how the desire for borders is maintained through channels of individual and collective identification, affect and sentiment" (Darling, 2016: 711).

My regime of bordering approach, therefore, takes the border as place and consciously acknowledges the entanglements of local politics of illegalized migration control with the changing parameters of respective states' citizenship and minority issues, and regional and bilateral relations. This means being attentive to the individual and collective identification, affect, and sentiments underlying seemingly mundane encounters that are shaped through the collective memory and grievances situated in the "interstice between security and citizenship," in Guillaume and Huysmans' (2013) terms. This approach is especially pertinent to understand encounters between state and nonstate actors, local communities, "wanted" and "unwanted" newcomers or visitors at border zones with a prolonged history of conflict, as the Greek–Turkish one is.

As noted earlier, Greek–Turkish relations have been shaped by landmark historical events. During the last century, there was a brief rapprochement in 1947–1953 when the two countries signed an educational exchange agreement (*Kültür Anlaşması/Μορφωτικό Πρωτόκολλα*). This was pursued under the NATO framework against Soviet Bulgaria (Karakatsanis, 2014). Nonetheless, first Cyprus and then Aegean disputes caused serious

friction between the two countries, militarization of the border, and the forced migration of substantial portions of minority communities in both Greece and Turkey who sought refuge in their kin states and eventually lost citizenship of their country of birth (Akgönül, 2007; Christopoulos, 2013). Since the 1980s, the Greek–Turkish friendship discourse has been swinging between enmity and friendship, excitement, and boredom, gradually shifting from initiatives driven by leftist internationalism and a shared memory of living together, to EU-funded projects and economic interests under "the long shadow" of the EU (Anastasakis et al., 2009; Karakatsanis, 2014). While the economic crisis in Greece nurtured de-escalation to a great extent up until the mid-2010 s, Turkey's anti-Western foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean—especially in the aftermath of 2016's failed coup—has led again to souring of bilateral relations (Rumelili, 2019). In addition, regarding center–local government relations in Turkey, central governments have maintained strict control over provincial administrations' appointed officials and limited the power of elected mayors (Savaşkan, 2021). Despite small changes triggered by Turkey's EU accession process, local government reforms of the last two decades under the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) ultimately reproduced central state power (Savaşkan, 2021). In this context, in a border province like Edirne—the "city of white Turks"—with low trust towards the JDP, one observes unconditional loyalty to the state, if not the top cadres of the JDP, and the founding principles of the Turkish republic; a loyalty that is (re)produced by a militarized sense of border and the collective memory and grievances of past atrocities.

Returning to our initial question regarding the connection between migration "crises" and the long durée, we need to look at the composite *regime of bordering* from a long durée perspective to be able to understand how cultural and discursive politics on the ground shape local responses to the control of illegalized migration. This strengthens our theorizing on border regimes by capturing the layered and connected histories of existing borders, established conceptions of citizenship, and established forms of otherness. Studying contemporary control and contestations around illegalized migration in relation to these historical and geographical entanglements epistemologically allows one to observe and take stock of those moments when citizenship and securitization of migration, as a new element of security, "work in conjunction to reinforce subjugations and alienations" or "work disjunctively through practices of citizenship, enacting new modes of political being that disrupts the securitizing of citizenship and the alienations" (Guillaume and Huysmans, 2013: 28). This can be done only by examining the subjective (re)positionings of citizens, be they state or nonstate actors, vis-à-vis their constitutive Other, together with their (re)positionings vis-à-vis illegalized migrants. Therefore, methodologically, I suggest that encounters in the security field ought to be observed in relation to economic and cultural fields, as two key domains of mundane cross-border encounters in the borderlands, to make better sense of whether and how security and citizenship work conjunctively on the ground.

The remainder of this article applies this perspective to the case of Greek–Turkish border in Thrace, and shows that local responses to movement and control, shaped through a militarized sense of border and the reach of the central government, have ultimately been enacting the state rather than resisting it, thus (un)intentionally, impeding the emergence of new modes of political being in the interstice between security and citizenship.

Unraveling the regime of bordering in Thrace

As discussed so far, history is present in lived experiences of borders, and it shapes mundane encounters and (re)bordering processes. The Thracian borderland is

a microcosm where one can observe how different regimes unfold in relation to one another. This is thanks to its distinct topography consisting of a 12.5-km land border followed by a 206 km-long river that naturally divides the region, and its demography that is carried over with the presence of an established Turkish-Muslim community in Greek Thrace. In this zone of contact *and* transit, one clearly observes multiple bordering, ordering, othering practices as they have been (re)shaped through the ebbs and tides in regional and bilateral relations, minority issues, plus increased control over illegalized transit migration.

The Turkish border province of Edirne is in many ways the heartland of the Thracian region. The city was the Ottoman capital in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was an important trade center, especially in the late-nineteenth century along the Orient Express Railway connecting Istanbul with Vienna and Paris. As of 1911, Edirne's total population was 65,454: 25,900 Greeks, 25,000 Muslims, 9500 Jews, 3500 Armenians, 1504 Bulgarians, and 50 Greek Catholics (Balta, 1998: 231). Edirne's multiethnic and multireligious demographic composition has changed remarkably during and since the devastating wars of the early-twentieth century. With the Lausanne Treaty (1923), Evros River became the natural dividing line between Greece and Turkey, hence becoming the new border of the Edirne province. The only exceptions are the districts of Bosnaköy and Karaağaç, which after the departure of their Greek inhabitants, became the only Turkish territories beyond the river. Greek refugees *(πρόσφυγες)* from Karaağaç were settled across the border, the town of Orestiada, named after Karaağaç's Ancient Thracian name, Nea Orestias. With the arrival of Muslim and/or Turkish refugees (*muhacirs*) in Karaağaç and other emptied districts, Edirne became the second-largest settlement following Aydın province and its non-Muslim population dropped from 43.6% in 1900 to 18.4% in 1927 (McCarthy, cited in Kaşlı, 2014). In the following decades, Edirnean Jews, the only remaining non-Muslim community post-Lausanne, were also directly and indirectly forced to leave Edirne following the 1934 pogrom, intimidations by the Association for Fighting Against Zionism in the 1970 s, and the plundering of Edirne's Great Synagogue in response to an Israeli attack in Palestine (Kaşlı, 2018). While the public tendency has been to dismiss these as exceptional stand-alone events, together they form a public narrative that selectively remembers Edirne's past diversity and forgets repeated acts of violence against non-Muslims (Kaşlı, 2018: 16–17).

Concomitant with the 1950 s Cyprus conflict, the Thracian border, like the rest of Greek–Turkish border, came under strict military control, leading to the deployment of extra military forces on both sides and even mine fields on the Greek side of the border which have still not been completely demined (Kaşlı, 2014). The escalation of the Cyprus conflict and militarization of the border region had severe impacts on cross-border mobilities and interactions between Greek and Turkish borderlanders. It also had direct consequences for the Muslim-Turkish minority in Greek Thrace, who were exempted from the population exchange. Several informants—in their 30 s or older at the time of my fieldwork, living in or originally from mixed mountain villages in Greek Thrace—reiterated the following story in slightly different ways:

> That summer night in 1974, Greek soldiers came and collected in the village center all the Muslim men over fifteen and kept them all night under the vigilance of armed men, some of them being Greek neighbors from the same village. Next morning, the head of armed men said that [they] were brought there to be killed but, upon the new order received from Athens, [they] were free to go.

This common narrative and its reiterations in 2014 were used to describe subsequent hardships that the Thracian Muslim-Turkish minority has encountered in the last half-century. Despite some changes in Greece's minority policy and considerable improvements in the living conditions of the Thracian Muslim-Turkish minority since the 1990 s, problems persist in exercising their religious and educational rights (Hüseyinoğlu, 2013).

Militarization of the region and limited circulations also left their imprint on the kind of economic and cultural activities and interactions that Greek and Turkish borderlanders have engaged in. These were mainly limited to members of the Muslim-Turkish community of Greek Thrace crossing the border to visit their relatives, to do shopping for wedding or circumcision ceremonies or to study at Turkish public boarding schools in their mother tongue. Some fled to Turkey, along with co-ethnics from communist (now post-communist) Bulgaria and conflict-ridden Kosovo, to find refuge in the "ethnic homeland", while others gradually decided to stay after completing their schooling in Turkey.

Oscillating bilateral relations have also impacted how stakeholders in Edirne have frequently repositioned themselves vis-à-vis the national Other. For example, up until late 1960 s, the Karaağaç area has remained a contact zone, thanks to the historical Orient Express Railway station that remained in use even after the border was drawn, allowing continued trans-local petty trade and friendship ties between the two sides of the border. Yet, this has also changed with the escalation of territorial conflicts in the Aegean and Cyprus. The train station was closed in the early 1970 s with the construction of a new railway on the Turkish side further inland, away from the border. The lifting of visa requirements for Greek passport-holders in 1984 led to the revitalization of old personal ties between Edirneans and people from Greek Thrace. However, a decade later, in 1998, a "Lausanne monument, museum and square" was opened in the yard of the station which was by then the fine arts campus for the newly founded Trakya University. The university senate presented this site of memory as a gesture to stand "against the internal and external activities revitalizing Sèvres and overthrow[ing] the founding principles of the republic." Shortly after the national fundraising campaign and the opening of the Lausanne monument—supported by the municipality and local business organizations—the two foreign ministers paid a visit to Thrace in 1999 as part of the Greek–Turkish rapprochement. Excited about the possible economic gains, local business organizations of Edirne this time began to organize bus rides between the border towns of Orestiada and Edirne, engaging more closely with the Greek embassy in Edirne, which eventually agreed to extend the opening hours of the Kastanies-Pazarkule border crossing from half a day to a full day (Kaşlı, 2014).

Local accounts illustrate that a more friendly atmosphere began to emerge in the border zone in the 2000s. In addition to the Kastanies-Pazarkule border crossing being permanently open, military watchtowers on the Greek side gradually became unmanned and checks on civilians passing through the military zone on both sides became less rigorous. These changes in border control, plus visa-free entry for Greek citizens, led to increased circulation, growing interactions and trust between the two societies, and excitement among many local stakeholders about cross-border business, fairs, and cultural events. However, at the same time, institutional cooperation possibilities under the EU's INTERREG CBC program were immediately put on hold and frozen ever since due to the Aegean and Cyprus disputes. Cross-border encounters with the historical Other have ever since continued through rather informal co-operations or low-profile activities organized by a handful of local actors with personal interests and motivations to meet and build ties with those across the border.

In his genealogy of the Greek–Turkish "friendship" discourse circulating in media, festivals, and other initiatives between 1999 and 2013, Karakatsanis (2014: 197) observes a "swaying between enmity and friendship" over the years which "gradually turned into a motto"; "an affirmation than a demand (...) that could 'go with everything'". This for him, signals not only a normalization of bilateral relations but also significant changes in the content of the initiatives for rapprochement and the vision attached to the message of friendship. In addition, in Thrace, I sometimes observed the same actors engaging—paradoxically—in discursive acts of both enmity and friendship simultaneously. For example, Ahmet, a small tradesman from Karaağaç was in his early 50 s when I met him in 2014. He had been active in local politics and was a long-time board member of a center-right political party. As noted in the local newspaper *Hudut*, Ahmet, as the local head of his party, was also a signatory of the "No to Annan Plan" platform's statement in 2004. This was a historic moment as the Annan Plan and the related referendum aimed to resolve this long-lasting conflict by reuniting the Republic of Cyprus and the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus shortly before the island's accession to the EU. Ahmet was initially introduced to me as one of the most mobile and "Greek-friendly" persons in Karaağaç. While his first visit to Greece was in the early 1990 s to find his ancestors' village in Serres in Greek Macedonia, his personal connections with several families in Orestiada were built during his repeated visits with his family and friends from Edirne, especially in the 2000 s. Although he signed up for Greek classes offered at the Chamber of Commerce to develop his friendship ties, he apologetically said to me that most of his friends from Orestiada and its surroundings—who were 50 years old or older and used to hear Turkish either from their parents or their neighbors—were able to speak some Turkish. During one of my visits to Ahmet's shop in Karaağaç, upon my insistence to hear more about the local political atmosphere in 2004 and mentioning the news piece about the platform that I encountered in *Hudut,* he finally said the following:

> It was such an unnecessary move. The organizer of that event [the then local head of Felicity Party] is my old-time friend. He called me the night before and said, 'so you are coming tomorrow [to the press release], right?' and we [I] said 'yeah yeah.' (...) Probably many people who went there were like me. This is how things sometimes go in a small town like this. You go there for the sake [*hatır*] of your friend (...) It was not one of the things that I would want to tell about myself or about Edirne. So, I just explain it now because you seem to know it already... I can say those days are long gone (...) nobody even the organizer himself didn't insist on it afterwards.[5]

The formation of such a platform and the way it was presented in the most widely read newspaper in Edirne reveal a local political positioning in public debates over the future of Cyprus. Yet, this firsthand insight from a platform member gives us a wider perspective on how such local performances are shaped within a complex web of social relations. Ironically, this positioning of the local actors—as in 2004—stands in stark contrast to the then relatively more liberal JDP government's support to Turkish Cypriots who were pro-Annan Plan. While social relations might have played an important role in this performance, the participation of local notables across a wide political spectrum in the press release implies persistence—even tacit acceptance—of the old, militarized discourse that draws the borders between the national self and the Other. This persistence comes at a time when Ahmet's own trans-local ties were gaining precedence in his everyday life and when Edirne's geographical location, bordering Greece and Bulgaria, an EU member and a then-candidate member respectively, have been increasingly perceived as an asset by local stakeholders who have

been excited about possible CBC opportunities under the EU framework. Like the mixed feelings that that the opening of the ceasefire line in Cyprus and encounters with the constitutive Other have trigged through multiple and gradually more mundane cross-border visits (Bryan, 2010), such contradictory performances reveal the new borders of Greek–Turkish relations in Thrace. What we observe in this new iteration of de-securitization in Greek–Turkish relations is how the collective memory of recent conflicts and atrocities continues to reproduce the established sense of border among state and nonstate actors on the ground.

Next to these authorized mobilities and cross-border encounters, the Thracian border has been a point of unauthorized transit of different groups at different periods. During the military junta in Greece (1967–1974) and until the democratization of minority rights in Greece in the 1990s, members of the Muslim-Turkish minority community were the ones crossing the border to seek refuge in Turkey. In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup and the escalation of conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK, Kurdish and leftist asylum seekers were fleeing to Greece and Europe.[6] Similarly, due to the purge against civil servants, academics, journalists, and civil society in general since the coup attempt of 2016, there is again a rise in the number of Turkish citizens using the same path.[7] With the intensification of controls in other southern borders of the EU in the 2000 s, the Thracian border constituted more than 80% of irregular migratory flows from third countries into the EU around 2010 (Hatziprokopiou and Triandafyllidou, 2013) and became the new object of security in Thrace as well as the other borders where militarized measures have attempted to keep illegalized migrants at bay (İşleyen, 2021).

As shown in the next and final section, local encounters with the illegalized migrants and control over illegalized migration have been shaped through the pervasive sense of border described here. The collective memory of recent conflicts and atrocities that resurfaces in unexpected ways invites us to see the historical and geographical entanglements as the reasons why securitization of migration, as a new element of security at the Greek–Turkish border, works conjunctively with citizenship, using Guillaume and Huysmans' (2013) terms, and does not open possibilities for enacting new modes of political being and disrupting the securitizing of citizenship and the alienations in this particular context.

Local responses to illegalized migration entangled with ongoing disputes

In the last two decades, militarization of migration control manifested itself in the Thracian border in the direct support of Frontex from 2006 onwards, the construction of a fence along the 12.5 km-long land border between Greece and Turkey, the deployment of extra police officers in Evros region, and the development of intelligence sharing between Greek and Turkish security forces since 2012.[8] Ironically, these interventions coincided with the de-escalation and de-militarization efforts in Greek–Turkish relations and lead to several encounters between local civil society as well as actors of migration control.

In the context of Greek–Turkish rapprochement, there has been one remarkable locally driven initiative to jointly act on the rising number of "transit" migrants and apprehensions in the region from a human rights perspective. In May 2003, the Edirne Bar Association (EBA) invited representatives from the Evros (Greece) and Haskovo (Bulgaria) Bar Associations to explore opportunities for collaboration within the framework of EU regional funds and to develop joint projects related to conditions in detention facilities, the training of local lawyers on international refugee law and national regulations, advocacy, and

legal assistance for migrants with irregular legal status. However, no further communication between Greek and Turkish counterparts followed this first meeting. The former head of the Human Rights commission of the EBA recalled that "the Greek partner did not feel comfortable being there" and that he later heard "some rumors" like "they applied for the same fund on their own with a very similar project."[9] Besides this cooperation attempt which could potentially enact new modes of political being but did not work out in the early years of the rapprochement, there has been very little communication between local civil society organizations or activist circles across Greek and Turkish Thrace. Following the Greek government's decision to construct the fence in January 2011, activists from Orestiada and Edirne met each other once in April 2011, at a one-day event in Edirne, including panels, a photo exhibition at the main shopping street, and a demonstration in front of the detention center. Yet, the contacts across the border and the event itself were initiated by the Istanbul Migrant Solidarity Network, a non-hierarchical activist group, though organized together with Edirne City Council and the local branch of Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (DISK).

There are two main reasons why these cross-border contacts and joint actions on issues related to illegalized migrants' conditions were not maintained further. First, the language barrier between civil society actors impedes personal contacts. Due to decades of limited contact across the border, very few people in the region speak both Greek and Turkish. While their language competence puts members of Muslim-Turkish minority from Greek Thrace at an advantage for cultural and economic exchanges, they understandably keep a distance from local political matters, such as these, due to their historically precarious position between the two states, with their loyalty and political belonging being repeatedly tested. Second, both the Greek and Turkish counterparts underlined on numerous occasions that they feel it is "necessary to be cautious at all times" in small border towns like theirs, where what you say and do is easily followed by the police and the army. Hence, security and citizenship work in conjunction to reinforce subjugations of local communities to (illegalized) migration control.

In contrast to this limited space for contesting migration control, since 2013, Greek and Turkish border police have held regular meetings in Thrace as part of the new EU-supported institutional framework of cooperation. These meetings have allowed street-level state agents embedded in everyday life in the border towns to get to know each other and develop social ties through cross-border sports tournaments, cultural activities, and, for some, even family visits on weekends. At the opening of an art exhibition, organized by the Greek Consul in Edirne in May 2014, I was introduced to the head of the Foreigners Police of Edirne, who was chatting with the police head of the Kastanies Border Gate. Such encounters demonstrate that agents of border control and their relations are also part of the neighborly relations that have been slowly developing on the ground. At another moment, during my informal chat with the then head of the Foreigners Police of Edirne in his office, he noted that their job was a "delicate matter" and, according to him, this new process was "even more sensitive." Even though he and his personnel were ready to cooperate on apprehensions on the Turkish side, he stressed the importance of "sincerety" (*samimiyet*) and was suspicious of their Greek counterparts' "hidden agendas" (*başka ajandalar*) such as pushbacks. Recalling the historical position of Turkey as the kinstate of the Balkans' Muslim-Turkish communities, being cautious but hopeful for the future of the CBC on migration control, he added:

> "I must say one reason why I am so sensitive about this is the Western Thracian Turks. *We* have *our* 150,000 *people* [*insanımız*] there. I must consider their *security* [*emniyet*] too (...) In the

> beginning our relations were a bit tense of course. But as we got to know each other, things got better. Since the first day we are exchanging *gifts*. I sent them to the final games in Istanbul for example. They loved it! Here we organized basketball games, like a "friendship game" [*dostluk maçı*] between the police teams of the three countries. Such things are very important." (emphases mine)

Here the emerging relations between Greek and Turkish police officers evoke Andersson's (2014) depiction of the Maussian "gift economy" in the Afro-European borderland, where, with each financial exchange, social bonds are created, and new facets added to the uneven relations between African and European forces, combining into the "illegality industry." In the Greek–Turkish case, however, the gift exchange had rather political underpinnings between relatively equal actors, as it coincided with the rapprochement and attempts to enhance neighborly relations, thereby making the symbolic gesture part and parcel of enduring concerns for national security. The emphasis by the head of the Foreigners Police on the security of the Muslim-Turkish minority of the Greek Thrace—beyond his official sphere of authority—reveals how the sentiments about past and ongoing disputes that are assumed to be collectively shared easily make their way into conversations about a seemingly unrelated field of action, namely illegalized migration control.

The urge of the head of the Foreigners Police to suddenly present himself as the guardian of the ethnic kin across the border highlights the slippery ground on which the police cooperation on illegalized migration sits. The suspicion towards the "sincerity" and "hidden agendas" of their Greek counterparts, in other words, highlights the unresolved bilateral relations and the fragility of his intentions to cooperate with the "untrustworthy" national Other. As such, these utterances recall the "Sèvres syndrome" which still prevails across Turkish public narratives of Europe—including Greeks who gained independence from the Ottoman Empire—as "an unwanted intruder with the goal of territorially partitioning the country" (Aydın-Düzgit, 2018). As a loyal state agent aware of this legacy, he puts his acts of exchanging gifts, initiating friendship games, and attending the monthly meetings with his Greek counterparts into perspective as deeds not just aimed at collaboration towards their joint goal of control against unauthorized cross-border mobilities, but also to assert his authority as a guardian of Greek Thrace's Turkish-Muslim minority in the "lost territories" of the empire.

In September 2015, when people were chanting "Crossing No More" in Edirne, I witnessed once again how this established sense of border in Edirne's public space was at play for both state and nonstate actors. Unsurprisingly, only a handful of politically engaged and activist Edirneans involved in local organizations paid a visit to the people on the move. They made few posts on social media to mobilize support for the crowd's immediate sanitary and bedding needs and to calm down fellow Edirneans concerned by the presence of this unexpected crowd lingering in their city. However, during the following days, they directed anyone interested to contribute to the helpline of the governorship. In this way, they carefully avoided becoming too involved in the matter and did not in any respect confront the local authorities. They continued to visit the makeshift camp in the stadium but only to check "if there is anything [they] can do to help" the emergency teams operating under the governor of Edirne—hence under the Ankara government. Moreover, when overtly criticized for being too submissive by volunteers and activists coming from Istanbul, one of the most vocal Edirneans reacted, "when everyone eventually leaves this place, we will be the ones staying behind to deal with the authorities, every day." On the Greek side of the border, in Orestiada, there was similar hesitation. Several no-border activists from Orestiada came to Edirne a few times just like regular day-trippers.

They observed what was happening but only from afar since the marchers were surrounded with riot police. They did not dare visit again in the following days to avoid possible police stop-and-searches.

In this "crisis", which last around 10 days, the routine politics of bordering was laid bare. During their informal meeting on 23 September 2015, EU leaders only discussed the relocation of those who were already on the Balkan route and the aid that should be provided to Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey as part of "regional cooperation on migration." They specifically underlined the need to "reinforce the dialogue with Turkey at all levels (...) cooperation on stemming and managing migration flows."[10] After the meeting's result became clear to those waiting in the makeshift camp, buses arrived ready to transport people to other cities. While being escorted to the buses, many migrants were still asking "why do they not let us go?". One police officer took this question seriously and responded wholeheartedly "in order to protect you against the oppression you will face on the other side." The police officer clearly showed no trust towards her counterparts on the Bulgarian and Greek side of the border whose brutal pushbacks have since been recorded by human rights activists.[11] Yet, for her, their "ruthlessness" was proven by "their records of oppression" toward Greece and Bulgaria's Turkish-Muslim minorities. Recalling her own family's victimhood and forced displacement from Bulgaria to Turkey—the collective memory of the past century's war traumas that all borderlanders have carried with them—she wished to emphasize that her and her colleagues' caring was clearly different from those on the other side.

Though coming from a police officer in this case, such utterances reflect a narrative that commonly pops up in conversations that are in any way related to the border. Edirneans often describe their town as "border city" (*serhat şehri*) recalling its position as an Ottoman capital prior to Constantinople/Istanbul and a frontier during military expeditions to the Rumelia (a historical region corresponding to the Balkans), and devastating wars of the early twentieth century colored with overheard family stories of forced displacement from birthplaces across Turkey's present-day borders. Likewise, a Greek journalist from Orestiada aptly summarized, "the border is in the DNA of this town [Orestiada]," where majority of inhabitants are descendants of refugees (*πρόσφυγες*) from Karaağaç, Edirne. The minarets in the horizon of old Ottoman mosques located in Edirne's town center make some of this small and relatively new town's people describe visiting it as "going inside the border" (*να πάω μέσα*). Similar to Cypriots' feelings of unease about being outside the designated area around the time of the opening of the ceasefire line in 2003 (Navaro-Yashin, 2005: 115) or their "discovery of new borders" after the opening and repeated encounters with their constitutive Other (Bryant, 2010: 16), the sense of border in Thrace is still heavily determined by the long shadow of a traumatic (trans)local history, ongoing bilateral and regional conflicts, minority rights-related disputes, and a lighter yet continuing presence of the military across both sides of the Thracian border. These historical and geographical entanglements determine the contours of local responses to (illegalized) migration control today, be they state agents or members of the civil society.

Conclusion

In this article, I have taken a closer look at how 2015's March of Hope unfolded on the Greek–Turkish border in Thrace, attempting to make sense of the contrast between local state and nonstate actors' responses to the people on the move. I have argued that studying discursive practices of boundary-making shaped through local histories helps us move forward in our efforts to fully understand the productive power of contemporary migration

control and contestations around it. To account for these locally specific responses, I suggest using the notion of a dynamic, relational, and composite *regime of bordering*, consisting of regimes of citizenship, migration and bilateral relations. Understanding a regime of bordering at play at a given border—a zone of contact *and* transit—requires a historically and locally informed analysis. This goes beyond a mere focus on illegalized *and* contemporary migration control. Ethnographic evidence from Thrace presented here shows how the long history of the Greek–Turkish conflict and the militarized sense of border is decisive in the positions the local actors take in the local politics of migration control. Despite slight changes in the last two decades, the established sense of border and, relatedly, the strong reach of central governments into local affairs have made non-compliance with the policies of migration control too costly or unappealing on the ground. This becomes evident in the performances of both local state and nonstate actors who enacted the state—rather than resisting it—during the 2015 "crisis."

Edirne and the Thrace region offer us a vignette of the historical entanglements of recurring migration "crises" and contestations around (illegalized) migration control at the Greek–Turkish border—both a national border and an EU external border. The peculiar geography of Thrace—topographically and demographically different to the Aegean—lays bare the mundane effects of militarization, unresolved conflicts, border, and migration control. While the physical proximity makes it seemingly easier for various types of formal and informal (im)mobilities and interactions across the border, the closer vicinity of the "national enemy" does not allow unfamiliar faces to linger too long in these border towns. It is also different from other parts of Turkey where Syrians and other migrants are highly visible in public spaces, settling and mostly working in different sectors with total precarity (Ikizoglu-Erensu and Kaşlı, 2016). However, there has been rising suspicion and negative public opinion towards Syrians across Turkey in the latest years (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019) and even mimicking of the bordering functions, as recorded in an inland city with a large JDP voter base (Ikizoglu-Erensu and Kaşlı, 2016). Likewise, we may expect considerably different local responses from the Kurdish-majority cities of Turkey, where we observe a long history of state violence and oppression of Kurds and other minorities, and hence a different sense of militarized border. Yet, there has been increased tendency of anti-Syrian sentiments among the Kurdish grassroots (Şenoğuz, 2017), unlike Albanian-dominated Southern Serbia where locally driven alternative acts of citizenship emerged in 2015 (El-Shaarawi and Razsa, 2019). In this light, it is doubtful that the local state and nonstate actors would have acted any differently than those in Edirne, had the 2015 demonstration in Edirne happened elsewhere in Turkey.

Five years after the 2015 "crisis," in February 2020, Turkish authorities announced that they would not stop passage to Europe, allowing thousands of refugees to pass the Turkish side of the Kastanies-Pazarkule border crossing. This was related to the Greek–Turkish disputes concerning the delimitation of the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zone in the Eastern Mediterranean, yet another moment of weaponization of mass migration for foreign policy interests (Gökalp-Aras, 2019). This second "crisis" has clearly shown that the EU-Turkey Statement is contingent upon both the de-escalation of Greek–Turkish relations and Turkey's highly centralized and increasingly authoritarian governance structure which not only attaches together local and national actors of migration control but also, with the crackdown on civil society, impedes further solidarity with or for illegalized migrants.

Local responses to migration "crises" along the Greek–Turkish border in Thrace, therefore, show that illegalized migration control is part and parcel of historical and geographical entanglements of territorial borders. Attention to the local history of a given border and

local experiences of a composite regime of bordering allows us to capture state–society relations crisscrossing supposedly clearly demarcated territorial borders. In the recent encounters with (illegalized) migrants at this border, it is this interconnected (trans)local history adorned with past atrocities that explains on the one hand, societal actors' inertia and silence and their disconnect with civil society across the border, and, on the other hand, local state agents' distrust against their Greek counterparts along with a feeling of responsibility and care towards the minority community across the border. This approach advances the critique of contemporary borders, increasing securitization and internal and external multiplication (cf. Mezzadra and Nielson, 2013) by undermining the clearly demarcated internal/external distinction at the EU's borders, which presupposes a homogenous and pre-existing interiority as distinct from the exteriority of its territorial borders. While future comparisons between internal and external borders may further challenge the internal/external distinction, the locally and historically informed regime of bordering approach is proven useful to assess the exact transformative potential of local encounters, especially at those borders marked by their contemporary function of being a hard external border.

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ORCID iD

Zeynep Kaşlı https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6886-5890

Notes

1. In February 2020, when Turkish state officials again channeled migrants to this border crossing, local communities had even less contact with the migrants. See expert interviews by the Association of Migration Research in Turkey, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4v3EdWNUZI (accessed 29 June 2021).

2. The Greek region between Evros River and Nestos River is administratively called the East Macedonia and Thrace whereas Muslim-Turkish minority calls it "Western Thrace". The east of Evros River, from Edirne province in the West to Istanbul in the East and Canakkale in the South, is called "Thrace" by its inhabitants and is administratively part of the larger Marmara region. For the convenience of the reader, I refer to "Western Thrace" as "Greek Thrace" and larger Edirne province as "Turkish Thrace."
3. I was based mainly in Edirne town center but conducted extensive fieldwork in the whole region. I spent extensive time in Orestiada and Alexandroupoli on the Greek side, and Enez and Keşan on the Turkish side, with multiple visits to nearby towns and villages of Greek and Turkish Thrace.
4. I chose *Hudut* and *Hürriyet* on the Turkish side, *Eleftheri Thraki* and *Kathimerini* on the Greek side, according to the criteria of widest distribution and readership to capture the "voice" of the border and the national mainstream respectively.
5. Personal interview, Karaağaç, Edirne, 20 August 2014.
6. Didymoteicho's Mufti has been officially authorized to bury supposedly Muslim "illegal" border crossers found dead in Evros region. In his registers, the first burials recorded in 1989 were three Turkish citizens from Tunceli, an Anatolian province where majority is Kurdish and/or Alevite. Host of repeated local rebellions and state violence, its inhabitants and descendants call it Dersim. In his registers, over the course of the nineties, the deceased's country of origin has diversified tremendously, dominated by people from third countries. Interview with the Mufti and observation of the registers at his office, Didymoteicho, June 2014.
7. For further details, see https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/turkish-asylum-seekers-allegedly-being-pushed-back-in-small-boats-by-greece/ (accessed 22 April 2022).
8. For further details, see Amnesty International country report available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR25/008/2013/en/ (accessed 29 June 2021).
9. Personal communication with the former head of the Human Rights commission of the EBA, May 2014.
10. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file-eu-turkey-statement-action-planc (accessed 29 June 2021).
11. See, for example, https://harekact.bordermonitoring.eu/ (accessed 29 June 2021).

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Biographical note

Zeynep Kaşlı is an Assistant Professor in Migration and Development at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), part of Erasmus University Rotterdam. She is an interdisciplinary scholar specialized in state-society relations with a regional focus on Turkey, Europe, and the Middle East. Her research focuses on three strands: interplay between (im)mobility, borders and citizenship; politics of migration and diversity; and extraterritorial state power, diaspora politics and transnationalism. Her work appeared in journals such as Political Geography, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Journal of Refugee Studies, and Alternatives: Global, Local, Political as well as other scholarly and non-scholarly periodicals and edited volumes.