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Immobilizing mobility:

Border ethnography, illiberal democracy, and the politics of the "refugee crisis" in Hungary

A B S T R A C T

In the summer of 2015, more than 350,000 migrants moved through Hungarian territory. Almost immediately there emerged in response a dialectic between, on the one hand, depoliticizing narratives of crisis that sought to immobilize the migrants and, on the other, concrete political mobilization that sought to facilitate their mobility. While state institutions and humanitarian volunteer groups framed mobility in terms that emphasized a vertical form of politics, a horizontal counterpolitics arose by the summer's end, one that challenged hegemonic territorial politics. The state's efforts to immobilize resulted only in more radical forms of mobility. Outlining an ethnography of mobility, immobilization, and cross-border activism, we follow the dramatic yet momentary presence, and subsequent absence, of migrants in an evanescent rebel city marked by novel political solidarities. [*mobility, immobility, transit zones, border politics, refugees, migrants, Hungary*]
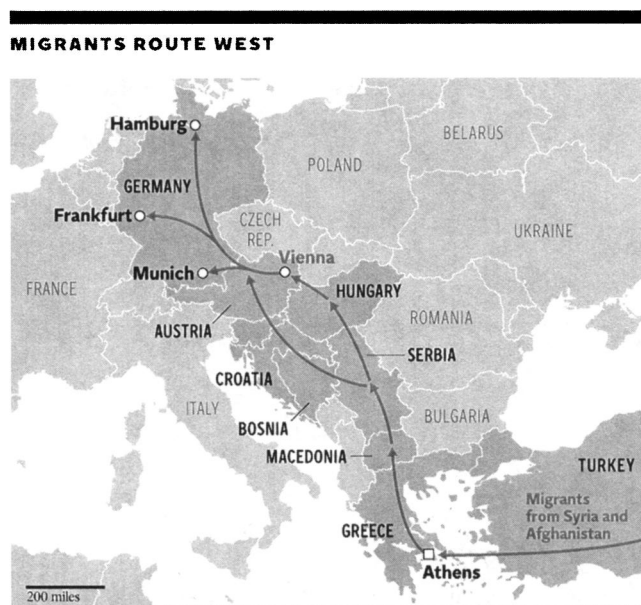
In the first place, we don't like to be called "refugees."

Hannah Arendt

The ethnography of mobility can take surprising twists and turns, revealing how mobility can hijack the political and voice the unspeakable. The resounding moment in our ethnography came in early September 2015, when thousands of refugees and migrants protested their immobilization in the Hungarian capital as authorities refused to allow them to travel to western Europe.[1] During a protest at Budapest's Keleti train station, we encountered a group of Syrians and Afghans chanting slogans at police officers who were blocking the entrance to the station and preventing them from boarding trains to the west. Up to that point, the migrants' mobility had depended on negotiating or evading many forms of violence, most of them state sponsored. Many of the people immobilized at Keleti had likely made it past Syrian or Turkish border guards known to have shot migrants (UK *Daily Telegraph*, October 20, 2015), across the treacherous Mediterranean to the Greek island of Kos, whose police were reported casually violent (UK *Guardian*, August 12, 2015), and then through a gantlet of tear gas and stun grenades in Macedonia (*EurActiv*, August 21, 2015) to finally confront the Hungarian state's stunningly indifferent bureaucracy (which later turned violent). Now, in a Schengen Area member state and with their destination in sight, the migrants were not going to give up. "Let us go! Let us go! Let us go! Freedom! Germany!" the migrants shouted in English, holding up the international train tickets they had bought.

As this scene played out, we were not surprised to see a determined group of neo-Nazis approach; as in other European countries, extreme-right political movements and xenophobic discourses have grown in Hungary over the past decade. Together with activists, Kallius quickly translated what we considered the most important information into Arabic and Persian. To avoid violence, the migrants had to know that they were
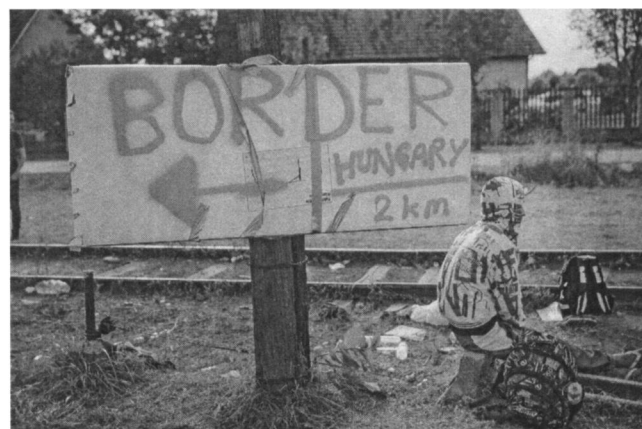
MIGRANTS ROUTE WEST

Figure 1. The Balkan route from the Middle East to Germany. (Courtesy of the UK *Independent*)

Figure 2. A refugee on his way to Hungary waits at the Serbian border, September 15, 2015. (Yotam Ronen/Activestills)

being provoked. But we were caught off guard; the neo-Nazis started chanting in chorus with the migrants: "Let them go! Let them go! Let them go!" Before long, migrants and neo-Nazis were discussing the absurdities of EU migration policy. This improbable encounter illustrates some of the contradictions of the so-called refugee crisis and the mobilization around it by left-wing activists, humanitarian volunteers, and ultranationalist right wingers, who all engaged with and contested the official ideology of European classification.

The protesters at Keleti were some of hundreds of thousands of people pushed to seek a better future in Europe by the Arab Spring revolts and the civil wars throughout the Middle East. On Europe's semiperiphery, Hungary saw more than 350,000 migrants moving through its territory: depending on family networks and financial situation, some spent only a few days in Hungary, while others were stuck for many weeks. The distinctions between categories such as *refugees* and *migrants* became blurred as Afghans, Iraqis, Kurds, and Syrians were joined by Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, all of whom had crossed several borders by car, train, foot, or boat to reach safe haven in western Europe (see Figure 1). Hungary occupies a strategic corridor between Serbia and Austria; in recent years, it has developed into a crucial entry point to the EU Schengen Area.[2] Seeking safe passage through Hungary, migrants found themselves in conflict with the EU and its regulations governing mobility. The Hungarian Office of Immigration and Nationality (Bevándorlási és Állampolgársági Hivatal, BÁH) designated reception centers (or detention centers)

for all migrants who crossed from Serbia to Hungary (see Figure 2). Upon crossing this border and arriving at the closed transit camp in Röszke, the migrants received free tickets to camps around the country: the largest one, in the eastern city of Debrecen; in Bicske, near Budapest; or in Vámosszabadi, by the Slovakian and Austrian borders. To reach these destinations, migrants had to change trains in Budapest, but most decided to continue to western Europe rather than travel to the extremely overcrowded camps, where the prospect of quality legal aid is minimal and reception conditions are poor.

Migrants bought tickets to cities in Austria and Germany, despite the efforts of the Hungarian state—represented by the BÁH, the police, and, intriguingly and somewhat worryingly, many humanitarian volunteers focused on organizing people and cajoling them to board trains to refugee camps. With some notable exceptions, most migrants were barred from boarding the trains bound for western Europe, and the transit zone around Keleti station heaved with individuals and families who chose to wait for the opportunity to move on.[3] This immobilization often came with a substantial financial loss for migrants, who had spent hundreds of euros on the international train tickets and now found themselves trapped at the passageway underneath the Keleti station with no money, no ID, and no practical possibility of refunds.

Once in Hungary, migrants encountered an escalating tension between depoliticizing narratives of crisis and concrete political action that sought to facilitate mobility. State agencies and humanitarian volunteer groups framed mobility in terms that emphasized a vertical form of politics, which rests on a series of binaries—notably citizen-foreigner and politics-humanitarianism—distinguishing groups to be acted on and the institutions that do the acting. We base our understanding of this form of politics on Partha Chatterjee's (2004, 27) view of political society

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as a space populated by groups that fall on the wrong side of these binaries. These groups are subject to benevolent, paternalistic, or violent action by the state to remedy their situation. In the Hungarian government's response to migrants, a rhetoric of "crisis" enabled the deployment of a citizen-foreigner binary that legitimized state action against a group that was held in a conceptual and, eventually, material stasis. Migrants were immobilized by a discourse that labeled them "criminals" and framed them as a threatening group to be dealt with. Such framings also fabricate "the state" as a cohesive institution with authority and responsibility to remedy threats. The citizen-foreigner binary was not the only one deployed. Accounts of insecurity invoked a Hungarian public under threat and, consequently, reminders of indigenous exclusions—Roma and homeless people, whose marginalization has been central to constituting a desirable Hungarian public. The vertical politics exercised on migrants thus reflects the same state actions experienced by indigenous Others.

Vertical politics locates agency and action necessarily and exhaustively on the side of the state and leaves no room for agentive responses by migrants. At the same time, humanitarian action, while often critical of the state, also tends to represent migrants as passive victims—the ultimate "suffering subject" (Robbins 2013). The very concept of charity reproduces a vertical form of intervention in which agency and action are rooted in the charitable act to the extent of precluding a commensurate agency from receivers.[4] Vertical politics and intervention displace violence, naming the problem as a threat to the political actor or as a moral mission for the aid worker. Vertical politics can isolate the complex structure of violence that affects migrants in Europe today, depoliticizing and dehistoricizing "cases" for charitable or political intervention. Against these forms of vertical politics, and in dialectical relationship with them, the crisis was also marked by unexpected horizontal solidarities involving private citizens working with migrants, standing with them in their protests, sheltering people, and transporting them to the western border. We suggest that these are horizontal modes of solidarity to the extent that they call into question the acted–acted on dichotomy of vertical politics. The examples we give are neither exhaustive accounts of horizontal solidarity nor ideal ones: we focus on what we saw as attempts by citizen groups to question the reading of the migrant crisis as a problem of state responsibility, and migrants as humanitarian victims lacking agency. These are often fragmented actions, but ones that come to the heart of the matter. The "crisis" is about the violence against deeply marginalized peoples; it is not about perceived violence posed by migrants to an idealized "state" (or, sometimes, "Europe"). Horizontal solidarities then seem to us to work on the basis of human solidarity: they seek to question distinctions between citizen and migrant or refugee and the way political agency is constricted.

The construction of a border fence with neighboring Serbia and Croatia (the border with Slovenia having been effectively closed) was but the most visible of a number of strategies of immobilization that the Hungarian state enacted. By the summer's end, however, migrants' radical occupation of public space across the country mobilized horizontal solidarities with EU citizens, activist networks, and NGOs, of which we discuss but a few. These solidarities, in turn, highlighted slippages between humanitarian and political action and led to the de facto collapse of the Dublin Regulation, the cornerstone of EU asylum legislation, which requires migrants to apply for asylum in the first EU country in which they arrive.[5]

The nature of migrants' presence in urban space changed dramatically during the Budapest protests, from seemingly quiescent victims in June to powerful demonstrators by August. By early September, chants echoing the pro-democracy protests in Syria rang out at Budapest's rail station forecourts, evoking jarring connections between these protests and the Arab revolts in the Middle East.[6] Public parks evolved into hubs of habitation, smuggling, and communicative action: Pope John Paul II Square, a park near Keleti station, soon became informally known as the "Afghan Park." Migrant occupation of these and other seemingly neutral nonplaces, such as highways, created spaces where people forged horizontal political solidarities centering on contests over the significance of public space, mobility rights, humanitarian deservingness, and the meanings and scope of volunteer work and activism. As the Hungarian government amended asylum legislation to criminalize anyone helping the migrants, horizontal counterpolitics emerged in opposition to the hegemonic verticality of territorial politics. Similarly, efforts of immobilization resulted in more radical forms of mobility, such as Hungarian and Austrian citizens smuggling migrants across the border free of charge. Under conditions of "illiberal democracy" or under "post-fascism" (as Hungarian intellectual G. M. Tamás has dubbed the country's regime), migrant protests were transformative.[7] Migrants and refugees, horizontally aligned with activist groups, effectively questioned this ordering through protest and disrupted the state's immobilizing strategies through acts of radical mobility that rendered the marginal central and the invisible visible.

The state's bordering practices, and borders themselves, fabricate the political through processes of marginalization and exclusion wherein a number of groups have at best a tangential relation to the political norm. This territorial order, and the bordering practices that it depends on, allows for the production of *transit zones*, ostensibly neutral spaces conducive to vertical politics. Conversely, effective verticality depends on the functional arrangement of the city in terms of vacant

zones, places of movement, and sites of leisure, all of which stabilize potentially charged public spaces into a controllable order. The analysis of mobility, immobilization, and activism exposes the complex politics of space, place, and voice (Appadurai 1988), which came to light through the encounter among migrants, humanitarian volunteers, and the Hungarian state agencies. The exclusion of migrants is not a unique or exceptional event: it is linked to other forms of exclusion that became stark when studying how migrants and refugees were governed in the summer of 2015 in Budapest. Outlining a border ethnography of mobility and immobilization, we follow the situational radicalism of the migrants' agency in an evanescent rebel city, marked by novel political solidarities (Monterescu and Shaindlinger 2013).

As anthropologists living in Budapest, we not only witnessed the events of the summer but also participated in them.[8] It was sometimes difficult to distinguish the role of an activist or an active citizen from the positionality of an anthropologist: the ethnographic skills of interviewing and probing, as well as an intercultural sensitivity and acute awareness of power structures in the humanitarian context, were crucial to our engagement with migrants. Our familiarity with Hungarian and European migration policy systems was fundamental in gaining trust and achieving a level of embeddedness that constitutes a prerequisite for ethnography. Although we sympathize with recent calls for activist research and engaged ethnography (Hale 2006; Low and Merry 2010), such an undertaking was not our original intention. Our involvement as activists or concerned citizens capable of transporting migrants or writing public commentaries took precedence over ethnographic research; our anthropological sensibilities, however, deeply affected the way we related to the constantly changing events. Thus it was partly our own actions as citizens and activists that pointed us to the dialectical relation between immobilization and mobility. To address the exigencies of the field, from June to October 2015, we conducted mixed-methods research, practicing daily participant observation in and out of Keleti station, interviewing migrants in transit, and analyzing Hungarian and English-language media sources, official government reports, and social media (Bonilla and Rosa 2015).

An ethnography of immobility

In Budapest, the Keleti train station became the focal point of the relational dynamics among the migrants, volunteers and activists, Hungarian government, and the European Union. From June onward, a partially sheltered passageway under Keleti turned into a base for hundreds of migrants. As the summer reached its end, living conditions deteriorated rapidly. Sanitary conditions were abysmal, and the absolute lack of privacy was stressful. Kallius, who was involved

in a project with a safe house for migrants near the train station, expected it to be rather easy to find people who would like to have a quiet, private place to spend the night. She quickly learned, however, that despite the poor living conditions, Keleti's location as a node of mobility was what mattered more for the migrants. For the immobilized, all other needs were overshadowed by the hope that Keleti would once again function as an actual train station.

Near Keleti, the "Afghan Park" underwent the same transition: migrants assessed it according to potential mobility, as a hub where they could meet smugglers heading to western Europe. Many migrants chose to sleep there on the cold ground, even in the rain, rather than at a nearby safe house. The possibility of meeting smugglers, and therefore of achieving mobility, was the main concern governing how migrants formed their understandings of safety and opportunity. What mattered to our interlocutors was not what they had endured during the journey to Budapest, but how the state's vertical strategy of immobilization blocked them from moving onward. As Kallius learned to recognize the smuggling hot spots and saw how price fluctuations corresponded to EU migration policy, new people kept arriving, resulting in about 1,000 to 1,500 migrants sleeping in and around Keleti by August.

Later that month, a tragedy led refugees to stage protests at the Budapest Keleti train station, protests that, together with Germany's announcement that it would not apply the Dublin Regulation to Syrians, finally led to the opening of the Hungarian-Austrian border and the collapse of the Hungarian asylum system. On August 27, 2015, a truck was discovered in Austria with 71 dead migrants inside. The migrants had embarked on the fatal journey from Budapest; unable to board international trains, they turned to smugglers and died of suffocation. The next day, Migszol Csoport (Migrant Solidarity Group), a small Budapest-based activist organization, held a candlelight vigil at the Keleti train station's main entrance.[9] The group prepared a single banner that stated "Europe: your hand is covered with blood" (see Figure 3), and they demanded that refugees be allowed to board trains. A few hundred Hungarians lit candles in silence, while Migszol members toured the passageway underneath the station, informing migrants stranded at the station of the vigil upstairs.

As the crowd thinned out and the vigil reached the time of its official end, a large group of migrants, mostly from Pakistan, came up from the station's downstairs passageway and joined the vigil. Many of them had just heard of the tragedy. The Muslim migrants started to pray and lifted the activists' banner, chanting slogans in Pashto and Urdu. Passersby and volunteers alike were astounded at the transformation: the migrants had until then stayed in the passageway, which was quite crowded (see Figure 4). By remaining there, they seemed to be, for many humanitarian volunteers, a faceless mass of people in distress; as they

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Figure 3. Hungarian activists light candles at a vigil held August 28, 2015, after 71 migrants were found dead in Austria. (Courtesy of Migszol Csoport)

Figure 4. Migrants camp in the passageway of Budapest's Keleti train station as they wait to board trains for Austria, September 4, 2015. (Ana Gurau)

emerged from below, a volunteer for a humanitarian group nervously called for a translator to make sure everything was under control. The act of praying at one of the city's key sites broke down the depiction of refugees as depoliticized victims requiring others to act on their behalf. This collective performance allowed migrants to claim historical agency and narrative authority beyond their previous position as "universal humanitarian subject" (Malkki 1996, 377). Ultimately, it turned out to be the event that led to a series of daily escalating protests and to the march itself.

From rolling protests to the march for the border

Daily protests began the day after the vigil. Several migrants, mostly men from different backgrounds, staged a sit-in at the train station entrance, a scene of a weeklong impasse between migrants protesting their immobilization. Migration Aid, a Hungarian humanitarian group, had called for a large protest against the government's brutal migration policies to be held on September 2.[10] As an activist who had spent most of her evenings at Keleti, Kallius was of two minds about whether to join the "Hungarian" protest or the migrants'. She asked the Migration Aid spokesperson if the group's protest could move to Keleti, where migrants had been asking for public support for weeks. Citing security concerns, however, Migration Aid declined to merge its protest with the migrants'. The city was divided: Hungarians were protesting in one location, while refugees, who had not been informed of the Hungarians' protest, were protesting in another. Solidarity appeared to have its limits.

The scene repeated itself daily: hundreds of refugees sat, chanted, and sang, demanding before a wall of police to be allowed to move on (see Figure 5).[11] Apart from humanitarian volunteers and Migszol members, the only audience for this message was the police blocking the main entrance; Hungarians, tourists, and all those who did not "look" like refugees were allowed to enter the station through other entrances. Indirectly, the whole world could follow the events through various international media who were present. The state continued its haphazard response. During the blockade, one "migrant train" ostensibly heading to Austria took migrants to a refugee camp instead, where a Pakistani man fled the police, fell on the tracks, and died. A Migszol activist, himself a refugee, who was there told us later that Hungarian and international journalists prioritized taking photos over calling an ambulance.

Late in the evening on September 3, after another long series of protests at Keleti, Kallius joked with a young Syrian informant about immobilization by recalling the proverb "If the mountain won't come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go the mountain." Yahya, a 24-year-old law graduate, responded by telling her in a matter-of-fact tone that the proverb was quite fitting indeed, since actually there were a few hundred migrants who planned to start marching the next morning.[12] That night, this group of Syrians, who would eventually be joined by Afghans, Pakistanis, and Iraqis, were driven by extreme forms of immobilization to adopt a technique that was revolutionary in its simplicity: walking to Austria.

On September 4, migrants took matters into their own hands and began marching in their thousands from Keleti toward the highway to Vienna in the March of Hope (see Figure 6). The march ended in complete exhaustion—several migrants collapsed on the M1 highway—finally pushing the state to provide buses to the Austrian border.[13] The protests before the march, the Hungarian state's inchoate and at times inhuman response, and the march itself came to symbolize the "European refugee crisis" and

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Figure 5. After being barred from boarding international trains for four consecutive days, migrants protest at Budapest's Keleti train station, September 1, 2015. (Courtesy of Migszol Csoport)


Figure 6. Migrants walk from Hungary toward Austria at the beginning of what came to be known as the March of Hope, September 4, 2015. (Courtesy of Migszol Csoport)

the triadic relationship among the state, Migration Aid, and Migszol, as well as to heighten the contrast between the vertical politics of the state and humanitarian groups and the horizontal modus operandi of Migszol.

In the meantime, the situation also escalated in Budapest. Police were called in to protect migrants from football hooligans after a Hungary-Romania match in a stadium near Keleti; indeed, some of the hooligans hurled firecrackers at the migrants. At this point, when tensions at Keleti peaked and the living conditions at the station had become truly unbearable, the Hungarian government made a decision that would have long-lasting consequences: to completely disregard EU legislation, open the border to Austria, and provide buses to transport migrants from Keleti and the march to the Austrian border.

The exhausted migrants, volunteers, activists, and journalists alike greeted the arrival of some 90 public buses with a mixture of disbelief, relief, and suspicion. Migrants refused to board the buses unless journalists were allowed to join. Migrants staying at the various camps around the country quickly proceeded to leave as well, walking many kilometers along several highways to border-town train stations. Over the course of the weekend, the transit zones in Budapest, as well as the camps in Bicske and Debrecen, went from dramatically overcrowded to almost empty. An Austrian convoy of private citizens arrived in Budapest the following day and transported many migrants who had been unable to board the buses. The double standard in law enforcement became obvious when the authorities ignored the Austrian convoy by targeting Hungarian citizens—also transporting migrants—as smugglers, resulting in much more publicity for the Austrian effort than for the Hungarian. The movement of incoming and outgoing people lasted intermittently until September 15, with the final closure of the Serbian border made infamous in global media when police brutally used tear gas and water cannons against migrants at the Röszke border crossing (Reuters, September 16, 2015). After that, Keleti became abruptly silent. The station once again resembled a nonplace of transience and absence. After the social drama of an eventful summer, spatial order appeared to have been restored (see Figure 7).
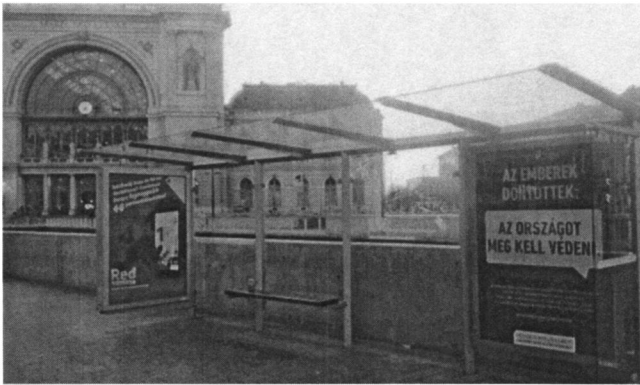
Figure 7. On October 1, 2015, the effect of Hungary's border fence is visible: the Keleti train station in Budapest is empty of migrants. A piece of propaganda from the conservative Fidesz party states, "The people have decided: the country must be protected." (Courtesy of Migszol Csoport)

The paradoxical movement and the city of alterities

These dramatic events highlighted the differences between Migration Aid and Migszol, including their respective conceptions of solidarity. Migration Aid added protest to their repertoire but willfully held migrant-led protests at arm's length while doubling their efforts to provide humanitarian assistance. Migszol continued their work of activist solidarity, sharing information and accompanying migrants on marches and protests.

In practice, the two groups were not always distinct. Their members often encountered and worked with one another, and Migration Aid volunteers, who stood at the roadside distributing food and water to marchers and later took people to the border, could be said to be doing work that was political, not purely humanitarian. These slippages spoke to how connections between charity and politics can ensue. But an abiding difference remains in the explicit focus of each group. Migszol is a very small, explicitly horizontal group; its politics remain entwined with and formed in consultation with migrants, and the group's key claim is that the humanitarian crisis needs a political solution. Migration Aid, in contrast, is a very large, highly specialized humanitarian organization mobilized by the "crisis" and propelled by a vertical account of charity and politics. In addition, the latter was much more visible during the summer. While Migszol is adamant about remaining an informal, unregistered collective, in the aftermath of the summer events and to the disappointment of some humanitarian volunteers, Migration Aid registered as an NGO and embarked on international projects involving sustainable refugee camps (*Heti Világgazdaság* [*HVG*], October 18, 2015). There are no tensions or explicit disagreements between the two groups, but the two neither work in the same space nor actively cooperate when migrants are absent. The

contrast between these groups was further exposed when lingering alterities in Budapest—the homeless, the poor, and the Roma—were involved, as we discuss below. Taking the city as a "difference machine" (Isin 2002) that dialectically produces difference as it molds national identities, the lens of urban alterity is well suited for mapping the movement's cultural negotiations with the state, society, and migrants.

The "crisis" discourse led to highly specialized forms of humanitarianism that at times appeared incongruous in the Hungarian context. The mass mobilization of humanitarian aid largely targeted a specific group of people—ignoring, explicitly or implicitly, the indigenous poor. Because Keleti station is located at the center of a particularly deprived area, this omission was more obvious: the sudden humanitarian outpouring directed at newcomers highlighted both the starkness of indigenous poverty and marginalization in Budapest and the exclusionary effect of the discourse on deservingness.

The refusal to distribute humanitarian largesse to other marginalized groups exposes deep divisions in Hungarian civil society. Migszol, echoing some other Hungarian activist groups, insists that the struggles of homeless people, migrants, and Roma are connected by the structural racism of Hungarian state institutions and the illiberal war on poverty led by the conservative Fidesz party government (Udvarhelyi 2014). Humanitarian volunteers challenged this approach each time a homeless person was refused food because it was "reserved for refugees," or an evicted Roma family was deemed ineligible for donations of warm clothes. The oft-voiced argument that the volunteers had replaced the state in providing social services should then be qualified: the volunteers replaced the state only during a perceived crisis, and only those in transit were considered eligible. Thus, paradoxically, rather than challenging notions of belonging through inclusionary "acts of citizenship" (Isin and Nielsen 2007), humanitarian volunteers targeted nonnationals as the primary subject of intervention in a way that foreclosed their agency.

Most Hungarians assume that all refugees are in transit, but they also understand and support refugees' plans to leave the country and thus support the state's vertical logic. Recent Hungarian policy, media, and political rhetoric has focused on the emigration of young Hungarians to western Europe in search of employment and a better life, and also on the deep-seated fear of being invaded by non-Hungarian (read non-Christian) Others. On a practical level, this assumption of refugees' mobility halts energy and resources from being used on integration schemes; on an analytic level, it reveals thought-provoking parallels between Hungarians' and migrants' positioning toward western Europe, both seeking a better life. In the words of Dace Dzenovska, this assumed Other is "svoi" (one of us)—a sociality of "people who recognised each other as fellow travellers from

across the lines of state-based power" (2014, 278). These parallels call attention to analyses of border regimes that do not overemphasize depictions of "Fortress Europe" and reproduce the idea of the border as merely material fences and walls (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

Another line of friction involves the Hungarian Jewish population, which has long played the role of "the stranger" vis-à-vis the Hungarian (Christian) national project (Mars 1999). But while most Hungarian Jews are largely assimilated and relatively well off, their liminal position between citizenship and religion tended to yield an ambivalent response to the refugee crisis, which divided the community along generational lines. Many of the older-generation Jews whom Monterescu interviewed still remember vividly the history of Jewish persecution during World War II and after 1956. Their desire to assimilate and "make no trouble" is often coupled with a fear of an "Islamic invasion" by unassimilable migrants.[14] The same troubled historical memory, however, compelled some commentators such as Róbert Frölich, Neolog chief rabbi of Hungary, to compare the inhumane treatment of refugees to Auschwitz and invoke "echoes of the Holocaust."[15] Overwhelmingly opposing the government, the younger generation exhibits a remarkable commitment to what they consider Jewish and European values of social justice. With initiatives like Aurora, an alternative cultural center, young Hungarian Jews read the refugee issue in light of the Jewish history of expulsion under the slogan No One Is Illegal.[16] Nonetheless, the principled coalition between Aurora and Migszol does not preclude a profound ambivalence among most liberal Jews. One interlocutor, who volunteered to drive four Syrian migrants to the Austrian border (see Figure 8), concluded the trip with a confession that she was Jewish and urged them to "not hate Israel." Responding to our description of the split Jewish position, she pointed in her own generation to "a group of ultraleftist Jews who hug trees and Muslims indistinctively," "a very strong rightist group saying that all Arabs/Muslims should be sent back to where they came from," and "people like myself looking at the complexity of the issue."

Migrants and refugees in and of public space

Responses by liminal groups and by humanitarian and activist workers to migrants and to "the crisis" point to cleavages in Hungarian society and indicate troublesome effects that the presence of migrants has on an imagined public—for both civil society and the state. This comes out most starkly when groups make decisions about the relative deservingness or worth of members of the public. The legitimacy of vertical politics partly rests on a restrictive reading of this public as a desirable community amenable to representation and government. The bordering of this public occurs through a structure of exclusion that
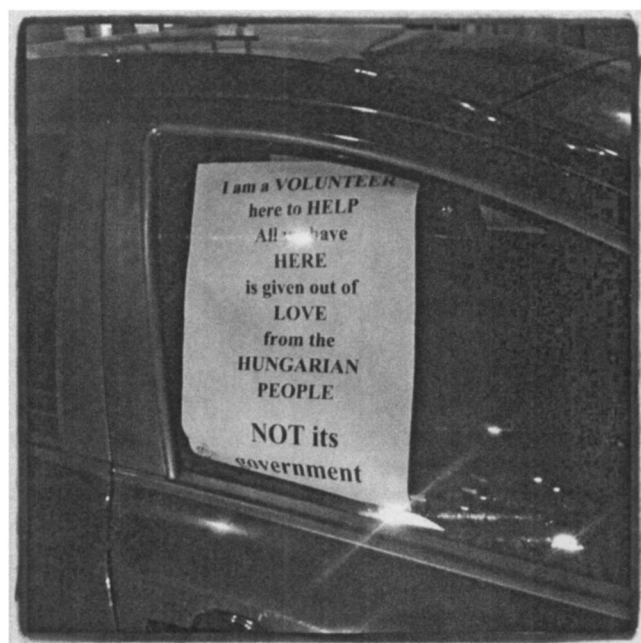

Figure 8. A volunteer drives four Syrian migrants from Budapest to the Austrian border, September 4, 2015. (Eszter Lanyi)

marginalizes groups imagined to hold to ways of life and living distasteful to "public norms." The migrants moving through Hungary also face exclusionary measures, but not simply because of a citizen-foreigner dialectic (cf. Holmes and Castañeda 2016). Some of the rhetoric of the crisis relates Roma to migrants. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán criticized the European Union's proposed quota system for distributing refugees, noting that his country already has a Roma population that Hungarians "have to live with":

> Hungary's historical given is that we live together with a few hundred thousands of Roma. This was decided by someone, somewhere. This is what we inherited. This is our situation, this is our predetermined condition. . . . We are the ones who have to live with this, but we don't demand from anyone, especially not in the direction of the west, that they should live together with a large Roma minority. (Ónody-Molnár 2015; our translation)

In October, Hungarian justice minister László Trócsányi worried aloud at a conference in Brussels that Roma in Europe could be a target for Islamic radicalization (*EUObserver*, October 19, 2015).

Notions of "publics," then, define legitimate action and agency in a public sphere (Newman and Clarke 2009), and it is here that the border again emerges. The border is not a fixed line at the end or beginning of the nation. Borders and border thinking emerge at different scales when contrary or disruptive subjects and practices erupt,

such as the March of Hope. Much more than a line dividing one sovereign territory from another, the border is an affective and mobile expression of value and order. The formal and informal policing of marginalized groups, in particular homeless individuals and young Roma men, expresses this affective (b)order. Although the state conflates itself with this order, its capacity to do this is usually tenuous; in recent years, however, the Hungarian state has been particularly successful in blurring distinctions between state and public. Its treatment of refugees is then neither unique nor unexpected: it expresses ongoing exclusions and marginalizations of indigenous Others.

"The public" in Hungary today represents a very specific cut of the broader society, a valorized and valued community that excludes large numbers of citizens and nonnationals (Rancière 2004). This (b)ordering operation plays out in mismatched competitions over the right to be present in the public sphere. Máté Kocsis, the mayor of Budapest's Eighth District, where Keleti station is located, echoed his earlier pronouncements about homelessness in a public statement on refugees:

> [They] have completely ruined our recently upgraded II. János Pál pápa tér [i.e., the "Afghan Park"]. They have erected tents, set fires, they are littering, they are being rowdy, they are stabbing with knives and are defacing property. We have never had so much human waste in our public places. (Adam 2015)[17]

The declaration of groups as deviant and unworthy or unfit to be present in public legitimates a language of crisis, the declaration of states of emergency and exception, and a strongly vertical form of politics (Rajaram 2015). There is thus a continuum between battles over the right to housing, over "Gypsy criminality," and over the Hungarian state's response to migrants. All this is made more urgent by the state's recent ability to blur distinctions between itself and the public, thereby closing off debate and restricting horizontal politics and solidarity among different marginalized groups. This hegemony is evidenced in Migration Aid's approach to migrants as objects of humanitarian need, their exclusion of other marginalized groups, and their cooperation with the police.

Declarations of crises in recent times in Hungary have legitimated extreme actions, such as making homelessness illegal. Regarding migrants, these declarations have led to the passing of new legislation that effectively declares a border region between Hungary and Serbia an exceptional zone. The new asylum law, which went into effect on September 15, 2015, declared a state of emergency at the border, allowing the deployment of troops in peacetime and the right to search homes where migrants are thought to be sheltering. Most troubling, it gives the state a right to establish a narrow transit zone at the border that "would not qualify, in immigration terms, as entry into [the] state" (Robinson and Szakacs 2015).

By declaring Serbia a safe third country, the new law makes inadmissible the asylum claims of anyone who has transited through Serbia on their way to Hungary (and allows migrants to be deported). It is now illegal to cross the border through a new chain-link fence. Damaging the fence is a criminal offense punishable by up to eight years of imprisonment; by mid-November, there were up to 1,000 Afghan and Syrian migrants jailed in Hungary (BBC News, November 12, 2015). Migrants face a catch-22: asylum claims are inadmissible, and any other type of entry into Hungary is illegal (a clear violation of international legal norms against criminalizing asylum seekers).

The (b)order, and the way it works, express the Hungarian state's capacity to represent a threat to itself as a threat to a society and its way of life. The state runs a "protection racket" (Tilly 1985, 169): it fabricates crises to legitimize extreme vertical forms of politics and delegitimize some forms of agency. Declarations of "crises" create an absent presence of deviant groups and allow "the state" to effectively produce itself as a cohesive actor. Refugees and migrants, like other marginalized groups, become so much political capital for the state.

After the new asylum law came into effect on September 15, Keleti became hauntingly quiet in just a few days (see Figure 7). A few dozen migrants sleeping in the passageway were visibly confused by the number of volunteers, which far exceeded their own numbers. But when migrants started to travel through Croatia and then Hungarian border areas, avoiding Budapest, the tents in Keleti did not stay empty for long: they were soon inhabited by homeless people. Recalling the volunteers' exclusion of the indigenous poor, these people were quickly driven away from the tents, and Keleti became, once more, empty.

The atmosphere at the station remains haunting for those of us who were involved during the summer. There are still volunteers who travel to the border areas to deliver humanitarian aid, but in Budapest, the only thing left of the crisis is the ongoing public discussion, not unlike a nostalgic hero-cult, of the experiences and work done by humanitarian volunteers during the summer. This public celebration of volunteers, while not uncalled for, seems overemphasized and even ironic when there are no targets of compassion in sight. It remains to be seen whether the humanitarian impetus of the summer will transform into political solidarities that will extend not only to other marginalized groups in the country but also to political opposition against the brutal asylum legislation and the fence that stands on the Hungarian-Serbian border.

33

Border ethnography and migrant subjectivity

Our aim is to spark discussion on three fronts: the analytic utility of the term *crisis*, the need for an embedded border ethnography, and the importance of research that does not isolate either migrants or societal response as separate objects of analysis. The transformations in the subjectivity and agency of the migrants in Keleti in the summer of 2015 point to the dialectical relation between vertical forms of immobilization and the mobility of people targeted by these strategies. While producing unexpected political solidarities, this dialectic also powerfully exposes existing divisions in societies, ad hoc coalitions (between activist and humanitarian volunteer groups, and humanitarian volunteer groups and the police), and creative misunderstandings between rival actors.

We single out a mode of contested activism and collective im/mobilization predicated on the dynamics of border crossing. The resonance of the border extends far beyond the frontier between two states and the materialities of checkpoints. It is both an idea and a transgressive category of practice that cuts through the capital city of the nation-state and moves along with the border subjects who bear it—the refugees and migrants. This indexical, place-based notion of the border allows both migrants and anthropologists to challenge its fixity (Green 2012, 586).

Of late, ethnographic mapping and the study of "shifting constellations of indirect social relations" have gained methodological salience next to more "traditional" participant observation relying on direct contact with informants (Feldman 2011, 375). The ethnography of im/mobility we outline makes a case for ethnographers to acknowledge the tangible ramifications of indirect relations but emphasizes direct relations: the researcher's presence, embeddedness, and immediate social relations with informants on the move. In the particular case of the migrants' protests in Hungary, thinking of the "border as method" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) required continuous presence at locations such as Keleti train station, safe houses, and the highway—places where the power of the border as a constitutive relation was unfolding through its dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, and, most crucially, by mobilizing political subjectivities. These subjectivities did not rest in nonplaces but rather remade "transit zones" into what Marc Augé called "anthropological places . . . relational, historical and concerned with identity" (1995, 77–78). With an élan that is reserved for intense temporalities of protests and revolutions, spaces of transience became the stronghold of radical horizontal politics.

The burgeoning scholarship concerned with "the suffering subject" (Robbins 2013) has shaped a politics of representation defined by an ever-greater "imperative to sanitize the vulnerable" (Bourgois 1995, 15), partly for fear that research might reinforce already-existing stereotypes

about marginal populations engaged in legally dubious activities, and partly because it is difficult to conceive of migrants' political agency outside the territorial order of things (Malkki 1996; Rajaram 2002). As we show, however, migrants and refugees challenge such political fixation and resist conceptual boxing-in. In Hungary, the "refugee crisis" served as another reminder that modern states "need chaos—if only to go on creating order" (Bauman 1991, 9).

Migrants both challenge and confirm the vertical politics of state power, whether that power is expressed through the state's immobilization strategies or through volunteers' humanitarian intervention. That challenge stems not from the inside-outside nexus of territorial orders, but from migrant movements' capacity to render certain ideas stark and troublesome—commonsensical and even hegemonic ideas about the purposes of politics, publics, and the forms of agency permitted therein. The horizontal solidarities and the novel political connections that we speak of came into being while migrants and the way they were governed highlighted the inequalities and exclusions on which public order and politics rest. This, however, was a flickering moment: it revealed complex articulations between neoliberalism, capitalism, and conceptions of politics and order, pointing to potential solidarities between marginalized groups—the Hungarian polity's surplus populations that remain difficult to pinpoint. The project of critical border ethnography is both academically and politically productive, as it highlights the agency of refugees and migrants against immobilization strategies that deny them political subjectivity (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). Such an endeavor requires refusing an event-based temporality of "crisis" that dehistoricizes both context and agency, turning instead to articulating the connections between the management of migrants and deep-seated economic, political, and cultural processes that maintain the illusion of a coherent state (and the public that it depends on). This type of articulated analysis, though not impossible, is difficult to accomplish. It requires that we remain vigilant to history and disavow the fragmenting, isolating, and immobilizing tactics of vertical politics.

Notes

and the participants of the PhD colloquium at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University for their insightful comments and useful references.

1. We will most often use "migrants" when referring to the people who entered, or tried to enter, Hungarian territory over the summer, but at times we will interchange it with "refugee." We are aware of the political, legal, and cultural implications of the term *migrant*, particularly when it is juxtaposed with *refugee*, and the confusion in the way these terms are used. Our insistence on primacy of *migrant* stems from our informants' reluctance to be called refugees, from a concern that these implications cloud critical analysis, and from a sense that in this current mobility of third world populations into Europe, "migrants" and "refugees" have more commonalities than they have differences. (For more on this question, see Apostolova 2015.)

2. Hungary has been a significant country of transit, as well as destination, for many years. The increase in the numbers of asylum seekers over the past years in Hungary has correlated with the increasing number of deaths in the Mediterranean and the European Union. As the number of registered asylum applications in Hungary has increased, the legislation has been tightened on par. After the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees published a damning report in 2012, Hungary stopped detaining asylum seekers in January 2013. That spring, however, the number of people seeking protection in Hungary increased very sharply, and the legislation was completely redesigned. New asylum law that went into effect in July 2013 reintroduced the detention of asylum seekers, shortened appeal times in cases of negative decisions, and restructured the integration scheme for recognized refugees. The arbitrary legislation that allows for systematic detention of asylum seekers did not deter migrants from crossing through Hungary. The numbers continued to rise: until 2012, the number of asylum seekers had been around 2,000 per year, while in 2013 there was an increase to 20,000, and in 2014 to 45,000. Further changes to the Hungarian asylum legislation took place in 2015, as we discuss below. Significantly, legislation relating to asylum now also falls in the sphere of criminal legislation. In 2015, the Serbian-Hungarian border became the main entry route to the European Union. See the Hungarian Helsinki Committee's "information note" at http://helsinki.hu/en/information-note-on-the-main-asylum-related-legal-changes-in-hung.

3. In June and July 2015, the main train stations in Budapest effectively became transit zones as migrants waited to board trains or other transport to the west. In addition to Keleti, the Nyugati, Déli, and Kelenföld stations teemed with a fluctuating number of people waiting from 24 hours to two weeks to travel to western Europe by train or with smugglers. At the end of July, the Budapest municipality officially declared these areas transit zones and provided a supply of drinking water, extra security, a few mobile toilets, and signs that read Transit Zone.

4. We are reminded here of Eduardo Galeano's words: "I don't believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person. I have a lot to learn from other people" (1999, 146).

5. The Dublin Regulation (signed in 1990 and amended in 2013) is an EU law that determines which member state is responsible for considering an application for asylum. It is based on the principle that the responsibility for an asylum claim lies with the first member state where an asylum seeker's claim is lodged and fingerprints are stored. An exception is Greece, whose asylum system has been considered dysfunctional since the European Court of Human Rights ruled against deportations to Greece in 2011. In autumn 2015, member states Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia ceased to apply the regulation by transporting migrants through their territory to Austria and Germany. At the time of writing, the future of the Dublin Regulation remains to be negotiated, and European asylum policy has become one of the most divisive issues of EU politics.

6. See video posted by Migszol Csoport on Twitter, September 1, 2015: "Syria! Syria! Syria! #refugees chanting and sing. This is incredible. #keleti #hungary #refugeeswelcome." Migszol Csoport, Twitter post, September 1, 2015, 11:25 p.m., https://twitter.com/MigSzolCsop/status/638779804288970752, accessed October 2, 2015.

7. In a 2014 speech, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán described his views of the future of Hungary as an illiberal state: "And so in this sense the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organisation, but instead includes a different, special, national approach." In his devastating critique of the Orbán regime, "This Is Post-fascism," G. M. Tamás describes the specificities of illiberal democracy in terms of mobilization: "So this is not a fascist system in the sense that it is mobilizing the population; it is demobilizing it. This is not a 20th Century totalitarian system at all" (2015).

8. Kallius has a long history of migrant activism in Hungary and was deeply involved in Migszol activism during this current "crisis," among others, as a commentator for international media. Rajaram was present at Keleti during the protests and at the march, is currently involved in education projects for refugees in Hungary, and is writing about the crisis. Monterescu, who joined the events later that summer, documented the involvement of Jewish activists in the movement and related urban dynamics.

9. Migszol Csoport is an informal activist collective, established in 2012 and comprising Hungarians, migrants, and refugees who work to realize the political and social rights of migrants and refugees in Hungary. Because the group has differentiated itself from charity groups since the beginning of its work, its members who volunteered in humanitarian work during summer 2015 did so only as individuals. As a group, Migszol provided migrants with information on Hungarian and European migration policy and legislation, helped migrants on an ad hoc basis with issues such as searching for lost family members and trying to organize refunds for lost money, and collected testimonies of human rights violations that migrants had endured on their way to Budapest.

10. Migration Aid began as an informal Facebook group of thousands of like-minded Hungarians who wanted to provide humanitarian help to refugees passing between camps. During summer 2015, it served as an umbrella group rather than as a discrete organization for humanitarian volunteers. While critical of the government's response to "the crisis," its explicit goal was to help the authorities move migrants to their designated reception centers. Leaders emerged through activities in social media, but despite severe internal conflicts, Migration Aid was extremely efficient in providing humanitarian aid to migrants. Other humanitarian volunteer groups questioned some of Migration Aid's tactics (e.g., cooperation with the police, checking refugees' papers before giving them food), resulting in tensions; those were overcome, however, due to the urgent nature of the humanitarian crisis. In October 2015, some Migration Aid volunteers registered as a foundation, although there were practically no migrants passing through Hungary anymore.

11. See videos by Migszol Csoport posted on Twitter: "Video live at Keleti right now! #refugeeswelcome #refugees #hungary #dublinIII." Migszol Csoport, Twitter post, September 1 2015, 9:13 a.m., https://twitter.com/MigSzolCsop/status/63874 6634281709569, accessed October 14, 2015; "This will be a long

night, #refugees #keleti powerful chanting in this video. Why doesn't anyone talk to them?" Migszol Csoport, Twitter post, September 1, 2015, 11:22 a.m., https://twitter.com/MigSzolCsop/status/638778946465742848, accessed October 6, 2015.

12. We use pseudonyms for our interlocutors. Public figures' names remain unchanged.

13. Ironically, the state was now acting as trafficker itself by breaking its own and EU laws and allowing people without Schengen visas to move across its territory.

14. The most notable example is that of Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész, who wrote in 2014: "I should recall how the Muslims are flooding Europe to later conquer, or, in other terms, destroy it; how Europe manages all this, based on suicidal liberalism and brainless democracy. . . . Europe is beginning to realise where it has been taken by its liberal immigration policy. All of a sudden, they have realised that the breed of animal named multicultural society doesn't exist" (Kertész 2015). Similar statements were made by Péter Feldmájer, former president of Mazsihisz (the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities) (*24.hu* 2015), and by György Szabó, president of Mazsök (Jewish Heritage in Hungary) (MTI 2015).

15. Flörich told the *New York Times*: "It was horrifying when I saw those images of police putting numbers on people's arms. . . . It reminded me of Auschwitz. And then putting people on a train with armed guards to take them to a camp where they are closed in? Of course there are echoes of the Holocaust" (Lyman 2015).

16. Jewish activist and Aurora founder Adam Schonberger explains: "What does it mean to be a minority or an oppressed group in Hungary and how can we create a clearer vision of the other oppressed groups? I really hope this center is going to be a hub of understanding each other and of understanding the reality of our own identity at the same time" (Pickus 2014).

17. This follows Kocsis's work in 2012 toward enacting new laws making homelessness or sleeping rough in public effectively illegal (National Public Radio, April 6, 2012).

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