Engineered migration at the Greek–Turkish border: A spectacle of violence and humanitarian space

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Abstract

In February 2020, Turkey announced that the country would no longer prevent refugees and migrants from crossing into the European Union. The announcement resulted in mass human mobility heading to the Turkish border city of Edirne. Relying on freshly collected data through interviews and field visits, this article argues that the 2020 events were part of a state-led execution of 'engineered migration' through a constellation of actors, technologies and practices. Turkey's performative act of engineered migration created a spectacle in ways that differ from the spectacle's usual materialization at the EU's external borders. By breaking from its earlier role as a partner, the Turkish state engaged in a countermove fundamentally altering the dyadic process through which the spectacle routinely materializes at EU external borders around the hypervisibilization of migrant illegality. Reconceptualizing the spectacle through engineered migration, the article identifies two complementary acts by Turkish actors: the spectacularization of European (Greek) violence and the creation of a humanitarian space to showcase Turkey as the 'benevolent' actor. The article also discusses how the sort of hypervisibility achieved through the spectacle has displaced violence from its points of emergence and creation and becomes the routinized form of border security in Turkey.

Keywords

Engineered migration, European Union, migration control, spectacle, Turkey

Introduction

On 28 February 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that Turkey would no longer stop refugees and migrants from crossing into the European Union (EU) and that the country's borders with Greece were now open for free passage. Turkish police, gendarmerie, coast-guards and border guards were ordered to stand down and not to practise interception operations. Immediately after the announcement, the news spread on mainstream media using language that

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encouraged migrants and refugees residing in the country at the time to head out to the border province of Edirne, which constitutes Turkey's land border with the EU. Hundreds of people gathered at Istanbul's main bus terminal with the aim of reaching the border town while thousands were making preparations to depart.[1] Many paid extra fees to secure a seat in intercity buses and undertook the journey on their own. Others were put onto buses run by Turkey's Presidency of Migration Management (PMM)[2] and transported directly to the border. According to the reports of bar associations, hundreds of people in the removal centres of different Turkish cities were forcibly brought to the border and waited there before gradually attempting to cross into Greece (Yüce, 2020).

Pazarkule border gate with Greece was targeted deliberately by Turkish security officials who aimed to concentrate the migrant population in the buffer zone at and around the gate. The selection of the Pazarkule border gate was puzzling since its physical setting is not conducive to an undetected border crossing. Its surroundings are where border control has traditionally been highly militarized, while huge infrastructural investments have more recently been made by Greece to promote the monitoring, control and deterrence aspects of this particular border geography, such as the Evros border fence built in 2012. The Greek government responded to border-crossing attempts by thousands with violence, including the use of chemical substances, plastic bullets, tear gas and even real bullets, resulting in at least two deaths in addition to many injuries (Amnesty International, 2020, 2021). For approximately a month, images of violence and injured bodies were highly mediatized and broadcasted on a daily basis in Turkey and in international media until Turkish authorities forcibly evacuated those at the border on 27 March 2020 amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. We argue that in the context of the February/March events, a spectacle, albeit with its own peculiar traits, was produced and performed by the Turkish state through an 'engineered migration'. Borrowed from Kelly Greenhill (2010), this term refers to situations where human mobility is manufactured by a state in order to tarnish the image and reputation of another state in the eyes of both a domestic and international public. The February/March events were part of a state-led constellation which brought together a range of state and non-state actors, technologies and practices. The Turkish state put considerable effort into utilizing its infrastructural, logistical and technological capacities to produce a controlled mobility alongside its ultimate political objective of exposing the border and migration regime of the EU as discriminatory.

As an extremely mediatized and hypervisible spectacle, the Pazarkule event needs scholarly attention and exploration. The notion of 'border spectacle' (De Genova, 2002, 2013) refers to hypervisible (re)presentations of migrant bodies as obscenely 'illegal' through spectacular exercises of border enforcement, which hollows out the process in which such 'illegality' is created for its spectators. The making of the spectacle of the engineered migration in Pazarkule comprises two complementary acts: the spectacularization of European (Greek) violence and the creation of a humanitarian space reflecting the 'benevolent' image of the Turkish state.

The article relies on primary data collected through field research conducted in September and October 2020, six months after the Pazarkule events. In total, we conducted 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of nongovernmental organizations operating in the buffer zone at the Pazarkule border gate, in addition to mukhtars and village administration staff in border villages. In addition, we had dozens of open conversations on a daily basis with local villagers and migrants on the move. Our interlocuters were among the few people who had been permitted by the authorities to enter the restricted area at the border while carrying out daily humanitarian activities until the evacuation. Their testimonies were pivotal to uncovering the implicit knowledge and practices materialized in the demarcated space of Pazarkule. Our fieldwork took place in different border sites in the city of Edirne, particularly four border villages around the Pazarkule border gate and at the closest locations to the Evros river which saw the most concentrated mobility during the

February/March 2020 events. The interviews conducted with local villagers, mukhtars and facilitators provided us with nuanced and grounded insights into how engineered migration was materialized at that time. Furthermore, our subsequent visits to the border villages revealed that what had been spectacularized back then has become the routine. More precisely, the Evros border has continued to be de facto open on the Turkish side, and the elevated level of violence during the Pazarkule event has been normalized in ways that attest to previous findings (Karadağ and Bahar, 2022). Finally, we undertook a document analysis of existing reports, circulated official statements, broadcast videos, press releases and daily news.

Producing spectacle through engineered migration

Borders are key political institutions for the execution of modern sovereign power. Through border policing, nation states – and increasingly non-state actors – define, sort out and differentiate forms of human mobility based on context-specific and historicized understandings of legality/illegality (Salter, 2003). One way in which states perform sovereignty is through the 'border spectacle' – a concept put forward by Nicholas De Genova (2002, 2013). The border spectacle is 'the spectacle of enforcement' (De Genova, 2013: 1181), where 'migrant "illegality" is rendered spectacularly visible' (De Genova, 2015) in the racialized and criminalized image of the migrant (De Genova, 2013). The spectacle marks the border 'as a scene of ostensible exclusion, in which the purported naturalness and putative necessity of exclusion may be demonstrated, verified, validated and legitimated' (De Genova, 2013: 1181). It is 'the fetish of transgression' (De Genova, 2013: 1189) that the spectacle renders hypervisible for public consumption (Van Dessel, 2023) through a combination of such practices as discursive formations, images and datafication, which work to constitute border crossings 'as the brazen acts of veritable outlaws' (De Genova, 2013: 1189) who must be halted and counteracted. An ever-increasing spectacularization of interceptions, apprehensions, detentions and deportations serves a 'mediatic performance' (Carlotti, 2021: 5) put on by states to ascribe migrant 'illegality' a commonsensical nature.

De Genova (2013) has developed the concept of the spectacle by drawing on Guy Debord's monograph entitled *Society of the Spectacle* (1983), a critique of consumerism and alienated masses. For Debord, what lends the spectacle its essence 'is not the collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by the images' (Debord, 1983: 2). De Genova extends Debord's formulation of the spectacle to the study of border enforcement. This enables De Genova to move beyond an understanding of the spectacle as a matter of 'crisis' ostensibly caused by 'unauthorized/illegal' border crossings and to argue, instead, for a deeper engagement with the spectacle's essential character as a '*mise-en-scène*' (De Genova, 2013: 1185). The hypervisibility of migrant 'illegality' through border enforcement performs the 'magic trick of displacing "illegality" from its point of production (in the law) to the proverbial "scene of crime"'; that is, the border-crossing attempt and its prevention by the state (De Genova, 2013: 1189). It is border policing and immigration law that produce the notion of the 'illegal alien' and 'illegality'. The latter, which the spectacle purports to combat, is the product of law (De Genova, 2002: 436). Through its racializing and criminalizing portrayal of border transgressors, the spectacle detaches reality from its wider conditions of emergence. The law which produces migrant illegality in the first place becomes invisible in the spectacularized acts of arrests, pushbacks and expulsions (Andersson, 2016; De Genova, 2002, 2013).

De Genova's concept of the border spectacle has become a key point of reference within academic debates at the intersection of critical security studies and critical border studies. These include works on contemporary border policing by, for example, the EU (Stierl, 2018; Van Reekum, 2016) and Australia (Horsti and Neumann, 2019). In addition to its role as 'the exemplary theater

for staging the spectacle of "the illegal alien"' (De Genova, 2002: 426), the border provides the scene of grandiose acts of humanitarianism by the countries of the 'Global North'. The enactment of illegality is intertwined with the simultaneous victimization of migrants and the state's self-projection as a 'paternalistic (indeed, patriarchal) "protection racket"' (De Genova, 2013: 1191). The Mediterranean Sea is one such geography of recurrent instances of the border spectacle displaying this dual purpose. Through video footages and pictures circulating through traditional and new media tools, EU interceptions and rescue missions of a capsizing boat turn into spectacles of 'illegal passage' with 'white Europeans pulling black people out of the sea' (Mainwaring and DeBono, 2021: 1042). Another instance of hypervisibility was the image of three-year-old Alan Kurdi's dead body on a Turkish beach, which gained an 'iconic status as the symbol of the Mediterranean refugee crisis' accompanied by narratives of migrant suffering and vulnerability (Ibrahim, 2018: 3). Similar to the notion of the 'illegal alien', the 'migrant-as-victim' image obscures the structural factors and conditions that create migrant vulnerability. It locates violence, death and suffering in the 'shameless "smuggler/trafficker"' (Van Dessel, 2023: 761), which allows the state to stage a scene of 'protection [that] is not merely preserved for its own "rightful" citizens but even for some of its migrant denizens' (De Genova, 2013: 1191). But the Global North's restrictive and discriminatory border regime, which forces people to become dependent on smugglers/traffickers for life-threatening journeys, also completely disappears from the view through the spectacle of humanitarianism (Van Dessel, 2023).

Studies have also looked at the materialization of the spectacle beyond the EU's territorial limits through externalization policies and practices. Sebastian Carlotti (2021), for example, examines how the spectacle of illegality emanating from the EU's definitions and problematizations of human mobility finds its way – or not – into the everyday border practices of West African states. Julia Van Dessel (2023) focuses on 'migration information campaigns' as an understudied aspect of EU externalization efforts in Niger. She argues that the so-called 'awareness-raising campaigns' in Niger belong to a deterrence strategy 'by spectacularizing the EU's externalized border' (2023: 750). Information campaigns make use of a range of methods, including film screening, real-life testimonies of returned migrants and artwork producing two narratives. The first is victimization, whereby migrant suffering is made spectacularly visible through representations of different forms of vulnerabilities that migrants are subjected to in the hands of smugglers/traffickers. The second narrative rests on migrant 'stigmatization', which reduces migration decisions to a matter of individual choice resulting from an inability or lack of interest to exploit opportunities in the country of origin by leaving for the EU. Taken together, the two narratives 'conceal the political causes of the violence faced by migrants on their way to North Africa and Europe and to delegitimize those who persist with migration in spite of these risks' (Van Dessel, 2023: 765).

We argue that the February/March 2020 events at Turkey's borders with Greece paved the way for a spectacle. At the same time, a closer look at these events demonstrates that this case is different from the examples given above. As Casas-Cortes et al. compellingly argue, 'every form of border produces its own spectacle', and we must 'be aware of these various moments and forms of production' (2015: 68). For instance, information campaigns that Van Dessel (2023) focuses on demonstrate the nexus between the externalization and the spectacularization of the EU's border. Put differently, the spectacle turns into a scene of externally promoted securitized and humanitarian logics. Here, the spectacle emerges through processes of reproduction of and compliance with the EU's border and migration control logics and practices in extra-EU geographies. In the context of the February/March 2020 events in Turkey, however, the spectacle is a product of what Kelly Greenhill has termed 'engineered migration', which refers to 'cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated in order to induce political, military and/or economic

concessions from a target state or states' (2010: 13). Here, a state manufactures migration and human bodies for political – and times military – purposes. Since the 1950s, dozens of attempts at engineered migration have taken place around the world with half of these successful in reaching their goals, as Greenhill's analysis shows. One strategy that actors employ aims to inflict 'hypocrisy costs' on the state party that the engineered migration targets. Hypocrisy costs are 'those symbolic costs that can be imposed when there exists a real or perceived disparity between a professed commitment to liberal values and norms and demonstrated actions that contravene such a commitment' (Greenhill, 2010: 4). For Greenhill, states particularly make use of this strategy if they think that exposing such a gap between previous commitment and current behaviour will harm the image and reputation of the target state – domestically and internationally.

This article concurs with Greenhill's argument about the central role of hypocrisy costs in engineered migration. The point of divergence concerns the liberal/illiberal divide which is assumed to lie in the differential manner through which norms are harnessed and used by the parties in question. For Greenhill, norms matter for challenger states in so far as they can be exploited to attain goals which are otherwise very unlikely to be achieved. Challengers, who are predominantly illiberal states, worry little, if at all, about reputational costs for their norm-violating behaviour because their primary concern is to maximize bargaining benefits to gain engineered migration. The target countries being liberal democracies, however, are vulnerable to moral and normative contradictions due to their essential characteristics that constrain their behaviour in crisis situations like migratory pressures. In short, liberal and illiberal states view and approach norms differently in situations where migration is engineered for political, economic and military purposes (Greenhill, 2010).

This article challenges the liberal/illiberal dichotomy, which reduces challenger states' engagement with norms to practices of exploitation and violation. During the 2020 events, Turkey's imposition of hypocrisy costs on the EU was only one aspect of its engineered migration. Equally important was that the Turkish state rebelled against the taken-for-granted normative hierarchy which tends to place the EU above the 'rest' with respect to adherence to humanitarianism and a rights-based approach in the governance of irregular migration. By engineering migration, Turkey made a countermove seeking to topple the EU's superiority in the global normative ordering. Contrary to Greenhill's argument (2010) regarding challengers, Turkey's actions were driven by reputational considerations and an agenda of rebranding its humanitarian image that takes the form of setting the *mise en scène* through engineered migration. The country's attempts at subjecting the EU to hypocrisy costs went hand in hand with its objective to generate a new normative hierarchy of actors with an elevated status for Turkey vis-à-vis its EU counterparts.

This is where the spectacle became crucial to the process of reordering actors in normative terms. Existing accounts of the border spectacle take the (co-)production of illegality for granted. Put differently, whether it is the countries of the Global North or their interlocutors in the Global South, the hypervisibilization of the illegal migrant is what turns the border into a spectacle. As a key partner of the EU in migration control, Turkey's border enforcement practices were part of the joint constitution of the spectacle in their participation in the EU's rendering of migrant illegality through diverse technical and technological investments (İşleyen, 2018a; Karadağ, 2019). The 2020 events fundamentally altered this dyadic process through a countermove by the Turkish state. What we see is that the partner state is no longer the compliant and willing collaborator in border spectacle's enactment through the image of the illegal migrant. On the contrary, Turkey abandoned its previous role in the spectacularization of migrant illegality and reconfigured the spectacle in new ways. It was no longer illegality that was the constitutive element of border enforcement, as a result of which the migrant ceased to be the object of Turkey's securitized migration control.

Through engineered migration, Turkey took on the role of a facilitator of human mobility. The following question then arises: When migration becomes engineered by the partner state based on a narrative of 'journey to hope', what becomes of the spectacle? What is rendered hypervisibilized and what is hidden from view? These are the two central questions that the border spectacle scholarship has so far dealt with.

We argue that engineered migration is an important tool for understanding and analysing the spectacle in the particular case of the 2020 events. By unpacking the emergence, operation and termination of the engineered migration, we can get insights into how an alternative spectacle was created at the EU's external borders. Through its performative acts, Turkey challenged the prevalent and entrenched discourses and visual formations underpinning the public image of the spectacle at the edges of Europe. Once human mobility became a matter of engineering or manufacturing, the parameters within which the spectacle mediates meanings, reactions and social relations were fundamentally altered and redefined.

Engineered migration in the making: Mobilizing bodies to the Pazarkule border gate

Since the early 20th century, the Greek–Turkish border has assumed a discursive, symbolic and material role in the nation-building process of both countries, dividing the Thrace region by the Evros border, once unified under Ottoman rule, into Eastern Thrace (Turkey) and Western Trace (Greece) (Kasli, 2014). While it has historically been a site of cross-border movement, the Evros borderland has been reconfigured by the influence of new migratory movements from the 2000s onwards during which a 'new security regime' in the face of the EU-ization of migration and border policies has been put into practice not only by Greece but also by Turkey (Dimitriadi, 2013). Since then, the Evros region has been increasingly incorporated into the European border regime with the intensification of border technologies equipped with automated surveillance systems, thermal cameras and thermovision vans (TVVs), expansion of detention and removal centres both in Evros and Edirne and construction of the fence (Karamanidou et al., 2021; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). While the surveillance infrastructures have been enhanced, the presence of Frontex in Evros has become permanent since 2010. Following a request by the Greek government to the EU in 2010, a RABIT (Rapid Border Intervention Team) operation was launched, which was then folded into Operation Poseidon Land in 2011 with smaller teams. Since 2015, the operation called JO Flexible Operational Activities has been pursued in cooperation with Greek forces (Karamanidou and Kasparek, 2020).

Following the EU–Turkey Statement of March 2016, the existing surveillance mechanisms and internal checkpoints on the Turkish side were further intensified (İşleyen, 2018a; Karadağ, 2019). Facilitators who attempted to transfer people into Edirne were sentenced to three to four months' prison time. On the other hand, migrants were detained in the city's removal centre, and repetition of such attempts resulted in deportations. Our respondent, an NGO expert in Edirne, confirms the intensified bordering mechanisms in Edirne, noting: 'We have been in close cooperation with law-enforcement units in the city for the last five years, and until Pazarkule events, there had been a serious struggle against irregular migration' (Interview 1).

The events of February/March 2020 stand as a turning point in the decade-long history of technologies of surveillance and interception in Turkey. Turkey's endeavours to manage border security in Edirne were reversed overnight in February 2020 with the mobilization of state infrastructure to condition and facilitate the movement of migrants to the border region and beyond. Since the signing of the March 2016 Statement, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan occasionally raised

complaints about the implementation of the agreement and voiced 'warnings' about Turkey's having no choice but to open up its borders with the EU. When 34 Turkish soldiers were killed in the province of Idlib in Syria on 27 February 2020, these warnings turned into actuality. Erdoğan played the trump card in Turkey's increasingly strained relations with the EU and declared that the government had decided to open the country's borders with Greece (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Turkish police, gendarmerie and coastguards were ordered to stand down their operations of interception and border security.

On the very same night of Erdoğan's televised statement on 27 February 2020, engineered migration was set in motion through the activation of communication among relevant state institutions, local associations, local governments and law-enforcement units as well as commercial bus companies and taxis. In his account of how Turkish authorities engineered migration, our respondent stated that 'a memo saying that the border gates with Greece would be opened suddenly spread everywhere through WhatsApp groups' (Interview 1). Our fieldwork reveals that the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), the sole authority in migration policy operating in close cooperation with district governors, mayors and police departments, played an active role in the mobilization and orchestration of migrant mobility:

> People in the removal centres were brought to the area by buses. From different provinces as well as from the removal centre in Edirne [. . .] But these big buses did not have a PMM logo on the front side. The PMM usually uses small minibus type vehicles. When big buses are needed, they rent from private companies [. . .] But we knew that these big buses or vehicles belonged to the PMM. And they even openly admitted that in the field. The PMM itself stated that there was no one left in the removal centres and that they had brought everyone here. (Interview 1)

Another expert, a regional director of the institution, noted that

> we were always talking among ourselves with our offices in other regions to coordinate. Based on our coordination, we certainly know that they [the PMM] emptied removal centres across the country, and detained migrants who had been waiting for deportation were brought to the border area by buses. (Interview 2)

She continued by stating that the removal centres were still empty (on the date of interview), and that there was no one left except those detained for judicial cases. Experts we interviewed who operate in the Edirne office confirmed that a similar situation was true for the removal centres in Edirne and Pehlivanköy which were emptied leaving behind only those held for criminal cases.

For our respondents, the evacuation of removal centres was pivotal. In 2020, there were 28 removal centres across the country with a total capacity of nearly 20,000 migrants. The comprehensive report on refugee protection in Turkey during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic includes results similar to our findings regarding the release and transfer of undocumented migrants from removal centres (Üstübici and Karadağ, 2020). Furthermore, another report, based on interviews with migrants, asserts that Iranian migrants in Ağrı removal centre (in eastern Turkey) were forcibly brought to the border without their request (Hak İnisiyatifi, 2020). With respect to the forced transfers, our respondent described the exceptionality of Pazarkule events as follows:

> It was 2013 in Edirne when there was another crisis, a movement that consisted of 5000 people, we observed that too in the field. In that crisis, however, people were not directed to the border – they were stopped. Everything was done to control the group, and they tried to convince people to return. But Pazarkule was the opposite. People were encouraged or forced to the border [. . .] In removal centres,

people were threatened by saying that if you do not go to Edirne, you cannot get out of here [. . .] Not only in removal centres, but also the person who had been pushed back to the Evros river and wanted to return, was put into the bus and taken to another point of the border to try again. For instance, a person could not cross from Meriç district, he was taken onto a bus and transferred to the Uzunköprü region to try again (Interview 1).

In addition to the transfer from removal centres, on the day after the announcement, hundreds of buses and vehicles were waiting in the squares of many districts of Istanbul; while some of them were private bus companies, others had no logos and were carrying people to the border for free.[3] In line with other observations, our results show that the state apparatus activated and coordinated not only the border security actors but also a broader array of actors, be they state and non-state ones, in the transfer of migrant bodies. These actors were mobilized to transport people from inland areas to the border zone. However, the entire process facilitating the mobility towards the Evros border region was kept invisible from the public eye, including in the mobilization of transportation and the evacuation of removal centres.

During our field visits to the border villages, mukhtars and villagers repeatedly described the novel and extraordinary character of this situation. Overnight, their villages started to host thousands of people circulating on daily basis:

> They were coming with buses every night. Seven or eight large buses per day. Buses with 40 seats or 100 seats [. . .] Buses were coming here under the supervision of police. At the first stage, it was very extreme, it exceeded 1000–1500 people per day [. . .] All coffee houses (*kıraathane*), the school and the wedding hall were filled with migrants. Little kids and little babies. That night, it was one of the first nights, there was heavy rain and families could not go on. In the next days, after the rain stopped, they were guided to the river in groups of 15 or 20. Some were guided by security forces and some by the facilitators. The facilitators had inflatable boats and motorboats and they were releasing people in groups of 20 wherever there were no Greek soldiers on the opposite site. (Interview 3)

Amnesty International (2020) confirms what our respondent, a mukhtar of a border village, noted. Buses were 'travelling towards the border in convoy escorted by ambulance and police vehicles, state officials paying for fuel for buses and gendarmerie officers disembarking people and instructing them to walk the short remaining distance' to the border (Amnesty International, 2020: 10). The testimonies of NGOs on the ground confirm how state apparatus acted as the *prime movers* of migrants by means of an infrastructure activated via sociotechnological constellations that were intentionally conditioned, designed and operated by the Turkish state. In some cities, the PMM used its own capacities to carry the inhabitants while, in others, the presidency worked in cooperation with municipalities to carry out transportation or simply encouraged and directed migrants to head to the border area (Interview 4). As noted, migrants arrived by vehicles of all kinds, including large buses, minibuses and even taxis, from all parts of Turkey. 'We were on the field till the early morning of the first day of the announcement, and there were vehicles with licence plates belonging to almost all provinces of the country', says our interlocutor (Interview 5). He continues:

> We were shocked on the first evening; they come by cars, taxis and buses. They were passing police checkpoints without any hindrance and even asking the police for the address of the Pazarkule border gate. We told ourselves that this couldn't be real, that it was a dream, but we got used to it the next day. (Interview 5)

While thousands of migrants were mobilized to the Evros region, the Pazarkule border gate was deliberately designated by the Turkish authorities as a concentration locus to be spectacularized.

For our local respondents, what was even more striking was that migrants were allowed to enter the buffer zone between Turkey and Greece, which had previously been strictly forbidden to all civilians, citizens and migrants alike. Our respondent explained his awe in the face of this situation:

> This is first-degree restricted military area, so we were really surprised. We have been observing the Edirne border for five years, and these buses could now easily enter the previously restricted areas, in which even we were not allowed, with the help and direction of the police and gendarme on top of it. I am from Edirne, I grew up in border villages, and I haven't seen anything like that for 30 years. (Interview 1)

Before the 2020 events, surveillance cameras, police checkpoints and other preventive measures en route to the Evros border restricted and conditioned, if not completely ceased, migrant mobility. The radical shift in Turkey's border policy with its European neighbours and the altered attitude of the armed forces towards migrants in the region have drastically changed the nature and intensity of this mobility. While this engineered migration was in the making, thousands of migrants attempting to cross the Evros river were dispersed along the river coast, but the Pazarkule border gate was chosen as the epicentre of media attention where approximately 13,000 people were intentionally directed and transported (International Organization for Migration, 2020) as well as the epicentre of state infrastructure as the most condensed site of migrant population. As our respondent put it, 'when thousands of people gather in the same place, it becomes the agenda of the whole world' (Interview 1).

In the next sections we will show how engineered migration that was orchestrated but kept invisible by the Turkish state employed two complementary forms of spectacularization that took place at the Pazarkule buffer zone in February/March 2020. Recent significant investments by Turkey in border infrastructure and technological capacities that were readily equipped with thermal cameras, camera traps, drones and other surveillance devices at the Pazarkule gate served to materialize the dual logic of the engineered migration: a spectacle of Greek/EU brutality and of the humanitarian space created by the Turkish state.

A spectacle of Greek/EU brutality

Karamanidou and Kasparek have pointedly noted that pushbacks and other forms of violence have been routine technologies of border management in Evros for decades, an 'enduringly tolerated practice' that paradigmatically characterizes and is aptly embedded in the racialized border regimes of liberal states (2022: 14). The acts of pushbacks, degrading conditions of detention and physical, sexual and verbal violence in the Evros region have been continuously documented by NGOs, activists and human rights organizations over the last two decades (Amnesty International, 2005; Forensic Architecture, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2008; Pro Asyl, 2007, 2013). The events of February/March 2020 were manifestations of the *longue durée* of border violence as well as the hegemonic narratives of 'extra-legal normality' in the Evros region (Demetriou, 2019; Karamanidou and Kasparek 2022). But they are also novel in the sense that the use of border violence, which had been previously ignored, denied by Greek/EU officials and kept hidden from the public eye, was now being circulated, televised and even broadcast live on mainstream channels in Turkey under the narrative of 'crime against humanity'.[4] Furthermore, following the spectacle of the Pazarkule event, the once-hidden and denied border violence by Greek officials, which had reached its peak during the abovementioned incidents, became a banal aspect of the Evros border.

In this state-orchestrated mobility, the borders were open on the Turkish side while, as expected, an opposite trend was in play in Greece. We argue that in the making of the engineered migration,

Turkey deliberately rendered the preparation stage invisible from the public eye and presented it as an instance of spontaneous mobility burst onto scene. The entire process of manufacturing that led the way to the Pazarkule events were erased from the public imaginary while its outcomes were narrated as the sole and naked reality itself. In that regard, in the creation of the spectacle at the EU external borders, engineered migration was illustrated as an autonomous one in line with which this mobility's emergence and operation was erased from public view while its outcome, namely the violent response of Greek/EU forces, became hypervisible. Hence, unlike the original connotations of 'border spectacle' in the literature, in our case, the spectacle involves dialectical interconnectedness between the scene of Greek/EU brutality and the obscurity of engineered migration.

The response by Greek forces took violent forms, including the use of chemical substances, stun grenades, plastic bullets and tear gas, beating and even shooting, resulting in at least two deaths and thousands of injuries (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020). Thousands of people were trapped in the buffer zone at and around the Pazarkule border gate for approximately a month under extremely vulnerable conditions. The police and army were mobilized, and Frontex announced[5] the deployment of an additional 100 border guards at the Greek land border as part of a rapid border intervention on the request of the Greek government.

What was novel during the Pazarkule events is that all forms of violence by Greek/EU border forces were watched live on TV channels for weeks in Turkey as well as in the international media, including footage of people being pushed back, injured, shot in the head, poisoned by tear gas, covered in blood, having their arm cut off and even killed. The news on TV channels, circulated photos and video clips, real-time testimonies of migrants, production of short movies prepared by Turkish state authorities and pro-government media actors implied a pornography of violence exerted by the Greek and EU authorities. Every physical contact between migrants and the Greek police offered unique opportunities for the Turkish government to record and stage scenes of assault, abuse, beating, stripping and pushback in line with its objective of tarnishing the image of Greece and the EU (Turkish Chamber of Medical Doctors, 2020). As noted, the technological infrastructure at the Pazarkule border gate was already in place to function as a hypervisibilized concentration locus due to the recent upgrade of the surveillance equipment.

The violence used by Greek security officials was repeatedly pointed out by the President, the Minister of Interior, the Governor of Edirne as well as the vice-president of the PMM. For instance, on March 16, President Erdoğan stated that:

> [the Greek forces] need to know that their attitude at the border line is a murder. There are four or five refugees they killed at the border. We will account for them. We will not leave it there. Likewise, we will carry the forced stripping of people with all the pictures to the attention of the UN General Assembly this year. (16 March 2020)[6]

The high-tech infrastructure, once established to control unauthorized mobility, was now mobilized to record and archive the brutal acts of the Greek border security, to render their violence hypervisible for public consumption and finally to display the miserable conditions of migrants. Drones were used to visualize the movement from a bird's eye view along the coasts of Evros in which the once illegalized border crossings were now rebranded as 'journey to hope'.[7] The narrative and imagery produced and circulated in Turkey during the Pazarkule events aimed to portray the Greek/EU brutality as the sole 'culprit', while neither the primary role of the Turkish state as the manufacturer of this mobility nor the manipulation of displaced bodies was ever mentioned. In other words, the entire process that led the way to the Pazarkule events was erased from the public imaginary while its outcomes were presented as the sole and naked reality itself.

The local testimonies indicate that in addition to the spectacularization of the brutality of the Greek forces on Turkish and international media, the Turkish security actors were exercising 'encouragement', in other words, psychological pressure on migrants who were not willing to continue their incursions and physical conflict in the form of 'pep talks': 'If you slack off like that, you will not be able to pass the border. Carry on.' (Interview 6)

In a similar vein, in the accounts of border villagers, the narrative of shameless and pitiless smugglers/traffickers who had been previously portrayed as the villains responsible for all migrants' suffering and vulnerability, was totally abandoned after the Pazarkule events. The malicious 'smugglers' of the past were now replaced by a narrative of 'facilitators'. In the interviews, locals repeatedly expressed their compassion for migrant women and mothers, naked and injured bodies, barefoot babies or helpless elderly as the ones embodying the ultimate symbol of vulnerability, and accordingly, a new narrative emerged in which the only actors to blame were the Greek/EU authorities.

A spectacle of humanitarian space: Marketing the Turkish state as a humanitarian actor

It was not only about exposing the brutality of the 'other', but this laid the ground for the Turkish state to present itself as the 'benevolent' actor in contrast. The engineered migration of 2020 offered unique circumstances for the Turkish government to create a humanitarian setting from scratch and to stage the scenes of humanitarianism by producing opposing images of the 'self' and the EU 'other' (Karadağ, 2019). Infrastructure was used to shine out as the 'humanitarian actor' during this 'crisis' and to market its own state-led humanitarianism.

Once again, the technological infrastructure at the Pazarkule border gate functioned to create a humanitarian space demarcated by Turkish law-enforcement authorities where care and control coexisted. The intertwined logics of caring for migrants through compassion and the restriction of their movement have been extensively studied in the case of both EU border-control practices (e.g. Cuttitta, 2018; Mainwaring and DeBono, 2021; Pallister-Wilkins, 2020) and Turkey (İşleyen, 2018b; see Karadağ's contribution to the Geopolitics forum by El Qadim et al., 2021). What makes the 2020 events in Turkey novel is that the spectacle of Turkey's humanitarianism was the constitutive element of concealed engineered migration rather than merely an operational exercise responding to the 'here and now' of emergency and human suffering. Right after the gathering of the people in the buffer zone, the Turkish police and gendarmerie enclosed an area to contain the migrants, and engineered the spectacle in this *mise-en-scène*.

Although state-led humanitarian scenes and Turkey's purportedly 'benevolent' gesture towards migrants were highly mediatized, there is no research that unpacks this humanitarian space in terms of how it was produced, materialized, performed and finally evacuated. Our fieldwork aimed to fill this gap by reaching local experts and NGOs who were authorized to enter and operate in this contained space. The testimonies of our respondents reveal that the infrastructure was integral to the simultaneous promotion and containment of the mobility through the generation of humanitarian space.

> Right after the settlement of tents in the buffer zone, the area was completely under the control of the gendarmerie and the police, no entry or exit was allowed in any way. Karaağaç [a border village] is the closest neighbourhood to the Pazarkule border gate, people who were going to that district [for basic needs and phone charge] were registered in order and with their fingerprints, and they were able to leave that area and only those people were allowed to return. Those who came after these prohibitions and restrictions could not enter the zone. It was subject to permission, both entry and exit. (Interview 1)

Our field research indicates that in this contained zone, the gendarmerie and the police were operating tight control of entries and exits while the PMM carried out registrations through fingerprints by orchestrating state capacities on the field. The PMM also supervised the actions of state and non-state actors and assigned tasks to law-enforcement units. The surrounding area was not only the space of identification and surveillance, but also a state-led humanitarian setup where NGOs were subjected to the filtering measures of state authorities. The Turkish government authorized only a handful of NGOs (in addition to UNHCR and UNICEF) to partake in humanitarian activities in the demarcated area. In addition, quotas were imposed on those accredited NGOs; that is, only a certain number of staff were given access (Interview 8).

Other non-state actors attempting to enter the zone to deliver aid were asked to hand over their provisions to state authorities. As volunteers of one of those unauthorized NGOs, our respondents describe the police interrogation when they sought to partake in activities in the demarcated humanitarian space:

> The police took away my and my friend's phones and started to interrogate us. "Why are you here?" they asked. We said: "We work for an NGO. We are here to distribute provisions to migrants. It was not our intention to come here." They told us that we were in the restricted area and had to pay a fine of 13,000 TL. Then they let us go. The police were extremely careful of not letting non-migrants into the area. They checked our phones to see whether we had taken any photos of the area. I was able to send the photos to a friend of mine before my phone was taken away. By no means, the armed forces would like people to take photos or talk to migrants there. (Interview 7)

As migrants carried out protests and clashed with the Greek police in the zone on a daily basis, medical assistance was a predominant form of care by the Turkish authorities. Due to the frequent and intense violence used by Greek forces through high-pressure water, tear gas and plastic bullets, injuries were frequent in the restricted area (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020). In some cases, migrants fell while running away from Greek armed forces. During Greek pushbacks, wounds caused by plastic bullets, fractures on feet and ankles were recorded. Given the frequency and severity of injuries, access to health services and medical needs was a major requirement, and the Turkish state provided it. In the region, a field tent hospital was operating under the authorization of a governmental emergency service, UMKE (National Medical Rescue Team). Many NGO representatives in the field agreed that the provision of medical care as well as basic needs was insufficient despite the humanitarian infrastructure of the Turkish state (Amnesty International, 2020; Support to Life, 2020)

> On various occasions, people with chronic diseases passed out while waiting in the long food tails queues under the burning sun. Migrants made fires on their own to get warm and sometimes children fell into those fires. Their hands and legs were burned. We often distributed canned food and, in one instance, a child cut his tongue with the sharp edge of the can. (Interview 8)

Our interviewees reported that there were also manifold unforeseen emergencies and cases of injuries in the area due to the occasional fights which broke out between different migrant groups.

During the Pazarkule events, all these humanitarian practices were exceedingly mediatized and discursively circulated, with daily official statements of how the Turkish government was 'taking care' of the migrants and providing aid. However, despite the spectacularized humanitarian setting, our respondents also talked about extremely inadequate quantities of food, which contributed to long line-ups merely for soup and bread (Association of Bridging Peoples, 2020;

Hak İnisiyatifi, 2020; Support to Life, 2020). Sometimes, exhausted and despondent migrants had to pass through a strict control of entry and exit in order to go to the closest town three kilometres away for groceries from the cheapest supermarket. To carry back the supplies, they had to rent overcharged horse-drawn carriages. People had to build their own tents due to the lack of shelter provision. They slept on the ground or in makeshift tents constructed out of tree branches or plastic sheets taken from nearby agricultural sites. However, at the end of the day, it was Turkey that portrayed itself as the one-and-only humanitarian actor while the country shifted the root causes and sources of suffering, hunger and misery to Greece/the EU.

After a month of engineered migration and produced spectacle, the concentrated space of Pazarkule was evacuated. 'The next morning there were no tents on the site, when we went to the area on 29 March, the day after the evacuation, the area was unrecognizable, completely flattened with various construction equipment.' (Interview 1). This anecdote reveals how the state terminated the Pazarkule border gate setting which it had created in the first place. The NGOs with clearance to carry out humanitarian activities in the contained area encountered an empty space with no trace of those who had lived in the camp for a month nor the technological and humanitarian infrastructure.

This reversed mobility started in the middle of March, which corresponded to the announcement of the presence of Covid-19 in the country. Following the detection of the first case of infection, Turkish authorities initiated a process similar to the one at the start of the Pazarkule events.

The first returns took place with free bus rides to Istanbul and to other major cities operated and organized by the PMM. After the first wave of voluntary returns, the number of migrants remaining in the camp was 6000. While voluntary returns continued, the PMM tried to convince the remaining people to leave the area, which caused the number to drop to 3000. Akin to the process of mobilizing migrants at the outset, the PMM used the NGOs on the ground to communicate with, to deliver messages to and to convince migrants to leave the border area. As an incentive, NGOs proposed giving economic support to returning groups. Free bus rides and financial aid were also provided.

Before the evacuation of all remaining migrants and the dissolution of the area, volunteers of authorized NGOs were ordered to leave.

> We left the area after the last round of food distribution. Other NGOs had to leave as well. The order was given by the governorship of Edirne. I don't think that anyone besides the PMM personnel remained in the area. Everyone else, including the Red Crescent, was evacuated. Later, all remaining migrants were registered, their fingerprints were collected before they boarded buses and were transported to different cities, eight or nine of them, if I am not mistaken. (Interview 1)

The last remaining group, composed of approximately 2000 migrants, was the most resilient and resolute, as noted during our interviews. However, the stage of persuasion had already passed for the state actors, who, at that point, were not shy of resorting to force. The state apparatus and its infrastructure ceased to exist after the last remaining migrants were dropped on the streets of Istanbul, Izmir and other major cities in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak (Karadağ and Üstübici, 2021; Üstübici and Karadağ, 2020). The state abandoned migrants to their fate, and the vacuum of humanitarian aid was at that point, to some extent, filled by NGOs and local associations, which provided transportation and temporal shelter. Since then, what happened at the locus of Pazarkule border gate, the spectacularization of Greek/EU violence and Turkey's humanitarian image has diffused over the entire Evros border region and become routinized in the eyes of the Turkish public imaginary.

Conclusion

Through a focus on February/March 2020 events at Turkey's border with the EU, this article offers an alternative conceptualization of the spectacle that is reformulated and reconfigured under the circumstances of an engineered migration. When border enforcement is not actualized as a joint action of two neighbouring states producing migrant illegality as a scene of ostensible exclusion, and where a previously collaborative border regime is abandoned by one side, the notion of spectacle takes on new meanings and forms of relations. In the case of Pazarkule, the insidious nature of an engineered migration materialized by the Turkish state was kept away from public view. Instead, two complementary acts of spectacularization relied upon the constellations of images and discursive formations; that is, the spectacle of Greek/EU brutality vis-à-vis that of Turkey's humanitarianism.

Our article has aimed to unpack the process of engineered migration, its emergence and operation in order to understand an unprecedented form of spectacularization generated at the EU's external border. Our primary data from local non-state actors who were able to enter the banned zone of Pazarkule enabled us to reveal what was hidden and what was spectacularized. Furthermore, the spectacle created by February/March 2020 events has been routinized in terms of the dramatic shift in Turkish border enforcement practice from one of control/interception to one of inaction, and the creation of de facto open borders. Our triangulated data combining interviews/testimonies about February/March 2020 with fieldwork visits six months after the incidents attest to the routinization of the spectacle still hinging on the two complementary acts discussed in the article. In ways similar to Turkey's use of technology in the Aegean Sea (İşleyen, 2021), the systematic pushbacks by the Greek security services are still archived and circulated by the Turkish media while the narrative of Turkey's benevolence towards vulnerabilized bodies is spectacularized on a daily basis.

Similar scenes have taken place at the Polish–Belarusian border, which indicates that these findings on the Turkish case will most likely have a much wider academic and policy relevance in the near future. In November 2021, thousands were stranded in Belarus waiting for the opportunity to cross into the EU for protection. In addition to declaring a state of emergency, the Polish government accused the Belarusian state of allowing people to easily arrive at the border zone and of even promoting this mobility. Polish and other EU leaders went one step further by pointing the finger at Turkish Airlines for carrying people from conflict-ridden regions to Belarus, thereby perpetuating the situation at the border. Though Turkish Airlines announced that all flights followed international standards of identification, meaning that migrants possessed the documents for authorized travel to Belarus, the company agreed to stop the sale of one-way tickets from Turkey to Minsk and to limit the purchase of such tickets by people from Iraq, Syria and Yemen. These events demonstrate that EU borders will continue to host scenes laden with grandiose acts of prevention and protection accompanied by fetishized depictions of the bodies, which together work to mark the border as a site of exclusion, violence and compassion. The border reminds us that mobility is an unequal right forcing millions to undertake dangerous journeys to reach the countries of the Global North.

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Notes

1. https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2020/03/09/gidiyoruz-ama-turkiyeyi-hic-unutmayacagiz (accessed 12 July 2023).
2. During the February/March events, the name of the institution was the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). The status of the General Directorate was changed to Presidency in October 2021.
3. For further details on people piling up in Istanbul districts to go to Edirne, see https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/gundem/gocmenler-otobuslerle-goc-idaresinden-ayrildi-5650933/ (accessed 12 July 2023).
4. For the mainstream news in Turkey, see https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2020/03/09/gidiyoruz-ama-turkiyeyi-hic-unutmayacagiz (accessed 12 July 2023).
5. https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-launches-rapid-border-intervention-on-greek-land-border-J7k21h (accessed 12 July 2023).
6. https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/koronavirus/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-yunanistan-sinir-hattinda-takindigi-tavrin-cinayet-oldugunu-bilmeli/1760716 (accessed 12 July 2023).
7. The mainstream media daily featured the drone footage of migrants heading towards the border. See https://www.haberler.com/guncel/gocmen-hareketliligi-havadan-goruntulendi-2-12968156-haberi/ (accessed 12 July 2023).

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3. Mukhtar of a border village located at the nearest point to the Evros river, October 2020.
4. Lawyer and NGO expert, September 2020.
5. NGO expert, field manager, September 2020.
6. Member of solidarity association that conducted field observation during Pazarkule events, October 2020.
7. Member of solidarity association, October 2020.
8. Medical doctor and NGO expert, September 2020.

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