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ABSTRACT

State-centric explanations of life in Europe and (or, including) Turkey often do much more than account for differences between the two – they reify them. This paper notices similarities instead. Such an analytical exercise does not simply turn the older narrative upside down. It starts with accepting the pluriverse of relations unfolding within Turkey-EU spaces and chooses to experiment with the idea that what seems marginal can in fact be formative. My argument is situated in discussions about mobility – the latter being a chief destabilizer of the conventional idea of space as a perennial entity. Building on observations of diplomatic process, ethnographic moments and conversations with refugee rights workers and volunteers in the period around adoption of the 2016 Turkey-EU refugee deal, I show the analytical possibilities of studying spatiality through the eyes of islands dissenting from the current border regime. Their very existence, on both sides of Turkey/EU border is an invitation to pay closer attention to splits and similarities that run across inter-national borders, rather than along them.

Keywords: Europe, migration/mobility, space, Turkey, refugees

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Introduction

International Relations (IR) scholarship on Turkey *and* the European Union (EU) has mostly moved within the framework of difference demarcated by the borders of modern nation states. Narratives about their relations thus rely on containers of political, social or cultural spaces, often so simplified that they seem almost homogenous. This is to an extent a product of the state-centric approach of IR as a field, but even the more recent studies paying attention to non-state actors and transnational phenomena cannot escape the limits of national belongings. It is almost an imperative to use the phrase 'EU and Turkey' and thus reify a dividing line each time one tries to discuss events and processes in their map. The IR debates, though, show an awareness of the multiplicity of divisions – it is one thing to say 'Turkey is not an EU member' and quite another to declare that 'Turkey is not European.' And yet these two statements often go hand-in-hand, with non-Europeanness offered as a justification of non-membership, something really tiring for many long-term students of the relationship. Of course, cracks have been pointed out in such simplified narratives of differentiation. Bahar

Rumelili placed liminality (in-betweenness) firmly into the essential vocabulary of research on the relationship.[1] Other authors called for escapes from discussing Turkey as a 'unique' case.[2] And while field-defining texts in critical European studies[3] have established that the ambiguous space we call Europe is constituted by a diversity of actors and viewpoints, many of us still find it hard to conceptualize the spaces beyond the container of the nation state.

Bearing in mind that inter-*nationally*-conceptualized research frameworks no longer have the patent for explaining the world[4] and that not only border practices but also "desires for territorially bounded entity and identity" have already been established as violent,[5] this paper experiments by looking at Turkey-EU spaces through the worldviews of some of their unofficial protagonists. The door for such a pursuit was opened by recent Anthropocene literature[6] and the work done on island studies.[7] Through literature that view fragments and patches as potentially formative, the Turkey-EU space reveals itself to be perhaps surprisingly more connected than it may seem from the results of diplomatic summits. I propose "architectures of similarity" as a conceptual tool that allows us to grasp some of this connectivity. Few themes are so productive for showing architectures of similarity as mobility. It is precisely movement, crossing the (b)order, whether physically or metaphorically, that destabilizes the essentialized and imprecise framing of Turkey *and* Europe and helps us see inconsistencies in dominant assumptions of difference.

Working at the intersection of IR and anthropology, I invite the reader to think of Turkey and Europe interactions as patchworks of fragmented encounters. The research leading up to this paper started rather conventionally. In a book project on the politics of belonging,[8] I was hoping to present an argument that would deepen mutual understanding between the 'two sides'. Informed by ethnographic moments, interviews with policy-practitioners and surveys of diplomatic archives, I looked for a way of overcoming the trenches. That would, however, still involve taking for granted that there are *two parties* that can bridge their communication gaps or at least make sense of each other's cacophonies. It was the post-2015 period, when

1 Bahar Rumelili, "Liminality and Perpetuation of Conflicts: Turkish-Greek Relations in the Context of Community-Building by the EU", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 9, No 2, 2003, p. 213-248; Bahar Rumelili, "Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU's Mode of Differentiation", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 30, 2004, p. 27-47.

2 Paul Levin and Sinan Ciddi, "Interdisciplinarity and Comparison in Turkish Studies", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 15, No 4, 2014, p. 557-570; Murat Somer, "Theory-consuming or Theory-producing? Studying Turkey as a Theory-developing Critical Case", *Turkish Studies* Vol. 15, No 4, 2014, p. 571-588.

3 Such as Didier Bigo et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies*, London, Routledge, 2020.

4 Lucas Van Milders and Harmonie Toros, "Violent International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 26 (Special Issue), 2020, p. 116-139.

5 Stefan Borg and Thomas Diez, "Postmodern EU? Integration between Alternative Horizons and Territorial Angst", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 54, No 1, 2016, p. 136-151.

6 Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: on the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015; Delf Rothe, "Governing the End of Times? Planet Politics and the Secular Eschatology of the Anthropocene", *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 48, No 2, 2020, p. 143-164.

7 Jonathan Pugh, "Relationality and Island Studies in the Anthropocene", *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 13, No 2, 2018, p. 93-110; David Chandler and Jonathan Pugh, *Anthropocene Islands: Entangled Worlds*, London, Westminster University Press, 2021.

8 Lucia Najslova, *Turkey and the European Union: The Politics of Belonging*, London, IB Tauris/Bloomsbury, 2021.

mobility became a central theme in the diplomatic framework of the relationship as well as the interviews and observations of the positionality of NGO actors and volunteers, that helped me see that the fault lines in the many Turkey-EU spaces do not necessarily run only along the national border. In other words, while my research into the EU-Turkey relationship has been originally guided by a policy-oriented search for "making difference work", I encountered instead fragments of commonality across the imaginary (and material) border. IR of course has already moved beyond studying territorially bounded entities. It has done a lot of work in documenting transnational movements and processes. After all, that is the very subject of EU studies. The present essay is not so much focused on general questions of de-territorialized or fluid political authority.[9] It has a modest goal to show that worldmaking does not need to be locked into oppositionality or mirroring. To that end, it offers fragments from below that form miniature architectures of similarity, literal and metaphorical spaces that tick along the same clock, regardless of their respective territorial regime.

In terms of structure, the paper proceeds as follows: the first section discusses the patchiness of European space and the potential of recent Anthropocene literature to reveal new ways for thinking about it. The second section shows how the habit of taking spaces as perennially fixed[10] limits our understanding of variety of practices in the many Turkey-EU relations. The penultimate section then builds on experience of islands (people, aid workers and volunteers) who question the border regime. Their very existence disturbs the routine explanations of politics within an inter-*national* framework. Moreover, as Anthropocene scholars have shown, binaries such as same/different, Turkish/European, member/partner, while still guiding the dominant policy frameworks, are receiving new intellectual competitors. I thus conclude with an examination of the possibilities of connectivity in this new era. Focusing on similarity then neither erases nor replaces analytics of difference – it rather offers new vantage points for seeing the many relations in the EU-Turkey cosmos.

Experimenting with Patchworks, Noticing Architectures

Before delving deeper into Euro-Turkish territorial waters, let us spend a few paragraphs in the open seas. The growing complexity of cross-border flows and the emergence of a higher number of significant non-state actors have rendered earlier IR approaches, in which the main protagonists were the states and their organizations, to be simply *one way* of writing about international politics, not anymore *the only proper way*.[11] This complexity has also dethroned another staple of IR writing – that of an omniscient narrator speaking to (and about) some imaginary collective 'we'.[12] All-encompassing narratives have become increasingly insufficient tools for explaining world events and relations. This may sound counter-intuitive, as the world is now

9 John Agnew, "Sovereignty Regimes: Territoriality and State Authority in Contemporary World Politics", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* Vol. 95, No 2, 2005, p. 437-461.

10 Harvey Starr, "On Geopolitics: Spaces and Places", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 57, 2013, p. 433-439.

11 See for example Oded Lowenheim, "The I in IR: An Autoethnographic Account", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, 2010, p. 1023-1045; Costas Constantinou, "Diplomacy and Its Forms of Knowledge", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No 2, 2013, p. 141-162.

12 Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*; Megan Daigle, "Writing the Lives of Others: Storytelling and International Politics", *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 45, No 1, 2016, p. 25-42.

uniquely connected with air, water and road corridors and various webs of knowledge including the one with the patented trademark. Yet the world does not flow evenly, does not always move in synchronized waves or linear trajectories; instead it happens in patches, or stories, as Anna Tsing and others have argued convincingly.[13] The realization of the fragility of big narratives has led scholars to venture in various directions – from declaring the "death of hope"[14] to closer engagement with non-human elements and infrastructures, such as in the unique digital collection presented by the authors of the *Feral Atlas*.[15] Regardless of their position on human agency, the newer approaches to studying the inter-*national* tend to share interest in the micro-workings of temporality and spatiality. Experimenting with complexity thinking might be disorienting and leave many loose ends. It can also provide new vistas.

A keyword that attracts researchers who have noticed this complexity is Anthropocene, a term originally proposed to label a post-Holocene epoch, in which humans became a major geological force. Yet it opens many other discussions beyond those on irreversible environmental damage. The environment has for long enjoyed only a marginal role in IR conferences and publications.[16] When it eventually became a more notable subject, IR still struggled with the question of the boundaries of community. Climate change seemed to be predominantly a crisis that 'we' either can or cannot resolve together – yet environmental degradation enters human space-times with different intensity, and it is often those who have the least power to shape global relations that are the most impacted.[17] The knowledge brought under the Anthropocene keyword then puts into the spotlight the pluriverse of communities and relations. As a recent review of IR thinking on the topic put it: "disagreement prevails over who needs to be secured and by whom".[18] It is perhaps paradoxical that this pluriverse comes to the forefront at a time when a common and united action is requested. The intellectual invitation of the Anthropocene is to grasp this ambivalence. Or, as Bruno Latour put it: "We have problems, but we do don't have the publics that go with them."[19] The Anthropocene discussions are as much about knowledge and capacity and willingness to understand the other as they are about the physical state of the environment.[20] This is precisely what makes the Anthropocene literature a helpful guide in exploring the less walked paths in structuring our knowledge about the Turkey/Europe spaces or worlds.

The Anthropocene invitation has of course wider ramifications for understanding of international (b)orders. It is probably a truism to note that the UN summits addressing environ-

13 Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*; Chandler and Pugh, *Anthropocene Islands*.

14 David Chandler, "Death of Hope? Affirmation in the Anthropocene", *Globalizations*, Vol. 16, No 5, 2018, p. 695-706.

15 Anna Tsing et al. (eds.), *Feral Atlas: The More than Human Anthropocene*, California, Stanford University Press, 2021.

16 Cameron Harrington, "The Ends of the World: International Relations and the Anthropocene", *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 44, No 3, 2016, p. 478-498.

17 Delf Rothe, "Governing the End of Times? Planet Politics and the Secular Eschatology of the Anthropocene", *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 48, No 2, 2020, p. 143-164.

18 Eva Lövbrand et al., "The Anthropocene and the Geopolitical Imagination: Re-writing Earth as Political Space", *Earth System Governance*, Vol. 4, 2020, p. 1-8.

19 Bruno Latour, "Waiting for Gaia. Composing the Common World Through Arts and Politics", A lecture at the French Institute, London, November 2011, p. 1.

20 Liana Chua and Hannah Fair, "Anthropocene", Felix Stein et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 2019.

ment have so far brought only modest outcomes, and so have those that discuss mobility – a matter both related and similar. Such summits happen as negotiations between states, and the conflict is often reported between individual states, but also groups, such as East/West, South/North, industrialized/developing, or, in terms of migration, "countries of origin" and host countries. And while what states say and do matters, methodological nationalism constrains one to a framework of competitive differentiation, shadowing or echoing the steps of diplomacy. In other words, studying the international as a sum of states (even if one zooms in on the diversity of actors and positions within) prevents us from tracing phenomena that escape such a framework. That the state is not the only unit of analysis is of course old news. Yet, as also very experienced scholars observed, trying to escape the state by attention to the plurality of smaller actors always hits the wall of the national framework.[21] Moreover, researchers who have ventured into the study of transnational activist coalitions had sad news to report – the inclusion of 'civil society' into key world-making conferences is often just lip service and NGOs and activists rarely get a relevant platform.[22]

But what if we are not constrained by measuring policy efficiency and impact and simply look at the meaning of patterns that emerge despite not being given an amplifier? Here David Chandler's and Jonathan Pugh's invitation[23] to reach out to islands to get a deeper sense of Anthropocene complexity can get us one step further. In popular imagination, islands are often portrayed as isolated entities, settings of exotic adventures – think Robinson Crusoe, the Mysterious Island or the many new TV shows in which a group of people are stranded, voluntarily or not, in a wilderness and struggle to enjoy it or to get back to "civilization". Island studies scholars have weaved together a thick patchwork of research showing the relationality of island structures and connectivity between islands and mainland(s).[24] Yet while we know that islands are not fully isolated, in that they are part of various social and environmental processes including global commodity chains, Chandler and Pugh[25] suggest that the uniqueness of island ecosystems still presents a new avenue for thinking about a world in which nation states and many projects of modernity have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In their reading of the current debates, "it is widely noted that the question of how to live in a world shaped by relational entanglements and feedbacks is *the* problematic of contemporary Anthropocene thinking."[26] Paying more attention to islands, allowing that they can be the lead protagonists of the story, rather than supporting actors, can do many things. It can leave us confused, because how will we organize knowledge without the narratives we are used to? It can also take us on a productive journey toward noticing emerging patterns, or webs of relations that have been there all along. Taking a step down to a more ontic level, we can think of movements and in-

21 Borg and Diez, "Postmodern EU? Integration between Alternative Horizons and Territorial Angst", p. 136-151.

22 Florian Weisser and Detlef Müller-Mahn, "No Place for the Political: Micro-Geographies of the Paris Climate Conference 2015", *Antipode*, Vol. 49, No 3, 2017, p. 802-820.

23 Chandler and Pugh, *Anthropocene Islands*; Jonathan Pugh, "Relationality and Island Studies in the Anthropocene", *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 13, No 2, 2018, p. 93-110.

24 Pugh, "Relationality and Island Studies in the Anthropocene"; Adam Grydehoj, "Critical Approaches to Island Geography", *Area*, Vol. 52, 2020, p. 2-5; Philip Hayward, "The Constitution of Assemblages and the Aqapelagality of Haida Gwai", *Shima: the International Journal of Research Into Island Cultures*, Vol. 6, No 1, 2012, p. 1-14.

25 Chandler and Pugh, *Anthropocene Islands*.

26 Chandler and Pugh, *Anthropocene Islands*, p. 2.

dividuals working in areas such as ecology or mobility as islands, generating new perspectives on the mainlands or the world as such. Some of these islands challenge, on similar grounds, policies in their respective countries of citizenship or residence and, more generally, question (b)orders and (b)ordering practices that structurally violate human rights. Regardless of which side of the border they stand on, they justify their dissent by similar principles. Others do not object to the existence of (b)orders – but still see mobility as a normal thing, not a punishable offence. Islands are connected but also autonomous – and this very ambivalence is an opening into the exploration of spaces between and beyond the *inter-national* framework.

By experimenting with analysis that takes the inter-*national* border as an ambivalent category, one that shapes lives of humans but is not an ultimate marker of differentiation, we can do some work in excavating other patterns shaping these very lives. Once we bracket the border, we can perhaps uncover what I call architectures of similarity – a system of social relations that escapes the rigidity of inter-*national* framework. After all, if human curiosity has brought us to sophisticated adventures such as interstellar travel, and scientists explored whether other beings such as tardigrades could help humans reach the nearest inhabitable planet[27], why not pay a bit more attention to phenomena that can be studied with less carbon footprint? Architecture is both an expression of a relationship between humans and their material environment, it is also something that shapes their sense of identity or belonging.[28] It is something planned and executed, it reflects the tenor of the time and atmosphere in which it was produced. In IR it is common to discuss "security architecture" or "European architecture". Such contributions usually focus on institutions and processes inside and between bordered entities. What type of architecture will we see if we pay closer attention to islands that have spoken on mobility in Europe in the second decade of the twenty-first century?

Cracks in the Big Narratives: Accession, Partnership and the Refugee Deal

Before we turn to islands in the EU-Turkey spaces, and how they help us better understand the architectures that go beyond the inter-*national*, let us pay closer attention to why the dominant narratives about their respective mainlands are so unstable. Much of recent discussion, in academic or policy circles, engaging the keywords Turkey and Europe (or EU and EU-rope) has revolved around the question of what kind of future these two might have. Would it be based on shared belonging – confirmed by Turkey's accession to the Union and open future? Or would it be on *ad hoc* cooperation – a "transactional partnership" defined by short-term goals?[29] The question can be rephrased as – are we building a community or a market? – and in fact cuts deep into foundation of the EU project. After the first decades of European integration, when neofunctionalist expectations did not deliver the 'European people', EU policy-

27 Stephen Lantin et al., "Interstellar Space Biology via Project Starlight", *Acta Astronautica*, Vol. 190, 2022, p. 261-272.

28 John Archer, "Theory of Space: Architecture and the Production of Self, Culture and Society", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* Vol. 64, No 4, 2005, p. 430-433.

29 Emiliano Alessandri et al., "EU-Turkey Relations: Steering in Stormy Seas", Turkey, Europe and Global Issues Report No. 31, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2018; Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, "Low Expectations: A Year of Renewal for the EU-Turkey Relationship", *ECFR Commentary*, January 27, 2021.

makers have taken a few pages from the nation-state playbook.[30] Yet it is not such bad news that the many steps towards symbolic integration have stopped short of creating a 'European nation' or a homogenous 'European culture'. The impossibility of such homogenization has in fact helped keep at bay spiraling ethnonationalism and calls for bounded Europeanness against which Borg and Diez warned in their careful examination of the pitfalls of bordering the EU.[31] In fact, some of the very programs that were introduced top-down to strengthen ties between Europeans, such as educational networks, have become a fruitful platform for the critique of euro-orientalism and the exclusionary narratives of Europeanness.

The debates about the organization of the inter-*national* space and rights of states have been going hand in hand with the effort to come to terms with the mobility of individuals. The latter proved to be very disobedient to the standard ways of doing IR and talking about them.

In the case of Turkey, the membership/partnership debate has from its onset tried to tame the many diverse relations and went well beyond legal frameworks and marking of territory. Diplomatic agreements often catalyze a diversity of voices within their individual parties. As Mehmet Döşemeci showed in his seminal study of the first two decades of the association agreement between Turkey and the EEC, the implementation launched debates not just on images of 'the other' but also on the many diverse memories and expectations within Turkish society.[32] Moreover, as Mehmet Uğur established, diplomatic frameworks, although their declared aim might be to bridge divides, can also do quite the opposite – encourage oppositionality.[33]

While the formal opening of accession talks in 2004 indeed did little to bring Turkey as a state into the EU, a denser web of relations between Turks and EU-peans did emerge. The significance of such openings for manifold accessions and partnerships on the Turkey-EU map remains under-appreciated. The state-level diplomatic relationship suffered a blow when EU members partially suspended the accession talks in 2006, a move justified by different perspectives on the Cyprus issue. In Cyprus, which joined the EU as a divided island the same year accession talks with Turkey were starting, the EU's role in conflict resolution has been ambiguous at best.[34] There was little dispute among scholars of Turkey's EU process that the 2006 suspension had negative impacts on harmonization with EU law. [35] In its most recent progress report, the European Commission noted that Turkey has basically stopped trying to become a member.[36] At the same time, distance and proximity are relative. Turkey as a state

30 Cris Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000.

31 Borg and Diez, "Postmodern EU?".

32 Mehmet Döşemeci, *Debating Turkey's Modernity: Civilization, Nationalism and the EEC,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

33 Mehmet Uğur, *The European Union and Turkey: An Anchor/Credibility Dilemma,* Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999.

34 Nathalie Tocci, *EU Accession Dynamics and Conflict Resolution: Catalyzing Peace or Consolidating Partition in Cyprus?*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004.

35 For a recent volume on EU's waning influence in Turkey see Senem Aydin-Düzgit and Alper Kaliber, "Encounters with Europe in an Era of Domestic and International Turmoil: Is Turkey a De-Europeanizing Candidate Country?", *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 21, No 1, 2016, p. 1-14.

36 European Commission, "Turkey 2021 Report", October 19, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/turkey-report-2021_en .

might be far from becoming a member of the EU, and yet, the trajectories of many individuals are closely intertwined with lives of those on the other side. Territory then is not the only shaper of the relationships in the Turkey-EU spaces. Yet it is a major dealbreaker – after all, the recent Council decision imposing sanctions on the candidate was justified once again, by a territorial dispute over drilling in Cypriot waters.[37]

A short excursion into the shifting spatiality of Turkey and EU map over recent decades further illustrates the point. If mere geography is at stake, then Turkey has been in its current borders since 1923, with minor international border change in 1939, when Hatay became part of the republic. The republic's predecessor, the Ottoman Empire has seen various territorial configurations until its demise in the 1920s. Relations formed in those earlier times, as well as ideas about politics and society, have not been erased by new borders. The same is true for the EU which went from six to now twenty-seven members, and brings together a variety of spatial pasts. When the EU's founding stones were laid, some of its members were still deeply entangled in colonial relations crossing continents, and those who lived on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain were a part of a very different Union – the Soviet one. Experience with earlier imperial projects, whether one was a colonial center or a satellite, has shaped the way various EU members think about European integration. The Union itself consists of a patchwork of spaces carrying different temporalities.[38]

The 2016 refugee deal, which opened a new chapter in Turkey-EU diplomatic history, also must be read as an ambiguous moment. With that deal, the border both thickened and became more permeable. On the government level, Turkey pledged to strengthen border protection, while the EU committed to provide finances for Syrians and their host communities in Turkey.[39] The deal itself marked a unique confluence of two different logics guiding the diplomatic framework. As a candidate, Turkey, in order to become a member, was learning from the EU. In the logic of migration partnership, the two partners had formally equal epistemic weight. It was even suggested that Turkey had the decisive cards – since migration has been becoming an ever more securitized issue in the EU for decades.[40] Turkey is not the first or the only neighboring country with which the EU concluded a partnership aimed primarily at preventing north-west bound movement of people in search of asylum and new life opportunities. Yet Turkey is the first country that had a shot at membership but entered into a partnership that could distance it precisely from that goal. And yet still, the conversations about mobility perhaps served as a catalyst for noticing the manifold relations beyond diplomatic summits.

The path to unlocking the rigidity of narratives about Turkey and Europe may lead

37 European Council, "Conclusions", July 15, 2019, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/07/15/turkish-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-conclusions/.

38 Kalypso Nicolaidis, Berny Sèbe and Garbrielle Maas (eds.), *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies*, London, IB Tauris, 2015.

39 Council of the European Union, "EU-Turkey Statement", 18 March, 2016, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/ (Accessed 20 December 2017).

40 Jef Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 38, No 5, 2000, p. 751-777; Ruben Andersson, "Europe's Failed 'fight' against Irregular Migration: Ethnographic Notes on a Counterproductive Industry", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 42, No 7, p. 2016, p. 1055-1075.

precisely through noticing the many relations on their common mobility map. In a variety of disciplines including history[41] and anthropology,[42] the attempts to overcome methodological nationalism were driven by studies of refugees and diaspora. This meant attention to relatively small or "minority" communities. Studies of the small however showed cracks in narratives about the big – such as when Jennifer Miller documented lives of Turkish guest workers in Germany and found out that the Iron Curtain between the East and the West was a bit more permeable than is conventionally believed.[43] In terms of Turkey-EU relations, "migration diplomacy" emerged well before the 2016 deal.[44] While the Arab Spring has certainly placed the question of mobility on Turkey-EU agenda with a new urgency, it has also reconfigured the pluriverse of relations. Turkey became a home to the Syrian diaspora, but also a "space of transit"[45] toward the EU. But it was also Turks who were coming, including highly educated academics and writers, whose experience and knowledge quickly made it to the pages of important academic journals as well as to a variety of conferences, workshops and book projects.[46] As Lisa Malkki cautioned in an important article, it is the "national order of things" that sometimes prevents us from seeing the many reasons why and how humans move.[47] It can also obscure the creative agency adopted by many non-state interlocutors, building transnational links to support refugees.[48]

Islands and Fragments Overcoming the Border

If the explanations provided via mainlands is so insufficient, let us follow with islands. As we know by now, these are not static entities. Mobility is not something marginal, it is formative. It concerns those who move, but also those who welcome them, reject them, or are left behind. The very number of people on the move itself is a dent to the bordered storytelling of international space, notwithstanding the fact that every mobile human makes a mark on a wider community they leave and join. If we take this as a guiding assumption, it is easier to see why

41 Fiona Paisley and Pamela Scully, *Writing Transnational History*, London, Bloomsbury, 2021.

42 Raelene Wilding, "Transnational Ethnographies and Anthropological Imaginings of Migrancy", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 33, No 2, 2007, p. 331-348.

43 Jennifer Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders 1960s to 1980s*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2018.

44 Ahmet Içduygu and Ayşen Üstübiçi, "Negotiating Mobility, Debating Borders: Migration Diplomacy in EU-Turkey Relations", Helen Schwenken and Sabine Ruß-Sattar (eds.), *New Border and Citizenship Politics. Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship Series*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

45 Leonie Ansems de Vries and Elspeth Guild, "Seeking Refuge in Europe: Spaces of Transit and the Violence of Migration Management", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 45, No 12, 2018, p. 2156-2166.

46 Seçkin Sertdemir Özdemir, "Pity the Exiled: Turkish Academics in Exile, the Problem of Compassion in Politics and the Promise of Dis-exile", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 34, No 1, 2021, p. 936-952. A consortium of German universities has established an 'Academy in Exile' and exile experience has been frequently addressed in outlets with wider circulation (newspapers, magazines), especially in EU countries that have been home to Turkish communities in earlier decades (the UK, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands).

47 Lisa Malkki, "Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 24, 1995, p. 495-523.

48 Başak Yavçan and Fulya Memişoğlu, "Beyond Ideology: A Comparative Analysis on How Local Governance Expands on National Integration Policy Based on the Case of Syrian Refugees in Turkey", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 48, No 3, 2020, p. 1-21.

an inter-*national* analytical framework cannot do justice to reporting on actual lived human experience. The movement of people in the south and east looking for asylum or opportunity in the north-west (including Europe) has been interpreted as a claim to exercise a "right to the world"[49] or "mobility justice".[50] Movements can mean a spontaneous search for adventure, an expression of curiosity. They can also be live-saving journeys from situations that have emerged as a consequence of exploitative inter-national arrangements.

Every person on the move has a story to tell. So do those who decided not to stand in their way, including civil society organizations and spontaneous groups and individuals. Some came with food and shelter, others with campaigns to defend their rights. There is not much point in dwelling on the distinction between humanitarian and rights-based, the reality is fuzzy. Even those, such as the MSF (Doctors without Borders, *Medecins Sans Frontiers*) who insisted on providing apolitical humanitarian aid, have ended up protesting a wider policy regime that disables even such basic work.[51] Aid, though sometimes critiqued as apolitical, can in fact generate the unexpected, what Vanderwoort called "subversive humanitarianism."[52] People who support mobile others have often been accused of "crimes of solidarity",[53] a concept established in west European epistemic circles. Paying closer attention to civil society/government interaction in eastern Europe, we may wish to emphasize two-fold precarity: NGOs are supposed to constantly justify the presence of migrants, but also their own presence.[54] In a political atmosphere shaped by anti-immigration campaigns and authoritarian tendencies, initiatives supporting migrants are just one unwanted group helping another unwanted people. In addition, they must regularly explain their objectives to donors, as they are often funded in short-term project cycles. Finally, they must cope with the fact that much of their effort is fruitless, given the rising trend of building physical obstacles (such as border walls), pushbacks and various other government strategies discouraging people from arrival.

Yet, despite the difficulties and even physical danger, people on both sides of the EU/Turkey divide continue to build relations that escape the inter-national fault lines. They also formulate worldviews that cannot be categorized as "Turkish" or "EU-pean". This seems like a banal observation, but once we have accepted that such people are not marginal, let us see what their existence says about the 'big picture' of the relationship. On the one hand, the 2016 refugee deal provided a new opportunity for inter-national polarization, as political representatives on both sides of the deal repeatedly wondered whether the other party would stick to its commitments. Yet there is another fault line – between governments, who adopted it, and a diverse patchwork of people who do not agree with its philosophy. Writing on the wider problems of the EU's inability to cope with the fact that a growing number of people are seeking asylum in its member states, Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani proposed the term "mobility

49 Joseph Nevins, "The Right to the World", *Antipode*, Vol. 49, No 5, 2017, p. 1349-1367.

50 Mimi Sheller, *Mobility justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*, London, Verso, 2018.

51 Tom Scott-Smith, "Humanitarian Dilemmas in a Mobile World", *Refugee Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No 2, 2016, p. 1-21.

52 Robin Vanderwoort, "Subversive Humanitarianism", M. Feischmidt, L. Pries, L. and C. Cantat, C. (eds.) *Refugee Protection and Civil Society in Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 101-128.

53 Liz Fekete, "Europe: Crimes of Solidarity", *Race and Class*, Vol. 50, No 4, 2009, p. 83-97.

54 Lucia Najslova and Ayşen Üstübiçi, "What Can We Learn from Refugee-rights NGOs? Insights from Eastern Europe", Research Memo published by IIR Prague and Mirekoc Istanbul, April 2018.

conflict"[55] as a better description of what has often been called the European refugee/migration crisis. In Heller's and Pezzani's view, the parties of the dispute are the mobile humans and governments that prevent this movement. Heller and Berndt Kasparek, building on long-term academic work in the field of mobility, recently called for a European Pact with migrants.[56] The first premise of such a pact "would recognize that any policy that is entirely at odds with social practices is bound to generate conflict and ultimately fail."[57] The two other premises stipulate that a "conflict cannot be brought to end unilaterally", hence, a pact with migrants, and any mobility policy has to accept that "migrants from the global South are no strangers to Europe".[58] In a perfect Anthropocene-style deeper look in time, their argument sees current states and their agreements as representing just one layer of spatiality and temporality shaping human experience.

On an individual level, many such pacts already exist. Take a Czech truck-driver, I will call him Miro. Miro is a man in his fifties, who has seen the world. Born into Czech Roma family, he was a refugee in North America, eventually returned to Czechia, and spent many long years on the road. I knew him from TV, as a campaigner for the admission of refugees from camps in Greece. Czechia does not share an external border of the EU and while it provided humanitarian aid in conflict zones, in the 2015 crisis it did little to welcome asylum-seekers on its soil. Miro did not understand why this was the case. When we met for the first time, he supplied me with a wealth of stories from his travels. If published in a book, it would be a bestseller. But he did not have much time to write the stories down – he had a full-time job, and when he was not clocked in, he cooked for his children and kept busy calling members of parliament and various intellectuals, appealing to them to make at least a tiny change to the restrictive immigration policy. I am not the one to decide which part of his lived experience made him campaign for refugee rights. But I noted, in several conversations, his repeated allusion to similarity, even sameness between the variety of people he met on his journey.

Petr is a bit older than Miro. He is a businessman and occasionally writes columns for a newspaper. Years ago, Petr was also the youngest signatory of a petition that sent him and many others to jail. This was in the late 1970s – shortly after the Helsinki accords – and the petitioners (*Charter 77*) wanted something radical: that their country of citizenship upholds the rights enshrined in the constitution and in the international pacts. These days, when Petr writes columns or speaks publicly, he often outlines similarities with the pre-89 dissent movement and current campaigns in support of refugees. In the period of authoritarian socialism, the eastern bloc dissidents were often referred to as "islands" by their sympathizers. For Petr and some others, the connection between the pre-89 defenders of civic rights in general and present defenders of refugee rights, or a different mobility regime, becomes obvious. The journey towards rights and justice did not end with 1989/end of previous regime. In fact, this is exactly what Petr wrote in one of his commentaries:

55 Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani, "The Mediterranean Mobility Conflict: Violence and Anti-Violence at the Borders of Europe", *Humanity Journal*, November 9, 2018, http://humanityjournal.org/blog/heller-and-pezzani/

56 Charles Heller, and Bernd Kasparek, "Towards a European Pact with Migrants", *OpenDemocracy*, October 6, 2020, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/towards-pact-migrants-part-two/

57 Heller, and Kasparek, "Towards a European Pact with Migrants".

58 Ibid.

> 'Today's struggle is in many respects different, but in its deepest essence the same. The younger activists of today cannot have our experience from those times, but despite that, and thanks to their intuition, their education and their undisguised humanity know that if we let refugees fleeing war die and suffer, we let our own human and civic rights be killed.'[59]

Why do stories from a land-locked Czechia matter in conversations about spaces in Turkey and Europe? True, neither the Czechs nor other residents of countries often lumped together as 'new EU members' are the usual protagonists in the library of texts discussing Turkey *and* EU. And yet their sudden presence on these pages is perfectly justified. We are simply following the Anthropocene invitation to explore new connectivity. Or perhaps what is new is the perspective, and the relations that now surface as surprising have been there all along.

A young student, I will call her Aylin, whom I met in Istanbul about a year after the 2016 refugee deal went into effect, did not do much traveling before she noticed refugees. In the early 2010s, she had a good job in a private company. It was one of those rare jobs that provided both income and a free time. So when Syrians started arriving to Turkey, she started volunteering. First once a week, then a bit more often. She eventually left her job and applied for a degree in aid work in Scandinavia. When I met her, she was already pursuing the degree, and said: "That's what I'm doing now. I am happier."

Fragments of meaningful connection of course do not always come with joy. A Czech woman in her 60s, I will call her Eva, has provided money and care, attended demonstrations, and engaged in various initiatives for refugee rights and acceptance into Czech society. She is usually energetic, but on a late afternoon, as we were sitting on one of Prague's beautiful squares, she talked about the frustration she often feels:

'The shame. It is the shame. We cannot endlessly declare "refugees welcome" in a society which is indifferent to everything. … We live in a dictate of money pragmatism … people want to have some security without humanism … It is the fight to be a normal human being what is the most exhaustive…. This is why the community of initiatives is important. It helps each of us remember that this is normal. It is normal to help … I often see it as a training and permanent reminder of everyday life – such as – [she turns to a building on our left side and points her whole arm in that direction and continues] Imagine someone would now start beating a guy on that corner and another person is walking by. Will he just continue walking by or will he help? It is the same thing as helping refugees.'

Ece is in her twenties. She works for one of Istanbul's municipalities that recently received many refugees. Ece is excited, confident, caring. She tells me: "We are like an NGO", meaning that the municipality cannot really make policy, also given the centralized nature of public administration in Turkey. When we talk, she is curious about forms of cooperation between NGOs and municipalities in Czechia and even more surprised to hear about the very low number of refugees. In one of our conversations, she asks "Would it be possible to establish a partnership with a Czech NGO"? I say I will try, and I did. But then the NGO, being under the

59 Petr Pospíchal, "Charta 77 inspiruje i dnes: k odvaze, ke vzdoru, k solidarite", *Deník Referendum*, January 1, 2017, available from http://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/24368-charta-77-inspiruje-i-dnes-k-odvaze-ke- vzdoru-k-solidarite

heavy burden of casework and the general frustration of not being able to make things work at home, does not really have the capacity to follow up. It's the "national order of things"[60] that eventually takes over.

There are many others whose stories we could sketch – everyone has a personal history, through which they explain their participation in debates about refugees. How many such people are there? But we are not just recording testimonies and counting, we are also doing translation.[61] A while ago a conference in Italy brought together researchers studying solidarity. While most participants presented research from literal islands and coasts, I came with fragments from a landlocked place. Watching and listening to accounts of at least some happy endings, when fishermen and villagers were able to provide refugees with a safe landing, I wondered how to show that up there, hundreds of kilometers away from the sea, there are people with a similar message. They do not buy rescue boats, and while some did travel to the south, for most train stations are the harbors. At that time, I did not yet know about treasures hidden and opened by islands studies literature, including the suggestion to "think with" the islands, to look at the world from their perspective.[62] Being on the coast exposes one to different type of interactions than being deep in the mainland. But would not sticking to the coast deprive us of seeing patterns across wider space? Would we not find ourselves in the shoes of the proverbial observer, who was so fixated on one tree that they failed to see the forest?

Architectures of Similarity

If one is constrained by highlights from diplomatic summits, they may be forgiven for concluding that not much has been changing in Turkey-EU relations; at best, the two are beating each other in the same game. Six years into the implementation of the Turkey-EU refugee deal, many new walls emerged in Europe and its neighborhood. Turkey still remains a home for the majority of Syrians who fled the conflict, and it seems that the diplomatic partnership is working out – Turkey has effectively positioned itself as a country "protecting Europe" from migrants, and invites European journalists to see and report on new fences and detention systems.[63] But if one ventures out of our habitual patterns of measuring progress in the relationship, a flourishing garden full of new species opens.

James C. Scott in his seminal work *Seeing Like a State* argued that grand designs often fall apart and can even harm the inhabitants of the spaces that they are supposed to cultivate if they are not consulted with them.[64] Planning, Scott argues, is not a problem *per se* – it is rather whether the architects listen to what already exists in the spaces that are to be (re)designed. If we browse through the scholarship on architectures, and history books in general, the observation that spaces shift in time and built infrastructure changes purpose, seems so foundational

60 Malkki, "Refugees and Exile".

61 I follow Tsing's invitation to put seemingly detached stories into meaningful context.

62 Pugh, "Relationality and Island Studies in the Anthropocene", p. 93-110.

63 Nektaria Stamouli, "Turkey Puts its Migrant Security System on Display for Europe", *Politico*, January 3, 2022, https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-migrant-security-system-iran-border-europe-afghanistan/

64 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed,* Yale University Press (E-book), 2005.

that it is almost banal. In the immediate moment of our connection with space, however, we rarely see all its pasts and futures. Take a walk through a usual scenery of a literal Mediterranean island. One of the common sights is congeries of stones with a tree growing amidst. This perhaps used to be someone's living room. It is not anymore – and an occasional plastic bag flying in the wind or tagged along the visitor fence reminds us of the century from/in which we look at the remnants of the past lives. One of the many things that we cannot tell just from the collection in front of us is how it turned from a space of everyday errands to a monument that we encounter on holiday strolls. Another thing we cannot tell from just looking at physical infrastructure is the future trajectory. To know more, we must talk to those in charge of building it. Or living in it. Pieces of infrastructure and architecture get, or become, repurposed.

Perhaps there are similarities in questions asked by designers of built infrastructure and the more abstract designs of public space.[65] Does it serve immediate physical/biological needs such as water supply or sanitation? Does if offer possibility, an inspiration, balance on Bauman's negotiation between human needs for autonomy and community?[66] Can it provide or foreclose a sense of belonging? Does it offer clarity? And would not a macro-design of all things go against the very creative spontaneity of architecture as a "constructive practice, and making things up"?[67]

We talked of islands, but these just happen to be in the sea. The sea with its vastness has played an important role in how people built their communities and imagined those not yet discovered – as two writers recently put it: the sea is "an eminently human affair."[68] The sea is also so big that Godfrey Baldacchino, president of the International Small Islands Studies Association, proposed that "we should not speak of a Planet Earth but a Planet Ocean".[69] And while, for very good reasons, sea-oriented research focuses on coastal communities, sailors, and others directly involved with the waves, the sea is perhaps big enough to offer thoughts on the landlocked. One of the things to be found in the sea is water and water is, if we take a few pages from Andrea Ballestero's research, mobility.[70] More specifically, mobility happens also between water and what we sometimes call containers. Ballestero, writing about aquifers, proposes to think of elemental choreographies – to capture the movement within and between elements and our thinking about them. That way also boundaries and distinctions between the sea and the land reveal themselves as more permeable. In their research of mobile humans, Guild and Ansems de Vries recently proposed to pay more attention to "spaces of transit," the many

65 John Archer, "Theory of Space: Architecture and the Production of Self, Culture and Society", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* Vol. 64, No 4, 2005, p. 430-433; Christina Contandriopoulos, "Architecture and Utopia in the 21st Century", *Journal of Architectural Education,* Vol. 67, No 1, 2013, p. 3-6.

66 Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001.

67 John Palmesino and Ann-Sofi Rönnskog in conversation with Etienne Turpin, "Matters of Observation: On Architecture in the Anthropocene", Etienne Turpin, E. (ed.), *Architecture in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Design, Deep Time, Science and Philosophy*, London, Open Humanities Press, 2013.

68 Markus Balkenhol and Michiel Swinkels, "Introduction: The Sea as an Eminently Human Affair", *Etnofoor*, Vol. 27, No 1, 2015, p. 7-11.

69 Godfrey Baldacchino, "There is So Much More to Sea: The Myriad Aquatic Engagements of Humankind", *Etnofoor*, Vol. 27, No 2, 2015, p. 179-184.

70 Andrea Ballestero, "Aquifers (or, Hydrolithic Elemental Choreographies)", *Theorizing the Contemporary, Fieldsights*, June 27, 2019, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/aquifers-or-hydrolithic-elemental-choreographies

ports and stations changing the lives of the people who pass through them.[71] Connecting such thinking with anthropological explorations of "production of place at the confluence of land and water"[72] might open another path to seeing connections that escape more conventional classifications. For Gagné and Rasmussen, such amphibian anthropology helps us understand, how seemingly separate elements co-produce each other and let arise new phenomena which are not an exclusive ownership of any of the original constitutors. [..] If we take this knowledge back to the more ontic level of the troubling EU *and* Turkey conversation, things are starting to look a bit cozier. It is precisely this allowing for the possibility of immanence that allows us to see the previously marginal as potentially formative.

It is indeed possible to study Turkey *and* Europe as if they were two separate containers that occasionally relate. It is indeed possible to structure the histories of interaction of people *there* by rigorously taking pages from their respective national archives. This way, however, we conflate categories of analysis with categories of practice and reproduce and reify the very problems that creative thinkers should try to dissolve. Perhaps the job of academics is not so much to do the coloring within the pre-printed margins. It is precisely the opposite – to stay on the pace of permanently emerging relations, to try to understand the ongoing changes, and to translate them for and between the various participants of the many "situations on the ground" that we study. At the time of writing, it is increasingly obvious that spaces and places are just one of many elements of complexity of human trajectories. This is clear in the expiration of the dominant narratives about Turkey and the EU (such as member, partner); it is also clear in the startling similarity of micro-perspectives of the various protagonists of the relationship. My aim in this article has been to demonstrate, via zooming in on the mobility aspect of the many Turkey *and* EU relations, that while attention to difference and differentiation has been, for good reasons, a productive research strategy, there are now other intellectual options. Calling for attention to architectures of similarity does not invite a lazy reversal of the dominant narrative. I rather offer a methodological tool that could be useful in excavating worldmaking across this very entrenched divide. Scholarship that informs these observations is nested in its own separate containers/dossiers, including mobility studies, civil society studies, aid studies. But these are in fact not pockets outside IR – they "are IR".[73] How otherwise to deal with the Anthropocene challenge, if not by reckoning that lines of division travel also through different spaces than those on national maps?

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71 Guild and Ansems de Vries, "Spaces of Transit".

72 Karine Gagné and Mattias Borg Rasmussen, "Introduction – An Amphibious Anthropology: The Production of Place at the Confluence of Land and Water", *Anthropologica*, Vol. 58, No 2, 2017, p. 135-149.

73 Van Milders and Toros, "Violent International Relations".

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