Lost in the Aftermath

Published in:
Security Dialogue

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal

Prologue

About a mile inland from the tourist beaches of Kos, a small Greek island 2.5 miles from the coast of Turkey, lies the Hotel Captain Elias. Ten years ago it was a 4-star hotel where guests enjoyed views of the surrounding mountains, a quiet poolside retreat, and easy access to the beaches, bars and restaurants of Kos Town. The hotel was a casualty of the financial crash of 2008, and soon lay abandoned with an empty pool, overgrown lawns and broken windows. When thousands of migrants arrived on the shores of Kos throughout the Spring and Summer of 2015, local officials on the island were unable to provide a suitable reception centre, and so began directing migrants to the deserted hotel. Local and international volunteers from the group *Kos Solidarity* organized food, water and clothing for the visitors, and in March 2015, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) set up on the grounds of the hotel to provide basic public health measures and individual medical consultations (MSF, 2015a; 2015b; LVOL1; LVOL2). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations arrived soon after to provide basic infrastructure (e.g. official tents, portable toilets, mattresses), and by the height of the migrant arrivals in August 2015, the hotel was operating as a de facto reception centre for the island. Wary of making these arrangements permanent (and thus threatening the tourist economy of Kos), local officials tried to move the migrants out of the hotel by, for example, routinely cutting off water and electricity supplies (IORG1; LVOL1; LVOL2). In September 2015 the EU arranged to build a more permanent reception centre (or 'Hotspot') in an abandoned army site 15 miles outside of Kos Town; as a result, the Hotel Captain Elias was shut down and monitored 24/7 by security personnel (MSF, 2015b).

The story of the Hotel Captain Elias, and the subsequent Hotspot, is emblematic of the ongoing and complex politics of emergency and protection in the wake of a mass refugee migration to Europe, which reached its height in the summer of 2015. Important critical interventions about the ways that 'emergency' shapes policies and response (Pallister-Wilkins 2017), about the changing practices of protection and border security (Bigo 2007; Dauvergne 2007; Watson 2009), and about the experience of mobility in a context defined by security (Adamson 2006; Mountz 2010; Rygiel 2010; Squire 2009) have helped to shape a more critical understanding of migration in recent years. These interventions seek to destabilise the dominant state-based narrative, re-centre the migrant in our conversations, and validate and engage with the voices and experiences of those people who are actually living through – and suffering the consequences of – these politics. Much of this work helps us combat exclusionary and fearful discourses, develop stronger and more engaged solidarities, and push back against xenophobic forms of populism and protectionist agendas.

Kos, like many of the Mediterranean islands, is an important site in these interventions. Both the 'high' politics of control, security and containment as well as the everyday provision of humanitarian protection are operable here, and often develop in tension with one another. At the time of writing, the Hotspot on Kos has been open for nearly two years. Like the other Hotspots in the Mediterranean, it is overcrowded. Waiting dominates the space, as processing times have lengthened as the crisis becomes ever-more entrenched. Nevertheless, the primary function of the Hotspot is to keep the everyday security practices of Greece and the EU away from public view (De Vries, Guild & Carrera, 2016; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016; Pallister-Wilkins, 2017; Topak, 2014). The Hotel Captain Elias stands empty in

the midst of this ongoing crisis: it carries traces of the improvised and immediate responses that emerged on Kos in 2015, and also of the systems of closure and removal that aimed to sweep aside the material, visible and visceral marks of migration. In this sense, the Hotel Captain Elias exists in the aftermath of the migration crisis, and therefore presents a challenge, and a question, of how to engage in absence, echoes and traces.

Fences:

<Insert Image #1: Fence, © Debbie Lisle, 03/09/2016>

While researching the consequences of the so-called 'European Migrant Crisis' on Kos, we visited the derelict Hotel Captain Elias a year after its closure. We were able to (unofficially) access the grounds of the hotel complex, but the doors to the actual building were locked and chained. A year of neglect and incarceration meant that the plaster of the hotel itself was crumbling, the cement pathways and patios were cracked, and the palm trees and bleached grass were threatening to envelop the site. We spent approximately four hours on the site that day, took hundreds of pictures, and completed extensive field diaries.

During this visit, both of us independently wandered by this discarded section of fencing and cut our legs on the rusting edges. While it now lay broken on the ground near the empty swimming pool, in 2015 it had been used to organize and contain the migrants inside the hotel grounds. Unlike the migrants, we were free to move inside, outside and around the fence, and it became one of many objects that reminded us of our contrasting mobilities: on the one hand, the forced, precarious and highly adaptive routes of migrants; and on the other the privileged, smooth and unimpeded access of two researchers. To say, therefore, that we were somehow 'marked' by this fence is both facile and offensive: our happenstance encounter with this object bears no resemblance to the manner in which migrants were previously incarcerated, controlled and managed by it. Thinking about this contrast in mobilities clarified the shared critical ethos driving our research: the responsibility of those with privileged access is to grapple with the challenges of how to enable, create, or simply leave more space for marginalized voices to articulate their life-worlds in ways of their own choosing. Our job is not to occupy already pressured space with privileged and narcissistic narratives about our own 'wounds.'

Our research intervention here embodies a critical and reflexive practice that draws on feminist praxis, acknowledges emotional and intellectual empathy, foregrounds dispositions of vulnerability and works on mobilizing solidarity (Davids 2014; Lisle, 2016b; McNevin 2006; Moulin and Nyers 2007; Nyers 2006). Our challenge in critically interrogating the aftermath of the Hotel Captain Elias on Kos is to *avoid* putting ourselves so firmly in the centre of the research that we erase, obscure, displace the migrants themselves. This intervention does not represent the 'results' of a research project, or present objective 'data' and 'evidence' that we systematically gathered. We have chosen here to reflect on our practice through the mobilisation of photographs, selected not to represent a 'whole' or 'complete' picture, but to open avenues for discussion. Although it is not a technical discussion of method per se, it reflects our ongoing struggles to understand our own practices and modes of political intervention: how we engaged with the site, how we encountered the traces of a migrant population, how we collaborated with each other, and how we struggled with our own

emotions and reactions while working towards a position of critical solidarity. In the project as a whole, we seek to engage in this reflexive praxis by deliberately muting some of our own struggles in order create more space for building solidarity with those on the move. In this sense, we seek to avoid the 'grim choice' between narcissistic identification and voyeurism that Musaro (2011: 14) applies to NGOs and media outlets. This is especially difficult when written from the vantage point of home, looking back at an all-too-brief visit to another place and life-world.

This essay – in a true sense, as to essay means to attempt, to try – has been deliberately written in a varying tone and voice, oscillating between writing directly to one another, writing to ourselves by prising open those things that trouble, disturb, and challenge us, and reaching out into the wider field of those who are engaged in critical thinking and practice about security. These diverse voices reveal cracks and fissures in our research practice – places and moments where understanding and challenge might arise and which we hope will create further openings. While this process makes us vulnerable, it also importantly generates space for creativity. To frame our discussion, we have chosen to use images which reflect traces of the migrants who lived in the Hotel Captain Elias. This decision is informed by two particular methodological developments within Critical Security Studies and International Relations. First, we join a number of scholars who have been transforming wide-ranging accounts of the visuality of global politics into more precise research methods that draw from long-standing practices in Anthropology and Visual Culture (Mutlu, 2015; Lisle, 2017; Vuori, Saugmann & Mutlu, 2015). Second, we take inspiration from those scholars like James Der Derian, Saara Särmä and Cynthia Weber who are brave enough to engage in creative practice and use it in their research. Neither of us are trained photographers: we claim no expertise or authority with respect to the aesthetic value of our images. However, we are both critically attuned to the political, ethical and methodological possibilities of the visual field in terms of how it enables a different kind of encounter with space, bodies, senses, time, objects and materials (Bleiker, 2018). Here, we are thinking alongside Vicki Squire's (2016) excellent photo essay about the 'potentials and perils' of visually documenting migrant arrivals on Lampedusa, and the careful way in which she foregrounds criticality, reflexivity and empathy in her work.

All of these pictures were taken by us over the course of our afternoon visit to the Hotel Captain Elias. To select them, we first went through the entire collection individually, choosing six pictures each that, for us in our own reflections, were evocative and challenging. Some of the pictures we chose simply because we liked them aesthetically – they were arresting, capturing our attention because of form, line, and colour, rather than simply content. Others, we chose because they forced us to grapple with particular issues. We then sat down and went through all twelve chosen pictures, discussing each in detail and in depth, allowing our conversation to be wide ranging, tangential, speculative, and at times antagonistic. We ultimately selected seven images in total, all contained here, as the most important, demanding and troubling – either in themselves, or in the conversations they inspired. What is reflected here is the content and consequence of these conversations.

We have used these images to help us 'make sense' of a praxis – a practice of critical engagement in research. It is important that these are images; it is important that they are

images of objects; and it is also important that the human figure is absent. What we are engaging with in this intervention is a practice of memory. The material traces of those who lived at the Hotel Captain Elias in 2015 signify a pre-existing world, but offer only a very partial representation of what happened at the hotel that quickly became a reception centre and is now a relic. As many scholars of the visual have argued (Bleiker, 2018; Lisle, 2011; 2010; Roberts, 2009), photographs are not equivalent with reality because they are always constituted by a combination of documentary and aesthetic desires. And as Barthes showed so movingly in *Camera Lucida* (1993), the capacity of photographs to contain multiple life-worlds makes them excessive, shocking and elusive. Following on from this work, we do not read these images as representations of the way things 'are' now, or indeed, the way they 'were' in the summer of 2015. Instead, we encounter them as witness marks, as traces of lives, as shadows and echoes that not only demand attention, but also require interpretation. In short, they need to be *read*. As partial representations, the photographs are driven by perspective, ordered by point-of-view, and shaped by framing, not only of the objects that we observed but also of the environment through which we moved. For us, they conjure memory; for others, they will be seen differently. There is nothing complete here. In this intervention we come to no conclusions, but rather pull back the cover on the process of reading itself. For us, criticality, reflexivity, understanding and solidarity must start from here – from the exposure of process, practice, thinking and dialogue.

We were both – individually and together – extremely destabilized by this visit. While we continue to write about migration, mobility and violence in ways that speak to the critical voices in International Relations and Security Studies (e.g. asylum migration and smuggling; the juxtaposition of tourism and migration), we keep returning to the derelict and abandoned space of the Hotel Captain Elias. The conversations reflected here are about our practice of returning to the strange echoes of that site, and about our efforts to grapple with the deeply troubling and ethically complex questions that research into migration throws up. Our idea here is to attend carefully and empathetically to the nuances of this specific site, and inhabit – however tentatively – a position of solidarity with the voices, relations and encounters that emerged here during the summer of 2015.

Attuning ourselves to the rather jagged and truncated edges of that derelict fence, we seek to engage with the materiality of the Hotel Captain Elias, working with the visual to expose our own conversations and struggles and (we hope) inspire new ones. For us, this is where criticality begins, as we prise open cracks in the field to enable a deeper, more creative understanding of mobility and migration.

Tent (DL):

<Insert Image #2: Tent, © Debbie Lisle, 03/09/2016>

As the Hotel Captain Elias was transformed into a de facto reception centre during the Spring of 2015, the UNHCR erected several large white tents along the front entranceway to the hotel, around the emptied swimming pool, and on the service road behind the main building. These tents were mostly used to shelter migrants from the elements, but also to help process those undocumented migrants who had not already been registered at the Kos

police station. I came upon this abandoned UNHCR tent just off the main entranceway to the hotel as it lay discarded in the shade of a palm tree. At that moment, Heather, you were scrabbling around the back of the hotel pondering all the locked doors, boarded up windows and inaccessible buildings. But this was the moment I began to understand something you had been articulating about how a permanent / temporary logic structures the experience of migration. Here was a tent – familiar from media images of previous refugee camps and humanitarian crises – that had provided temporary shelter for a dramatic situation that everyone was working hard to end. Inadvertently, however, it also signified permanence. The fact that these white tents are so ubiquitous and recognizable reminds us that displacement and migration are, and have always been, permanent features of the global order. Indeed, this claim is central to your work on irregular migration which *starts* from the position that migration is not an anomaly in the sovereign order, but rather constitutive of it. Tuning into that starting place of permanence, I began to think about circulation: are tents from one humanitarian crisis recycled into another (from Haiti to Kos? From Kos to Darfur?) Who determines when a tent has reached the end of its 'useable' life, and where do these un-useable tents go? In thinking about the life-cycle of the tent itself, I began to engage with questions of temporality I had been avoiding for a while – about different rhythms, paces, speeds and durations of bodies and objects. I liked this discarded tent because it was stubborn: it refused to disappear or disintegrate when the acute crisis moved elsewhere. And I especially liked how the tent was busy making a home with the natural life-forms nestling in its folds – life-forms whose cycles and rhythms are wonderfully indifferent to the human populations that occupy or abandon their universe. The tent was busy reinventing itself by providing a new kind of shelter to seeds, grass, leaves, branches, insects, organic material and bacteria.

I had been thinking about tents in a different way up until this moment; specifically, the brightly coloured camping tents that migrants inhabited along the tourist beaches of Kos Town during the summer of 2015. These were new additions to Hailey's (2009) guidebook critically exploring the geography, architecture and politics of all kinds of camps (e.g. Scout camps; sport camps; refugee camps; peace camps; settlement camps). Although the tents erected on Kos Beach were not the solid bricks and mortar of the Hotel Captain Elias, they served a similar purpose: to shelter the arriving migrants as they recuperated before moving on to other European destinations, or waited to be registered so they could start the process of claiming asylum. It was this bizarre juxtaposition between sun-lounging European tourists and camping migrants *on the same tourist beach* that initially drew me to Kos in the first place. Indeed, these colourful tents reminded me of those used by sunbathing tourists taking a break from the Mediterranean sun, or, in the case of some Northern European beaches, from the wind. Similar tents showed up again when we interviewed local volunteers distributing donations to the migrants: there on the warehouse floor next to the sleeping bags were several rolled up camping tents (KOBS2). How clever, I thought, that people had the insight to donate tents to help protect migrants as they journeyed further North into Europe. It suggested a furtive kind of solidarity.

One of the reasons I kept coming back to the discarded UNHCR tent was because it reminded me of a personal failure. My previous work on the intersections of leisure, mobility, war and violence had neglected the constitutive role of humanitarian infrastructures, economies and discourses (Lisle, 2016). Your suggestion to think harder

about the logic of temporary / permanent made the significance of this global humanitarian architecture entirely obvious. *Of course* displacement and migration have to be managed, governed and controlled by a sovereign order that wants to hide these troubling features so that it can perpetuate itself as both entirely natural and fully functioning. With a rictus grin, the sovereign order proclaims: *'The international system of sovereign states is alive and well! Everyone belongs to a state, and therefore everyone is a citizen! Those very small numbers of stateless persons will soon be citizens; indeed, most of them will go back to where they belong!'* That proclamation requires *permanent* discourses of expert knowledge, well-resourced international institutions and vast populations of trained professionals – all of which mobilize to solve supposedly temporary crises in the sovereign order by, for example, quickly erecting necessary infrastructures of provision (e.g. food, shelter, sewage and hygiene), engaging in diplomacy, creating new policies and refining legal principles. In this sense, the discarded UNHCR tent not only taps us into the humanitarian infrastructure that arrived in Kos in the Spring of 2015, but also helps us make sense of the expansive network of security and humanitarian actors now managing the migrants who have been moved out of the abandoned Hotel Captain Elias and into the Kos Hotspot (e.g. volunteer organizations, church groups, police forces, militaries, private security firms, translators and medical staff). The tent reminded me that all the individuals we interviewed from MSF, Frontex, EU and the UN were only on Kos temporarily, but the edifice of the humanitarian architecture they belong to is now firmly entrenched in the global order. Indeed, the UNHCR tent is part of a wider system that *normalizes* repeated interventions by the 'International Community' – interventions that utilise the shock of emergencies to intensify a much slower and incremental re-ordering of global space.

As you and others have pointed out, the colonial echoes of this architecture are entirely explicit, but simultaneously very difficult to detect underneath discourses of suffering, giving and urgency (Amar, 2012; Duffield, 2001; Johnson, 2011). The 'International Community' that operates through this humanitarian architecture has all the agency to manage, act, and 'solve', whereas those who are acted upon (in this case, vulnerable migrants and overwhelmed locals) are denied the capacity to act on their own behalf or in solidarity with one another. More to the point, any initiative or collective behaviour undertaken to escape these conditions is disallowed and results in rendering these supposedly abject bodies available for even *more* intervention and management. What I find quite difficult – not just here, but also in my other work – is how to avoid replicating a reductive colonial frame when analysing the diverse experiences of migration and mobility. You and I discussed this a great deal: how are we supposed to attend carefully to the poly-vocal, complex and emergent agency of *all* actors in this field when confronted with, on the one hand, racist, mysoginist and offensive claims by the Frontex officers processing migrants, and on the other hand, the palpable exhaustion, helplessness and despair of those migrants stuck in the hotspot? It is really hard not to feel stuck.

Tarp (HJ):

<Insert Image #3: Tarp, © Heather L. Johnson, 03/09/2016>

The image of the collapsed tent is strange for me, both familiar and not. The discarded, almost forgotten nature, of the crumpled canvas is striking. For me, these tents have become almost archetypical; they are universally recognisable markers of a contradictory presence. At once, they are somehow reassuring and also woefully inadequate. The emblem of the UNHCR, and the physical shape of the tents, are images I feel like I know. The UNHCR tent announces the presence of authority, expertise, and perhaps even competence. Their presence tells the world that the crisis is being dealt with, but also that there is need here. There is a gap in protection, bandaged over by canvas. Their precariousness, the insubstantiality of the shelter the tents provide, proclaims the need for further action, asserting in its temporariness that the response that is offered, the protection provided, is not enough.

The tent on the ground, overrun by nature, seems to convey, somehow, that that the response is over, is no longer needed.

There was other canvas throughout the grounds of the hotel, however, that was in less familiar a shape. In our conversations, and in your work, you reflect on the strangeness of the familiar – or, the familiar becoming strange. When what seems to be normal and expected is suddenly disrupted, the gaps and cracks needed for critical intervention can emerge. I've become anaesthetized to canvas, too familiar perhaps with the tropes and images of 'shelter'. Even in a crisis, I 'know' what shelter 'looks like'; I 'know' what 'work' canvas does. Turning a corner at the back of the hotel, however, a tarp suspended across two walls was arresting. This kind of research demands that we be open to surprise; here, I was surprised.

At the back of the Hotel are a series of smaller, walled off areas that don't have roofs. It's unclear at this point whether they ever had a roof. If they did, the absence marks the tumbled-down, derelict state of the hotel (and raises the question of when they fell); if there were never roofs, however, the original function of the spaces is not clear and no longer imaginable. Who built these walls, and when? Why?

The tarp, stretched across the space and serving as a make-shift roof, transforms the space into a form of shelter. This shelter is not a familiar form, but an adaptive and creative one. The tarp provides shade, much needed, from the beating sun.

The tarp is also remarkable in that it remains in place. It has stood the test of time; while the elements – wind, sun, rain – and deliberate dismantling of security forces have crumpled the UNHCR tent and ripped other canvas shades, such as those purpose made for the pool area, this improvised piece fixed to the brick by means that aren't immediately visible, is still in place. Shade is still being provided, and the space remains an improvised yet durable shelter. While the tent struck me as an image of finality, of aftermath, of an event that was over, this tarp seemed durable and continuing. Even with the asylum seekers gone, with the fences up, this rudimentary shelter remained. You reflect on the tent as being, for you, stubborn. I find this tarp to be the same, even more so perhaps as it continues to serve the function it seems to be have been put up for. It is evidence of another stubbornness, as well: the irradicability of agency and action, even in the most abject of circumstances. The rhythms of transience and permanence emerge here, too.

One of the most consistent conversations we've had since our time in Kos, and over the time we were there, has been about the persistence of agency. It's a strong theme in critical refugee literature (Johnson 2013, 2014, 2015; McNevin 2006; Millner 2011; Moulin and Nyers 2011; Mountz 2010; Rygiel 2011; Squire 2009), which contests the victim narrative and the notion of abjection and powerlessness. Agency here is understood as the capacity to control one's own life; the capacity to 'write one's own script' (Isin 2008). Increasingly, this is understood in contexts that are constrained and limited; that even in structural conditions that are deeply limited, fundamentally precarious – as was the case for those living in the Hotel – agency nevertheless persists in small moments, small actions. In the putting up of a tarp to create needed shade.

Even in emergency and crisis, in makeshift and improvised reception conditions, adaptation – and the agency of those individuals who are doing the adapting - is persistently evident. We cannot know, of course, who put the tarp up, but the makeshift and provisional form it takes – the uneven, crooked suspension of the tarp, the shape of the piece of material itself that implies that it was scrap, a torn piece from somewhere else – implies something 'unofficial'. More shelter was needed, and so more was created from the material available. Such construction not only marks improvisation, but also the ways in which individuals not only can, but do, identify their own needs and act on them.

Chairs (DL):

<Insert Image #4: Chairs, © Debbie Lisle, 03/09/2016>

It is strange, isn't it, that such a quiet and tranquil space off the island's beaten tourist track produced so many surprises. I remember the moment we came upon this row of chairs at the back of the hotel complex: we were rooting around the newly built and recently cemented additions near the kitchen area, and puzzling over the half-finished nature of the architecture. We walked through an open doorway and stood transfixed in front of the chairs, unable to fathom the makings of such an aesthetic tableau. I remember a particularly funny moment as we turned to each other with the same WTF? expression on our faces. Who put these here? Why were they lined up in perfect symmetry? Who was sitting in these chairs, and who / what were they facing?

I have come back to this image over and over again because it presents a series of important challenges to the critical ethos I think we are trying to cultivate. One of the things I found difficult in asking the question *'what happened here?'* on Kos was attuning myself to the way migrants engaged in collective action, cooperation and solidarity during the mass arrivals in 2015. My hesitation here reflects a fear that I will lapse into the dominant media framing of migrants as a swarming mass of abjection and vulnerability, unable to care for themselves and therefore utterly reliant on the charity of others. Or the flip side – that I will individualize (and therefore racialize and feminize) the stories of particular migrants in ways that shrink them into ciphers for my own benevolence. What I most appreciated was your comparative lack of preciousness in this regard: stop being so hesitant and start *paying*

attention to what happened here. What did the migrants actually *do* at the Hotel Captain Elias? Who were they? How did they get here? How did they relate to each other? How did they spend their days? How were they constrained and how did they push against those restrictions? As you have said many times, these are simultaneously the simplest and also the most difficult questions to answer. But I really like how this critical invocation to *pay attention* to the everyday life-worlds, encounters and experiences of migrants themselves carries the potential to counteract forms of privilege, preciousness and dilettantism. I say potential, here, because researchers from established academic institutions 'parachuting' into other life-worlds are always 5 seconds away from becoming pith-helmeted 19th Century anthropologists measuring the skulls of the 'natives' and plundering their 'exotic' cultures.

Like the tents, these chairs are very familiar, but in a completely different register. These are the cheap and mass produced plastic patio chairs that adorn hotel grounds, beachfront restaurants, shaded areas, dormatories and waiting rooms around the world. I immediately added these to my collection of mundane material objects that reveal connections between discrepant mobilities such as mass tourism and irregular migration. Moving out from that rather narrowly framed insight, I thought about how these chairs must have enabled practices of rest and recuperation during the Spring and Summer of 2015; indeed, I recalled seeing media images of migrants relaxing on chairs very much like these – if not *exactly* these. I came to see the hotel as an interregnum – especially in the Spring and early Summer of 2015 – where migrants re-grouped after an arduous sea crossing, convalesced, gathered information and planned for the next leg of their journey. But that is far too benign. The migrants sitting on these patio chairs were also *waiting* at the Hotel Captain Elias: waiting to be documented, registered, processed and managed; waiting to be recognized as legitimate agents or even citizens; waiting to return home or go elsewhere; or simply waiting for their next meal or their next wash. What *happens* in that condition of waiting? We have talked a lot about the disposition of waiting in the experience of migration: its relation to the logic of temporary / permanence framing official responses, and the rhythmic liveliness that abounds in a condition perceived to be empty and still.

Stepping back from this strange tableau, you posed the question of whether the migrants sitting in these chairs had been running a meeting. We know that the migrants at the hotel divided themselves into different 'zones' based on language, culture, nationality and gender, and that there were some moments of tension over scarce resources, access to care and overcrowding (Freedman, 2017; AFP-JIJI, 2015) But contrary to the media images of the Hotel Captain Elias where listless bodies were sprawled on mattresses and crammed in tents, might they actually have self-organized to demand better conditions? Might these chairs have served a different purpose by enabling migrants to address the political conditions of their precarious situation? Certainly the chairs operated as objects of rest, recuperation and leisure, but they may just as easily have facilitated modes of resistance, confrontation and dissonance. In that sense, these artfully positioned chairs are also confrontational: they remind us that disenfranchised populations are never mute, abject or hopeless. They always gather to collaborate and generate solidarity, from technical efforts to troubleshoot and improvise (e.g. erecting shelter; building a fire) to more formalized gatherings to agitate against their conditions of invisibility and / or abjection.

When understood as a facilitator of resistance, these chairs are also confrontational in a different way in that they are a powerful rebuke to the dangers of aestheticization. When I first saw this image, I was delighted with the way it resonated with the tradition of aftermath photography I have previously written about (Lisle, 2011). Finally, I had taken a *good* photograph. But the very aesthetics that make the picture *good* (e.g. clean lines, solid colours, symmetrical shapes) evacuate its political significance. This picture sanitizes the conditions of the Hotel Captain Elias: it evacuates the migrants, it cleans up the mess, it silences the echoes of what went on here in 2015. So my 'good' picture is not so good after all…

Window (HJ):

<Insert Image #5: Window and Lock, © Heather L. Johnson, 03/09/2016>

The straightness of the chairs in a line was indeed arresting; they were not set up in a such a way that anyone sitting in them could converse, engage; their placement seemed deliberate, though, without any other seating in the room. The colours, contrasted with the vines, do make a beautiful image. This image of a locked door, by contrast, is not a particularly aesthetic picture – I don't even think it would make a scrapbook of amateur pictures from a disposable camera. And yet, when flipping through, it stopped me. It stopped me because of the complete closure it conveys; I found confrontation here, too, but it was different from the confrontation that you found looking at the chairs. And for me, this confrontation is about erasure, closure, prevention. While the confrontation of the chairs is about the traces that remain of people, of activity, the confrontation of the steel and locks is, for me, about the opposite. Rhythms here re-emerge, heading towards permanence, a steady, solid assertion of incontestability. Or, at least, that is how I read this as the intended and scripted narrative.

While we were able to get access to the grounds of the Hotel, we could not actually enter the building. Any images we have of the hotel interior were taken by pressing the camera lens against the dirty glass of a window – where the glass was even accessible. Most larger windows, and the doors, were covered by professionally cut and installed corrugated steel. The steel is bolted to the frames, and although it has been exposed to the elements for more than a year, it remains starkly new, shiny and in good condition when compared to the other parts of the building. The steel counter and sink in the pool house, for instance, are badly bent and rusted. The security steel remains unmarked by either exposure or deliberate interference. There is no graffiti, such as that found on the walls; there are no scratches or tool marks. The only doors and windows that are not blocked in this way, oddly enough, are those at the front of the building. They are glass, crusted with dust and dirt. The glass is unbroken, but hard to see through. I imagine that they remain clear so that the building can still be accessed, but the contrast is striking. Along the back of the grounds is a series of outbuildings, their purpose entirely unclear. This image is of one of these; the window blocked by steel, the door padlocked, the building entirely inaccessible. Its function is unclear; there is no shelter available (any longer), and speculation or exploration is firmly discouraged.

As we've discussed in relation to all of our images, the story of the Hotel Captain Elias is for me one that reflects the ongoing sequence of crisis response, as temporary and improvised shelter is replaced by more durable, measured, managed solutions. As laid out in the prologue, the initial set-up of the Elias was spearheaded by on-the-ground solidarity groups that had been put together in direct response to migrant arrivals. As time went on, and as the 'crisis' became more intense, more NGOs arrived. When the 'official' response, the Hotspot, was set up, however, the shelter at the hotel was shut down. The disordered and improvised was replaced by the official and regulated. This transition is core to the rhythms of emergency response and protection, and speaks also to rhythms of crisis. The jarring alarm gives way to a new normal that remains exceptional. Here, with the installation of steel, the Hotel was not just abandoned: it was closed. The fence was re-established, sealed and bolted. The building itself was barred, the windows covered with steel, and all entries and access locked – by padlocks, some doors were boarded. This retaking – a sovereign re-taking in Nyers' terms (2003) – was about conveying a specific message of unwelcome. The Hotel was not simply no longer in use, but *not to be used*. The presence of the migrants was erased; that part of the life of the Hotel physically marked as over. Or, this seems to me to be the intention, the narrative that is scripted.

You noted, both as we prowled through the grounds and later as we went through the images and talked them over, the ever-present encroachment of nature. It's here in this image as well; the brush and weeds, looking just like overgrown and dead grass, entirely prevented us from approaching the outbuildings at the back. To tramp through these weeds was to expose legs and feet to sharp scratches and scrapes, and hidden in the grass were hazards: broken glass, sticks, more of the broken fence, and other objects that conspired to keep us away. The brush was this way throughout the grounds, working with the man-made barriers to convey something more than abandonment: absence. The space is not simply empty, but deliberately so. It has been *made* empty. That the people haven't simply left, but have been removed, and with them their experiences, and the crisis itself. Moreover, they aren't welcome back. The padlocks, the steel, the boarding up, the fence all marked that the Hotel wasn't simply closed but *had been* closed – and that we were trespassers. The crisis had passed, and for this space was over.

You note that the chairs, their set up, 'clean up the mess'. I wonder if they do; they are spaces of waiting, and the infrastructure of steel and lock that surrounds them proclaims loudly that the waiting is now elsewhere. There is no longer any waiting in the Hotel Captain Elias; it is, instead, empty. Not only is the Hotel removed from the situation, but the role that it played in the early days of the migrant arrivals has also been effaced. It is empty; the material security measures seem to declare that the space is, instead, in the aftermath, its closure aiming to obscure and prevent even the memory of what happened here.

Toothpaste (DL):

<Insert Image #6: Toothpaste, © Debbie Lisle, 03/09/2016>

We know that in aftermath environments such as the Hotel Captain Elias, the clearest traces of those who passed through are contained in, and produced by, material objects and infrastructures. Of course, the absent presence of migrants also resonates at atmospheric, affective and imaginary levels, but it is objects – often mundane ones – that bring us into proximity with the everyday life-worlds of those who are now gone. Despite all the efforts to lock the space, chain it, incarcerate it and efface what happened here in 2015, the material traces of the migrants were everywhere. I am intrigued by our contrasting accounts of the patio chairs (my concern that their photographic aestheticization sanitizes this space; your claim that they are a powerful signifier of migrant agency) because it reminds us that objects are never inert containers or transmitters of stable meaning. Objects are deceptive: they appear closed off and mute, but are instead dangerous beasts that refract multiple, contradictory and incomplete meanings. What's more, they do this over and over again.

Throughout our strange visit to the Hotel Captain Elias, we encountered dozens of banal objects littered throughout the grounds: a cutting from a porn magazine, multiple crisp packets, a green bucket, crushed beer cans, plastic bags, a tennis ball, cigarette packets, a ripped pillow case and numerous water bottles. This is the detritus of everyday life. This is what is left behind when people on the move stop to feed, clothe, clean themselves and then move on (or are forced to move on). We initially paid close attention to these objects, taking multiple pictures and notes, and working out their proximity to the building, the walkways and the pool. Quite quickly, however, we became acclimatized to the detritus and began to focus on the relations generated by the site, its rapid transformation from empty to full to empty again, and the creative ways that the migrants inhabited and adapted this abandoned infrastructure of leisure. I came upon this discarded tube of toothpaste towards the end of our visit as I circled back towards the main gates.

I have been so vexed by this object in particular because I think it reveals some serious limitations in the kind of materially-oriented critique we have both been using in our examinations of the border security technologies operative in the more 'official' end of migration at airports and ports (Bourne, Johnson & Lisle, 2015). I am fully on board with the claim that human agency is emergent and distributed through non-human objects and materials – that we become who we are in assemblage not only with each other, but also with non-human animals, things and materials (Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2016; Latour, 2007). I know that we cannot understand (let alone 'solve') pressing questions such as climate change, online security, species extinction, technological warfare and health pandemics without radically re-thinking our human-centred approaches to global politics (Burke, et al, 2016; Grove, 2014). But when I move away from the field of highly technologized borders and rest instead in a place like the Hotel Captain Elias, these ideas seem to resonate in a completely different way. My effort to read this space as a collection of assemblages feels somewhat useless, pointless and a bit empty. A simple formulation of this problem might be as follows: if migrants are already de-humanized and devalued, what is the point in demonstrating how non-human life-worlds constitute even the most precarious and degraded spaces?

So I've been thinking alongside this discarded tube of toothpaste to try and work out how to do this kind of work differently – to force myself to confront the irresolvable, uncomfortable

and deeply troubling ethico-political questions thrown up by issues of migration (Lisle, 2016b). Conceptually, the tube of toothpaste made me think much harder about how objects carry with them multiple trajectories, temporalities and rhythms. Certainly I am impressed with work that excavates the complex timescales of pre-emption, futures and probabilities, but I feel like sometimes we forget that the multiple and contested histories of objects *also* have complicated timescales. I'm reminded here of Derrida's (1994) idea of hauntology and ghostly presences that always inhabit the present and past simultaneously, therefore disrupting our comfortable groove of linear (and for him, metaphysical) time. This dried up tube of toothpaste has compelled me to re-think my assumptions about genealogy as a process of recovering a previously marginalized 'truth', and instead try and attune myself to pasts, presents and futures that are thoroughly heterogeneous, poly-vocal, contested and unknowable. I find this process extremely difficult – characterised more by disappointment and failure than revelation.

One of the things I appreciate about our attention to materiality is the way it punctures modes of isolation and autonomy. Objects never exist in solitude: they are always part of multiple trajectories of production, use, reproduction, sharing and disposal. Indeed, this tube of abandoned toothpaste is one item in a much wider infrastructure of care that sustained the Hotel Captain Elias throughout 2015. We had many enlivening conversations with the local volunteer group Kos Solidarity who were central in coordinating the support of the migrants at the hotel throughout 2015 (LVOL1; LVOL2). They distributed meals and water, but they also brought donated hygiene products so the migrants could wash and take care of themselves. When we visited their warehouse distribution centre in Kos Town, I became mesmerised by the boxes and boxes of soap, shower gel, shampoo, nappies, tampons, sunscreen (KOBS2). When I stumbled upon the discarded toothpaste tube, something important clicked for me: figuring migrants as exemplars of 'bare life' makes no sense. Neither the migrants themselves, nor those people near and far donating items they think might be useful (clothing, soap, shoes, tents), accept this form of abjection. Yes, at this point in their journey they required food, shelter and medical attention – all of which was provided by both local and international infrastructures of care. But migrants are never just biological objects of input (food) and output (shit) that need protection from the elements: they are also figures who want to take care of their bodies, their loved ones, their futures. What the donation, use and circulation of objects of hygiene illustrate is that migrants are not just passive objects targeted by various forms of governance (e.g. public health, security): they are subjects with dignity and agency who care for themselves and each other in ways that exceed mere biological survival. Much more than the carefully arranged patio chairs, this discarded tube of toothpaste taps us directly into the everyday life-worlds of the migrants that lived and passed through the Hotel Captain Elias in 2015. This was not a life-world of passive waiting or abjection, but rather a rich set of embodied collective practices that signify dignity, agency and power.

Kids Clothing (HJ):

<Insert Image #7: Trackies, © Heather L. Johnson, 03/09/2016>

The small, everyday objects that remained scattered throughout the grounds of the Hotel – the toothpaste tube that you found, the food wrappers and empty cans – are, for me, traces. They mark exactly what you've observed: collective practices of dignity, and agency. They are evidence that lives were lived in this space, beyond simple static waiting and the empty 'bare life' that Agamben (1998) has so problematically popularised. My ongoing frustration with Agambanian approaches to 'camp spaces' that mark the global asylum regime – the detention and reception centres, the refugee camps – is that they reduce life. The founding principle that agency in these spaces is not just limited, or muted, or compressed, but removed entirely, simply does not resonate with what I have observed on the ground in refugee camps, detention centres, and various other spaces of mobility (including refugee protest camps and border areas) (Johnson 2013, 2014, 2015). Even where arguments can be made that this reduction and control is the objective of the state (as in the detention centres and Hotspots), agency always perseveres. It might be quiet, even constrained and momentary (Johnson 2013), but lives continue to be lived, choices continue to be made, demands, hopes, and questions articulated. Relationships are built, and torn down.

If we are to understand these dynamics, however, we need to move beyond the abstracted tropes and idealized figures of 'the' migrant or refugee. We need to move past simple representation; this has been a key element of our discussion throughout this work and, I think, is at the heart of the critical ethos we are trying to develop.

At the back corner of the hotel, just at the outskirts of the pool area and next to the half-formed out-buildings that housed the chairs and the tarp, was a significant growth of brush. Caught within it, between the branches, were the trouser half of a small child's tracksuit – blue, with a bear's head decal. There were a couple of other items of clothing around the grounds – a crumpled hoodie, a t-shirt – but both of us were stopped by this particular garment. In our collection of photos, both of us have several images of it. I remember the moment I saw them with a pang of shame, as my first reaction was an 'aha!', discovering traces of children and families, with all of its poignancy, evidence of the most vulnerable and most powerless. It was an evocation of the dominant trope. That reaction, bound up with nostalgia, pity, guilt, and an impotent form of rage, is predictable. It is also scripted, and entirely typical.

The use of children in humanitarian images is widespread, very common, and usually quite deliberate. The picture of toddler Aylan Kurdi on a Turkish beach has become iconic, and is credited with causing a wide-spread shift in public opinion towards greater support of the refugees arriving in Europe. Policy changes followed, particularly in Germany – all supposedly spurred by an image of a child. Elsewhere, I have written about the patterns in the use of gendered images and those of children in the ongoing victimisation of refugees (Johnson 2011, 2017). Humanitarian agencies have long mobilised these images to counter public perceptions of danger and threat, and to bolster support. In much the same way that the image of the tent, which I discussed above, has become ubiquitous and carries layers of meaning, so, too, do images of children. That is, they carry well-established and pre-cast narratives. They are particularly prevalent in fundraising campaigns. A child is strongly associated with innocence, and so with vulnerability. Such images inspire protective responses, a more ready identification of need and a greater willingness to respond to that

need. These politics underpin humanitarianism and the civil society and activist groups that grow up around it. They are also rife with tension, as they establish a clear relationship between the figure depicted – the child – and the viewer as one between a victim and protector. The relationship is inescapably one of power, where the agency and control lies with the audience and not with who is depicted. It is not, therefore, a relationship that engenders a solidarity premised upon equality.

The discarded tracksuit sets up this relationship for me, even more powerfully. It conjures not just a child, but an absent child, one who might have been failed by the system, to have lost or never achieved adequate protection, and who deserved better. This notion of 'deserving' is yet a further dimension of the use of children in depicting refugee, asylum and humanitarian images. The innocence bound up in the symbol of the child conveys that this individual, at least, is not 'at fault', not seeking to 'take advantage', not a 'bogus refugee.' Indeed, Musaro (2011) writes about how emotions, and images that are mobilised to invoke them, are central to 'making' an audience empathize with the fate of strangers.

Even with such an awareness of the politics of the representation of children, and the problematic use of images of a child to mobilise and trade on victimisation and need throughout humanitarianism, both of us unanimously agreed that this image was central to our collection here. It was the first one we settled on, if you recall – but neither of us chose it because it was the 'most important', particularly surprising, or even terribly effective. Rather, the words we used were 'well, we have to include this – don't we.' We have spoken at immense length about how research in the field is actually carried out. How we can position ourselves as critical scholars committed to engagement and solidarity, when we are only physically present very briefly. And, in the case of the Hotel Captain Elias, this is even more difficult because we are more than a year into the aftermath. Even when starting from a critical place, images and objects that invoke children do an immense amount of work to generate the emotional engagement that the crisis demands – however problematically, and however much that invocation is in tension with our critical ethos. It creates an atmosphere.

For me, this atmosphere is one that, initially, speaks of loss or, perhaps, of forgetting, and so our project becomes at least in part an invocation, or a demand, of memory. The atmosphere in the Hotel Captain Elias is of things left behind. There is no way to know whether these clothes were left behind deliberately, discarded, or dropped and lost in a departure. The journeys of irregular migrants, and particularly of asylum seekers, are often marked by such trails and traces. Squire (2014) writes of the items left throughout the desert at the border between the US and Mexico; other photo-essays and exhibits mark the lives of migrants through the objects they leave behind or carry with them (Squire 2016). Here, the brush obscures a small piece of clothing, seeming to have fallen and then been overtaken by the encroachment and growth of grass and weeds. Were these tracksuit bottoms dropped, or left on the ground? Did they fall out of a bag as a family left, or was this the place where a family slept, ate, lived? Were they discarded by a child, too hot in the summer sun? Or, by a parent because they were soiled or torn? We didn't pick them up, or even touch them. Thinking back, we didn't touch or disturb any of the objects we found – concerned, perhaps, about leaving our own traces, as though we didn't belong.

Echoes:

These objects, the material elements of these lives, are evidence. But as we have argued, they don't speak as 'truth' or 'fact', but rather require (if not demand) interpretation. Our 'readings' of this site have been guided by two desires: first, we want to contest the dominant policy, media and official narratives that render migrants silent and abject (i.e. to write against the official story); and second, by trying to open up some space that can be occupied and filled out by the narratives of migrants themselves (i.e. to create space for previously unarticulated stories). We feel rather more comfortable in the first mode, and indeed, we have many allies pushing in the same direction. It is the second mode that is most challenging because it requires us to *get out of the way.* This is about forming a new kind of absence in the space of privilege and enunciation. We are keen to think further about what this productive kind of absence might look like, and how it may eventually generate creative forms of solidarity. At the Hotel Captain Elias, however, we found this practice really difficult as the voices we were creating space for had already gone. In that sense, we moved through a strange echo chamber that continues to resonate.

All of our conversations – about these images, about the visit itself – have pushed these two lines of interpretation as we shared with one another how we have each read these traces, and what they say to us. Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2016: 317) argue that the challenge in research about the current experience of migration in Europe lies in understanding how crisis and routine are articulated in practice, as 'mutual conditions of possibility'. The materials, traces, and echoes of the migrant inhabitants of the Hotel Captain Elias open up these new possibilities of engagement as they bring everyday life-worlds into the frame of both crisis, and aftermath. Our own conversations, and our approach here, has tried to create those possibilities in the research itself by opening up the process of critical and reflexive intervention.

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