

The Care/Security Nexus of the Humanitarian Border: Assisted Return in Norway

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ABSTRACT

While Assisted Return and deportation are frequently viewed as two different return policies, the first represented as humanitarian and the latter as enforcement, this article argues that there is a continuum between these policies and that they form part of humanitarian border enforcement. Drawing on policy document analysis and interviews with NGOs and with irregular migrants, the article provides a two-level analysis by examining how AR is presented from the Norwegian governmental perspective and how it is experienced from the Afghan migrant perspectives. The article argues that the government bases its AR policy on the need to maintain the credibility and sustainability of the asylum system, as part of fighting crime, while presenting it as a humanitarian solution. For irregular migrants, however, the experienced lack of proper asylum procedures delegitimizes return policies. Overall, the performative aspects of humanitarianism in return policies contribute to depoliticizing return.

INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 2017, the Norwegian government planned to deport all Afghan youth with a temporary permit who had turned eighteen by October that year. There was significant media coverage about this controversial case of a group of youth who became known as the “October children”: after arriving as unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan they had received a temporary permit until they came of legal age. Many civil actors (lawyers and guardians of unaccompanied minors) and human rights organizations (including Amnesty International Norway) signed petitions and demonstrated against the return of these youth. They argued that several of the asylum cases had procedural errors and demanded a halt of returns – Assisted Return (AR) and forced return – to Afghanistan until the country became stable enough to ensure returnees’ safety and dignity. As this discussion went on, the outspoken and controversial Norwegian Minister of Immigration Sylvi Listhaug (from the Progress Party) went on a trip to Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya with the aim of securing return agreements. In January 2018, the government declined to halt forced returns to Afghanistan, arguing that stopping deportations to Afghanistan would mean that Norway would attract Afghans and other migrants. In the meantime, several worried Afghan youth left the reception centres. As covered widely in Norwegian newspapers and activists, some of these youth went missing and others went to Paris, where they lived on the street.

These events highlight the ways in which state-induced returns, such as deportation and AR have become an increasingly important focus for Norway as a way to deal with asylum seekers and

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irregular migrants. The return of asylum seekers with rejected applications back to their country of origin is a central topic on the agenda of migration management of Western European governments. In public debates, deportation and AR are frequently presented as distinct fields and different ways to manage irregular migration. AR is typically presented as a humanitarian solution, whilst deportation is considered to be an enforcement strategy tied up to security discourses. While the performative of AR is portrayed as the hand that cares (humanitarian), deportation is the performative of the hand that strikes (the police and the penal system).

This article argues that, rather than seeing AR and deportation as distinct policies, there is a “symbiotic relationship” between them; and this fusion is part of their legitimation and operation. The case of Afghan migrants, as this article will show, is particularly appropriate to show how caring humanitarian logic and security logic are entangled with each other in the context of migration management and their symbiotic continuum is part of the production of and operation of a humanitarian border (Walters, 2011) enforcement.

What Walters has (2011) called the “humanitarian border” is the increased violent securitization of migration which is accompanied and supported by the simultaneous emergence of humanitarian aid and services in the border regions. The humanitarian border is neither fixed nor contiguous, but emerges through different forms of technologies of government, including administering aid and shelter, and occurs in instances when humanitarianism is operationalized to manage a political crisis and neutralize public controversies on migration situations (Walters, 2011). While Walters (2011) situates this border along the edges of nation-states, in this article I provide an empirical grounded analysis of the transformations of border enforcement beyond the territorial frontier. I take as a starting point Balibar’s (2002, 91) observation that the border can no longer, if it ever could, be understood as limited to the frontier of any nation-state, but emerges at different instances, moments and places “wherever selective controls are to be found”. The polysemic nature of borders, which work differently for different people (Balibar, 2002), means that they are not always identified as borders by all concerned, or in similar ways, necessitating a multiperspectival approach to the study of borders (Rumford, 2012). In this article, by scrutinising the discourses of AR and deportation from the perspectives of both the Norwegian government and the irregular migrants, I demonstrate how AR policies are part of a more general tendency of the “rebordering” of political and territorial space (Walters, 2011; Bendixsen, 2016), called the humanitarian border. I link the governmental discursive representations of AR to the lived realities and experiences of irregular migrants. The aim of this article is to cast light on how AR policies operate through a care/security nexus and how it forms part of a rationality and technology of humanitarian border governance. I explore how AR is framed within a humanitarian discourse to justify enforcement state policies and how the resulting policy transformation is understood by irregular migrants who are the main “users” of these policies. In doing so, I argue that AR and deportation together form part of humanitarianization of border enforcement through a care/security nexus.

The article is organised in three different sections. After a short background discussion of methods and research approaches to return policies, I examine AR from the Norwegian governmental policy perspective together with the understandings of return held by Afghan migrants who have signed up for AR. This section highlights how the logic of AR is linked to deportation, presented as a duty and legitimized through a humanitarian discourse. The third section reflect on how the humanitarian border rests on the simultaneous operation of logics of humanitarianism and security, before a short conclusion where I reflect on how the humanitarianism discourse contributes to a depolitization and policing of return.

METHODS AND BACKGROUND TO AR IN NORWAY

This empirical analysis draws on three main sources of data: (i) return-related policy documents and public statements by governmental officials, (ii) interviews with NGOs working with AR

programmes and (iii) in-depth interviews in Oslo and Bergen (2011-2015) with 14 irregular migrants who have signed up for AR to Afghanistan, a majority of whom were men between 17 and 35 years of age. Some of them had arrived to Norway as unaccompanied minors. All of these irregular migrants were former asylum seekers whose applications had been rejected and who had overstayed their departure date – thus becoming irregular or “illegal” in Norway. While the limited number of informants does not allow for a generalization, many of the experiences and perceptions relayed here are common to irregular migrants in Norway. I have also conducted several interviews (more than 50 in total) with irregular migrants signing up for AR to other countries, and these form a backdrop to my understanding of the Afghan case.

A recent report has estimated that there are between 18,100 and 56,000 irregular migrants in Norway (Mohn et al., 2014), and that the lower figure is the most plausible. Reducing irregular migration has become one of the policy priorities for Norway, as for the EU and its member states. In this context, return migration has become one of the main Norwegian priorities, as is reflected in several public documents, including the government’s Return Strategy 2011-2016, and by politicians’ statements such as, “the pathway out of irregularity is return to the home country”.¹

Since 2002, AR has been organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on behalf of the Norwegian authorities. Rejected asylum seekers, asylum seekers awaiting a decision and people who do not have legal residence in Norway can apply for return through the AR programmes. In 2014, the term “voluntary” was removed from the term “assisted voluntary return,” and the Norwegian government now uses “assisted return.” IOM retains the term “voluntary” in its terminology, as this is considered to be a unique selling point when approaching states in the search for an alternative to deportation (Koch, 2014).

While a small country that is not an EU member, as a Schengen country Norway is important in the ongoing discussions about AR in general, and Afghanistan in particular. Norway strives to harmonise its return policy with that of the EU and adopted the EU Return Directive (2008) in 2011. While the EU signed a readmission agreement with Afghanistan in 2016, Norway already had a return agreement in place in 2005. Norway’s agreement with Afghanistan is a tripartite agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and it is, alongside the agreement with Kosovo and Iraq, considered as the most successful agreement in terms of returns. Norway has deported more Afghans than any other European country in 2016 (according to Afghan authorities, 64% of all deportees in 2016 arrived from Norway).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING: HUMANITARIANISM AND STATE-INDUCED RETURNS

In this article, I draw on two scholarships that are strongly interrelated: that on humanitarian border as a state technology of control, and that on deportation as a form of migration management.

The first strand of scholarship discusses how the humanitarian practices and logics overlap, complement and depart from different forms of power and governance, such as securitization and militarization at the border (Walters, 2011; Williams, 2015; Little and Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Pallister-Wilkins, 2017). The management of migration and technologies of governance from the violent securitised border enforcement policies cannot be untied or differentiated from the simultaneous ideological framework of humanitarian engagement and services. Fassin (2012) has showed how “humanitarian reason,” namely higher moral sentiments such as respect for human life and alleviation of suffering, have become part of politics and governance, enacted through the practice of rescue and assistance. Research has argued that humanitarian interventions which focus on saving lives simultaneously mask the violence of the borders that are making people vulnerable in the first place, and that in practice humanitarianism is not an innocent apparatus for rescuing lives, but instead is steeped in power structures with political effects. For example, humanitarianism as a

regime of care pursued by NGOs and IOs in times and places of exception (due to e.g. disasters, war and violence) is unwittingly and sometimes unwillingly tied up with control, biopolitics and victimization (Malkki, 1995; Fassin, 2007; Agier, 2011; Ticktin, 2014). NGOs and humanitarian organizations are linked to the governmental functioning of power to the extent that they become contingent upon each other: the control function (including asylum policies and management of refugees) is accompanied by a function of protection (Agier, 2011). Thus, the governing hand and the caring hand are not always distinguishable: “every policy of assistance is simultaneously an instrument of control over its beneficiaries” (Agier, 2011: 12).² Humanitarian policies and practices which should relieve human suffering are ultimately political and become part of justifying symbolic and physical violence (Ticktin, 2006; Williams, 2015).

Current border enforcement practices go through a simultaneous process of securitization, militarization and humanitarianization; “humanitarian discourse and rationality is increasingly integrated into the way in which border enforcement efforts are both framed and justified” (Williams, 2016, 27). Williams (2016) introduces a safety/security nexus to cast light on the ways in which “migrant safety and border security discourse are seemingly reconciled in both official state discourse and policy. Within the discursive space of the safety/security nexus, migrant safety and border security are framed as mutually attainable goals; greater border security is posited as the means to increase migrant safety.” (27) Aas and Gundhus (2015) have explored the discrepancy between the humanitarian self-perception of European member states and EU agencies and the simultaneous support of policies which contribute to making lives more precarious. They argue that the growing prominence of human rights discourse and humanitarian ideals, in border policing practices that co-exist with the securitization of the border, is a new mode of governance and is part of the nature of policing what they term humanitarian borderlands: “the mission is framed and legitimised through the language of humanitarianism and human rights (...) at the same time as they [Frontex officers] find themselves complicit and practically involved in deeply inhuman conditions” (Aas and Gundhus, 2015, 14). Walters (2011) calls for the need to study how the humanitarian border takes different forms, in order to better understand the shifting rationalities and technologies of border governance. This article is part of that effort.

The second strand of literature discusses how deportation serves as one of the main ways of establishing insiders/outside, wanted/unwanted, and deserving/underserving (Walters, 2002), and how deportation has become part of the production of boundaries of belonging and citizenship definitions (Anderson et al., 2011). De Genova (2002) has showed how deportability has become an important feature of how nation states deter and control migrants: irregular migrants face the possibility of coercive expulsion from the space of the state, making them live in permanent fear and vulnerability. This “deportation turn” (Gibney, 2008) or “deportation regime” (de Genova and Peutz, 2010) is a systemic regime of exclusion set up to govern mobility, migration and exploitable labour force (de Genova, 2002; Walters, 2002; de Genova and Peutz, 2010; Koch, 2014).

While this conceptualization of deportation has encouraged critical inquires on policing, citizenship and sovereignty in migration governance, less attention has paid to how deportation works together with AR as part of a broader scope of return policies (Koch, 2014). Research has situated AR within migration governance and specific ways of controlling immigration (Blitz, Marzano and Sales, 2005; Koch, 2014; Vandevoordt, 2018), including through deportation (Kynsilehto and Puumala, 2016; Khosravi, 2017). AR functions as a form of migration management which complements forced deportation (Bloch and Schuster, 2006; Coutin, 2015), while being more cost-efficient (Vandevoordt, 2018). AR has been defined as a form of soft “state-induced deportation” (Bloch and Schuster, 2006; Coutin, 2015) and “soft deportation” (Leerkes, van Os and Boersema, 2017). Yet the continued focus on deportation as “the ultimate act of a sovereign state in defining its membership” (Gibney, 2008, 17) has contributed to conceal other more indirect and ambiguous ways in which states work to return migrants (Koch, 2014). Koch (2014) has argued that both AR and deportation are part of state-induced returns. He calls for the need to see their connectedness

and how they are part of the larger migration management to expel migrants and prevent them from arriving. So far, little research has explored the discourses of AR and how it operates together with deportation in the humanitarian border enforcement.

This article aims to contribute to developing this field of research further by exploring how the logic of care and logic of security work concurrently and how AR and deportation together constitute part of humanitarian border enforcement. In the following, I discuss how the Norwegian government frames AR as duty for migrants, a crime prevention policy and a humanitarian solution; and the way in which irregular migrants understand AR.

AR AS A DUTY FOR MIGRANTS AND A CRIME PREVENTION POLICY

The following statement from the government comprises many of the themes that I will discuss in more depth:

We will strengthen cooperation with the EU on the rapid return of people who do not need protection and give priority to European police cooperation to address human trafficking. This is crucial to reaching the goal of receiving fewer asylum seekers who do not need protection. The government will strengthen its cooperation with transit countries and countries of origin about returns. We support the EU policy of developing a more comprehensive migration and return policy, including in particular a stronger link between return and development.³

As this (like other statements by the government) indicates, the implementation of AR in Norway depends on multiple actors at various scales: at the supranational level, this means increased cooperation with EU police on readmission to returnees' countries of origin and collaborations with IOM and UNHCR for assistance in returning migrants. At the interstate level, Norway is instigating readmission agreements with third countries to facilitate deportation, a field in which the development – migration nexus (Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002) has increasingly become stronger (Geiger and Pécoud, 2013); in other words, readmission agreements are linked to development funding. At the national and local level, the Norwegian police has yearly expulsion quotas which increase, and various NGOs, church and migrant organizations receive government funding to provide information to target groups for AR about the AR programmes (Bendixsen et al., 2014).

In several political documents, budgetary funding documents, statements to the media and in political discussions, the government argues that “the credibility and sustainability of the asylum system is conditional upon the person who is not granted a residence permit leaving the country.”⁴ Return is presented as a duty that migrants have in the interest of maintaining the credibility of the asylum system.

None of the irregular migrants that I interviewed, however, considered AR as a duty. Common among the irregular migrants who I spoke with was a lack of confidence in the Directorate of Immigration, which was primarily about mistrust that their asylum applications had been properly processed. For many interviewees, not believing that their asylum application had been fairly dealt with was the main reasons for their negative assessment of AR and their rejection of the idea that they had a duty to return. Notably, research (Strand et al., 2016) suggests that while most asylum seekers maintain the position that the asylum process is fraud and that their application has not been fairly treated, many nuance this position after they have returned to the country of origin.⁵

At the government level, a particular temporality through which AR should take place is high on the implementation agenda:

The quick return of foreigners without a legal basis for staying in Norway is relevant to the whole legitimacy of and confidence in the asylum system. Quick returns send important signals, prevent

illegal stays in Norway and improve the individual's opportunity to re-establish themselves in the home country. (Strategy 2012-2016, National Police Immigration Service)⁶

Accordingly, returns should target people who have recently arrived in Norway and can speedily be sent back to a "home country" where they should be able to continue their lives. According to this narrative, the government prevents future irregular migrants from arriving, guarantees that the asylum system is protected and improves migrant's lives through quick returns. As I will discuss later, this apparent fusion of security and humanitarian discourses is predicated on enforcement policies.

The urgency of speedily removing this group of people and preventing others from coming, is tied to the idea that they might otherwise commit crimes:

When a large number of people live illegally in the country, many without known identity and often in places of residence that are unknown to the authorities, there is also the risk of crimes being committed, since it is difficult to earn a living legally without a residence permit. The return of persons who have already committed a criminal offence is also a priority. Returns are therefore also an important preventive measure, and will reduce the use of resources in the criminal and migration chain. (National Budget, 2018)⁷

Return policies, and their speedy implementation, are frequently presented as a crime-fighting tool: "Rapid return is also an important instrument in the fight against crime. The false and unknown identity of criminal foreigners poses a security risk and is a social problem" (Strategy 2012-2016, National Police Immigration Service).⁸

The connection between return and crime was also perpetuated by Sylvi Listhaug (Progress Party) in a number of statements in the media during her period as the migration and integration minister. For example, in 2016 Listhaug called for an increased budget allocation to "asylum return," arguing: "It is about returning those who are rejected, but also about finding criminals to be expelled from Norway. We are keen to return the most possible in order to maintain a fair system."⁹ Some months later, Listhaug commented to the media that she "was very pleased" that 2016 had the highest number of forced return ever, and that "It's about fighting crime and keeping the population safe. Those who stay illegally in Norway, we shall find them and then we will send them back to the country they belong to."¹⁰

In 2017, the allocation letter for the police stated that "the risk that crimes will occur increases" when a large number of people live "illegally" in the country, which again suggests that "work on returns and identity clarification is important in a safety and crime prevention perspective." Here, as in other places, it is not clear whether "work on return" is about AR or deportation or both.

The criminality aspect has gained a prominent role in how the police are instructed to work on irregular migration, and the government stresses the importance of cooperation between the criminal and administrative authorities to improve efficiency in the area. The public statements accompanying the increased budget allocations to the police over the last few years emphasise closer collaborations between the immigration authorities and the police, create a return coordinator position with special responsibility for return in each police district, and develop a plan to reach local return targets (Allocation letter for the police 2017). The use of the penal systems and role of the police in the field of return reveal the intensely policing rather than political nature in the work against irregular migration.

AR AS A HUMANITARIAN SOLUTION COMPARED TO DEPORTATION AS ENFORCEMENT

In addition to refugees being construed as potential criminals, their return is presented as a way to relieve the welfare state of costs:

If we are unable to expel those who have their immigration applications rejected, this will lead to increased public service burdens, the need for more spots in reception centres and more requests for reversals. (Allocation letter for the police, 2017)

In the National Budget for 2018, the Government argues that if failed asylum seekers are not returned efficiently, this will “increase the burden on public services.” The next sentence reads: “Living without a legal residence permit is also a burden for the individual, both adults and children.”¹¹ Return is thus also a way to alleviate the migrant’s burden of living irregularly in Norway. Whilst in one sentence the irregular migrant is depicted as a (potential) criminal and the cause of incurred costs, in the next he or she is considered a victim who needs help and for whom AR is the best solution. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration’s Head of Section Knut Berntsen told *Nettavisen*, an online Norwegian newspaper:

AR is certainly the best solution for those who have received a final rejection of their application for protection. It’s far better to come back with some money in your pocket and tell your story yourself, rather than being returned by the police.(. . .) For a family, rehabilitation assistance can be a considerable amount of money and can provide a good start.¹²

These and other arguments are instrumental in how irregular migrants are blamed for their own suffering and it is suggested that *their* lack of signing up with AR which instigates the enforcement (forced return) by the Norwegian government. Irregular migrants are presented as people incapable of knowing their best interests: “I want as many as possible to choose voluntary return, because it will be better for them, for the Norwegian state and for all involved,” says Sylvi Listhaug, the Minister of Immigration (the Progress Party), to the Norwegian state television channel, NRK.¹³ The message that “voluntary return” – referencing to AR – is better than “involuntary return” – deportation – is repeated frequently, including on the government’s website. This sets up a misleading dichotomy between AR as “the best solution” and humanitarian compared to forced return, a dichotomy which among the irregular migrants as I will discuss did not exist.

While the budget for AR went down and the budget for deportation went up, economic support for families who had been in Norway for a long time went up if they applied for AR by 31 December 2016. This was justified by the Directorate of Immigration in the following way:

Why are we doing this? The situation the families live in Norway is undesirable over time. Several of these families have been living in asylum reception centres for a long time. The family can also risk involuntary return to their home country. For families with children, re-starting their lives in their home country can be a big financial burden. We want to give these families an opportunity to return in a dignified way. We hope the temporary increased financial support can help them choose assisted return, rather than risk being sent home involuntarily.¹⁴

Disregarding the role of the government in making their situation difficult and as the source of the threat of deportation, the government shows its caring face by providing these families with an opportunity to return in what it calls a “dignified way.” AR is here framed through a humanitarian logic: it is a compassionate intervention to end physical suffering (Fassin, 2012). According to the online information leaflet about AR produced by the Directorate of Immigration available online, “the goal is to make sure that as many people as possible receive information about AR to their home country as a dignified and sustainable alternative to remaining in Norway illegally, being expelled and deported by the police.” The Directorate of Immigration thus represents itself as caring and saving migrants, and presents AR as a well-intended form of assistance.

Simultaneously, information provided to irregular migrants about AR presents deportation as the only other option (Bendixsen et al., 2014). Deportation has become an increasingly important strategy and apparatus to facilitate and implement return policies (ibid.). A rise in the number of

readmission agreements with third countries facilitates deportation. Target numbers for deportations have increased each year: the number of forced returns doubled between 2006 and 2011 (Janmyr, 2014), rising to approximately 5,966 in 2013 (see Table 1), and peaking at 8,078 in 2016. From October 2013 to 31 July 2017, more than 23,000 persons without an immigration permit were deported from Norway.¹⁵ The decrease in the number of deportees can partly be explained by a decrease in the number of asylum applications from 2016 to 2017 and by the decrease in the number of people with a departure date living in reception centres from 5,700 in 2013 to approximately 1,950 at the end of 2016.¹⁶ Yet, AR is the means through which deportation is legitimised (“they could choose AR”) and deportation practices are presented as a necessary evil (“otherwise they will not choose AR”).

TABLE 1
TOTAL DEPORTATIONS AND ASSISTED RETURNS FROM NORWAY 2011 TO 2018

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Deportation total*	4744	4901	5934	7259	7887/7825	8078	5434	5077
Deportation Afghanistan*	206	391	603	793	544	910	366	216
Assisted returns total**	1812	1800	1900	1600	1167	1455	569	240
Assisted return to Afghanistan**	94	–	156	210	146	203	102	16

*Source: adapted from PU, <https://www.politiet.no/aktuelt-tall-og-fakta/tall-og-fakta/uttransporteringer/>, accessed 1.04.2019.

**Source: adapted from UDI: <https://www.udi.no/statistikk-og-analyse/arsrapporter/>, accessed 20.04.2019. For year 2017 the numbers include assisted return and assisted return accompanied by the police.

Deportation plays a significant role in implementing, promoting and legitimising AR to Afghanistan. Return to Afghanistan, through the IRRANA (Information, Return and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan) programme, has been a priority area, as indicated by the number of police staff working on returns to that region (Eriksen, 2017), the high number of evaluations of the programme commissioned by the government and the willingness of the government to continue its return practices despite public criticism. The Norwegian government legitimises its controversial deportation practices to Afghanistan by arguing that if Norway discontinues these deportations, Norway will be considered “a free haven for Afghan migrants already in Europe”.¹⁷ It would also imply a “new and more liberal asylum practice in Norway compared to other countries we like to compare us selves with”,¹⁸ and would go in a “different direction than the rest of Europe.”¹⁹ The latter argument suggests that decisions about AR in Norway are legitimised by reference to policies pursued in the EU. It is an instance of how EU regulations that limit state’s practices (i.e. to return asylum seekers to other member states where they know conditions to be inhuman according to standards set by the ECHR) can be used to legitimate restrictive national migration policies.

IRREGULAR MIGRANTS DISTRUSTING AR POLICIES

In contrast to the discourse and representation of AR, for the irregular migrants AR come across more as antipolitics of care (Ticktin, 2006), through which biological life becomes part of sustaining the hierarchical and unjust power relations that create their vulnerability in the first place. Many of the migrants who had signed up for AR talked about it as a way of dealing with uncertainty, waiting and being stuck. Increased competition and low income in the informal labour market, combined with increased checks by the police at targeted restaurants, shops and garages, made life

as an irregular migrant difficult. One man applied for AR because “I cannot live any longer in Norway – I feel really bad now.” This related to difficult working conditions and a difficult housing situation. Yet he did not believe that he could live in Afghanistan longer than the period necessary to receive the complete financial support from IOM:

I cannot stay there – came out from there 15 years ago and I do not know how to stay there. Never. The people who live in Afghanistan do not have jobs, they have no electricity, no water. How should I do it when those who live there do not know how?

Among those who were to return to Afghanistan, quite a few would be returning for the first time since they were children, as they left their home country when young. In this group, many had little memory of and few (or no) connections to Afghanistan. Many lacked a social network in Afghanistan, and this was the cause of the deepest concerns among this group of migrants: how would they find accommodation and work when they have no family or social network in that area?

Overall, irregular migrants frequently talked about AR as a way to avoid deportation. The informants varied with regard to how important the risk of a forced return was for signing up for AR (see also Bendixsen, Kjørrauthor et al., Strand et al., 2008; Strand et al., 2016): those returning early did not fear forced return to the same extent as those who had lived as an irregular migrant for several years. If someone of the same nationality had recently been forcibly removed, this also affected informants, particularly those living in reception centres. Some argued that if it was not for forced return, they would have stayed in Norway. People with children feared the reaction of their children if the police came in the middle of the night to take them to the deportation centre. One man argued that he always thought about deportation, implying that AR was a way of closing a chapter in his life. For a few of the migrants I spoke with, the possibility that they would lose the economic incentives in the AR programme and the impact of forced return on a potential future migration to Europe made them sign up for AR.

While most migrants confirmed that they had received information about AR, a common feature was that most did not perceive information about AR as relevant because they did not judge return as a significant option. Moreover, more than half of the irregular migrants I spoke with did not trust the return programme as many were uncertain as to whether they would actually receive the promised economic support.

The fact that AR programmes existed was not perceived to confirm that a return would be safe. This is in sharp contrast to how the Norwegian government presents the programmes. For example, Kari, who had a short-term position as information officer for IOM, recalled during an interview that one day she had provided information about AR in a reception centre when a person from Afghanistan challenged her:

‘You work for IOM? Do you know what happened to IOM’s office in Kabul? They were bombed. Do you want to work for IOM in Kabul?’ When she had replied ‘No’, he had added: ‘And I do not want to go home because I’m afraid’.

In such situations, it becomes difficult even for those in charge of providing information about AR to argue return programmes as more humanitarian and sustainable alternatives compared to life in Norway. In formal conversations about AR, NGO actors whose positions were funded by the Directorate of Immigration and who were tasked with providing information about AR found it difficult to respond to expressions of fear. Furthermore, the interviewees’ responses suggest that the legitimising function and the humanitarian flair that agencies such as IOM and UNHCR are supposed to fulfil for national governments in the context of return is not necessarily working in practice, that is, at least not in encounters with irregular migrants.

Moreover, several irregular migrants conflated the nation-state and agencies such as IOM. Some mistook the work of IOM and that of the Directorate of Immigration, or perceived them to be working closely together. One 26-year-old Afghan man, who had lived in Europe for 10 years, said:

IOM? That's who the rejection comes from. It said IOM in my letter of rejection. They say that you must travel voluntarily otherwise the police will come.

This suggests that the humanitarian mandate and identity of IOM (Koch, 2014) have partly lost their validity and credibility among some migrants. While international organisations such as IOM and UNHCR might have retained some of their moral authority and humanitarian standards vis-à-vis states, their increased engagement in the implementation of AR, among other things, seems to have impaired their moral standing and thus moral sanctioning power among irregular migrants (see also Ashutosh and Mountz, 2011).

DISCUSSION

The entanglement of the humanitarian logic and securitization logic in discourses on AR facilitates deportation, both morally and practically. Deportation, operating through criminalisation of irregular migrants and securitization of the border, is legitimized by the argument that AR would otherwise not work. While AR is presented as a solution that the migrant should “choose” instead of being deported, for many irregular migrants it is expressed as a choice available only in a structurally contingent situation so that the question of agency and choice becomes dubious. Research has discussed how the boundaries between voluntary and non-voluntary return are problematic because they assume a situation in which the irregular migrant makes a choice between what are experienced as genuine options (Øien and Bendixsen, 2012; Van Houte, Siegel and Davids, 2016; Strand et al., 2016). Although depending on the time period spent as an irregular, many of the migrants I interviewed confirmed that without the fear of deportation they would not have signed up for AR. In many of the AR cases, “return” is a problematic and paradoxical label. In cases where migrants are signing up for AR in order to avoid a forced return, the label “self-deportation” might be a more accurate one. Further, legitimating deportation to Afghanistan by referring to EU member states’ practices is one instance of how responsibility for unpopular decisions about AR is shifted upwards. It contributes to insulating decision-making from domestic pressures. Reframing AR as a solution in the best interest of migrants, an intervention that should facilitate life to continue “at home” and an alternative to the enforcement policy of deportation shows how both AR and deportation are part of the production of humanitarian border enforcement.

The humanitarian border is also constituted by how AR is framed as necessary to maintain confidence in the credibility and legitimacy of the asylum system. The existence of irregular migrants is framed as a symbol of a non-functioning asylum system and their removal is viewed as the only way to restore confidence in its performance. By framing AR as a political intervention that will improve the asylum system and thus as addressing the political concerns of all future refugees, national security and international refugee rights are somehow reconciled: flaws of the system are “recognised” and serve as justification for why deportation and AR policies are necessary. The return of rejected asylum seekers is presented as a duty and obligation on the part of the migrant. Yet many migrants consider their application not to have been adequately processed (see also Schuster and Majidi, 2013), and thus reject the idea of return as a duty. Further, documents and public statements about AR do not specify *whose* confidence in the asylum system needs to be restored or maintained – Norwegian citizens or the asylum seekers who are, after all, its users? The

suggestion that the humanitarian government is also a biopolitical government of host populations (Mavelli, 2017) seems worth exploring also in Norway.

The rationales of AR and deportation are formulated as necessary for the appropriate functioning of a wide-ranging system for the management of migration. The performative aspect of the care/security nexus has a depoliticizing effect on AR. The removal of a category of people through AR as a humanitarian solution becomes an inevitable and natural response, contributing to a de-politicization of migration-related policymaking. Humanitarian vocabulary also situates irregular migrants as subjects in need of saving by the authorities, whose only humanitarian solution is return.

The security aspect of both AR and deportation is particularly visible in how AR is represented as a way of fighting crime and crime-related activities. In these narratives, irregular migrants are presented as easily tricked into or willingly committing crimes. Efforts to return them are also efforts to get rid of criminals from Norwegian soil. In this process, “humanitarian” return policies draw on and contribute to the discursive construction of “crimmigration” (Johansen, Ugelvik and Aas, 2013), the linking of crime and migration. In the case of criminality, AR is thought of as a solution before irregular migrants “turn into criminals” and deportation is the solution when “they have become criminals.”

While irregular migrants are in some instances represented as criminals, they are in other occasions represented as potential victims. Through AR they can be “rescued.” AR is framed as a caring solution, the humanitarian face of expulsion, and one that compares favourably to deportation. It is framed as a way both to rescue irregular migrants living in Norway and to prevent others from trying to reach Europe. In this framing, irregular migrants are viewed as not willing to return merely because they don’t know their own best interests. In Norway, this activates a long tradition of the welfare state protecting its members against social risk (cf. Kildal and Kuhnle, 2005), caring for its citizens and facilitating the “right” choices of its citizens. The Norwegian state presents itself as aiding and empowering irregular migrants to restore their lives in their “home country” – despite many migrants’ view that the country of return is no longer their home. Compassionate assistance is here provided not only by the IOM (Ashutosh and Mountz, 2011), but also by the Norwegian state, which adopts the language of humanitarianism. Thus, there is an inherent ambiguity within the return policy, as within the policy discourses of the EU (Vaughan-Williams, 2015): the irregular migrant is produced as both a life to be protected and cared for and a security threat, against which the citizens and the state must be protected. While the discourse and practices of AR and deportation may appear contradictory, they are a continuum of the same objective. For the government, it is important to continue to pursue AR as it is cheaper and less cumbersome than deportation which may result in adverse publicity and negative international responses from human rights organisations. For Norway, the nation state’s close cooperation with certain humanitarian international and national agencies, such as IOM, UNHCR and Caritas, is conditional upon AR having a humanitarian face (cf. Scheel and Ratfisch, 2014). For the nation-state, operating transnationally, through international civil society and non-governmental entities which use the language of human rights, enables it to reject refugee claims (Ashutosh and Mountz, 2011) and citizens’ demands for human rights. Yet while the collaboration at a transnational level might contribute to legitimate the policy among Norwegian citizens, with time the strong links between these scales of governance might contribute to thwarting their effects among its users, the irregular migrants. For irregular migrants, the strong involvement of NGOs and International Organizations (IO) in the field of return programmes conflates governmental and NGO and IO responsibilities and actors. In the long run, this can have a detrimental effect on the confidence that migrants have in these organizations.

CONCLUSION

This article has made clear how AR policies in Norway are intrinsically tied up with the deportation regime. This constellation of return policies, in which AR and deportation not only coexist but both are contingent upon each other, operates through a care/security nexus. It is by presenting AR as a caring and humanitarian approach that deportation can continue and even be expanded. Deportation as an enforcement policy, sometimes viewed as violent, is legitimised by presenting AR as the humanitarian choice offered to migrants. However, AR is politically driven by domestic, interest-based arguments (crime reduction, lowering costs associated with both welfare and deportation) rather than those founded on the protection of human rights (Blitz, Sales and Marzano, 2005). AR policies thus become an example of how nation-states are using coercive apparatuses in the name of compassion, humanitarianism and consensual legitimacy and are part of generating humanitarian border enforcement.

Examining both the AR discourse from a governmental perspective and the Afghan's perceptions of the return policy enables attention and a deeper understanding of the situation of AR as a policy that is part of the image-making of the government as humanitarian (Aas and Gundhus, 2015), its discrepancy with how the users of this policy experience it, and how the policy works symbiotically with deportation. One of the consequences of the humanitarian flair of the AR programme is a depoliticization of the policy and practice.

Humanitarianism has become a script that plays a key role in framing the government's rational of "migration management" and border control and is represented as in sharp contrast to violent deportation enforcement. AR policies and its particular conflation with deportation discourses transform the irregular migrant into an ambiguous figure – criminal, victim and irrational – that the nation-state must get rid of. The options made available to deal with the problem of irregular migration are presented as either AR or deportation. Both ways are legitimised as constituting the sustainability of the asylum system.

The humanitarian border enforcement is not taking place at the outskirts of EU, but is within the nation-state, partly configured through policies, practices and discourses on AR and deportation. This article has shown how AR (as a policy focusing on life that should be assisted, although not protected) and deportation (as a policy focusing on life that poses a threat to the nation-state) are synchronised policies of migration management and are an inherent part of the humanitarian border enforcement in contemporary Norway.

NOTES

1. The Minister of Immigration in 2011, Per Lønseth (Labour party), <https://www.udi.no/nn/statistikk-og-analyse/european-migration-network—norway/conferences-and-events/conferences/pathways-out-of-irregularity-2011/>, accessed 9.1.2018.
2. While some NGOs and IOs express their concern about being used by governments in ways which go against their ethics and standards, this article follows the important critical research that reveals how humanitarianism nonetheless come to intersect with other forms of power and techniques of governance.
3. https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/program_eu/id2473342/, accessed 5.2.2018.
4. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/innlegg-i-stortinget-om-stans-uttransport-afghanistan/id2578096/>, accessed 9.2.2018.
5. This research is not taking a position of whether or not the asylum process is fraud. Instead, it discusses how the experience and perception of the migrants of the asylum process before returning shapes the migrants' understanding and responds to AR and deportation policies.
6. <http://docplayer.me/1943047-Strategi-2012-2016-politiets-utlendingsenhet.html>, accessed 15.1.2018.
7. <https://www.statsbudsjettet.no/Statsbudsjettet-2018/Dokumenter/Fagdepartementenes-proposisjoner/Justis-og-beredskap/Prop-1-S-/Del-1-Innledende-del-1-Hovedinnledning-/>, accessed 9.1.2018.

8. <http://docplayer.me/1943047-Strategi-2012-2016-politiets-utlendingsenhet.html>, accessed 3.11.2017.
9. <https://www.abcnyheter.no/nyheter/politikk/2016/09/21/195243740/leirstein-ber-listhaug-stramme-grepet-om-tvangsreturer-av-kriminelle>
10. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/ny-rekord-i-antall-tvangsreturer-1.13319094>
11. <https://www.statsbudsjettet.no/Statsbudsjettet-2018/Dokumenter/Fagdepartementenes-proposisjoner/Justis-og-beredskap/Prop-1-S-/Del-1-Innledende-del-/1-Hovedinnledning-/,> accessed 3.11.2017.
12. <https://www.nettavisen.no/nyheter/far-295000-kroner—for-a-reise-hjem-frivillig/3422812209.html>, accessed 3.12.2017.
13. https://www.nrk.no/norge/mindre-penger-til-frivillig-retur_-selv-om_alle_-mener-det-er-best-1.13328347, accessed 3.2.2018.
14. <https://www.udi.no/aktuelt/20-000-kroner-per-barn-i-ekstra-stotte-til-assistert-retur/>, accessed 7.2.2018.
15. <https://www.statsbudsjettet.no/Statsbudsjettet-2018/Dokumenter/Fagdepartementenes-proposisjoner/Justis-og-beredskap/Prop-1-S-/Del-1-Innledende-del-/1-Hovedinnledning-/,> accessed 3.1.2018.
16. <https://www.statsbudsjettet.no/Statsbudsjettet-2018/Dokumenter/Fagdepartementenes-proposisjoner/Justis-og-beredskap/Prop-1-S-/Del-1-Innledende-del-/1-Hovedinnledning-/,> accessed 3.1.2018.
17. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/takk-kai-eide/id2578755/t>, accessed 18.1.2018.
18. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/innlegg-i-stortinget-om-stans-uttransport-afghanistan/id2578096/>, accessed 3.1.2018.
19. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/innlegg-i-stortinget-om-stans-uttransport-afghanistan/id2578096/>, accessed 3.1.2018. At the end of 2017, the following nine countries in Europe carried out deportations to Afghanistan: Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden, UK and Norway.

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