Assisted Voluntary Return:
Negotiating the politics of humanitarianism and security in migration management

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Abstract

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This dissertation analyzes the political geographies of humanitarianism in Europe's Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programs for migrants. Promoted as a humanitarian policy of migration management, and often implemented by humanitarian institutions, AVR programs provide counseling, travel booking, and reintegration assistance for undocumented immigrants and appeals-rights-exhausted asylum-seekers to return from Europe to their country of origin. AVR policies are typically framed as a humane, dignified, and voluntary alternative to deportation and, as such, have become increasingly enrolled in Europe's management of migration – particularly in the wake of the EU's 2015-2016 "migration crisis." This means that practitioners implementing AVR programs daily negotiate the realities of providing humanitarian assistance to migrants in a context that is increasingly securitized around governing migration through effective returns policies. Drawing from archival research and interviews with AVR practitioners at a range of organizations across Europe – NGOs, the International Organization for Migration, and state actors – who counsel migrants about the decision to leave Europe via

AVR, my dissertation unpacks the spaces and politics of how AVR is implemented at this intersection of care and control.

This dissertation contributes a critical geographical analysis of humanitarianism's paradoxical politics by deploying AVR as a lens onto how humanitarian assistance is enrolled in Europe's management of migration. The dissertation's empirical chapters investigate AVR's history, practices, discourses, and politics as a policy implemented at the nexus of state security motivations and humanitarian assistance for migrants. My study contributes an understanding of migration management as biopolitical governmentality, arguing that humanitarianism paradoxically becomes a spatially extended form of governance over migration through AVR. Inspired by feminist geopolitics, I analyze how this policy is implemented through a network of institutions that are embodied by individual practitioners. Drawing on interviews with these practitioners, I bring care ethics analysis into conversation with the politics of humanitarianism and the control of people's movement through migration management. In these ways, my dissertation contributes a spatial and political analysis of how humanitarian practitioners negotiate providing care for migrants in an uncaring, securitized political context.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A roadmap for the dissertation: How I approach studying AVR and why it matters

I. Introduction

> *The most challenging moments for me [...] (were) related to how a very cruel or harsh environment – anti-immigration sentiment in a country – can force people with choices that are really not choices. [...] You know, you want to return because that's what you've chosen, it's best for you […] but is it really a choice?* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17)

Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) is a policy funded by EU governments as a pathway for migrants, many who have no further legal recourse to remain in Europe, to voluntarily return to their country of origin. AVR programs entail a suite of practices, including: educational efforts for migrants about return, counseling regarding migrants' decision to return, assessment of migrant needs and vulnerabilities, booking and coordination for migrants' return travel, and reintegration assistance for migrants upon return. In framing and function, AVR has an unmistakably humanitarian identity. This is because powerful institutional actors like the EU and International Organization for Migration (IOM) frame AVR as a humanitarian policy, enrolling discourses of migrant assistance, rights, and dignity. This identity also stems from the fact that AVR is typically implemented by humanitarian organizations.

The above quote indicates, however, that AVR is a conflicted and paradoxical policy. While AVR is framed as a humanitarian "choice," a path which migrants can freely take to return, this choice is situated within Europe's increasingly anti-immigrant climate. This produces a highly conflicted political space for migrants to navigate, in relation to their legal status and the larger EU politics surrounding migrant return. AVR practitioners, such as the official quoted above, must also negotiate this conflicted political space through implementing a humanitarian program that frequently accomplishes a security-focused outcome: migrant removal.

This dissertation analyzes AVR across European sites to theorize how humanitarian assistance for migrants is negotiated against the security concerns of EU states and citizens. This study of AVR provides a lens onto how humanitarianism is incorporated with migration management in four key ways, allowing us to see: 1) how humanitarian assistance and immigration politics are intertwined at an institutional level; 2) how institutional discourses of humanitarianism are deployed to justify migrant return; 3) how practitioners navigate this tension between care and control; 4) the possibilities and limitations of how humanitarianism operates with respect to migrant return. This dissertation contributes to debates in critical humanitarianism studies, political geographies of bordering and migration management, and feminist care ethics by critically analyzing how humanitarianism is enrolled into immigration politics in Europe today through AVR.

Throughout this introduction I delineate this project's empirical and theoretical contributions, providing a roadmap of what is to come. I first introduce my case study of AVR, laying out the broad stakes and issues that inform the project's research questions. Next, I review the key theoretical interlocutors of this research, introducing the key ideas and concepts that I will employ in the following chapters to develop my argument. I then define my project's research questions as contributions to the previously-reviewed literature, and briefly introduce my data. The final section of this chapter concludes with an outline of how each chapter relates to my research questions, connecting key concepts and empirical themes from each chapter to the larger arc of my dissertation.

II. Establishing my case study: About AVR in Europe

In this section, I provide a broad overview of the (geo)political context surrounding AVR in Europe. This project's fieldwork began amidst the 2015-2016 influx of migration into Europe, which is commonly referred to as the "migration crisis" or "refugee crisis" in EU and popular media descriptions (European Parliament, 2017; BBC, 2016). My study provides a timely insight into how AVR is a governmental response to changes in political climates at the country level in the wake of this time period, during which there has been a marked focus on migrant returns at the EU scale. Though it accomplishes a security-focused end for EU governments, what is unique about AVR is that it is frequently implemented by humanitarian actors with sincere intentions to assist and care for migrants in navigating the return decision. Some argue that AVR, as a key program of European migration management today, effectively represents a humanitarian alternative to deportation (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010; Collyer, 2012).

AVR is a politically important practice to study, as over 1.4 million migrants have voluntarily returned since 1979 through IOM, and over 40,000 migrants used AVR programs every year on average between 2011 and 2015 (IOM, 2015b). In practice, AVR begins with educational outreach efforts to undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers. For interested migrants, counseling sessions with institutional officials help them decide whether or not to return. If the migrant decides to return, assistance is then provided for one-way travel to the country of origin, and sometimes, financial assistance is given for "reintegration" (for purposes such as paying rent, starting a small business, eliminating debt, etc.). For example, at the time of writing, AVR programs in the UK offer up to 3,000 GBP towards housing and living expenses upon return, assistance with travel documents, and payment of return flight tickets (Gov.UK, 2021). Therefore, AVR is funded by EU governments and enacted by institutions like IOM to

accomplish a security-focused aim: the return and removal of irregular migrants, through humanitarian means.

IOM (2021c) defines AVR as:

> *an indispensable part of a comprehensive approach to migration management aiming at orderly and humane return and reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.*

In this way, AVR is typically framed as a humane, dignified, informed, and non-coercive alternative to deportation for migrants in deportable circumstances. Even within this promotional quote from IOM, we can garner a sense of the paradoxes inherent with AVR – "orderly and humane," "unable or unwilling" – and that AVR is seen as "indispensable" to migration management today. To contribute to an emerging literature on the paradoxical nature of humanitarianism, this dissertation unpacks the paradoxical practices and discourses of AVR in order to understand their political significance for the governance of migration today. The growing prevalence of AVR means that this dissertation will contribute broadly to both policy and literatures on migration and borders, security and humanitarianism in Geography.

II.A. Four spatial trends that contextualize this study of AVR

This dissertation's research on AVR is contextualized by four consequential, and inherently spatial trends. Each provides a motivation for the project's research questions, underlining why I believe it is important to analyze AVR in this place and time at the nexus of humanitarianism and security. First, it has been well documented that avenues for seeking asylum are shrinking in Western countries (De Genova, 2017; Fassin, 2012; Mountz, 2010, 2013; Tazzioli, 2018). Asylum seeking numbers in Europe, however, rose by 122 percent in 2015, with the top 5 countries of migration being Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo and Albania (Eurostat, 2019). Despite this increase in arrivals, studies have shown how legal channels for

seeking asylum are dwindling – and AVR is considered a key component of this transition (Fassin, 2012; Mountz, 2010; Ticktin, 2011). The increasing popularity of AVR is evidence of "the replacement of the right to asylum with humanitarian reason" (Fassin, 2012: 141). This project addresses the role AVR plays in Europe's asylum system as a humanitarian policy that is integrated into EU migration management.

Second, this trend of exclusion is coupled with the rise of humanitarian organizations that manage migrants' spatial mobility, many *in situ* in refugee camps (Hyndman, 2000), some at the outer edges of Europe (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) or at the US/Mexico borders (Williams, 2015), and others within European cities (Ticktin, 2011). A key part of this has been the growth of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and its advancement of a managerial approach, which significantly shapes how Europe's spatial and institutional governance of migration enrolls a host of smaller humanitarian institutions. IOM stands "at the intersection of the nation-state, international human rights regimes, and neoliberal governance" (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011: 22). IOM's work exemplifies how powerful states coordinate with international organizations to contract out migration management, "legitimized in the language of humanitarianism" (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010: 22). Though AVR programs have long focused on relocating migrants from EU countries, and still approximately 80% of AVR cases are out of Europe, AVR is now facilitated by IOM around the world (IOM, 2011). I conducted interviews in IOM offices in London, Berlin, The Hague, Brussels, as well as archival research at IOM headquarters in Geneva, to gain an understanding of the institution's influential discourses and practices in the historical and present-day implementation of AVR.

Third is the influx of migration into Europe flowing from the violence in proximate conflict zones, in places like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and other countries where people

are fleeing war for survival. In 2015-2016, the European Union saw a marked increase in migrant arrivals. According to a Pew Research Center analysis of data from Eurostat (the EU's statistical agency), in 2015 a record 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in the 28 EU member countries of the EU, Norway and Switzerland (Pew Research Center, 2016). About half of these newly-arrived migrants were from three countries of origin: Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq – all states suffering from large-scale conflicts at this time, leading to displacement. Germany was the primary destination for many of these migrants, receiving 442,000 applications for asylum in 2015 (ibid.). According to Eurostat data, 292,540 asylum applications were approved in the entire EU in 2015, meaning the large number of asylum-seekers were either rejected or still had their cases in limbo at the year's end (BBC, 2016). The five main nationalities granted asylum were Syria, Eritrea, Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran (ibid.).

The impulses behind Europe's securitization and criminalization of migration stem from this volume of new arrivals, the places of origin these migrants come from (and their associated racial, ethnic and religious identities), and media coverage of migration as a 'crisis,' 'terrorist threat' and 'invasion.' Take, for example, a 2016 Daily Mail article in the UK, which raises fears over the arrival of a "staggering number of European jihadis," framed as "potential terrorists taking advantage of failing EU border control checks" (Daily Mail, 2016). This article quotes then Tory Justice Minister Dominic Raab bemoaning "the risks, including from crime and terrorism, that the EU's free movement rules leave Britain wide open to […] with no solution in sight, the safer option is for Britain to leave the EU in order regain control over our borders and immigration policy" (ibid.). Race, and the criminalization of racialized migrants, was a central factor in the anxieties undergirding Brexit (Burrell & Hopkins, 2019). Framings such as these call attention to the ways in which the power and privilege of English/European whiteness,

rooted in colonial histories and present-day inequalities, undergirds calls for securitization of the EU and the UK (De Genova, 2017; De Genova & Roy, 2020; Hubbard, 2005; Ehrkamp, 2019; Gregory, 2004).

Brexit anxieties bring us to the fourth spatial and political trend: how, in Europe, this influx has emboldened anti-immigrant sentiments amongst subsets of the population, leading to the growth of far-right parties who deploy explicitly racist and nativist rhetoric. The impact of this immigration wave was particularly felt in cities where unprepared governments rushed to form impromptu shelters in stadiums, parks, and local government buildings. The visibility of recently-arrived migrants was thus concentrated and heightened – in city centers, on the news, and at key border crossings like Calais on the French side of the English Channel – in a way that was easily framed as a "crisis" (Collyer & King, 2016; McConnell, et al., 2017). This raised the urgency of already-tense debates in Europe around the present and future of migration policy – particularly concerning undocumented migrants and appeals-rights-exhausted[1] asylum-seekers who are residing in EU countries. Undocumented migrants and appeals-rights-exhausted asylum seekers in the EU are subject to forced removal; however, many remain in European cities, living in the shadows to avoid detection. With right-wing, anti-immigrant parties demanding increased removals, questions of governance, coexistence, and return for this population of migrants have become politically charged and frequently debated.

Public opinion polls from this time reflect the widespread discontent and anxiety of the European Union's population regarding the new arrivals, which undergirds Europe's security response and construction of migration as a threat. In 2015, the European Parliament's yearly

[1] I use this term throughout, as an alternative to the more pejorative, but commonly used, 'failed' asylum seeker.

"Parlameter" public opinion survey, 47% of respondents saw immigration as "the most pressing challenge the EU will have to face" – which is a 33% increase in the number of people who saw immigration as the most pressing challenge for the EU in 2013 (European Parliament, 2015). This survey also reflected widespread discontentment in 2015 around the distribution of asylum seekers across the EU, with nearly 8 out of 10 respondents saying that the number of asylum seekers should be better distributed between EU member states (ibid). A Spring 2016 Pew Research opinion poll across 10 countries in Europe found that large majorities of each country disapproved of how the EU was handling the issue of refugees – with 94% disapproval in Greece, 70% disapproval in the UK and 67% disapproval in Germany (Pew Research Center, 2016). This same poll surveyed respondents about their feelings towards incoming migrants and found that half or more in eight of the 10 EU countries surveyed "believe that incoming refugees increase the likelihood of terrorism in their country"; furthermore, this poll reflected widespread concern amongst Europeans that refugees "will be an economic burden," with half or more in five of the nations surveyed saying that "refugees will take jobs and social benefits" (ibid.). These data provide important insight into what will generally be discussed as "security" motives, or the "securitization of migration" throughout this dissertation, showing that regional resentments, Euroskepticism (culminating in Brexit) and racialized fear of others are key components of Europe's present-day security concerns (Bigo, 2001; Léonard, 2010; Mountz & Hiemstra, 2014).

II.B. Studying AVR as European migration management

While migration rhetoric and policy in the U.S. remains decidedly focused on enforcement, in the EU there is a notable trend toward governing migration as a "manageable" phenomenon. This means that, while state sovereignty over who can enter and remain in Europe

is still prioritized, migrants' rights, vulnerabilities, and contributions to both home and host countries are factored into political discourse and policy (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). This approach depoliticizes policies that govern spontaneous migration into Europe by framing migration management as a technical process "beyond politics" (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010: 995; Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011). This is accomplished, in part, through an integration of humanitarian organizations, discourses and policies like AVR. In this way, AVR policies are typically justified as a humane and dignified tool of migration management in contrast to forcible deportation (Bendixsen, 2020; Cleton & Chauvin, 2020; Collyer, 2012; Encinas, 2016). Such programs bolster the European Union's geopolitical spatial imaginaries of itself as a liberal domain of human rights (Kuus, 2011).

However, for the reasons discussed above, migration management and humanitarian policies for migrants have become increasingly contested after the 2015-2016 migration "crisis" in Europe (McConnell, et al., 2017). In the wake of Brexit, with nationalist right-wing parties ascendant, policymakers across the continent are reacting against spontaneous migration with bordering practices that assert sovereignty at multiple scales (Jones, et al., 2017). For policymakers in Brussels, the perceived lack of effective migrant returns policies in this climate poses an existential threat for the future of the European Union. AVR has thus drawn varying, often contested, attention from politicians, media outlets and diverse constituencies. This means that humanitarian organizations running AVR operate in conflicted spaces that are funded and framed by the dueling imperatives of humanitarian assistance and securitization.

Therefore, while AVR policies are not new in Europe, and while migrants return via AVR for a host of reasons, the policies have taken on a renewed significance in today's political climate. For EU policy makers facing the public opinion challenges discussed above, AVR

provides a politically salient solution: a generally palatable humanitarian policy, implemented by a range of stakeholders, that allows migrants a choice to plan their return home in private as opposed to the expensive spectacle of chartered flight deportations. AVR has become a politically expedient and widely adapted policy due to how it is in line with EU commitments to human rights, preserves state sovereignty over territory and legal status-determination, and is cost-efficient compared to deportation. Furthermore, its incorporation of a range of state, IO, and NGO actors allows for an apparent political neutrality, often apolitically framed by IOM as "migration management for the benefit of all." This discourse of political neutrality preserves key tenets of EU liberalism that suggest EU states/subjects are compassionate, humanitarian and rights-protecting, papering over the inherent contradictions surrounding Europe's racialized enforcement of migration policies through appeals to good management and the law. This dissertation studies AVR as a governmental response to rising numbers of migrants, providing a lens onto an increasingly popular return policy that is less visible but vital to understand as humanitarian governance.

The analytical concerns of this dissertation are not only a European question. Brexit and the rise of far-right political parties across Europe is mirrored in the US with the Trump administration's draconian intensification of the US's historically problematic policies towards refugees, undocumented migrants, and asylum seekers from Central and South America – and finds further analogues in the exclusions of Canada's asylum regime (Mountz, 2010) and Australia's off-shoring policies (Watkins, 2017). In all of these instances, we see a general move towards criminalizing immigration and closing the door to new arrivals (De Genova, 2017). Despite the frequent intermingling of security and humanitarian priorities in migration management practices, literatures on migration, borders and humanitarianism in the social

sciences have historically viewed these dimensions separately from one another. Emerging research on migration management in Canada (Mountz, 2010), Australia (Watkins, 2017), Europe (Collyer, 2019; Fassin, 2012; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, 2020; Ticktin, 2011), and the US (Williams, 2015) calls attention to how governmental efforts aimed at policing and controlling migration are intertwined with discourses of humanitarianism as well as humanitarian actors/institutions. However, further attention is needed to how managerial discourses and practices enroll humanitarian subjects, organizations, discourses, and practices into non-militarized and more quotidian novel bordering processes like AVR.

In this study, I analyze how humanitarian discourses – such as notions of "choice," "voluntariness" and "assistance" – are enrolled into AVR's implementation, in large part through the facilitating and policymaking role of humanitarian institutions like IOM. I further address AVR as a spatial practice that is implemented by a range of state and non-state institutions at the merger of security and humanitarianism in migration management. Within the EU, the spontaneous mobility of vulnerable migrants is an enormous public policy issue, deemed regularly as an existential crisis for the EU, and bringing the distant suffering of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers' lives into sharp relief. This project's analytical attention is timely and relevant to ongoing debates on migration and refugee policy, accounting for how humanitarian actors care for and govern these populations.

III. A review of this project's primary theoretical interlocutors

This dissertation contributes to active debates in the field of political geography, engaging with literatures on bordering, security and insecurity, migration management, deportation, critical development studies, biopolitics and governmentality, feminist geopolitics, care ethics, and, most centrally, the paradoxical spaces and politics of humanitarianism. A key theoretical contribution

of this project is to bring institutional practices of migration management and humanitarianism into direct relation with biopolitical and intimate practices through an analysis of AVR. Throughout this literature review, I alternate between individual and institutional scales, to insist on the analytical inseparability of the individual and institution when studying AVR. This contributes to emerging work in feminist geopolitics on the embodiment of institutions and provides analytical insight into the paradoxes of humanitarianism – where, in the case of AVR, individual care exists in a fundamentally paradoxical tension with institutional control.

III.A. Feminist geopolitics: Studying institutions as embodied sites for the relational politics of care

Feminist geopolitics provides a framework for how individual and institutional discourses and practices interact, allowing us to see how migration is unevenly produced and managed at the nexus of biopolitics and geopolitics, with lived consequences for migrants and their managers (Hyndman, 2004, 2012). Feminist geopolitics encourages us to see state and humanitarian institutions as embodied: meaning they project certain images of their work into the world; they enact governing practices; they are sites for the emergence and maintenance of laws and political discourses; and they are potentially sites for change (Billo & Mountz, 2016; Mountz, 2010). This dissertation examines how AVR staffers, as relatively privileged humanitarian actors, provide care to migrants in a politically uncaring context (Hyndman, 2004; Massaro & Williams, 2013). This dissertation engages how humanitarian contexts are contradictory and paradoxical spaces where care and control converge (Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011).

In light of this reality, Chapter Six engages feminist care ethics to explore the extent to which AVR practitioners subvert the immediate task of removing migrants to also act politically to care for them. Feminist care ethicists have long argued that care is always already political

because of the ways in which the devaluation of care sustains the current hierarchy of social value, privilege, and power (Tronto, 1993, 2017; Lawson, 2007b). Feminist care ethical analysis begins from an ontological claim of relationality: that we are all embedded in interdependent relations of responsibility to each other and the social world (Held, 2006; Jaggar, 1989; Lawson, 2007b; Staeheli & Brown, 2003; Tronto, 1993). Inspired by feminist geopolitics, this dissertation examines how AVR staffers, as relatively privileged humanitarian actors, provide care to migrants in a politically uncaring context, evaluating the limitations and possibilities of this encounter (Hyndman, 2004; Massaro & Williams, 2013).

At the scale of individual practitioners who embody AVR institutions, my analysis offers an "emplaced investigation" of care (Raghuram, 2016). This focus on practice in context – on AVR as practiced in the EU's migration management regime – is vital because care is always intersubjectively worked out through relational practices in particular political, historical, and social circumstances (Raghuram, 2016; Tronto, 2017). While I did not interview migrants, the actions of AVR staff are produced by the deportability of migrants (De Genova, 2017). Europe's bordering regime renders migrants deportable, creating the very demand for migration management programs like AVR. Shrinking avenues for asylum in Western countries have prompted a rise in humanitarian organizations that manage migrants who are waiting in detention or whose claims for asylum have been unsuccessful (Hyndman and Giles, 2011; Tazzioli, 2018). As legal channels for seeking asylum dwindle, AVR provides an opportunity for appeal-rights-exhausted migrants to return home (Collyer, 2012; Mountz, 2010, 2013). However, many practitioners undertake this work because they want to support vulnerable migrants and because they feel that migrants would be worse off with forced deportation.

III.B. The paradoxical politics of humanitarianism

Therefore, at individual and institutional scales, a tension between care and control exists at the heart of AVR's implementation (Crane and Lawson, 2020). This tension is evidence of how humanitarian assistance is fundamentally paradoxical – juxtaposing compassion and containment, inequality and solidarity, security and development (Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011). Recent studies of humanitarianism aim to unpack such articulations in the biopolitical management of life between care and humanitarian assistance, on one hand, and militarization, securitization, criminalization, and exclusion on the other (Fassin, 2012; Hyndman, 2000; Redfield, 2005; Ticktin, 2011; Walters, 2011; Williams, 2015). This work raises vital questions about how humanitarianism functions as a calculative form of governance, limiting violence but remaining embedded within exclusionary politics (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020; Weizman, 2011). A growing body of literature is unpacking how purportedly 'non-political' humanitarian actors manage precarious lives (Agier, 2011; Malkki, 2015; Redfield, 2005; Ticktin, 2011). By studying AVR at this nexus of care, assistance and control, I contribute to emerging work in political geography that broadens concepts of humanitarianism and care to issues of migration and asylum, engaging their spatial complexities and political conflictions (Bendixsen, 2019; Hyndman, 2000; Lawson, 2010; Williams, 2015).

In studying how humanitarian institutions involved in European migration management engage the politics and paradoxes of humanitarianism, I merge a Marxist-feminist materiality with a post-structural attention to how practitioners construct, justify, (de)politicize, and enact their humanitarian practices of governance. While situating this analysis in political-economic context is foundationally important, this project can bridge a materialist analysis with concerns of subject formation, difference, and the agencies of diverse subject positions in engaging political spaces (Nagar, et al. 2002; Silvey, 2010). In this way, the project aims to provide a

better understanding of the various subject positions involved in implementing AVR. While there is growing attention to the articulation of security with humanitarianism in migration management (Collyer, 2019; Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011; Pallister-Wilkins, 2020; Walters, 2011; Williams, 2015), the need remains for in-depth analyses of institutional actors, the discourses they advance like migration management, and the practices they enact like AVR.

This dissertation contributes to political geographies of humanitarianism by addressing how humanitarian and security imperatives meet when powerful institutional actors encounter individual migrant lives in crisis via AVR. My project explores the spatial imaginaries enacted through this encounter, and how spatial practices of care versus control are enrolled. Fassin (2012: 1) defines humanitarianism as government of life itself, such that it encompasses "the set of procedures established and actions conducted in order to manage, regulate and support the existence of human beings." Humanitarian action is deployed according to moral sentiments for the suffering other, yet is situated within numerous inequalities (Asad, 2015). Practices of humanitarianism today are underpinned by "colonial cartographies and racial classifications" (Nguyen, 2012: 25). The "geopoliticisation of humanitarianism" (Hyndman, 2012: 242) has led many to study how efforts at assistance produce insecurities in recipients' lives and work while enhancing the funder's political, economic, and social security (Barnett, 2011; Duffield, 2007; Essex, 2013; James, 2010; Reid-Henry, 2011). Recent institutionally focused studies have addressed how humanitarianism's purportedly non-political actors operate according to many paradoxes in managing scenarios where people are facing crisis and insecurity (Agier, 2010; Fassin, 2012; Redfield, 2005; Ticktin, 2011). My project contributes to this growing literature with a timely analysis of how actors and institutions that manage the mobility of migrants through AVR operate at the paradoxical nexus of security and humanitarianism.

Reid-Henry (2014: 3) calls for political geographers to "spatialize humanitarianism's paradoxical engagements with the world." EU migration management processes are a key site to study this spatialization, in how humanitarian discourses and practices enable the securitization of Europe's borders (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). The very fact that European migration management, as a response to 'the crisis', can be framed in terms of security is precisely because migration represents a racialized threat to historically-white Europe's privileged notions of citizenship and belonging (De Genova, 2017). Thus, the paradoxes of humanitarian assistance, particularly concerning the flows of migration across the Mediterranean, are rooted in historical geographies of colonialism, development, and racial differentiation.

III.C. Political geographies of bordering and migration management: A conversation with Foucault and Agamben

Political geographers are merging Marxist, Foucauldian, feminist, and post-colonial intellectual traditions to study how power, politics, territory, and government are spatial phenomena, and are involved in the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991). Political geography studies how boundaries between people's lives rise and fall, how order is established and resisted at different scales, and how political movements take place in relation to structures of government (Agnew, Mitchell & Toal, 2003). The study of "orders and borders" has long been central to political geography, drawing analytical attention to the walls constructed between people in today's globalizing world (ibid.). This dissertation builds on a growing body of literature in political geography on the changing spatiality and materiality of borders and migration management (Bialasiewicz, et al., 2009; Burridge, et al., 2017; Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; Johnson, et al., 2011; Mountz, et al., 2013; Mitchell, et al., 2019; Paasi, 2005).

As opposed to the maintenance of a static, fortified border, efforts like AVR require attention to networks of practice through which "border*ing*" is accomplished as an ongoing

process of migration management (Johnson, et al., 2011). Here the border is studied "as a process…a verb" – as always in a condition of becoming (van Houtum, 2010). There is a need for scholarship, in light of today's increasingly sophisticated biopolitical bordering regimes, to move beyond the "territorial trap" (Agnew, 1994) in order to study the border as a "series of practices" (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, et al., 2009: 586). Viewing scale as unstable and produced in the service of politics, political geographers are researching how a multiplicity of borders between lives are rescaled, multiple, shifting, and embodied (Amoore, 2006; Coleman, 2009; Isin & Rygiel, 2007; Mountz, 2010; Newman & Paasi, 1998; Varsanyi, 2008). This literature contributes a spatial understanding of EU attempts to govern spontaneous migration at multiple scales (i.e., physical nation-state borders, camps, bodies, etc.) through contracted partnerships with humanitarian institutions.

Biopolitics provides a lens to see *how* such dimensions of bordering take place (Lemke, 2011). In this dissertation, I employ Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality to understand the implementation of AVR as migration management. For Foucault, the management of populations, the establishment of norms, and the ordering of spaces and flows are central to the operation of power (Brown & Knopp, 2010; Butler, 2004; Lemke, 2011). Biopolitics is about "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life," depending upon "a series of interventions and regulatory controls" at the level of the population (Foucault, 1990: 139-140). Biopolitics "frames rationalities" allowing for "problems to be discovered, classified, diagnosed, and solved" (Brown, 2009: 4). Foucault describes governmentality as:

> *The ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument* (Foucault, 2007: 108).

Geographical imaginations of (dis-)order and risk are key to the productive power of governmentality, providing a rationale of governance to establish categories and classification schemes, constrain and enable certain identities, practices and flows, and biopolitically manage life (Brown & Knopp, 2010; Brown & Knopp, 2016). Biopolitics and governmentality are important concepts for my analysis of migration management, because of their attention to how calculative techniques of knowledge/power govern individuals and collectives based upon nationality, race, gender, sexuality, religion and other axes of differentiation (Agamben, 1998; Amoore, 2006; Brown, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2010; Foucault, 2003, 2007; Hyndman & Mountz 2008; Hyndman & Giles, 2011; Lemke, 2011).

Foucault (2007: 18) identifies nativist anxieties that arose with a liberalizing political economy, creating the need to distinguish between and categorize 'good' versus 'bad' types of circulation – "the insecurity of the towns was increased by the influx of the floating population." A key paradox of biopolitics is that while power increasingly takes life as its aim in the management of lives and populations, the sovereign ability to kill and to let die does not disappear (Pratt, 2005). As Pratt (2005: 1053) argues, "the relation between the production of citizenship and the state's sovereignty over life" is "productive and fundamental." Here Foucault (2003: 246-247) is clear that state violence and racism are an inherent part of biopolitics' "making live and letting die." Feminist and postcolonial scholars have productively advanced Foucault and Agamben's work on biopolitics in this vein (Butler, 2004; Cacho, 2012; Fluri, 2012; Mbembe, 2003; Mountz, 2010; Pratt, 2005).

Building on Foucault's work, Agamben (1998, 2005) theorizes a fundamentally sustained connection today between biopolitics, law, and the sovereign practice of power (Lemke, 2011). With respect to unwanted migration, Agamben (1998) identifies a political logic of abandonment

to bare life, of exclusionary inclusion. Agamben (1998:142) is concerned with sovereign power's differentiation between bare life and politically qualified life – the ability "to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant." Critical research on humanitarianism has drawn upon Agamben's (1998: 168) description of the camp – "the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule" – to understand the decision-making power humanitarian organizations hold over maintaining life in conditions adverse to survival (Fassin, 2012; Redfield, 2005; Weizman, 2011).

AVR, however, shows that humanitarianism's sovereign power extends beyond spatially contained camp-like settings. The political differentiation between lives capable of managing and those deemed manageable – a defining logic of inequality within Agamben's camp – is extended outwards through practices of humanitarian management like AVR. Pratt (2005: 1055) provides a geographical treatment of Agamben's potentially totalizing thesis on bare life, calling our attention to "how power works to target and manage certain groups in concrete spaces." Isin and Rygiel (2007: 184) similarly charge us to investigate "how the camp works in all its material, experiential, and diverse forms." Agamben himself tells us to look for the space of the camp "in all its metamorphoses" throughout the biopolitical spaces of management around us; the camp is "the hidden matrix of the politics in which we are […] living" (Agamben, 1998: 175). Policies like AVR reveal how the camp's logic of political abandonment operates across space, beyond literal camp-like settings, to sustain a political differentiation between officials qualified to manage and migrants' lives deemed manageable. In this light, my study investigates how humanitarianism operates at the nexus of biopolitics and geopolitics as a paradoxical form of governmentality over migration (Duffield, 2010; Fassin, 2012; James, 2010; Sparke, 2006b).

In Europe today, migration management encompasses a host of discourses, practices, and institutions that differentiate between flows of people and goods across borders, with the aim of selective inclusion and exclusion (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). This is a biopolitical approach to governing life and managing political inclusion amidst the unprecedented mixed flows of globalization, and yet it has been furthered through a markedly depoliticized discourse (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010). The discourses employed by groups like IOM frame migration as a technical, calculative, and development-focused process that can be managed outside of politics. However, their managerial practices remain essentially about enhancing selectivity. Selective management is achieved through bordering practices like AVR that enforce the border at different scales in order to allocate certain people to particular places (van Houtum, 2010). Migration management allows the EU to invite labor migration in accordance with demographic and economic conditions, while maintaining policies of bordering, detention, and deportation (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011; Kofman, 2008; Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). For migrants who come uninvited or overstay work contracts – and who are now facing forcible relocation – AVR operates as a humanitarian practice of bordering by presenting an option first to voluntarily return with IOM's assistance before formal deportation processes commence (Collyer, 2012).

Therefore, AVR can be studied as a biopolitical extension of the camp's governmentality, justified as migration management, and implemented at the nexus of humanitarianism and security. Elucidating how AVR is framed, justified, and enacted as biopolitical governmentality is a key contribution of this study. In an increasingly interconnected world, managing borders is about managing lives and mobilities – the practices through which this management takes place, and the ways in which they are justified in the name of security and benevolence need to be made legible to society.

III.D. Critical development studies

To understand how migration management is justified, this project draws on critical development studies which analyzes institutional power, the role of expertise, and the power of bureaucrats to represent and reproduce powerful discourses (Crush, 1995; Escobar, 2011; Ferguson, 1994; Roy, 2010). According to Lawson (2007a), a critical geographical approach to development "focuses on contests of knowledge, scalar relations, conceptions of place/space and situated subjects." This approach is intentionally relational, considering how intertwined forces of history, geography, gender, race, postcoloniality, and many other factors influence the production of knowledge about who development is for and how it should be done. A key implication of this literature for my study is that powerful institutions are important field sites for research – leading to this project's focus on how institutions like IOM and smaller NGO's implement AVR (Mountz, 2010; Sheppard, Leitner & Maringanti, 2013; Ticktin, 2011). Migration and border management requires that we look with, and beyond, the state and economy to understand how discourses, practices, and institutions of development and humanitarianism paradoxically, and yet functionally, articulate with other scalar processes of migrant differentiation and control in particular places (Collyer, 2019; Walters, 2011; Williams, 2015). Therefore, critical development studies' foci on contests of knowledge and institutions as embodied are two key ways in which my study engages with this literature.

The concept of "development," while contested and multi-faceted, is important to AVR's framing and function. Chapter Four discusses how the reintegration dimension of AVR*R* policy is framed in terms of development assistance, benefiting both the migrant and the country of origin, which they are returning to. This points to a final import of critical development studies for my study, which is an attention to the politics at play in discourses of assistance, and how

politics of development are often intertwined with (geo)politics of security and political-economic influence. My dissertation contributes to this field by bringing together concepts of development and humanitarianism. While there is a larger interdisciplinary literature on the nexus of security and development (Duffield, 2007; 2010; Essex, 2013; Fluri, 2012; James, 2010), not enough work has been done on the spatial and political dimensions of humanitarianism. With notable exceptions (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010; Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011; Collyer, 2012; Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; Hyndman, 2000), not enough attention has been paid in the geography literature to the international humanitarian organizations that are increasingly influential in managing migration through practices like AVR.

III.E. Legal geographies of asylum, deportation and human rights

My analysis of AVR shows how legal status can determine the hegemonic terrain of meaning for migration politics, citizenship, and rights (Delaney, 2010; Loyd, et al., 2013; Rygiel, 2011). Delaney (2010: 45) claims that: "legal consciousness is (and legal imaginaries are) often deeply inextricable from and informed by *spatial* consciousness (and spatial imaginaries)." Spatial imaginations of law and space powerfully govern migration; such that when purportedly objective laws are broken in particular places, people's displacement or exclusion is accordingly rendered necessary and unavoidable (Blomley, 1994; Blandy and Sibley, 2010; Delaney, 2004; Herbert, 2009). Therefore, understanding the political process of asylum means engaging with core concepts of law, state power and space (Gill, et al., 2019; Martin & Mitchelson, 2009; Mountz, 2010). Through the process of seeking asylum, "legal indeterminacy" is often intimately linked to "spatio-temporal" indeterminacy as extended timeframes, uncertain legal status, and remote locations are increasingly frequent features of migration and asylum management (Martin and Mitchelson, 2009: 465; Fassin, 2012; Hyndman and Mountz, 2008; Mountz, 2010). The

hybridity of law proves politically useful to social control, restricting the urban poor in Western cities from making claims to full citizenship and rights to occupy space (Beckett & Herbert, 2009; Mitchell, 1997). The policing of immigration and management of borders is one of the key ways today in which we can see how the law is mobilized towards exclusion (Herbert, 2009).

The field of Legal Geography foregrounds the spatial operation of law, recognizing the diverse ways in which law, space and power are mutually constitutive of social relations (Braverman, et al. 2014; Jeffrey, 2020; Orzeck and Hae, 2020). Informing this field is critical and relational work on "legal pluralism" (Engle Merry, 1988), legal interpretation and violence (Cover, 1986) and "interlegality" (de Sousa Santos, 1987), which challenge the historical fixity, political objectivity and spatial singularity of common national law. Legal geography distinctively acknowledges that neither space nor law are given or natural, but that they are produced in ways that are imbued, often unevenly, with power relations (Blomley, 1994; Delaney, 2010). Since law is integral to the production of spaces of exclusion, and since space is not only the site but the stake of struggle against exclusion (Lefebvre, 1991), law remains a strategic terrain for study and critique toward producing more inclusive, emancipatory, and caring spaces.

In opposition to what Blomley (1994: 7) calls the apparent "closure" of law – the tendency to view law as an "autonomous, self-sufficient field that can be marked off […] from the vagaries of social and political life" – legal geography attends to the "unacknowledged assumptions about space that work to stabilize the validity of seemingly obvious propositions, identities and the very meaning of law" (Blomley, Delaney, & Ford, 2001: xv). In short, law does not exist above or outside of society (White, 2002). Rather, legal discourses are a constructive and normative force in constituting the social relations, identities and institutions by

which policies like AVR are ordered (Blomley, 1994; Blomley, Delaney, & Ford, 2001). Law is always under construction and informed by spatial imaginaries, legitimating certain knowledges and enforcing norms; it is also contestable and subject to change (Delaney, 2010).

While it is crucial to see the migrant as a social figure embedded in diverse contexts that could never fully be captured or determined by law (De Genova, 2017; Mezzadra, 2011), socially constructed categories of legal status do have great force with respect to migration, resulting in selective inclusions and exclusions (Derrida, 2002; Ehrkamp, 2017; Herbert, 2009). Legal constructions of human rights similarly take meaning in context-dependent ways (Engle Merry, 2009), and their interpretation for and application to migrants and asylum-seekers is often situated within exclusionary regimes of anti-immigrant bordering (Agamben, 2000). Western countries, most notably the US, EU, Canada and Australia, are now engaging in a host of bordering practices that creatively manipulate law and space to remove asylum-seekers from the rights, protections and processes guaranteed to them by international refugee law (Gill, et al., 2019; Hyndman, 2000; Hyndman & Mountz, 2008; Mountz, 2010). In such instances, it is important to understand how law "is situated in wider governmental networks and state apparatuses" (Martin & Mitchelson, 2009: 467). Law is integral to how the border is both "internalized and rescaled" (Varsanyi, 2008: 880), exemplified recently in the US's devolution of immigration control to local law enforcement officials through laws like 287g and the Secure Communities Act (Coleman, 2012) or through EU externalization (Bialasiewicz, 2012; Crane, 2020; Hyndman & Mountz, 2008; Watkins, 2017). AVR allows us to see how certain states and international organizations strategically make use of legal ambiguity in bordering today.

In its discussion of legal impossibility, this project undertakes a Foucauldian questioning of how legal categories are produced and how articulations of discourse, institutions and actors

form responses of governmentality, such as migration management. In this way, Butler (2004: 54-55) claims that governmentality "deploys law as a tactic" toward managing populations, representing "the operation of administrative power that is extra-legal, even as it can and does return to law as a field of tactical operations." The creative spatial construction of law is directly relevant to the enrollment of humanitarian actors in migration and border management. Weizman (2011: 4) describes humanitarianism as spatial management, claiming that humanitarianism, human rights, and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) have become "the crucial means by which the economy of violence is calculated and managed." Fassin (2012: 156) notes how a "proliferation of extralegal structures" for unwanted migrants make exclusion invisible or "have it performed by others" at 'EUrope's' borders in ways that are integrated with the operation of humanitarianism. When a migrant or asylum seeker is rejected based upon legal status, in spaces of detention and camps they can ironically become outside of the scope of IHL as their continued sustenance also becomes a project of humanitarian management (Agier, 2010; Hyndman & Giles, 2011; Weizman, 2012). It is thus important to attend to how legal status and legal ambiguity are powerful (and contestable) dimensions of managing migration today (Mountz, 2010; Mountz & Hiemstra, 2014).

Across Europe today, legal and spatial imaginaries of citizenship and deservedness are enrolled in evaluating migrants' claims for asylum, resulting in the criminalization of many migrants' existence in Europe as "illegal" – a socio-legal framing that facilitates exclusion and racialized impoverishment (De Genova & Roy, 2020). In a political context where unwanted migration is criminalized, removal thereby becomes justifiable for EU states as "the presumably transparent consequence of unauthorized border crossing" (De Genova, 2004: 161). For migrants, however, "illegality" is a "spatialized socio-political condition" that is lived through "a

palpable sense of deportability" (ibid.). In its focus on AVR institutions and practitioners, my dissertation contributes an analysis of how AVR accomplishes migrant removal (Mountz, et al., 2013), in concert with state and humanitarian discourses, practices and institutions.

Deportation remains central to managing populations insofar as it forcibly allocates certain bodies to certain states (Ngai, 2004). Numerous forms of removals and population transfers have occurred historically across the European continent, and voluntary and forcible deportation schemes today are part of a long history of expulsion as an "instrument of population regulation" (Walters, 2010: 76). As with the condition of being a refugee quarantined in a camp, there is nothing natural about deportation – like statelessness, it is a socially produced "effect of the division of the world into territorial states" (ibid.: 81; Arendt, 1951). Deportation practices are inextricable from state and societal racism, security concerns, economic considerations, as well as biopolitical differentiations of citizenship based upon gender, religion, sexuality, and age (Peutz & De Genova, 2010; Rygiel, 2011). AVR exemplifies how deportation becomes normalized as a calculated and humanitarian outcome of migration management, such that migrant removal takes place in a "technocratic bubble" (Collyer, 2012: 278). Institutional discourses of migration management render laws and practices that criminalize, detain, and remove migrants as seemingly apolitical and objective. The criminalization of migration, coupled with shrinking legal pathways for immigrants to enter Western countries, means that it is vital to understand how bordering efforts like AVR govern *and* assist particular migrants' mobility.

III.F. Summary of central contributions to the literature

My dissertation project engages with the literatures, detailed above, by analyzing how humanitarian actors govern migration through AVR, and further, how AVR counselors negotiate

the potentials and limits of caring for migrants in a securitized context. The dissertation contributes to these literatures by researching AVR from several angles. First, it studies AVR in *historical* context of its emergence as a humanitarian practice. Second, it analyzes AVR from a *biopolitical* perspective that illuminates how states enlist individual humanitarian actors to govern migration through discourses and practices of "migration management." Finally, it views AVR in the *institutional* context of how European governments manage unprecedented in-flows of migration through partnering with humanitarian organizations. This dissertation contributes to knowledge on migration and borders in political geography through analyzing: 1) humanitarianism and bordering processes in dynamic relation; 2) how AVR, as an emerging practice of migration management, is worked out at various organizational EU sites; 3) how humanitarian officials negotiate tensions between humanitarian and security-focused aspects of their work; and 4) how AVR is a policy solution to managing refugee and asylum-seeker flows.

In sum, this project will contribute to literatures in Geography by studying the dominant spatial imaginations, practices, and politics of migration management within a key humanitarian migration policy. AVR, as a discourse and practice of migration management, enrolls both care and control, and is integral to Europe's bordering regimes. This dissertation brings together burgeoning literatures on bordering, security, migration management, feminist geopolitics, biopolitics and governmentality, legal geographies of exclusion and deportation, development, and humanitarianism from a political geographical perspective to theorize AVR. This dissertation elucidates a more robust political geography of bordering through accounting for the diverse discourses, practices, and power relations of humanitarianism as governance and securitization.

IV. Research questions

To contribute to the above literatures, my project studies AVR as a lens onto how the institutions, discourses, and practices of humanitarianism govern migration. The political and spatial question of how and to what effect humanitarian organizations manage migration remains crucial – particularly in the context of repeated refugee crises and anti-immigrant politics in Western countries, topics now widely debated by governments and societies. My dissertation research adopts an institutional and embodied approach to answer the following four research questions:

> **RQ1:** How is AVR incorporated into Europe's securitized regime of migration management? How do AVR policies paradoxically incorporate institutional priorities for both state security and migrant humanitarian assistance?
>
> **RQ2:** How has AVR been framed over time as a humanitarian policy, and what are the spatial and political implications of this discursive framing?
>
> **RQ3:** How do officials from Europe's AVR network negotiate the humanitarian needs of migrants in relation to the security priorities of EU states? How is humanitarianism enrolled as a biopolitical form of government in the implementation of AVR as EU migration management?
>
> **RQ4:** What politics and care ethical practices of humanitarianism are possible in implementing AVR across European sites? What limitations do practitioners face in providing caring humanitarian assistance to migrants through AVR?

Below I detail how each of these questions relates to the four empirical chapters of the dissertation (Chapters Three – Six). To briefly outline my fieldwork: over 2016 and 2017, I conducted interviews with AVR practitioners regarding their implementation of AVR programs

across Europe. This dissertation research project has multiple research sites – London, UK; Brussels, Belgium; Geneva, Switzerland; The Hague, Netherlands; and several cities around Germany: Munich, Augsburg, Nuremberg, Berlin and Hamburg. Each provides an important context for AVR, as administered by IOM and partner organizations in concert with the EU's priorities for migration management. Together, these sites allow for a networked exploration of how discourses and practices of AVR are envisioned by leading policymakers and institutions and how AVR policies are enacted on the ground across the EU and the UK.

Interviews were held in institutional spaces where migration management and humanitarianism assistance for migrants are practiced. Through these interviews, I sought to understand how, in counseling migrants about Assisted Voluntary Return, humanitarian practitioners negotiate tensions between caring for migrants and responding to state governments (their funders), who expect them to help manage Europe's current migration 'crisis'. My interview questions focused on topics such as: 1) how migrant return is justified as a component of migration management; 2) how securitization is institutionally incorporated with humanitarian assistance; and 3) how humanitarians navigate this political terrain in counselling migrants. Through conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with practitioners, I was interested in the particular discursive ways they invoked humanitarianism to describe and justify AVR, such as "voluntary" and "choice," or separation from the government. I also wanted to understand the actual policies of implementing AVR on the ground. Finally, I aimed to comprehend how the process of implementing AVR is an encounter between a European humanitarian official and an often-precarious migrant facing deportation – involving political negotiations with emplaced, personal conflicts for both parties. In addition to interviews, I conducted archival research in

Geneva, Switzerland at IOM headquarters and two UK-based libraries, which allowed access to understanding the historical emergence and development of AVR programs in Europe.

This study's results will expand knowledge of AVR as a practice, the range of migration management institutions implementing AVR, and the merger of security and humanitarianism in European migration management. As such, the project aims to contribute to theory, public scholarship and teaching on the contested politics of migration, asylum and returns today. This project's goal is to analyze what practices and politics of humanitarianism are possible at different sites of AVR's implementation – theorizing the promises and confines of humanitarian assistance for migrants today.

V. Conclusion: Mapping the dissertation

In the dissertation, the arguments of specific chapters correspond with my Research Questions. A chapter on methodology follows this introduction, in which I give an overview of the research methods I deploy to answer my research questions about AVR. This chapter outlines my methodological approach to studying AVR as a multi-sited, multi-faceted policy of migrant return, which is implemented by a range of institutions, from security-focused states, to managerial international organizations like IOM, to small humanitarian NGOs (which I title, collectively, "the AVR network"). Therefore, I devote particular attention to qualitative research on institutions, and delineate my particular networked approach to studying AVR between key EU sites. Finally, I discuss the relationship between discourse and practice in terms of my analysis of the discourse, practices, and subjectivities surrounding AVR's implementation as migration management. This Methodology chapter is followed by four empirical chapters.

Chapter Three provides a historical overview of AVR practices, and establishes the political and institutional context around AVR's implementation in Europe. In this chapter, I first

introduce my argument about "legal impossibility"' in relation to Europe's asylum system; legal impossibility is a socio-legal reality that many asylum seekers face in Europe today, which also conditions the possibilities and limitations for humanitarianism in AVR. The bulk of this chapter provides a historical overview of the spatial and political processes that undergird AVR's rise to prominence during the 2015-2016 migration crisis. I outline the present-day institutional AVR network in Europe, noting how different institutional actors are situated politically. In these ways, Chapter Three addresses Research Question One (RQ1) by providing evidence for how, from its inception to present-day implementation, AVR has been a European policy of migration management. In its theorization of legal impossibility and historicization of AVR as EU migration management, this chapter contributes to the above literatures on EU bordering, legal geography, and deportation practices.

Chapter Four focuses on the practices of AVR – from information-sharing to counseling to travel arrangements – in order to understand what implementing AVR actually looks like at the nexus of humanitarianism and security. This chapter outlines different dimensions of how AVR policy works in practice and draws from interviews with practitioners across the entire institutional spectrum of the AVR network to give a sense of the diversity of AVR's implementation. In detailing each policy dimension of AVR, I analyze how imperatives for security and humanitarianism are in tension. In this way, Chapter Four addresses both RQs 1 and 3, in discussing how AVR as a policy paradoxically incorporates security and humanitarianism. In this chapter, I focus on how practitioners negotiate the security priorities of EU states, who are their funders, against the humanitarian needs of migrants, who are their clients (RQ3). This chapter theorizes the biopolitical relationship between humanitarianism and security, contributing to literatures on the nexus of security, humanitarianism and development. The

following two chapters focus on the counseling dimension of AVR, in order to investigate the politics of humanitarianism and care.

While Chapter Four discussed the practices of AVR, Chapter Five focuses on the discourses surrounding AVR. I outline the currently-hegemonic discourse of migration management as a seemingly apolitical approach to governing migration. I then unpack the antipolitical implications of AVR being framed as migration management, arguing that Europe's management of migration is in fact situated within numerous political and spatial inequalities. Institutionally, while Chapters Three and Four drew from interviews with the entire AVR network, the first three sections of Chapter Five focus singularly on the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The final section of Chapter Five situates AVR's discursive framing in political and spatial context, drawing from interviews with a range of practitioners (within and adjacent to IOM) to represent their critiques and struggles with how voluntary AVR actually is. This chapter predominantly addresses RQ2, detailing how AVR has been framed over time as an explicitly humanitarian practice, but also functionally incorporated within the discursive framework of migration management. In this chapter, I contribute to the above-discussed literatures on migration management, humanitarianism, and feminist geopolitics by theorizing the spatial and political implications of IOM's institutional framing.

Chapter Six addresses the work of four explicitly humanitarian, pro-migrant NGOs: two in Germany, one in Belgium and Germany, and one in the UK. This chapter analyzes humanitarianism, with respect to AVR, as 'conflicted care', occurring within conditions of highly unequal power between migrants and practitioners. Recognizing that many AVR practitioners try to be caring towards migrants in whatever ways are possible, I theorize these humanitarian practices as "minor acts of care" in order to explore the constraints and possibilities

practitioners face in implementing AVR. Therefore, Chapter Six chiefly addresses RQ4 by unpacking what politics and practices of humanitarianism are possible in implementing AVR across European sites, and what limitations humanitarian practitioners face in their efforts to be caring. This chapter makes a theoretical contribution to the above literatures on humanitarianism and feminist care ethics through analyzing the conflicted and paradoxical politics of care through which AVR practitioners both assist and govern migration.

Across these chapters, the dissertation provides an institutional lens onto how humanitarian officials navigate migration management in Europe's increasingly securitized migration context. In the wake of the Brexit vote, the 2015-2016 European migration 'crisis' and the 2016 US election of Trump – all provoking a right-wing backlash to securitize immigration – this project contributes a critical analysis of the potentials and limitations of humanitarian assistance in migration management. In practice, actors involved in migration and border management blend security and humanitarian-focused work. However, the literature on migration and borders in the social sciences have tended to view security and humanitarianism, as fields of practice and theory, separately from one another. Through my study of AVR programs, this project analyzes how migration management works spatially and politically through its integration with humanitarianism, care, human rights, and development – underlining the variety of complex subject positions embedded in those practices. This project's theorization of AVR at the nexus of security and humanitarianism represents a conceptual innovation that will help Geographers better understand and analyze humanitarianism, borders, and the securitized management of migration today.

This dissertation provides insights into foundational questions about what it means when security and humanitarianism become entangled in the governance of migration via AVR's

implementation. AVR's widespread adoption means that we need to better understand how it accomplishes migrant return, how practitioners navigate its implementation, and furthermore, how the policy is framed as migration management and incorporated within EU humanitarian assistance. This study's empirical findings on AVR ultimately allow for a theorization of the politics of humanitarianism in migration management, contributing to emerging work in political geography on the politics of migration, security, borders, care and humanitarianism today.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology: Researching AVR's networked sites, practices, and knowledges

I. Introduction and fieldwork process

This methodology chapter discusses the forms of evidence I collected to answer my research questions concerning AVR, the methods I employed to gather this evidence, and the process of conducting my fieldwork. This project's methodology is designed to analyze the range of institutions, discourses, practices, and subject positions implementing AVR. Across Europe, AVR is structured spatially through nested jurisdictional contexts (EU, regional, national, city) and implemented through a collaborative range of institutions, from humanitarian NGOs to intergovernmental organizations to state actors. AVR staffers who work at these implementing institutions are situated in between states and migrants, navigating the spaces of AVR between state security and addressing migrants' humanitarian needs (see Chapter Four). When practices of care merge with those of controlling migration, it is particularly important to attend to "people's lived engagements with political spaces" in which multiple institutional actors operate (Silvey, 2010: 831). Therefore, my methodology is designed to research the networked institutional sites, situated knowledges, diverse actors, and practical processes through which Assisted Voluntary Return is constructed, negotiated, and enacted as a humanitarian policy.

To answer my project's research questions, I set out to gather historical and present-day data on how AVR is both framed and practiced/implemented as a policy of migrant return, and how various actors situated within the AVR network negotiate the humanitarian and enforcement dimensions of the policy in Europe's increasingly securitized context. This research is contextualized by the political-economy of the historical and present-day inequalities between "Europe" and surrounding migrant-sending countries. However, this project bridges materialist

concerns of inequality with an analysis of subject formation, difference, and the agencies of diverse subject positions enrolled in implementing AVR policy between networked sites. In this way, my project's methodology is designed to undertake a nuanced analysis of what practices and politics of humanitarianism are possible through AVR at different nodes of implementation – theorizing the promises and confines of humanitarian assistance for migrants today.

This dissertation triangulates semi-structured interviews with archival research, content and discourse analysis in order to theorize how institutional actors construct, justify and implement AVR as a humanitarian program of migration management between distinct, but networked European sites. First, over 2016-2018, I interviewed AVR counselors and policymakers at a range of migration institutions across Europe – from the UK Home Office, to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to small humanitarian NGOs. Approaching these institutions as embodied sites where discourses and practices of AVR emerge and develop (Billo & Mountz, 2015; Mountz, 2010), my interviews address how AVR practitioners negotiate imperatives of humanitarianism and security in implementing AVR with migrants. Secondly, I gathered legal, policy, human rights and organizational documents from archives at Oxford University, the University of East London and IOM headquarters in Geneva. This archival research allows me to see how institutions frame, implement, and promote AVR over time; it also provides historical data on how EU states have contracted AVR out to NGOs and IOs to manage migration. Third, I conducted content analysis on interview transcripts, documents received in fieldwork, and archival materials to search and identify relationships between key themes such as humanitarianism, security, and migration management. Finally, this all allows for discourse analysis of how knowledge is constructed and put to work in powerful ways in implementing AVR. In sum, my project's methodology triangulates these methods to gather

evidence that will allow me to empirically understand: 1) how AVR institutions frame migrant removal from Europe as humanitarian; 2) the extent to which humanitarianism governs migration, accordingly; and 3) how humanitarian practitioners navigate this fraught political terrain between state security interests and their own imperatives to care for migrants.

My fieldwork began with a preliminary research trip to London in July of 2016. On this initial trip, I interviewed gatekeepers in the migration NGO sector and gathered historical information about AVR in the UK from the Refugee Council Archives at the University of East London. Then I returned in December of 2016 for my first round of interviews with Refugee Action, the UK Home Office and IOM in London, and then Caritas, Fedasil, IOM and the European Commission in Brussels. Then, building on relationships at these institutions from previous trips, in May of 2017, I returned for follow-up interviews in London, Brussels and Antwerp. On this trip, I also conducted introductory interviews at IOM headquarters in Geneva and requested access to IOM archival holdings. My final research trip was in November 2017, where I was able to conduct archival research at IOM headquarters in Geneva and expanded my network of interviews to IOM offices in Germany and the Netherlands. On this final research trip, I also interviewed a range of officials at the German asylum office (BAMF), and several German migration NGO's: Caritas, ZRB, and Raphaelswerk.

I spread my fieldwork out over four trips for several reasons. First was a practical consideration of limited research funding. This, coupled with the peculiarities of access in institutional research (see below) and the fact that snowball sampling via email takes time, meant that several targeted three-to-four-week trips were ideal for gathering data. This allowed me to make the most of my fieldwork resources by setting up my schedule of interviews before arriving in Europe. I have balanced my PhD student life with being a songwriter, recording artist,

and touring musician. As opportunities arose for concert tours in Europe over 2016 and 2017, I stayed several weeks longer after my shows concluded to conduct interviews, thus covering my flight expenses with music funds and stretching my research funds further towards accommodations and in-country travel for interviews and archival visits.

This arrangement, however convenient, raised its own realizations for me, personally. At one point while walking through the Amsterdam airport with my bandmates at the conclusion of a tour, guitars in hand, I realized that I was passing by an IOM airport return desk, where AVR returnees were lining up to leave Europe. Pausing here for a moment, watching migrants wait in the return desk line – likely facing an uncertain future after rejection in their European asylum procedure – the reality of my privilege to freely come and go from Seattle to Europe, repeatedly passing across borders and through checkpoints, sunk in. My own reality felt like the sharpest contrast to the reality of these migrants facing AVR.

I arrived at the idea for this project through my MA research in Kyiv, Ukraine, where I analyzed the role of development assistance in EU migration policies of "externalization." My MA research project looked at how the EU employed development – both direct aid and opportunities for Ukraine's political-economic incorporation with the EU – as incentive for Ukraine to accept return migration from Europe and manage migration in Ukraine, on the outer edge of the EU's common space (Crane, 2020). This research introduced me to how the International Organization for Migration is a wide-reaching and influential humanitarian migration organization, and further, sparked my interest in how IOM's institutional discourses of "migration management" are enrolled within European bordering projects. AVR was one of the programs IOM and the EU facilitated together in Ukraine, for returning undocumented Ukrainians from the EU. In moving forward to my dissertation research, I decided to try and gain

a better understanding of IOM's history in Europe with facilitating migrant return, and of how IOM officials implement return policies at various European sites. My MA research provided a valuable perspective of migration management from a country of return, where many migrants are "readmitted" back to Ukraine from Europe (Crane, 2020). The research illuminated how migrant return from Europe is not always safe, nor desired by migrants, and that policies like AVR are a lived process for migrants with very unequal power relations, structured by restrictionist migration laws and uneven geographic development.

Therefore, I arrive at this dissertation project on AVR with a desire to critically understand processes of migration management in the historical and present-day European context, with attention to the paradoxical nature of humanitarianism. My intention is to build a spatially aware understanding of AVR that is attentive to inequality and injustice, in order to contribute to more just and hopeful futures for migrants. My project's methodological approach brings a broadly defined political-economic analysis into relationship with post-structural discourse analysis and a feminist attention to lived experience and relational encounter across difference. This epistemological positioning attends to what institutional actors involved in managing migration say, what they do, and what the effects of their discourses and practices are in the larger context of uneven development and European bordering. Western projects of development and assistance have long managed and governed Others through socially constructed narratives, or truth claims, of power/knowledge (Crush, 1995; Dittmer, 2010). In line with the focus of critical scholarship (Bauder & Di Mauro, 2008), it is important to foreground that what these institutional actors are attempting to manage – namely, spontaneous migration – has political-economic roots in the ongoing production of material insecurity at multiple sites

and scales. I employ a political geographical perspective to understand AVR relationally, with a focus on context, history, and interconnections of people's lives and livelihoods.

II. Qualitative research on institutions: Feminist geopolitics and studying up

As mentioned above, Assisted Voluntary Return first came to my attention during my MA fieldwork in Ukraine, when I heard the policy mentioned by officials at IOM and other NGOs as a *humanitarian* program of migration management, specifically geared towards addressing migrant return. The policy did not factor centrally into my master's research, but it remained in the back of my mind as a prospect for future inquiry – particularly because the name itself evokes the paradoxes of humanitarianism in migration management. How "voluntary" is voluntary return? Are other alternatives besides voluntary return presented to migrants? What kind of assistance is provided to migrants in returning, and under what conditions? How involved are state/EU governmental actors in these programs? What degree of independence are NGO practitioners able to implement these policies with? These are the questions I carried forward about AVR, which motivate my dissertation research design's triangulation of qualitative methods.

My questions are suited for qualitative research because they explore how the social world of AVR is "interpreted from the perspective of people being studied" (Bryman, 2012: 399). Feminist qualitative work argues that the 'field' is co-created by the researcher and researched, and that the knowledge we produce in this process will always be situated (Crang, 2003; England, 1994; McDowell, 2010; Till, 2001; Staeheli & Lawson, 1994). In qualitative research, researchers themselves are the 'research instrument': "collecting data, but also filtering, feeling, experiencing, and analyzing field experiences and challenging personal understandings" (DeLyser, et al. 2010). Because of this, qualitative research is well suited to understanding

individual's experiences of places, events and processes. Furthermore, qualitative research can provide insight into the shape of social structures through analyzing the spatial processes through which structures are constructed, maintained, legitimated, and resisted (Sayer, 1992). Concepts such as context, space, place, environment, and scale all come into play analytically in qualitative geographic research to understand how spatial processes, like AVR, are produced, sustained, and changed (Cresswell, 1992; Massey, 2005).

In this project, qualitative research allows me to understand and counter depoliticizing discourses of migration management through attention to both context and process (Bryman, 2012; Dittmer, 2010). Studying migration, borders and humanitarianism though qualitative methods provides insight into how places and categories (i.e. 'migrant,' '(il)legal,' 'citizen') are constructed in relation to one another (Silvey & Lawson, 1999), how difference is imagined (Said, 1979), and how interventions that affect other's lives are undertaken and justified. At the broadest scale, my project's qualitative research design seeks to understand how walls are being constructed in today's 'globalized' world, to show how this bordering entails imagined, and yet politically and legally materialized distinctions between EU and non-EU, between 'illegal' and invited, between mobility and detainment, and between manager and managed. These borders between lives are not immutable or natural; they are socially constructed, and yet are maintained with convincing political effect by powerful institutional actors like the EU and IOM (Rancière, 2010).

In the European network of migration management, institutions govern citizenship by controlling the discursive framing of policies, in relation to the legal system and various other governmentalized structures (Rygiel, 2011). A collection of recent scholarship in Geography and related social sciences has emerged that studies institutions as spaces where dominant practices

and narratives are produced, circulated, and have effects in daily life (Billo & Mountz, 2016; Hyndman, 2000; Roy, 2010; Mountz, 2010). State-based and humanitarian institutions rely on embodied practices and judgements; they project certain images of their work into the world; they enact governing practices; they are sites to understand the emergence and maintenance of exclusionary laws and political discourses (Billo & Mountz, 2016; Herbert, 2009; Malkki, 2015; Massaro & Williams, 2013). In short, these organizations are mutable and potentially sites of change (Mountz, 2010). This analytical approach to power and knowledge is in line with critical and feminist geopolitics, as it challenges "assumed borders, interrogates the categories they designate, and questions the meanings and identities they engender" (Hyndman, 2000: xxi).

By conducting qualitative research on institutions, this project is situated within a tradition of researchers that "study up" (Nader, 1972) to understand how "knowledge is produced and problems are conceptualized" in powerful institutions (Massaro & Williams, 2013: 570). Studying up allows access to understand how institutional officials negotiate the paradoxical politics of removal and assistance in AVR programs. My approach to studying AVR focuses on the institutional sites, actors, and processes through which influential knowledge about migration management and humanitarian practice is constructed, enacted and negotiated (Billo & Mountz, 2016). Qualitative research on how knowledge is produced and circulated with institutions can analyze "how a parochial idea, rooted in time and place" (like migration management) is "rendered universal or at least transnational" (Roy, 2012: 35). This analytical approach to power and knowledge defines critical geopolitics (Dalby, 2010; Toal, 1996), and how feminist geopolitics challenges "assumed borders, interrogat(es) the categories they designate, and question(s) the meanings and identities they engender" (Hyndman, 2000: xxi; Dalby, 2010; Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2004).

While this project takes a networked approach to interviewing across institutions, instead of a deep ethnographic dive into one institution, it nonetheless draws inspiration from methodological writings on institutional ethnography (Billo & Mountz, 2016). Herbert (2000: 550) claims that ethnography is a method focused on understanding the "processes and meanings undergirding sociospatial life," those that allow orders to be reproduced and challenged. In approaching the depoliticizing discourses of migration management and humanitarianism, institutional ethnography influences my focus on how structures of power are "made real in the context of daily life" (Herbert, 2000: 553). In this way, embracing a qualitative research design allows my project to study the practices of AVR, as reported in institutional archives and organizational documents, and how practitioners interpret their actions as humanitarian versus political in a shifting geopolitical context.

My project's design is influenced by Roy's (2012: 33) ethnography of circulation and of the apparatus, which she simplifies as the emergent "norms and forms of reason." This form of qualitative research explores the relationship between power and knowledge, getting at how the political infuses purportedly apolitical settings. To focus on circulation means attending to how "worlds are put into motion" at "centers of calculation" (ibid.: 33). Roy argues that technocrats in bureaucratic circuits are a key population for researchers to more fully embrace as potential "double agents," or as those "positioned within the hegemonic apparatus and yet able to forge moments of subversion and critique" (Roy, 2012: 37; Roy, 2010: 191; Mountz, 2010). Related to this, Fassin (2012: 246) calls on scholars to assess "what humanitarian reason means, and what it hides," to move inside and outside of the social worlds we study, "closely marking their limits but also their spaces of freedom;" furthermore, our critiques can be supported by "the lucidity and reflexivity" of humanitarian practitioners themselves, many of whom are deeply ambivalent

about the policies they implement. As much as humanitarianism can be a regime of power, it is also "a site of ambivalence and undecidability" (Walters, 2011: 144). Therefore, to understand the possibilities and limitations of humanitarianism in EU migration management, I analyze how humanitarian practitioners variously construct, justify, (de)politicize and enact AVR as conflicted care.

My project's research design is influenced by feminist geopolitics to better understand how the work of IOM and partner institutions in AVR is political. In particular, I am interested in how institutional practices of assistance and care for migrants today are integrated with the control of their mobility. Fassin (2012: 10-12) claims that qualitative research on humanitarianism can give "insight into the logics of actors and the justification of their actions" in a way that connects the "global landscape" with local empirical realities. This project sheds light on the diversity of subject positions at AVR institutions – from state actors to small migration NGOs – to understand how AVR is discursively constructed and materially enacted between key sites. For example, this project investigates how consensus forms around what IOM considers "orderly," "assisted," or "humane" migration management. Analyzing AVR through "studying up" shines light on the politics of such discourses and the practices they justify. Furthermore, it explores the agency of staffers to negotiate how they implement AVR in a humanitarian fashion, while operating within Europe's overall securitized migration climate. In this vein, I follow AVR as a networked institutional humanitarian policy of migration management, in order to understand its multiple sites, practices, and meanings at different scales.

III. Researching the AVR network

This study analyzes AVR as a networked process and focuses in on nodes of implementation within this network. The networked reality of AVR allows me to analyze the project's multiple

sites together to make observations about how the policy works in the EU's regional context (as opposed to country-by-country, or institution-by-institution comparisons). The spectrum of AVR institutions – from the Catholic charity, Caritas, to the UK Government's Home Office – reflects how humanitarianism is paradoxical, balancing state security and migrant insecurity. I adopted this networked approach in order to study how these institutions construct, justify, and implement AVR between distinct, but networked institutional nodes. Differences between these nodes illuminate negotiations between security and humanitarianism, as well as the potentials and limitations of AVR as a humanitarian practice, across Europe's AVR network. This networked approach provides unique insights into the political, legal, and social dimensions of migrant return across Europe, as part of EU migration management.

This project contributes to relational methodologies that go beyond comparison, that look across places and across cases and ask what differently-situated subjects within the same networked process can help us understand (Roy, 2010). Analyzing AVR in this way allows me to assess the EU policy level and then nuance down to see nested jurisdictions (nation-states, regions, cities, institutions) in which AVR policy is actually implemented. Preliminary research directed me to this approach, as I learned more about the networked reality of how EU, state, intergovernmental organizations and local NGOs implement AVR policies (see chapter 3). To answer my RQs regarding how AVR is negotiated in particular sites by particular actors, this networked approach allows me to see how staffers have a degree of freedom in implementing AVR within these spaces. My networked analysis allows me to study AVR at the level of EU policy, at the scale of individual states, and also within local offices at particular institutions. This approach facilitates a nuanced reading of what otherwise might be bluntly over-generalized;

it allows me to assess the spatialized politics of humanitarianism and analyze how these politics are enacted at the various embedded scales in which they are made real.

This project contributes to literatures in geography by studying the spatial imaginations, practices, and politics of migration management within intergovernmental, NGO, and state organizations that are implementing AVR as a networked humanitarian practice. AVR is practiced by a network of institutions, who are themselves embedded within a nested set of jurisdictional contexts – from the EU as a whole, to nation-states, to regions/states, to cities. These institutions range from state actors like Belgium's Fedasil and the UK Home Office, to international institutions (IOs) with offices across Europe like the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to national humanitarian NGOs like Refugee Action in the UK and Caritas in Belgium. Just as spaces of "the border" are multiplied today (Johnson, et al. 2011) so are the institutional spaces of migration management multiplied and networked – especially between European countries. Therefore, to understand how AVR is framed and implemented, this project researches humanitarian discourses and practices at key institutional nodes within AVR's European network. This networked research design is justified because AVR travels as policy between institutional locations to manage the unpredictable fluidity of migration. Analyzing institutional nodes within a larger AVR network produces data that allows me to theorize different potentials and limitations of humanitarian assistance, as officials negotiate migrants' political status and spatial belonging in security-focused contexts. In short, by working across several nodes of the AVR network, I am able to study how the overarching policy operates, as well as how it is negotiated and nuanced in particular sites and by particular actors.

There is also an empirical justification for this networked approach to studying AVR. In preliminary research, I quickly came to see that the institutions implementing AVR are

themselves joined together in various networks across Europe. At the level of funding, many AVR-implementing institutions are linked through the shared funding stream of the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF, see Chapter Three). During the time of my fieldwork, a specific action of this AMIF funding was a program titled ERIN (European Reintegration Network), aimed at fostering cooperation between partner institutions from 18 participating host countries to "implement sustainable return and reintegration of third country nationals in their country of origin" (European Commission, 2021d). Following ERIN, since mid-2018, ERRIN (European Return and Reintegration Network) is the new EU-level joint initiative between 15 European countries, focused on coordinating joint reintegration programs between host and home countries, as well as providing an "innovation hub for members to develop join projects and improve practices […] which will help improve the efficiency of the return process and the quality of support offered to returnees" (ERRIN, 2021). From these initiatives, we can see that the European Union is investing in networking between implementing countries, and the institutions within them. These represent active dialogue and shared experiences between the different institutions and research sites in my project. Therefore, because AVR's implementation happens in networks, my research design purposively samples across different institutional nodes within the AVR network.

When I began researching AVR as a humanitarian practice, it quickly became apparent that humanitarian NGOs relied on networks to implement AVR. I discovered several networks and exchanges focused specifically on NGOs and the coordinated humanitarian implementation of AVR. Studying these networks, in particular, allowed me to better understand the spatial politics of humanitarianism with respect to AVR, in line with my research questions. In preliminary research, these institutional networks provided insight into who I should reach out to

for interviews, allowing me to identify which organizations are explicitly humanitarian in their approach to AVR. European Reintegration Support Organizations (ERSO) represents a network of humanitarian NGOs involved with voluntary return counseling, including many that are interviewed in this study. As reflected by a trainer of return counselors in Germany, this network entails a wide range of actors across Europe:

> *MM: Caritas Belgium is part of the network; Refugee Action is part of the network; Fluchtlingerberg, that's in the Netherlands. So different European organizations. We said, "OK, we all have the same problem; we all want to do the same – we want to have clients after return be taken care of by NGO's, local NGO's. And I have maybe two clients to Ghana – on these two clients, I cannot run a project." And we all got together.*
>
> *AC: So it's kind of about sharing knowledge, right? The ERSO?*
>
> *MM: Yeah. And this is civil society and NGO's only […] So and I would say the message is still, "please if you can, think about what happens after return, in what will be the middle-term perspective for these people."* (Interview, Micado Migration, Munich, 11.21.17).

The above official at Micado Migration is a trainer for Integplan, a reintegration training network for return counselors at a range of AVR implementing institutions within Germany, specifically. Integplan in Germany coordinates with ERSO at the European level and involves a range of state and NGO organizations in Germany as well as partner migrant organizations in countries of return (Integplan, 2017).

In addition to the above, IOM is a key institutional agent for networking AVR-implementing institutions across Europe. The role that IOM plays across Europe's AVR network – in policymaking, promotion and coordination of travel logistics (discussed in Chapters Three and Five) – significantly influences the Europe-wide integration and coordination in how AVR is practiced. As a final example of NGO networking, Caritas in Germany hosted a series of "Transnational Exchanges" between 2011 and 2018 involving many of the humanitarian organizations from the ERSO network (Caritas, 2011, 2014, 2018). Generally geared towards

creating dialog for exchanging best practices across Europe, these meetings have focused on topics like different models of return in different European countries, cooperation between return counselors in Europe and reintegration projects in countries of return, and return counselling with vulnerable migrants. A practitioner with Caritas described the benefits of these exchanges:

> *So, the second conference focused on the relationships with partners in the country of return, how their connection can be improved. And then, the counsellors just said that they really benefited from the exchange. And mostly from the informal exchange. You know, you can tell: "how do you do things? How do we do things?" You know […] sometimes we have cases from migrants who came from Belgium to Germany, you know, you have migration within Europe also. And there's this big problem when children are born in a different European country, you need to get the birth certificate and so on. It's messy. […] And so it's good to have contacts, even in the different European countries.* (Interview, Caritas Germany, 11.22.17)

The fact that humanitarian NGOs like Caritas and others in the ERSO network are networking to exchange best practices around humanitarian return and reintegration provides evidence that my dissertation's RQs are relevant to the reality of practitioners, who are collectively trying to figure out the possibilities for humanitarianism in the space of AVR.

In conclusion, the project's networked analysis allows me to study how migration institutions and their bureaucrats engage the paradoxical politics of humanitarianism (Reid-Henry: 2014). Methodological openness to AVR's paradoxical politics is vital because the interventions of humanitarian institutions like IOM (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011; Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010), UNHCR (Hyndman, 2000), the Red Cross (Ticktin, 2011), MSF (Fassin, 2012; Redfield, 2005, 2013), and state-based actors claiming the mantle of assistance (Essex, 2013) are often framed and understood as non-political. Therefore, this project's networked research design analyzes the political work of migration management institutions in AVR – theorizing the paradoxical politics of humanitarianism across a range of institutional spaces and practices of assistance and governance.

IV. Interviews

I conducted interviews with AVR practitioners to gain insight into how they craft discourses of migration management and how they implement AVR. While I did interview several state and EU governmental actors who influence AVR policy, the majority of people I interviewed were AVR practitioners: those working directly with migrants on behalf of AVR-implementing institutions. These practitioners counsel migrants on their return decision in often-small, local offices. They do not set the laws concerning asylum or migrant return, but instead are doing the conflicted, yet caring work of helping to mediate the impact of these laws on migrants facing return. Interviewing allowed for me to hear first-hand reports about these officials' successes and frustrations with AVR programs in the UK and Europe, as well as how AVR programs work in practice for migrants. These interviews provided insight into how these practitioners understand and practice AVR as humanitarian, how they navigate securitized funding priorities in their praxis and how they view AVR as part of migration management in Europe today.

I ultimately aimed to interview a range of NGO, IO, and state officials who have on the ground experience in implementing AVR with migrants, as well as those who have designed and funded AVR policies. Interviewing through a networked research approach allowed me to gain a comparative understanding of how different actors frame AVR in various national, local and institutional environments. By doing face-to-face interviews, I was able to access information and personal experiences that I never would have known otherwise. However, due to the politicized nature of AVR in EU societies and the fact that these policies directly impact migrants' futures, this also meant that whom I spoke with about AVR was a political decision.

A key part of deciding who to interview was recognizing that how I am positioned, as a researcher/interviewer, will impact the kind of data I can gather[2] (England, 2015; Mountz and Hyndman, 2006; Staeheli and Lawson, 1994). My decision to interview AVR practitioners was inspired by Feminist Geopolitics and the call to "study up" (Nader, 1972), interviews with this population allowed me to gain an understanding of how AVR is formulated as policy, circulated as discourse, and implemented in practice through institutional actors across Europe. Who I am in the world was easily read and trusted in these institutional environments, allowing me to develop rapport with humanitarian practitioners. In my initial requests for interviews, being able to narrate that I had done an MA focusing on issues of migration management, with fieldwork in an IOM field office, facilitated a level of comfort and familiarity. Furthermore, being able to narrate my history of studying and briefly working in the field of development not only helped me gain access to AVR-implementing institutions, but also helped to develop rapport with interviewees. Indeed, upon entering one of my initial PhD research sites in London, while

[2] In designing my research methodology, I quickly determined that conducting interviews with migrants returning via AVR would be a fraught undertaking. First, there was an ethical consideration: many of the migrants who are considering returning via AVR are in legally precarious situation in Europe, perhaps having applied for asylum and having had their claim rejected, or currently residing without documents in the shadows to avoid deportation. As right-wing, anti-immigrant pressures build in Europe, this is precisely the population of migrants being targeted for forced removal – therefore, confidentiality measures were of the utmost importance. Trust was of equal importance. Based on my own positionality as a white, male, American citizen, I felt like I was not well positioned to earn migrants' trust in this predicament, nor to represent their situated stories and experiences. Access was a key consideration in this decision, as it could understandably be difficult to contact and locate undocumented communities (England, 1994). Language was still another consideration, as English was likely to not be the majority of migrants' primary language. Finally, the need for interpretation added another layer onto my confidentiality and trust concerns. I believe that migrants' voices are deeply important to understanding processes like AVR (Lawson, 2000); however, considering ethical and practical issues, as well as my own situatedness as a researcher, I decided my research program should not directly conduct research with migrants around AVR.

waiting in the lobby and watching the staffers come and go, I was struck by the fact that one version of my own professional career could have been in that very building, where, hypothetically, after studying development economics and graduating with an MA in Geography, I ended up working for a migration-oriented NGO. Throughout the process of research design and fieldwork, I strived to remain cognizant of how my own identities privilege me to gain access to certain institutional spaces, and furthermore, to be able to ask certain questions to professionally situated individuals.

When doing institutionally focused qualitative research – particularly with large, multinational organizations like IOM, or governmental actors like the UK Home Office or BAMF in Germany – the issue of negotiating access was a foremost concern. Persistence in communication was crucial, and landing an interview typically required multiple carefully crafted email follow ups. I initially employed "purposive sampling" to contact officials at AVR implementing institutions, using academic contacts and research from organizational websites to identify key stakeholders (Bryman, 2012). In these introductory emails, I would typically introduce myself, giving a sense of my background, and then explain how my research objectives relate to their institution, attaching a letter of support from my advisor for institutional legitimacy. After my preliminary research, I expanded this sampling strategy, based on the contacts and information I established in Geneva, London, and Brussels, and began to "snowball sample," using initial contacts at AVR-implementing institutions to gain further contacts, based upon trustworthy recommendations (Valentine, 1997). For example, in Brussels, after making contact with gatekeepers at IOM and Fedasil (Belgian government AVR agency), I was able to expand my interview contact list to other NGOs and remote Fedasil offices in Brussels, Antwerp, and Sint-Truiden, Belgium. While emailing was always my first approach, in several instances I

just showed up at particular offices/buildings and asked if I could meet with someone from the institution. While this tactic never led to any immediate interviews, on several occasions, just "showing up" – a strategy certainly made viable through my positionality – was productive towards garnering contacts who helped me set up interviews upon subsequent research trips.

The primary value of interviews for my project is to learn how humanitarians and managers justify their work, and to probe what conflicts and insecurities they identify as part of their institution's operation. Interviews explore the different meanings that people attribute to phenomena; interviews get at the "situated and contextual nature of knowledge" (Jackson & Russell, 2010: 187; McDowell, 2010). This is not a neutral exchange, however. The interview is a "social encounter" shot through with power relations that call for reflexivity on the part of the researcher (McDowell, 2010). Reflecting on my interviews, I believe that I was able to establish a good rapport and speak about the challenges of implementing AVR with trust, comfort, and mutual respect. In this way, the commonalities I shared with many practitioners, in certain aspects of our identity and privilege, shaped my pathways through the field and influenced what I was able to learn.

As a research method, interviews provide access to "the meanings people attribute to [...] processes which operate in particular social contexts" (Valentine, 1997: 111). This is important in light of how politicized migration has become in Europe. Because of the conflicted political reality surrounding migration, interviews present an opportunity to learn how different officials interpret their institutional mandates to care for and govern migrants, which is key to understanding the politics of migration management today. Interviews allow the researcher to "probe […] issue(s) in depth" in ways that would not be possible from only doing content analysis on institutional policy documents (McDowell, 2010: 157).

I conducted semi-structured "depth interviews" that aimed to generate common themes and narratives across similarly positioned respondents (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). In terms of scripting the interview and conducting the interview itself, I drew from several guides for research techniques (Bryman, 2012; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Kvale, 2009; Valentine, 1997). My interviews explored topics of AVR's history, present institutional cooperation, and lived realities of implementing AVR. Interviews accessed the political relations of governance around AVR, the use of a managerial approach in migration, and the diverse ways in which humanitarian practitioners implement the policy. I utilized the interview schedule in a way that aimed for "depth and detailed understanding" in relation to the interviewee's experiences (McDowell, 2010: 158). I pursued multiple interviews in the effort to gain a deep understanding of AVR-implementing institutions' work at the nexus of security and humanitarianism. I continued to interview until the point when no new data is appearing, when central concepts are well understood, and the relations between themes are apparent (Bryman, 2012).

I faced several key choices in the process of conducting my interviews. One challenge I encountered with semi-structured interviewing was learning when to stick tightly to the interview schedule, as opposed to allowing room for interviewees to organically share their histories, experiences, and perspectives – or even asking off-script, probing questions on a particular idea to further explore meaning or difference (McDowell, 2010; Jackson & Russell, 2010). A related issue was learning to see recording the interview as a "political act" (McDowell, 2010: 161). On the one hand, recording allows for enhanced accuracy and an ability to directly quote; on the other, I saw in some instances that it can significantly impact how honest and comfortable interviewees are with the conversation. For my interview population of migration and border managers and humanitarians, recording was not often an issue of concern, as some of them go

"on the record" often. However, a few individuals were reticent to express any form of dissent while the recorder is on, stating "if we turn the recorder off, I can tell you what I really think." Another consideration I had to account for was "placing" the interview, which Elwood and Martin (2000) claim is a balance between pragmatic concerns of convenience, comfort and accessibility. I found that holding interviews inside of institutional offices was particularly instructive for my research, as here the "microgeographies" of the interview location are a "material site for the enactment and constitution of power relations" (Elwood & Martin, 2000: 650). Finally, I transcribed the recorded interviews as soon as possible to the date of the interview in order to maintain a sense of the context and climate of our conversation (Bryman, 2012; Poland, 1995).

Furthermore, doing institutional research means grappling with questions of access and "outsider" status – particularly because some migration managers and humanitarian actors might understandably have a real aversion to speaking with someone who they presume in advance is critical of the work they are doing. In terms of gaining access, McDowell (2010: 164) describes how "honesty and openness" can potentially come into conflict with "access and with the quality of the interview encounter." McDowell (2010) further points to numerous "inequities" that are present in the interview exchange, and in qualitative work writ large. In the case of my project, researching a population of "elites" brings its own unique power relations (Herod, 1999). When interviewing elites in institutional spaces, interviewees may try to determine what the researcher records, writes, and conveys in their scholarship (Herod, 1999; Valentine, 1997). In order to not occlude access, and to remain open to what the field can teach me (Herbert, 2000), I tried to strike a balance in my research approach between: 1) asking critical questions regarding the structural conditions of migration management; 2) while also being genuinely interested in how

individual practitioners I spoke with understand and justify their daily work, their decision-making capacity, and their interventions in the world. Myers (2010) encourages us to recognize the fundamental "partiality of knowledge," discussing how "insider" versus "outsider" positionalities are historically situated, and how, as researchers, we ultimately do not have control over how others see us. We should not expect to gain an objective view of what is happening, nor arrive as an impartial, neutral 'scientist'; we bring our biases into the field and we may be expected to choose sides on issues (Myers, 2010). An important part of doing reflexive scholarship is recognizing the partiality of our own knowledge (alongside the impossibility of impartiality, in general (ibid.)), and narrating the choices we make in the field and in interpretation (Jensen & Glasmeier, 2010).

Though my project at times had an element of 'going undercover,' I came to see that it was acceptable to admit to interviewees that I am politically concerned about the larger-scale context of the work that their organizations are doing. This often came with time and relationship-building and with an honest recognition of my own social situatedness (Jensen & Glasmeier, 2010; Myers, 2010). Organizations do not speak in one voice and I came to see that interviewing both devotees and dissenters can be instructive. Conducting research within these institutions required an ongoing reflexivity, paying attention to the power relations that exist based on the researcher and researched's situated positionalities (McDowell, 2010).

As a guest within institutional settings to which I did not belong, I did my best to manage my positionality as an open-minded and interested American graduate student. When appropriate, I mentioned my own background with NGO/development work as a point of connection, particularly to establish that I am interested in their experience in negotiating the implementation of a humanitarian program in a security-focused political environment. When

asking questions that might be considered politically sensitive, I would often mention that my country has its own foundational struggles with migration policy, inclusion, and historical geographies of violence that we are still very much reckoning with today. Recognizing the privilege I have as an American researcher (evidenced alone by my ability to take multiple trips to Europe to conduct this research), I tried to position myself as someone who was grateful for the interviewees' time, eager to understand the implementation of AVR through their perspective, and open to future communication. Throughout the fieldwork and writing up of this research project, I have strived to maintain subject confidentiality and foreground considerations of research ethics (Valentine, 1997; Secor, 2010).

In conclusion, I found that many practitioners across the AVR network in Europe were in fact quite attuned to power relations and inequalities surrounding AVR, and were interested in providing me with a nuanced picture of the challenges and positives of their work. Others were more administrative, technical, and politically neutral in representing their work to me. I tried to manage my positionality and engagement in an open-minded, inquisitive manner, recognizing that the processes they are involved in needs to be understood and politicized at different scales of intention and effect. In this way, it is vital for researchers to consider the "politics of fieldwork," meaning the geopolitical relations that enable the fieldwork to happen, and the power relations that exist between researcher and researched (Sundberg, 2003: 180). Part of my analysis entails contrasting the politics of AVR across different spaces and at different scales: migrants facing return need to be juxtaposed with bureaucrats in Switzerland or various other managerial bureaucratic headquarters. However, many humanitarians are realists and see themselves as working in a flawed, but best-case-scenario arrangement (Barnett, 2011; Fassin, 2012). This positionality is well reflected by a former AVR practitioner at Refugee Action in London:

> *I think a lot of people were exhausted by the process of trying to survive, you know, through the asylum process or sort of clandestinely after it, and just wanted an end to that. But they often were quite positive about the prospect of going back, until the point when they were about to travel, or had just traveled and then the reality sets in that they've got a whole new set of problems. Not even new – old problems that they have to deal with again. So I think you have to be pragmatic about that, that it's not a solution. It was an option for people that may improve their life or may not. But it was an option that we made available to them if they wanted to take it* (Interview, Refugee Action, London, 5.9.17).

This quote is an example of how many practitioners were realistically ambivalent about how voluntary AVR could be (Webber, 2011; Fassin, 2012; see Chapter Five) in the context of legal impossibility (Chapter Three), and themselves questioned how humanitarian the outcomes of AVR could be. These possibilities and limitations are discussed at length in Chapter Six.

This tension gets at the heart of humanitarianism's paradoxical nature in a world of nation-states and uneven development, which is precisely why I am interested to study the complexities of migration management as governance through qualitative methods. Jensen and Glasmeier (2010) state that critical research on policies like migration management is about "reinterpreting understandings and recasting problems." My hope is that this project can provide a nuanced political analysis of AVR, making its processes and effects clearer, towards advocating for a more just and humane politics of migration, in response to the present-day realist politics of migrant exclusion and return. In this effort, interviews are a key pillar of my analysis and I triangulate the insights they offer with those from official documents from institutions obtained, in part, through archival research.

V. Archival research

In studying a policy like AVR, archives present an opportunity to bring together the historical and the spatial (Domosh & Morin, 2003). Historical research in archives can provide insights into the working of state power, biopolitics, and governmentality in the management of bodies

(Brown & Knopp, 2010; Brown & Knopp, 2016). Conducting archival research in Geneva at IOM headquarters allowed me to gain insight into how influential ideas and programs for AVR are crafted over time. Archival research in London at the Refugee Council archives at the University of East London provided insight into how AVR factored into the migration sector in the UK, particularly through its collection of IOM newsletters and Refugee Action communications. Finally, the Refugee Studies Center library at Oxford University held a collection of papers that provided insight into the development of EU asylum law over time, in addition to containing informative documents pertaining to the work of IOM. Between these sites, archival work provided key knowledge about AVR as a practice and IOM as an institution, allowing me to gain a historicized understanding of how AVR has been conceptualized and circulated at the nexus of security and humanitarianism. Triangulating archival research with interviews and content analysis of documents provided historical context to situate what interviewees say within.

I came to these archives with clarity about what I wanted from the archive, and I was able to communicate this to the archivists up front. In conducting archival research, it is important to go in with an idea of what you are looking for, in order to not be "taken over by the archives," while also avoiding imposing your own order onto the archives, without denying their complexity (Harris, 2001:331). I emailed with archivists in advance about the goals of my study and specific types of documents I would like to see (for example, IOM newsletters), and then I first met with the archivist upon arrival before beginning to review the holdings. From this point, the process of archival research looked a little different at each site. For example, at IOM headquarters, I reviewed documents in the library room with the archivist the entire time, and we would go together into the basement archive when I was ready to review a new topic/theme. At

Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre library, because their holdings are listed online, the archivist requested that I send a list of documents/folders in advance that I wanted to review – and they had already pulled these for me upon arrival. The Refugee Council archive at the University of East London was unique in how the archivist was quite engaged with my project, and helpfully brought various items to me they thought were relevant to my study throughout the time I was in the library.

This locational variation in doing archival research reveals how the act of archiving is not a neutral process, and the archive itself is not an "inert and inactive thing" (Schein, 2006: 101). In each archival visit, I maintained a list of the organization of the boxes, folders and papers I was provided. These "organizations" are the "institutional effect of a dialectic between a filing system and the social power of actors" (Kurtz, 2001: 31). Every time I made a scan or copy, I updated this list and made sure to either write the reference number and location on the document or save it in the scan's file name, so that when I got home from the field I could place where my documents came from (Harris, 2001; Kurtz, 2001).

Stoler (2002) refers to archives in the context of colonialism, not as mere sites of retrieval, but as sites of power-laden production of knowledge. In my analysis of archival documents, I strived to read both "along the grain" and "against the grain" (Stoler, 2002). Reading along the grain allowed me to consider how AVR is framed and promoted, as well as historical accounts of key policies and moments in the evolution of AVR as policy (discussed in Chapter Three). Reading against the grain allowed me to consider what was left out of this framing, such as the voices of migrants and, often, the political security pressures that undergird these policies. Ultimately, I approached archival research with considerations of power and the politics of knowledge production at the forefront, in order to gain insight into organizational

histories and how the legal and political context around AVR has transformed over time.

VI. Content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA)

I employed content analysis and discourse analysis to analyze interview transcripts and documents accessed in archival research and through fieldwork. Content analysis allowed me to search, identify, and analyze how various organizations describe their work in AVR. In line with the project's research questions, through content analysis I aimed to understand how AVR implementing institutions describe their programs as humanitarian, how their policies are designed to assist migrants, what specific practices they implement, what numbers and figures they employ to promote their work, and how they describe AVR responding to both migrants' needs and the political climate in Europe. In addition to conducting interviews and archival research, I purposively sampled online resources for policies, laws, and reports from NGO, IO, and state websites. Human rights reports from groups like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Migrants Organise UK provided valuable outsider perspectives on AVR's framing and political effects. The EU's "Europa" policy database also holds texts that provide legal and geopolitical context for AVR. Content analysis is guided according to "units of analysis" – actors, words, and themes (Bryman, 2012). I examine these archival materials, interview transcripts, and online documents for the context in which they are produced, their audience, and the ends they aim to achieve (ibid.).

Coding is an ongoing part of content analysis, defined by Cope (2010: 447) as a method of "evaluating and organizing data in an effort to understand meanings in text." Coding helps to identify categories and patterns, which, in this project I did "by hand" (as opposed to with a computer program), keeping a running list of key themes and where they were referenced in particular interviews (Cope, 2010). Coding provided an efficient way for me to read across

articles and identify my project's key themes: 1) *humanitarianism*; 2) *migration and border management;* and 3) *voluntary return*. Additionally, I considered more emergent themes pertaining to how migration management and AVR have been framed as issues of "assistance," "security," "instability," "crisis," and "geopolitics." Using a simplified coding strategy as part of content analysis allowed me to analyze such key words and themes in context (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Content analysis thus allowed me to assess formal texts from institutional actors in the field of migration management, helping to establish: 1) an understanding of the language mobilized around AVR and migration management; 2) the institutional landscape around this practice; and 3) how institutions like IOM describe and report their work in AVR. Identifying key themes, the frequency of use, and relationships of association through content analysis provides a basis for understanding how actors in the AVR network frame and justify AVR as humanitarian. In this way, content analysis provides a springboard for "critical discourse analysis." Content analysis is the first step towards identifying keywords and arguments that constitute the discourses of AVR and migration management, and furthermore, how these discourses have been put into practice.

While content analysis identifies keywords and arguments that constitute political discourses of AVR, critical discourse analysis (CDA) analyzes how discourses like migration management are constructed and evolve in relation to material conditions, geopolitics, and power relations. With respect to the themes I identified in content analysis, I employed discourse analysis to study how situated conceptions of humanitarianism versus security are mobilized in institutional discourses around AVR. Fairclough (2009: 164) defines discourse as "semiotic ways of construing aspects of the world," which can be identified with "different positions or

perspectives of different groups of social actors." Instead of assessing documents as "objective accounts of a state of affairs," discourse analysis looks at their biases and intentions as situated texts (Bryman, 2012: 550). With this project's findings on AVR, CDA is used "to link language and its modes of use to the significance of power and social difference in society" (ibid.: 528). Discourse analysis of organizational texts can show what is constructed and silenced through supposedly apolitical framings, as often seen in development discourse (Ferguson, 1994; Lawson, 2007b). As a "form of action," discourse is "constructed and maintained" in relation to structures in society (Bryman, 2012: 537). For understanding how practitioners negotiate their roles and responsibilities in implementing AVR, CDA focuses on how "particular actors draw on the discourse to legitimate their positions and actions" (ibid.: 537). CDA thus allows me to analyze how interrelated themes of humanitarianism, security, and migration management are discursively constructed across the project's networked sites where AVR is implemented.

Analyzing interviews and textual materials through critical discourse analysis also allows me to understand how key themes around humanitarianism and care are used to justify material practices of AVR that affect many migrants' lives. The discourses surrounding AVR provide insight into the paradoxical nature of humanitarian assistance, and influence how AVR is implemented differently based on site of implementation (see Chapter Five). Micro-scale analysis of texts can attend to how actors and organizations claim authority at a macro-scale through their rhetoric and organization (Dittmer, 2010: 279; Ferguson, 1994). Denzin (2009) analyzes the "little d" discourses of evidence-based frameworks to reveal how they produce a hegemonic "big D" Discourse of power over qualitative work in the academy and society. In this way, discourse analysis can show how seemingly objective knowledge is partial and socially constructed (Dittmer, 2010; Said, 1981). Mouffe (1988: 92) describes how attention to discourse

reveals the "historical contingency of being and of objects." Recognizing the situated and partial nature of truths (such as those produced regarding humanitarianism and migration management) also means recognizing that hegemony is never a complete project and resistance is always possible (Said, 1981; Dittmer, 2010; Ferguson, 1994; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Massey, 2014).

Said (1981: 152-153) discusses the production of "antithetical knowledge," which entails seeing knowledge as "essentially an actively sought out and contested thing" that is to be "understood in human and political terms as something to be won in the service of coexistence and community." Since hegemonic expertise in migration management and humanitarianism is actively involved in the exclusion, deportation and detention of migrants and asylum-seekers, this presents a critical idea for my work to engage with. Myers (2010) and Said (1981: 151) challenge critical scholars to "become more political in society." The production of antithetical knowledge with respect to humanitarianism and migration management through discourse analysis can contribute to the field of geography and beyond. I return to this idea in the dissertation's conclusion.

In this way, my analysis combines a post-Marxist/feminist concern for the materiality of people's lived experiences with a post-structural attention to how migration managers construct their world and justify their interventions. Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) formulation of a post-Marxist political economy in relation to Foucauldian discourse is useful for my study – chiefly because it allows for a study of structural, hegemonic power imbued with the recognition that hegemony is never fully sutured (Dittmer, 2010; Mouffe, 1988). For me, a recognition of migration management as situated, place-making and power-laden is necessarily a recognition that other forms of assistance, expertise, and politics exist outside of the realm of western domination and capitalist political-economy. In this light, "studying up" to understand the

situatedness of knowledge concerning migration management and humanitarianism can destabilize the truth claims that justify exclusionary practices like migrant return.

VII. Conclusion: Key implications of my study's methodology

By studying AVR's institutional discourses and practices, the project analyzes what it means for the spaces and politics of humanitarianism when the removal of migrants from EU territory becomes a humanitarian project. Through in-depth interviews with practitioners, situated in a larger EU migration context, this work names the politics of the AVR field and aims to make clear how various stakeholders (states, humanitarian practitioners, state actors) are positioned relative to one another. This project's methodology is geared towards understanding how humanitarian actors construct, justify, and enact institutional practices of migration management like AVR. To gain this understanding, I triangulate methods of semi-structured interviews and archival research with content and critical discourse analyses of various texts, including legal, policy, human rights, and organizational documents.

Over the course of this Methodology chapter, I first discussed how conducting qualitative research on institutions allows me to gather evidence to answer the research questions I am interested in around AVR, humanitarianism and migration management. I then describe the networked approach I take to studying AVR between distinct but interconnected European sites and institutions. This chapter then proceeded to survey the methods that I employed in my dissertation research, elucidating how each helped me to gather data about concepts and questions from my RQs. To summarize, interviews allow for me to go beyond what AVR practitioners do, as reported in documents, to access how they negotiate between humanitarianism and security in implementing AVR. Archival research in Geneva and London allows me to gather historically contextualizing data on how states and institutions frame,

implement, and promote AVR over time. Content analysis allows me to identify and describe key themes from my interview transcripts and documents from archival research. Finally, CDA allows me to analyze how knowledge about AVR is constructed, and how AVR's framings are politically enrolled in material practices of governance.

Ultimately, triangulating semi-structured interviews and archival research with content analysis and CDA between sites in Geneva, London, Belgium, Germany, and The Netherlands allowed me to gain a nuanced understanding of how security and humanitarianism converge in AVR within and between specific institutions across Europe today. Understanding how this convergence structures the spatial practices of migration management advances our knowledge on the contested politics of governing immigration, humanitarianism, and migrant return today. The next four empirical chapters unpack different dimensions of AVR, in line with the project's four research questions. The methods discussed here are employed across all of the subsequent chapters, as I tack back and forth between theory and empirics (Herbert, 2010), and between the histories, discourses, practices, and political negotiations of implementing AVR in Europe today.

CHAPTER THREE

A brief history of AVR as migration management in Europe: From initial forms to present-day tensions between state and humanitarian actors

I. Introduction

AVR has been incorporated within European migration management from its initial design up to its present-day implementation. This chapter unpacks how AVR is a policy that allows European governments to manage migrant return, in concert with their legal systems for asylum, and in partnership with IOM and humanitarian NGOs. This chapter primarily responds to RQ1:

> **RQ1:** How is AVR incorporated into Europe's securitized regime of migration management? How do AVR policies paradoxically incorporate institutional priorities for both state security and migrant humanitarian assistance?

To answer RQ1, this chapter charts the spatial and political processes that have led up to AVR playing a key role in how European governments approached managing the 2015-2016 migration 'crisis' (Collyer & King, 2016; McConnell, et al., 2017; Mountz & Hiemstra, 2014). This chapter's analysis reveals how AVR policies have incorporated institutional priorities for state security and migrant-focused assistance from the initial IOM-European government formulations of AVR policy in the 1980's, up to the post-2015 'crisis' iterations of AVR policies implemented by a diverse institutional network across the EU. Therefore, this chapter establishes a historical foundation and political-economic context for the analysis contained in the following three empirical chapters.

Migration management will be discussed at length in chapter five, with respect to IOM's managerial mission and humanitarian framing of AVR. Chapter five will delve into the discourses of humanitarianism surrounding AVR and discuss the power relations these discourses are situated within: namely, the EU's strong migrant removal impulse. However, for

the sake of this chapter's argument, we can define migration management as an approach to governing migration that is based on selectivity. For EU societies and governments who are increasingly wary of spontaneous immigration, migration management aims to selectively include deserving migrants (as determined by the EU asylum system, or labor priorities) and then maintain an efficient system of return and removal for those uninvited (Ashutosh and Mountz, 2010; De Genova, 2017; Kofman, 2008; Geiger and Pécoud, 2010; van Houtum, 2010)**.** AVR is a prototypical example of how migration management policies incorporate humanitarian discourses, practices and institutions. Therefore, it provides an ideal lens into how the spatial politics of humanitarianism are being navigated and negotiated today in Europe around managing migration.

Over the course of this chapter, I first establish the socio-legal conditions of implementing and encountering AVR. The first section discusses the condition of "legal impossibility" many migrants face in Europe today, which is foundational to the tension between state security interests and how humanitarian organizations approach the program. I then discuss the historical emergence of AVR policies in Europe, showing how AVR paradoxically was designed as a humanitarian program and incorporated into Europe's securitized regime of migration management. Next, I briefly discuss the available data on migrants returning from Europe via AVR, so that we have a better sense of who the migrants navigating these practices of AVR are, and where they are returning to. Finally, I chart the present-day network of AVR-implementing institutions across Europe, noting the distinct roles of governments, IOM and NGOs. A range of vested interests exist within Europe's AVR network. While many AVR institutions share funding streams and meet to exchange best practices (see Chapter Two), a fundamental tension persists between security-oriented states and migrant assistance-focused

NGOs. This chapter's central argument – that AVR has existed from its initial formulation up to today as a humanitarian, yet security serving policy of migration management – helps establish the political stakes and provide context for the subsequent chapters' analysis of how Europe's AVR network spatially implements the policy during and after the 2015-2016 migrant crisis.

II. Legal impossibility: The socio-legal conditions of implementing and encountering AVR

In order to understand the political and legal context of AVR as European migration management, and the political stakes migrants face in their decision to return, it is vital to first account for how migrants are positioned with respect to the law. The process of seeking asylum is one of legal appeal and recognition – a decision made by states concerning acceptability in light of the law. Fassin (2012: 115) calls for us to situate the "refugee question" in the "historical time of asylum," namely the political and social milieu of post-world war Europe and the United States. Arendt (1951) shows how the problem of statelessness was produced over the early twentieth century in relation to the League of Nations and Minority Treaties – a time at which inflation, unemployment, wartime violence and colonialism meant that many lives were uprooted. Stateless persons' "expulsion from humanity" ironically happened at the same time as the world became increasingly "civilized" as a collection of organized nation-states (Arendt, 1951: 296-7).

It is thus crucial to recognize that the modern condition of statelessness, the very need to seek asylum under the legal codification of "refugee," emerged in concert with the politico-legal merger of nation and state. However, Western states have done relatively little about achieving durably inclusive legal solutions for refugees in mass; instead, the "whole question is handed over to humanitarian organizations and to the police" (Agamben, 2000: 18). For Agamben

(2000), the refugee symbolizes a break in the link between human and citizen, revealing the hollowness of human rights as unenforceable outside of legal citizenship (Engle Merry, 2009). This is why Hyndman (2000) critiques the construction and interpretation of refugee law for maintaining the "primacy of the nation-state both as the subject of international law and as context for citizenship" (Hyndman, 2000: 7).

Many states of the world share a historically agreed-upon legal obligation to protect refugees. This is codified by international law from the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the following 1967 New York Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (Chimni, 1998; Samers, 2010). The oft-cited definition from the 1951 accord defines a refugee as anyone who:

> *"owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."* (UNHCR, 2021)

Here we see that the law constructs "the refugee" as a (gendered) status belonging to individuals (not groups) who fit the proper legal categorization as a basis for their appeal (Hyndman, 2000). Western nation-states negotiated a tension in the Geneva Convention between "a humanist ideology that promoted the right to asylum and offered an ennobled representation of the refugee" with that of "a pragmatic politics that mistrusted these stateless populations and reduced them to the economic status of immigrant" (Fassin, 2012: 115). Since the formation of these foundational laws on refugees, there have been many competing opinions as to how they should be enforced, how a "refugee" should be interpreted in practice, and what responsibilities these laws entail for fear-laden, anti-immigrant states/societies (Hyndman, 2000; Fassin, 2012; Malkki, 1994; Samers, 2010). These geo-historical reactions are based upon situated perspectives on "the

law, justice and legal subject-citizens that underlie the post-War human rights regime" (White, 2002: 1058). In essence, the process of obtaining refugee status and asylum represents a channel (albeit diminishing) for legal appeal to states based upon the recognition of shared humanity. The law, therefore, is a key vector through which the politics of humanitarianism are negotiated in migration management, historically and today (Barnett, 2011; Gill, et al., 2019; Martin and Mitchelson, 2009).

In response to the often positivist and depoliticized study and practice of international refugee law and legal status (Chimni, 1998; Hyndman, 2000), geographers have built from the understanding that the legal and social are intertwined and mutually constitutive. This entails viewing law as produced and powerfully productive towards the creation and enforcement of categories, identities, and institutions that structure our social relations (Blomley, 1994; Blomley, Delaney & Ford, 2001; Delaney, 2010). "Legal closure" (Blomley, 1994) reflects the hegemonic tendency to view law as neutral, objective, and distinct from the social. White (2002: 1059) claims that legal closure is a key issue for the interpretation and application of asylum law:

> *Asylum law, resettlement policies and refugee and asylum seekers' multiple experiences and realities do not take place on the head of a pin, but in historically and geographically specific contexts and institutional domains.*

In this way, law can be studied as productive and disciplining, in some cases deterministic and others malleable, in relation to the inclusion of refugee status determination or the exclusion and return of appeals-rights-exhausted asylum-seekers (Black, 2003; Coleman, 2007, 2012; Martin & Mitchelson, 2009; Varsanyi, 2008).

It was well established in interviews that irregular/undocumented legal status – this status often determined through a negative decision in the asylum process – is the primary reason that many migrants leave Europe via AVR. In this dissertation, I use the concept of "legal

impossibility" as a way of understanding the structural and often-deterministic effects of legal closure on the AVR process (Blomley, 1994; Orzek & Hae, 2020; White, 2002). This concept is not meant to imply a totalizing lack of agency, but rather brings us to the empirical reality of the decision for many migrants around whether to return or remain in Europe[3]. Legal impossibility refers to the fact that many migrants who return via AVR have no legal option to remain in Europe, and thus essentially choose between AVR or undocumented life, with few work opportunities and the lingering threat of forced removal in an increasingly anti-immigrant, enforcement-focused climate. For example, the German state asylum authority, BAMF, situates AVR in relation to irregular status as follows:

> *Following recent estimates, in 2014, between 180,000 and 520,000 immigrants have been staying irregularly in Germany. In principle, they are obliged to leave the country. Measures of assisted return and forced return thus make up an essential component of German and European asylum and migration management policy albeit voluntary returns categorically take precedence over forced returns* (BAMF, 2015).

This "obligation" to leave points to the foundational reality of legal impossibility for many migrants, reflected in the statistics above, that brings them to consider returning via AVR. This socio-legal reality not only conditions how migrants approach AVR, it also places limitations on how humanitarian and caring AVR counseling for migrants can be (see Chapter Six).

Many AVR returnees are either in the process of asylum or have recently received an asylum rejection, meaning they are registered with the government and may be living in government housing for asylum-seekers. Other returnees are undocumented migrants, who

[3] Recent work on the autonomy of migration helpfully points to the agency and creativity of migrants in navigating migration management, for example, through circular migration (Mezzadra, 2011; Casas Cortes, et al., 2015; De Genova, 2017). Though analyzing the ways in which migrants navigate the return decision is not a central part of my analysis, the staffers that I interviewed regularly acknowledged that migrants are making a choice to return or stay, and some do disappear and stay in the shadows.

perhaps have been living in the shadows, legally-speaking, for years and are ready to return home. Returnees may have recently been contacted by state migration authorities notifying them they are subject to forced removal – with AVR offering a final alternative to pending deportation. IOM Belgium (2016a) claims that Belgium's AVR program (REAB) is officially intended for three categories of migrants in Belgium:

> *1) Asylum seekers who have withdrawn their asylum application*
> *2) Asylum seekers whose asylum application has been rejected*
> *3) All foreign migrants (except recognized refugees, citizens of the EU or a country in the Schengen area) who may fall under the Belgian Government's financial support and who request to return to their own country.*

Migrants in this last group are those who have not applied for asylum, "do not have valid documents to remain legally on the Belgian territory," and "who may fall under the Belgian Government's financial support" (IOM Belgium, 2016a). This range of legal positions migrants are in when approaching AVR reflects how many experience this condition of legal impossibility to remain in Europe. Chapters five and six discuss how this socio-legal reality influences how humanitarian AVR can be – even when implemented by caring, migrant-rights-focused NGOs.

Similar to Germany and Belgium, while a range of migrants may take AVR in the UK, the majority of those who do are undocumented and appeals-rights-exhausted asylum seekers. Here is how one practitioner in London described the situation these asylum-seekers face:

> *Those would be like people who have exhausted all of their rights for appeal. We called them "ARE" (note: appeals-rights-exhausted) [...] Because we are working with irregular migrants and so on. So they would have claimed asylum and been refused. And appealed and been refused. And maybe even made a fresh claim with new evidence and been refused. Went to the high court and been refused. In the UK asylum system, if you don't have a pending case with the Home Office, you're not entitled to any support, any support at all. You are given 21 days to leave your accommodation provided by the Home Office, and you still don't have permission to work. So those people are like in limbo.* (Interview, Refugee Action #3, London, 5.9.17)

Here we can begin to see how AVR, as a return policy, operates in dynamic relation with migrants' legal status determination. This creates a situation where, in the words of this German Asylum Authority (BAMF) official, there is "no option" aside from return:

> *But I wouldn't say we are, as we assist the voluntary returnees, we are the good guys. No. We are only the half-bad guys (laughs) […] No, I don't consider – I'm not a good guy. I want to assist them. I know the legal situation is they have no residence anymore here in Germany. I understand their individual needs and their personal situation, which is of course very deplorable in a lot of cases – really in a lot of cases. But we have no option. And so we try to convince them, "go back voluntarily, we'll assist you"* (Interview, BAMF, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

The statement here reflects both the conflicted positionalities of AVR practitioners (am I a "good guy"?) as well as the closure of legal impossibility ("we have no option") due to the "legal situation." This tension between legal impossibility and humanitarian assistance is foundational for understanding the role AVR plays in Europe's management of migration today.

As the Caritas practitioner shares above, migrants' relationship to the asylum process fundamentally impacts their ability to remain within Europe. In my interviews, AVR counselors reflected that gathering information about where migrants stand in their asylum process is crucial for helping them decide about return – precisely because this conditions whether they will have any ability to legally remain and work in Europe. Legal status is often the final backstop in counseling regarding the return decision:

> *C: […] And then I usually ask them about their personal details: name, nationality, when did they come to Germany, did they ask for asylum, how far is the asylum process. Because, unfortunately, it always comes down to what is your legal status. And that's already sad. Because, you know, that's not the first approach when you really try only to work in a humanitarian way. But that's just, you know, we work in a system. […] like it depends again on their legal status here, but sometimes it really doesn't make sense to stay when you have NO chance to really start life here and to go to language school and to get a work permit. And because so many refugees and migrants have come, actually, like the Foreign Office is not too interested in giving everyone a work permit – especially those who are not supposed to be here anymore.* (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg, 11.22.17)

The reality of legal impossibility for many migrants to remain in Europe is something that many AVR counselors struggle with as a limit on the humanitarian quality of their work.

II.A. The historical development of the EU's legal asylum system

I now discuss the EU's legal system for asylum, with attention to how this structures and conditions AVR's implementation at the nexus of security and humanitarianism. The EU's Dublin Regulation is key to how asylum functions at the Europe-wide level, distributing responsibility between EU nations for processing asylum claims, and instituting spatio-legal accountability for migrants in asylum-seeking. Originally decided in 1997 and now on its third iteration, the Dublin Regulation:

> *…establishes the Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application. The criteria for establishing responsibility run, in hierarchical order, from family considerations, to recent possession of visa or residence permit in a Member State, to whether the applicant has entered EU irregularly, or regularly* (European Commission, 2020a).

This was created as a policy to disincentivize "asylum shopping," or migrants claiming asylum in multiple countries at once to improve their chances, in light of Europe's Schengen Accord that allows freedom of movement between EU nations. The European Commission defines "asylum shopping" as:

> *In the context of the Dublin Regulation, the phenomenon where a third-country national applies for international protection in more than one EU Member State with or without having already received international protection in one of those EU Member States* (European Commission, 2020b)

Therefore, a migrant who received a definitive negative decision in Belgium would not be able to travel across the border to the Netherlands to make another claim. Scholars have noted the exclusionary impacts of the Dublin Regulations on migrants in Europe, calling attention to how the law is used as a "tactic of deterrence" to discourage asylum through producing tumultuous, "convoluted geographies" of asylum seeking (Tazzioli, 2020: 16, 5; Mountz, et al., 2013;

Schuster, 2011). Here we see how AVR's foundational paradox of security and humanitarianism is legally conditioned, enrolling the policy within an EU-wide system of migration management that protects the privilege of EU citizenship. Asylum policy is a key site of legal determination and contestation towards the selective inclusions and exclusions of migrants seeking entry, work and protection from outside 'fortress Europe' (Ehrkamp, 2017; Tazzioli, 2018; White, 2002).

The Dublin Regulation is an example of how the EU has increasingly moved towards establishing a common immigration and asylum policy between member states. In 1997, EU member nations met in Amsterdam and agreed, as codified in the Amsterdam Treaty, to cooperate more closely on immigration, asylum and visa matters. In this spirit, the 1999 Tampere Programme led to the development of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) with the following characteristics:

> *"a clear and workable determination of the State responsible for the examination of an asylum application, common standards for a fair and efficient asylum procedure, common minimum conditions of reception of asylum seekers, and the approximation of rules on the recognition and content of the refugee status"* (European Parliament, 1999).

Migration management was a stated priority of the Tampere Programme, which identifies "the need for more efficient management of migration flows at all their stages" (European Parliament, 1999). Voluntary return is identified as a key part of the "management of migration flows," with the European Commission calling for "assistance to countries of origin and transit to be developed in order to promote voluntary return" (ibid.). Between 1999 and 2005, six different legislative instruments – including the EURODAC database for fingerprints of asylum seekers to support the Dublin Regulation – were established by the EU in order to develop minimum common standards for asylum (European Commission, 2021c). A series of reform-minded updates to both migrant protections and cooperation on security measures were passed between

2008 and 2013, and then again in recent years following the stresses posed on the EU's asylum system by the 2015-2016 influx of migration.

In response to changes in political climates at the country level after the 2015-2016 migration influx, there has been a marked focus on migrant returns at the EU scale. Asylum seeking numbers rose by 122 percent in 2015, with the top 5 countries of migration being Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo and Albania (Eurostat, 2019). Practitioners in the U.K., Germany, and Belgium all described how large numbers of asylum-seekers 'overwhelmed' the local governmental capacities, leading to impromptu shelters in public space. This created opportunities for right-wing politicians to capitalize rhetorically on the sudden increases in migration to gain power rhetorically through framing the influx as a crisis and threat in often Islamophobic valences (Collyer & King, 2016). However, many interviewees also stressed that these tensions could have been avoided if their governments would have invested in more resources and spaces to receive, house and process migrants. In the UK, these developments were often tied to Britain's Brexit vote and "hostile environment" towards undocumented migration (discussed below with regards to Refugee Action and the Home Office).

Thus, we can see the socio-legal construction of Europe's asylum system over several decades: on the one hand, aiming to protect asylum seekers through ensuring EU-wide minimum standards, while on the other establishing common security measures and return mechanisms to efficiently manage migration. Today, individual European nations, like Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, remain ultimately responsible for determining asylum cases. However, asylum-seeking for migrants is conditioned by EU-level priorities for managing migration, which are reflected in the above asylum legislation as well as the funding made available for migrant return policies like AVR.

II.B. Navigating asylum and return in Belgium

Interviews and documents provided at Fedasil in Belgium give a sense of what navigating the legal process of asylum looks like for migrants in Europe today – and provide a comparable case study for the asylum process in peer EU nations, like Germany and the Netherlands, who similarly rely on AVR to manage migration. When migrants arrive to Belgium, their application for asylum is first processed by the Foreigners Office, who checks the Europe-wide Dublin system to ensure Belgium is their first asylum application in the EU, and whether or not this is their first asylum application in Belgium. If it is not their first application, then new supporting documents need to be provided in order to go through the asylum procedure again[4]. If all is in order with the Foreigners Office, then the asylum procedure begins. In many EU countries, Belgium included, migrants are now provided information about AVR upon applying for asylum, presented as an option for them to return voluntarily at any point during or after their asylum procedure.

In Belgium, asylum-seekers go before the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons. Here migrants respond to a list of questions regarding their situation and the Commissioner General assesses whether they have a 'credible' fear of persecution that merits asylum in Belgium. Here asylum-seekers are either considered for refugee status or subsidiary protection (which are special temporary protection arrangements – Syrians, for example, in 2015-2016). If granted refugee status, they may remain in Belgium for five years and then seek permanent residency. However, if asylum-seekers receive a negative decision – in other words, if

[4] This is an opportunity for some counselors to try and help migrants strengthen their claims and find legal assistance (see Chapter Six on the agency of staffers in negotiating humanitarianism's possibilities and limits in AVR).

no protection is offered from the Belgian government – they then have 30 days to either leave Europe or appeal.

Migrant appeals to negative initial asylum decisions go before the Council for Alien Disputes, or Aliens Litigation Council. Here, again, migrants are considered for both refugee status and subsidiary protection – often with the assistance of lawyers. A second negative decision on either of these fronts leads to the outcome of "expulsion," or forced removal, from Belgium. As Fedasil's "return path" leaflet for migrants and their social workers details, when "the negative decision is confirmed":

> *"If the (Council for Alien Disputes) rejects your appeal, this is the end of your asylum procedure and you must leave the reception centre or housing. Reception can only be extended in an open return place"* (Fedasil, 2017a).

Belgium offers "open return places" as a housing solution for returning migrants while their travel and reintegration plans are being made.

At this point, many migrants consider whether to go into the shadows to live an undocumented life at risk of deportation, or to return via AVR. This is the moment when many arrive to AVR information desks for counseling on the possibility of return. The question of when migrants will be able to return to Europe again can loom large in voluntary return counseling, as the return decisions migrants make can have long-term impacts on their mobility. In the case of the UK, having an AVR application approved means that all asylum procedures are halted and there is a 5-year ban on re-entry to the UK (Encinas, 2016). Interviews in Germany revealed how, when a migrant is deported (forced return), they receive a "reentry ban" of up to five years (BAMF, 2018); however, if they return via AVR, migrants are allowed to apply for asylum again in the future. The exception to this is if migrants return voluntarily to what is deemed a "safe country of origin," BAMF issues a ban on entry and residence for up to a

year for the migrant's first denied application and then up to three years for subsequent denied applications (ibid.). These bans on reentry apply not only to Germany but are also entered into EU-wide database (Schengen Information System) and applied to the larger Schengen area (ibid.). There is also the larger question of what it means to sign a "voluntary return declaration" (like the one quoted in Chapter Four, stating you will return voluntarily to your country of origin), if the migrant hopes to apply for asylum in Europe again in the future. Because migrants' applications for asylum depend on establishing a well-founded fear of persecution, having signed this declaration of voluntary return could create substantial legal barriers to asylum applications in the future (Encinas, 2016).

This reality of legal impossibility has caused many people, critics and practitioners alike, to question how "voluntary" can AVR actually be (Cleton & Chauvin, 2020; Webber, 2011) – chapter five narrows in on this question. Examining the historical emergence of AVR policy in Europe reveals that this socio-legal reality for migrants has been central to the past 40+ years of AVR's existence. The legal process of status determination is an ever-present factor in how migrants navigate their decision to return, in relation to humanitarian and state actors – Chapter Four will address these various practices of AVR implementation in this context. Legal impossibility is precisely why AVR fundamentally operates at the nexus of security and humanitarianism; it is also why AVR has become an increasingly important return mechanism in the European Union's collective approach to migration management.

III. The historical emergence of AVR in Europe at the nexus of security and humanitarianism

While I was conducting archival research at IOM headquarters in Geneva, an IOM official sat down with me to discuss return policies. Their first point was: "return is a field, not a category."

This comment points to the importance of situating AVR within the field of returns, in order to chart its historical emergence at this nexus of state security and migrant-focused humanitarianism. I now draw on archival research and historical institutional documents to answer why and how AVR policy emerged. In this non-exhaustive history of the policy, I focus in particular on how AVR was functionally incorporated into Europe's political regime of migration management.

Policies of 'voluntary' removal are not new. Ngai (2004: 60) details how the US in 1927 allowed thousands of migrants to 'voluntarily' depart, thereby saving the state "the time and expense of instituting formal deportation proceedings." For the US, this era of deportation was key to the establishment of documented versus undocumented (i.e., deportable) immigration (ibid.). Since the aforementioned 1951 Geneva Declaration, the "voluntary repatriation" of refugees has been a core function of both UNHCR and IOM's missions. Europe at this time was recovering from the devastation of World War II and many thousands needed resettlement assistance across the European continent. Here, a key initial distinction emerges. IOM and UNHCR both provide support to refugees who qualify for "voluntary repatriation" under the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol, and UNHCR's general mandate (IOM, 1991). However, over time, IOM increasingly began to offer voluntary return migration, as distinct from UNHCR, for displaced persons and other individuals who are not refugees. IOM's version of Assisted Voluntary Return served a politically important population for European governments, a group that was confounding the 'management' of their migration systems: those whose applications for asylum were "determined to be unfounded under relevant eligibility procedures applied by governments and/or UNHCR" (IOM, 1991: 2).

For the first 30 years of IOM's existence – then ICEM (Intergovernmental Committee on European Migration)[5] – the organization's primary focus was on refugee resettlement, family reunification, and "transfer of technology activities for the benefit of the Latin America region" (ICM, 1981). Selective Migration schemes were a key part of ICEM's efforts in the 1960's, aimed at matching skilled workers from Europe with needed professions in Latin America, and facilitating return accordingly (IOM, 2001). Directly predating the emergence of AVR was IOM's "return of talent" program, beginning in 1973, which was designed to counteract the "brain drain" through providing resources and logistical support for migrants in Western Europe to return to developing countries, mostly in Latin America (ICEM, 1979; IOM, 2001). The "return of talent" programs were explicitly framed as a development initiative. In the words of the Observer to the ICEM Council for the Commission of the European Communities, the programs were "aimed at encouraging the return of specialized personnel to their countries of origin and providing well-trained foreign experts appears to be of major importance in the context of concrete multilateral efforts to assist developing countries" (ICM, 1980). These programs focused on facilitating circular migration amongst particular diaspora, in response to economic development considerations, matching skilled workers from Europe with particular trades in their home country in Latin America.

However, IOM archival documents speak to the emerging need in the 1980's for a "humanitarian migration concept" to be applied for recent arrivals to Europe, "at the stage when the asylum seeker has exhausted all legal possibilities to be recognized as a refugee" (IOM,

[5] The name of the institutions now known as IOM has changed several times over the organization's history: Originally ICEM, becoming ICM in 1980, and then IOM in 1989. According to IOM (2021c), these changes evidence the organization's "transition over half a century from logistics agency to migration agency."

1991: 3). Many of these arrivals were from Eastern Europe, whereas others were from countries experiencing conflict and widespread poverty in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Latin America (IOM, 2001). IOM, in concert with European governments, was no longer able to resettle all of the asylum-seekers arriving to Europe, so new spatial arrangements needed to be devised for asylum-seekers residing within European territory, particularly those who have received a negative decision (ibid.). It is here, in 1979, that the policy of Assisted Voluntary Return emerged, representing an expansion of IOM's mission to the voluntary return of non-refugees. AVR emerges at the same time when the European Community was beginning to cohere a common space of free movement for EU nationals, which culminated in the 1985 Schengen Accord.

Relying on cooperation from both sending and receiving countries, and the involvement of IOM and NGOs, AVR was conceptualized to take place within a "humanitarian migration framework," providing an opportunity for "pre-departure counseling, pre-departure material assistance, documentation, transport, reception in the countries of origin, post-arrival assistance, safeguards in the countries of origin, etc." (IOM, 1991: 4). By design, this policy was to only be available to the rejected asylum seeker for a limited period of time, coming into play "during a determined period of time before individual governments would resort to measures of forced return in accordance with national law and practice vis-à-vis aliens in an irregular situation" (ibid.: 3). Therefore, from its inception, AVR is framed as humanitarian but given force and meaning through the pending reality of deportation: this is how it becomes incorporated with EU migration management.

III.A. IOM return programs in the 1980s and 1990s – the beginning

The first voluntary return program began in Germany in 1979. This program, termed REAG for "Return or Emigration of Asylum Seekers from Germany," from the beginning has been run in "close cooperation with voluntary agencies and Government social services" (IOM, 1991). This program marked an innovation in IOM's European history of return policy, in that asylum-seekers and migrants needing resettlement were not only assisted to migrate to a welcoming "third country" of resettlement, but some were assisted voluntarily to return to their own country of origin (IOM, 2001). Over the first decade of the program's existence, approximately 66,000 migrations returned via REAG, 33,000 to their country of origin and 28,000 to a "third country of permanent immigration" (ICM, 1989: 1). Belgium was the next country to adopt an AVR program, REAB (Return and Emigration of Asylum-seekers from Belgium), beginning in 1984. Switzerland initiated a voluntary return program in 1987 for the return and reintegration of unsuccessful Chilean asylum seekers from Europe, offering travel booking, reception in Santiago, a "reinstallation grant," and "counselling by the IOM staff in Chile on such matters as health care, education, housing and administrative procedures" (IOM, 1989: 15). The Dutch policy began in 1992, named REAN (Return and Emigration of Aliens from the Netherlands), as a policy for those with a legal obligation to leave the Netherlands (IOM Netherlands, 2010). AVR came to the UK in 1999, via IOM's VARRP program (Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Program), which featured an integrated reintegration funding and planning dimension.

The rise and fall in the number of people returning via AVR over recent decades show how the policy has been integral to Europe's management of migration, in concert with geopolitical events. Increases in AVR cases have often been in response to crisis, most notably

the Balkan conflicts throughout the 1990's and again with the influx of immigration over 2015-2016. An official at Coming Home in Munich, Germany reflected on this time period:

> *After the Bosnian War, the Yugoslavian War, we had 21,000 Bosnian refugees living in Munich. And when the war was over in December 1995, the German government decided to send the refugees back as quickly as possible – because the plan was that they had to rebuild their country. The refugees had been living here for two up to six years, and most of them had been quite well integrated here, and many of them had lost everything in their home country – houses and furnitures, and so on. And so we thought that they would need help in reintegrating.* (Interview, Coming Home, Munich, 11.21.17)

Germany saw a record number of returns via AVR between 1997 and 2000 as a result of the Balkans conflict coming to an end – with an all-time high of 102,359 voluntary returns in 1998. Returns hovered around 10,000/year from 2002 – 2012, ticking up again in 2014 and 2105 to a fifteen year high in 2016 (54,006 total returns), due to migratory pressures from conflicts in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan (BAMF, 2021).

Therefore, we can see that AVR grew in prominence as a policy of migration management in relation to geopolitical moments that produced migratory pressures on European nations. In this way, AVR's growth marked a divergent path from IOM's more development-focused returns initiatives throughout the first 30 years of the institution following WW-II. European governments saw AVR as a way to help 'ensure the integrity' of the European asylum system and provide a humanitarian alternative to forced removal for migrants remaining in Europe without legal status (Interview, European Commission, Brussels, 5.10.17). This historical growth of AVR reflects the emerging security concern with managing recent arrivals as the European Community cohered into a common space.

III.B. Return directives: Security motivations for the coherence of EU return policy

With the coherence of the Dublin Accord and shared EU asylum procedures, the question of what happens next for those migrants who are rejected for asylum has increasingly came to the

fore at the EU level, beckoning EU-wide coherent returns policies. As we enter the 2000's, AVR policy begins to take on a greater coordinated significance at the EU level, with specific return directives making AVR funding available at the EU level, to be allocated in concert with national governments. The European Return Directive was adopted in 2008, recognizing that it is "legitimate for Member States to return illegally staying third-country nationals, provided that fair and efficient asylum systems are in place" (European Union, 2008: 98). The document states that "effective" returns policies are "a necessary element of a well-managed migration policy" (ibid.). Reflecting how AVR is integrated into EU security measures for managing migration, this directive states a clear preference for voluntary return over forced return:

> *Where there are no reasons to believe that this would undermine the purpose of a return procedure, voluntary return should be preferred over forced return and a period for voluntary departure should be granted. […] In order to promote voluntary return, Member States should provide for enhanced return assistance and coun-selling and make best use of the relevant funding possi-bilities offered under the European Return Fund. (EU, 2008: 98).*

Thus, in accordance with the freedom of movement established within Europe's Schengen area, and a common EU policy of Asylum through the Dublin and Amsterdam Accords, this directive evidences increasing coordination at the European level for returns. For the EU, AVR is framed as the clear preference over forced return, in line with EU values of humanitarianism, and as integral to effective migration management.

The European Return Fund financed AVR policies from 2008-2013, with a total budget of 676 million for these five years (European Commission, 2021a). These EU funds covered up to 50% of national programs for return, which were drawn up "on the basis of strategic guidelines defined at EU level" (European Commission, 2021a). The European Commission's Migration and Home Affairs describes the motivation for financing this Return Fund as such:

> *To ensure a sustainable and credible policy approach to the management of migration flows, it is essential to address the problem of irregular migration. An effective return policy – in conformity with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and based on the preference for voluntary return – is key to this objective (European Commission, 2021a).*

The noted "preference" for voluntary return here is significant, signaling a growing awareness of the utility of AVR for managing migration, and a desire for coordination at the EU level.

Following this, and during the time period of this project's focus, the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) became the primary funding instrument for AVR from 2014-2020. The stated goal of this EU fund is to: promote "the efficient management of migration flows and the implementation, strengthening and development of a common EU approach to asylum and immigration" (European Commission, 2020c). AMIF's priorities reflect how migration has become an increasingly divisive political issue between European nations, with "relocation measures" to transfer asylum seekers from countries experiencing "high migratory pressures" to those with more capacity (ibid.: 8). AMIF's total budget was 3.137 billion Euros for these seven years, and returns are one of its four pillars, as described in the program's language: "enhancing fair and effective return strategies, which contribute to combating irregular migration, with an emphasis on sustainability and effectiveness of the return process" (European Commission, 2021b). At the end of 2020, the European Commission reports that AMIF funds facilitated: 118,113 migrants receiving return reintegration assistance; 159,253 persons receiving assistance to return voluntarily; and 117,296 persons returned by force (European Commission, 2020c). The majority of AMIF funds are managed by EU Member States and involve various stakeholders from federal authorities to NGOs and humanitarian organizations. Many of the government and humanitarian organizations discussed in the following chapters received funding through AMIF channels in order to implement AVR.

While in Brussels, I interviewed an official with the European Commission, who reflected to me that the EU's returns programs are designed to "bring the EU together" (Interview, European Commission, Brussels, 5.10.17). He explained how the 2015-2016 influx of migration had not distributed evenly, and that some member countries had been much more affected than others – making this a regional issue to be addressed through EU-wide initiatives. He spoke to the important role of "deterrence" in AVR policy: from his perspective, deterrence to undocumented residence in Europe was a crucial "incentive" for migrants to take up AVR on a larger scale in Europe. Without this, he said that far-right parties will continue to take advantage of the immigration issue to encourage Brexit-like movements. A UK government Home Office official similarly reflected on the right's perception of AVR in our interview, saying that AVR is:

> *a product that can sometimes be politically difficult: so the concept of giving people who (depending on your politics) shouldn't be here public money to return* (Interview, Home Office, London, 12.8.16).

In this way, the EU official in Brussels stated that a key dilemma facing European returns was how to run AVR as a humanitarian program without encouraging more migrants to come (knowing they can get a free return and cash in hand), and without making the right-wing populists angry that the EU is giving 'charity' to those that broke the law (Interview, European Commission, Brussels, 5.10.17). This reflects the security motivations that continue to motivate AVR today at the EU and UK government levels. For European policymakers, migration is seen as posing an existential problem for EU unity – particularly in the wake of Brexit – as resurgent nationalist, anti-immigrant parties like the AFD in Germany gain political power.

In conclusion, over the post-war history of European returns, we can see that a key distinction emerges between: a) development-focused returns programs, which are often part of a

circular migration dynamic; and b) AVR programs like REAG (Germany), REAB (Belgium), REAN (Netherlands) and VARRP (UK). The latter have evolved over the past four decades, taking shape as the European Community grew into the European Union with an increasingly interconnected and coordinated migration and returns policy. These AVR schemes are unique from IOM and UNHCR's past development-focused returns initiatives in how they are aimed at recent arrivals and have conditions on migrants' ability to seek asylum and return to Europe. Evolutions in the reintegration dimension of the policy (AVR*R*) have brought development considerations back in – however, these reintegration funds are conditional upon return. Ultimately, Assisted Voluntary Return has become integrated into European migration management, shoring up Europe's asylum system by providing an alternative to forced removal within a "humanitarian framework" (IOM, 1991).

IV. Who are the migrants that return via AVR?

I now provide Europe-wide and country-specific data on AVR returns, to give a sense of who the migrants are that return via AVR and where they are returning to. Between 2005 and 2015, the average number of yearly assisted voluntary returns from Europe was 37,000 (IOM, 2018b). However, in 2015, 69,540 migrants returned via IOM programs, reflecting a 37% jump from the year before. AVR numbers jumped another 41% in 2016 to a 15-year high of 98,403, with 83% of these returning from the European Economic Area (IOM, 2018b). These migrants returned from Europe to 156 different countries of origin. The 2015-2016 uptick in AVR numbers reflect how the policy was increasingly relied upon by governments and IOM to manage the large influx of migrants and asylum seekers within Europe.

IOM provides data on Assisted Voluntary Returns that is organized by host countries, and by the gender, age, and country of origin for migrants. Of the total pool of 2015 AVR returnees,

31% were women, 24% were children, and 5% were designated "vulnerable" (IOM, 2015a). Germany is by far the largest host country, with 35,556 returnees; Belgium is third with 3,870 returnees; and Netherlands is fifth with 2,927 returnees (IOM, 2015a). In Belgium, the top 10 countries of return in 2016 were Iraq (659), Afghanistan (122), Russia (58), Kosovo (40), Georgia (39), Iran (33), Albania (31), Fyrom (29), Lebanon (23) and Armenia (18) (IOM Belgium, 2016a). And in the UK, internal data was provided by Refugee Action that showed 15,154 returns over five years from 2011-mid-2016. The top ten countries of return from the UK were: Pakistan, China, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq-Kurdistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Brazil, and Zimbabwe. According to data from IOM and BAMF (the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees), between 2015 and 2018, countries from the Western Balkans (Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) were highly represented in Germany's AVR cases. Beyond this region, the six countries of Iraq, the Russian Federation, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia accounted for 40% of voluntary returns from Germany in 2018. The overall number of voluntary returns from Germany peaked in 2016 at 54,006, declining to 29,522 in 2017 and 15,962 in 2018 (BAMF, 2020).

These data show that, while the Balkan countries have been and remain the prominent return destinations from EU countries, AVR cases cover the entire globe. However, the large majority of global AVR cases, historically and today, are returning people from the European Economic Area. In 2015-2016, in particular, asylum priority was being given to asylum-seekers from Syria and Libya, where migrants were fleeing active conflict and return would be considered *refoulment*. In Belgium, for example, a special category of subsidiary protection was offered to Syrians during this time:

> *"subsidiary protection" – it means that, for example […] we know everybody in Syria – there's a war – and everybody who is living now in Syria is in danger. Anyone. So*

> *everybody who can now declare "I'm from Syria," you'll get at least subsidiary protection. It can mean that everybody who can, ehh, prove that he's from that country already will get protection. But it's protection for one year. After one year, the (government) is again going to look at the situation in your country. Is there still a war? And you get again one year protection. And after three years, you will get also protection as a refugee.* (Interview, Fedasil 3, Sint Truidin, 5.2.17)

This meant that migrants from many other countries, particularly in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, were fast-tracked for return, in the ongoing political effort to manage the 'crisis' and keep numbers low. These numbers reflect larger inequalities of uneven development, conflict, and racialized hierarchies of citizenship and mobility – as well as how the law works spatially to manage migration for EU security interests.

V. The present-day institutional AVR network in Europe

Having outlined the legal, historical, and political context of AVR, this section provides an overview of AVR's present-day institutional architecture in Europe. Chapter Two outlined my approach to studying AVR as a networked process. I now detail the institutional landscape of AVR in Europe in order to show how various actors are situated differentially in implementing AVR. Partnerships between state and non-state actors are fundamental to AVR, and these are not without tension – particularly around the role AVR plays in European migration management. These institutional relations, along with this chapter's discussion of legal impossibility, are important for understanding the possibilities and limitations of humanitarian assistance within AVR programs (Chapter Six).

AVR's institutional architecture, while different from country-to-country, can broadly be characterized by having four primary poles: 1) the European Union, which provides funding and EU-level directives; 2) national governments, which also provide funding and national directives – and in some cases, such as the UK Home Office or Fedasil in Belgium, offer their own AVR

program for migrant return; 3) IOM, which provides essential logistical support to coordinate returns between its offices around the world; and 4) humanitarian NGOs, often locally-based, who primarily provide on-the-ground counseling support to migrants. While IOM still provides return counseling in certain European countries, its role has evolved over recent decades to serve as a central logistical coordinator (booking travel, for example) and broker between state and humanitarian agencies. A key contribution of IOM to AVR is that it has offices in nearly every country of the world and thus can coordinate the return and *reintegration* on the other side of the journey. I now compare the institutional shape of AVR in Germany, Belgium, and the UK – three leading countries of AVR, where I conducted interviews – to show how these institutional actors align in order for AVR to take place.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Germany was the first country in Europe to pilot AVR programs and today it remains the country with the highest number of AVR cases. Due to its federalized system, the shape of AVR is slightly different in every one of the 16 states – and this can have a big impact on migrants' ability to even access AVR (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg, 11.22.17). Different NGOs implement AVR counseling in their respective federal states; for example, in the large state of Bayern, Caritas has an office in Augsburg, Coming Home operates counseling in Munich, and ZRB offers counseling services in Nuremberg. In Germany, nation-wide, IOM's role is primarily focused on administering applications and coordinating travel. With over 900 return counseling centers across Germany, a BAMF official described the country's AVR coordination as such:

> *Most of the counselling agencies are registered by IOM as an organization that can launch applications. They have a general form […] for that program and they submit the program and the respective documents – mostly ID's – to IOM. And IOM is processing the whole procedure according to the provisions fixed by the Federal Government and the Federal States. And then IOM will buy the tickets and make the departure for the*

> *returnees. So we have a standardized program and process across Germany.* (Interview, BAMF, Nuremberg, 11.24.17)

While the REAG-GARP AVR program is run nation-wide through IOM and BAMF, individual states have the bandwidth to implement the program differently with their unique approaches to counseling and reintegration (Interview, BAMF, Nuremberg, 11.24.17). As a sign of the security pressures of this moment, Germany recently introduced a new top-up AVR initiative, "StarthilfePlus" (translation: Start-up cash Plus), aimed at increasing the number of returns after Germany's 2015-2016 influx of migration. This program provides an extra financial incentive for migrants to return via AVR *before* their asylum case is heard, to relieve the backlog of asylum cases. Several interviewees pointed out how this was passed in response to right-wing, anti-immigrant pressure about the number of asylum-seekers in Germany, with national elections pending and Angela Merkel needing to form a coalition government.

Belgium has a longstanding AVR program and significant history of voluntary return up to the present day. Here, Fedasil represents a uniquely social/humanitarian governmental entity for AVR in Europe, partnering with both IOM and Caritas, as well as smaller community-based NGOs. Migrants in Belgium, when applying for AVR are identified as either Category A, Category B, or Category C. Category A includes "migrants currently in asylum procedure or within the 30 days OLT timeframe" (OLT = "Order to Leave Territory"); Category C includes "migrants who were never enrolled in a procedure to obtain a residence permit"; and Category B includes "registered migrants who do not fall under A or C category" (IOM Belgium, 2015). Asylum cases are adjudicated by the Foreigner's Office, whereas Fedasil handles all of the social aspects of the asylum case, such as housing, and, particularly in the case of negative asylum decisions: voluntary return (Interview, Fedasil #1, Brussels, 12.14.16). As in Germany, IOM manages the logistics of migrants' return travel from Belgium, whereas IOM and Caritas both

offer reintegration assistance, post-return. Return counseling in Belgium is widely offered by Fedasil, IOM, Caritas and smaller NGOs.

While the institutional structure of AVR in Germany and Belgium has remained relatively constant, the program has changed significantly in the UK over the past 20 years. The UK's AVR policy has historically offered three tracks for returnees: VARRP (Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme), which provided 1500 Pounds Sterling and applied to people who have been in the Asylum system in the UK but did not have minor children; AVRFC (Assisted Voluntary Return for Families and Children), which provided 2000 pounds Sterling and applied to unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors and families who had been in the asylum system with children under 18 (Interview, Refugee Action 2, London, 12.7.16). The third AVR track, AVRIM (Assisted Voluntary Return for Irregular Migrants), was designed for irregular migrants in detention or outside of the asylum system; no money was provided (only return travel) for this group unless the migrant was experiencing particular vulnerabilities. The UK's experience with implementing AVR epitomizes how the uneasy tensions around humanitarianism have been institutionally worked out over time in Europe, in relation to growing security pressures.

V.A. AVR in the UK: Refugee Action and the Home Office

When AVR began in the UK in 1999, the programs were run entirely through IOM, with NGOs around the UK sub-contracted for counseling. Then in 2011, a migrant-rights focused humanitarian NGO named Refugee Action, one of the NGOs IOM had previously subcontracted for counseling, won the contract to take over the country's entire AVR program – including outreach, counseling, return and reintegration. Refugee Action ran this program for five years up until 2016. This was the first time that a national AVR program was delivered entirely by NGOs

(Refugee Action, 2015). Refugee Action has been working with migrants in the UK for over 30 years and is generally well-known in immigrant communities as a humanitarian service provider. Refugee Action's program was called "Choices," named to reflect their "best practice NGO model," where "sustainable, successful and appropriate returns" are: client centered, led by client choice, result in sustainable return, delivered in partnership with those best placed to meet the client's need; and take a development approach, focused on poverty reduction both for returnees and the larger society (Refugee Action, 2015: 7-8).

Refugee Action's organizational structure for AVR reflected this humanitarian ethos. Refugee Action employed a "pre-decision team" that conducted outreach to migrant communities and offered "pre-decision advice" for those who were contemplating return via AVR. Then there was a "post-decision team," who would help migrants fill out AVR application forms and apply for reintegration assistance. Independence from the government, confidentiality and impartiality (providing "non-directive advice") were "cornerstones" of Refugee Action's humanitarian pre- and post-decision return counseling:

> *The cornerstones of all of Refugee Action's services are that we offer non-directive, confidential, impartial advice. So, you know, in terms of non-directive advice: we would take as much information as possible, set out the options, and then allow the time to make that decision themselves. The impartiality, particularly in voluntary return, comes in when we have to liaise with the Home Office. So we're not gonna put their agenda forward to the client. We're not going to push anyone into any decision. We're gonna be very careful about what information we relay backwards and forwards between ourselves. (Interview, Refugee Action #4, 5.9.17)*

Refugee Action had an embassy team, who helped coordinate migrants' return travel in a safe manner with government officials from the migrants' home country. They also had a logistics team whose role was to book travel. With respect to travel planning, Refugee Action would try to build in a three-month period for migrants before departure, in case they had second thoughts about returning:

> *So, we would book the ticket, but we would like try to arrange it so that [...] it's convenient for the client and then once they have been accepted they have their application open for three months. And they could still change their mind.* (Interview, Refugee Action #3, 5.9.17)

In these ways, Refugee Action approached AVR in a migrant-centered way, independent from government pressures – so much so that practitioners at other humanitarian AVR-implementing NGOs in Belgium and Germany described Choices as a model humanitarian approach to AVR.

However, this approach created conflict with the UK Home Office, for whom enforcement of return and managing irregular migration in the UK is a heightened priority. All of the practitioners I spoke to from Refugee Action reflected the tension between their focus on quality of assistance to migrants, and the Home Office's focus on high numbers of returns. At the time of research, the UK government was implementing what it called a "hostile environment." This climate was described by a Refugee Action employee as follows:

> RA: *There's the "hostile environment," which is making things really difficult for people here.*
>
> AC: *That's like the actual terminology that's used, right? The "hostile environment"?*
>
> RA: *Yes, it is [...] this is something that's come from government. They've said their purpose is to create a hostile environment, by which they mean people are not able to open bank accounts, people are not able to rent, people are not able to, of course, be employed. Recently they've changed the law and if you work that's a criminal offense and your money will be taken away from you as proceeds from crime. So even if you work cash in hand, which is of course not allowed if you're an asylum-seeker, but you're a migrant – so they will take away from you any money you have. And then also, of course, people that don't have leave, they don't have access to recourse of public funds if they need it [...] There's just no end to it. Now they're saying they are getting information from the NHS – so it's forcing doctors and nurses to become immigration officials. The same thing with everywhere – every organizations, schools the same thing, every organization you're in touch with if you're an irregular migrant then the Home Office will try to tap into that information and to find you so they can deport you.* (Interview, Refugee Action #5, 5.9.17)

In a group interview, Refugee Action practitioners described how the Home Office had infamously taken to driving vans around immigrant neighborhoods with signs that read "Go

Home." The UK's "hostile environment" reflects the production of legal impossibility through a securitized impulse to make undocumented life such a challenge that return is the only feasible path forward for migrants (Burrell & Hopkins, 2019). A Refugee Action practitioner shared how the NGO remained true to their humanitarian identity, while keeping peace with the Home Office in this hostile climate:

> RA: *I mean, I suppose our fundamental approach was: we're here for the clients; we're not here for the Home Office. They're putting the money up, which makes it possible - but the reason we're here is for these people. And so if we think that we need to do X, Y and Z for the benefit of these people, then that's what we need to do. And if we can't do it under the auspices of this program, then thankfully – because we're a national organization with a 30-year history – we've got some funds that we can use to do that.*
>
> AC: *So being diversified in a sense was beneficial there?*
>
> RA: *yeah. And so usually any high-profile stuff that was critical was carried out by people who weren't part of the Choices program, they were other members of staff - so that we could find a division. But I suppose for in terms of a public message, what we could say is "Refugee Action believes X, Y and Z." And you know, Choices may not have paid for that campaign, Choices staff may not have been involved in it, but we're all Refugee Action at the end of the day. So we were able to say to the Home Office: "we've stuck by the contract. Not a penny of yours has been used for this." But in terms of the public, people were able to see Refugee Action, which we know runs Choices, is taking the Home Office to court. And that felt to us like the way it should be.* (Interview, Refugee Action 2, London, 12.7.16)

These kinds of potentially disruptive strategies are further discussed in Chapter Six as minor acts of care, as part of that chapter's analysis of how humanitarian and caring AVR can actually be.

In 2016 the UK Home Office decided to move the country's AVR program entirely in-house. For Refugee Action, losing the contract for AVR was a financial blow, but also reflected a disappointing move away from humanitarianism in the UK's approach to managing migration. In a group interview, Refugee Action practitioners reflected on how this institutional change resulted in a markedly more securitized approach to AVR in the UK:

> AC: *Post 2016, voluntary return [...] do you have the sense that there is much of a humanitarian flavor left to these programs at all anymore?*

RA 3: *None whatsoever.*

RA 4: *No, I think that disappeared completely. I think the Home Office tries, sort of internally, a kind of "good cop, bad cop" approach. That's not for me to say. But they're gonna be – they don't care what happens to a person at the other end, whether it's the right decision for them. They want them to go back.*

RA 3: *Yeah [...] I mean, I know that, what I do know is that now they have still a remnant of what was Assisted Voluntary Return. And they might give out some financial support to certain people, but with a lot more stringent criteria than when we were doing the program. And so they're making it as difficult as possible: when you call – you have to give your details when you call them. There's no confidentiality, end of story. It's just a question of that or you'll be deported.* (Group Interview, Refugee Action 3, 4 and 5, London, 5.9.17)

A different practitioner at Refugee Action frustratedly reflected on how this move by the Home Office seemed performative, towards enforcing the securitized hostile environment message at the expense of programs budget and ultimate sustainability:

RA: *Then in June, end of June, (the Home Office) came back to us and said: "actually we've made our decision, we're not tendering at all, we're taking it in house." And we asked them why, and they said "well...a whole host of reasons, including the hostile environment," and we think that it just makes more sense." We said to them "well, we're pretty sure that you will see fewer people going home and it will cost you more." And they said "well, as far as we're concerned, the hostile environment is the thing, the political message is the thing – not the cost." Which is frustrating in a time of austerity in Britain, when everybody else was losing money – that the Home Office was happy to spend more money for less, just for the hostile environment message. But that, you know, it was always - it's always a massively political issue, voluntary return.*
(Interview, Refugee Action 2, London, 12.7.16)

As an instructive counterpoint to this Refugee Action practitioner, a Home Office official reflected on this decision by sharply contrasting state versus humanitarian approaches to AVR:

HO: We had an interesting working relationship with Refugee Action. So, the concept of voluntary return didn't always sit well, I think, with certain members of their team. And it took a long time for them to work and understand, kind of, the civil service ethos, and also kind of the performance management aspect of what we were doing. And that's understandable - they're a charity and it took a while.

AC: Sure, that's probably inevitable any time a charity, and explicitly humanitarian organization interacts with a state body, right? different ways of seeing the world.

> *HO: Yeah, especially when we are increasingly pushed as a government department towards kind of the enforcement side of things as well. So, I understand the conflict between that and the voluntary return aspect* (Interview, Home Office, London, 12.8.16).

The UK's experience with AVR reflects the fundamental institutional tension at the heart of AVR's implementation. European governments seek a security-focused return on their investment in managing migration, and of course, also structure the conditions and outcomes under which migrants navigate seeking asylum. On the other hand, NGOs like Refugee Action receive their funding through national government allotments, but seek to apply the funds in line with their humanitarian mandates. Refugee Action losing the contract for AVR in the UK shows how AVR became prioritized as a security measure for return to manage the 2015-2016 migration crisis – with the Home Office taking over to ensure this securitization.

V.B. Tensions between government and humanitarian involvement in AVR

The UK example exemplifies how tensions between government and humanitarian priorities are constitutive to the practice and implementation of AVR. There are a range of institutional approaches to AVR, which reflect the diverse places and politics of humanitarianism with respect to migration. For some Migrant Activist Groups, AVR is deportation by another name and is thus anathema. Other NGOs, including many of those interviewed for this project, see AVR's limitations (due to legal impossibility) but also recognize that migrants are much better returning via AVR – with counseling, travel booking and, when possible, reintegration assistance – as opposed to forced removal. On the other end of the spectrum, for state-based organizations, like the UK Home Office and BAMF in Germany, AVR is part of a menu of options for migrants facing removal and is desirable as a cost saving option for states as opposed to deportation.

A reintegration educator for AVR counselors in Germany reflected on how AVR exists tenuously between state (security-focused) and NGO (humanitarian-focused) ends of the migration management spectrum:

> *So, on one hand, you have people who say, "yes! They have to leave anyway. Why do we have to spend money on that? Just kick them out: deportation." […] But then it works if you say, "but deportation is pretty expensive. Voluntary return is much cheaper." "OK, yeah." And then on the other hand, you have people from the refugee rights movement, and they are totally against it: "you are instrumentalized by politics and you are helping these people to enact and implement their stupid politics." How is it, like, "Nobody is foreign anywhere." […] So and I think these are the two big poles that reintegration and return is kind of swimming between.* (Interview, Micado Migration, Munich, 11.21.17)

The fact that AVR-implementing NGOs receive money from states means they operate at risk of cooptation for government security. However, as realists working on the ground with migrants, they see AVR as a vital humanitarian program in this less-than-ideal, securitized climate: meeting needs and caring for migrant vulnerabilities. These NGOs operate in a fraught political space between the two poles of championing AVR for security and refusing it as migrant removal.

An official with the European Commission reflected on the "in-between" reality of AVR from the European Union's policy-making perspective, stating that in the wake of the 2015-2016 influx of migration: "by being in the middle, you are not credible to the left or the right." He reflected on how the EU is either seen as not returning enough (by resurgent nationalist parties on the right) or returning the wrong people, because everyone should stay (by humanitarian NGOs on the left). The below Refugee Action practitioner similarly reflects the challenge of working in between these two poles of the far-right and community-based refugee organizations:

> RA: *Although it was a HO run program effectively, and (HO) funded program, there were a lot of HO personnel who really didn't buy into it at all. And I think there was a lot of cynicism, a lot of "we're giving people a free ride, they shouldn't even be here, why should we help them, why should we pay them to go home?"*

AC: *So kind of suspect of the humanitarian component of it? Of the assistance?*

RA: *Yeah, yeah, so [...] we talked to police forces, anyone we thought might come into contact with somebody who was facing that sort of a question: "do I stay or do I go?" And [...] so we tried to make sure that other organizations had at least a broad understanding of what the service offered, and could therefore refer to us, where we could do the details. But we also talked to community organizations, many of whom were very reluctant to embrace AVR. Part of that for refugee community organizations was that they were saying "we're welcoming new refugees into our community all the time, and at the same time we're saying, 'and it's safe to go home'? That doesn't sound as if it matches."* (Interview, Refugee Action 2, London, 12.7.16)

In this way, the below quote shows how these tensions can even exist between differently state actors – where, in the case of Belgium, the Ministry of State is focused on enforcement and Fedasil takes a more social service, migrant-centered approach to implementing AVR:

[…] one representing the Ministry of State, you know, she said like, "we wanted to increase voluntary return with this."
And I was looking at my boss like: "we're not here to increase voluntary return. We're here to accompany people to return in dignity."
And this struggle, we're doing it. Like with this government we're obliged to struggle.
(Interview, Fedasil #1, Brussels, 12.14.16)

This is the conflicted political space in which many AVR implementing organizations work. Ultimately, surveying the institutional architecture of AVR reveals how the policy is a returns-focused security measure for the EU and simultaneously a humanitarian practice for NGOs, with IOM positioned in between as logistical managers of migration. These paradoxical arrangements are further discussed in subsequent chapters concerning AVR's practical implementation, discursive framing, and humanitarian negotiations.

VI. Conclusion

In a time of resurgent nationalisms, and rising anti-immigrant sentiment, AVR plays an increasingly central role in Europe's "management" of migration. This chapter's discussion of how AVR is intertwined with EU asylum procedures reflects the reality of legal impossibility for

many migrants to remain in Europe. This calls into question just how "voluntary" AVR is (Chapter Five) and constructs a key limitation to just how humanitarian AVR can be, despite the caring intentions of many practitioners (Chapter Six). The majority of returnees choose to voluntarily return from a very limited range of legal options for remaining in Europe. Not all returnees are appeals-rights-exhausted asylum seekers, but the fact that AVR has become so incorporated into Europe's asylum process, with the encouragement of enforcement-focused governments, is something that many humanitarian AVR practitioners regret.

The provided data in this chapter on where migrants return to, and who AVR policies are designed for, provide valuable context for AVR's implementation (Chapter 5). These numbers reflect the inequalities of global development, migration management and European/Western citizenship. Ultimately, AVR reveals humanitarianism's paradoxical nature (Fassin, 2012): practitioners come up against the law and violence of borders in their attempts to implement AVR in a political climate for asylum and return that is increasingly securitized by EU and government design. The socio-legal reality of legal impossibility, however sedimented in Europe today, is not inevitable. Viewing legal impossibility as relationally produced opens a space for alternatives, for a questioning of supposed inevitability and naturalness of exclusions – showing how they are historically situated and produced through ongoing socio-legal and political relations (Blomley, 1994; Braverman, et al. 2014; Delaney, 2004, 2010).

This chapter detailed how AVR has existed from its initial formulation up to today as a humanitarian, yet EU security-serving policy. The historical legacy of how AVR exists at this nexus of security and humanitarianism helps to explain why the policy has achieved a renewed significance and role in migration management amidst the EU's 2015-2016 migration 'crisis'. How practitioners navigate and negotiate a caring approach to AVR as humanitarian assistance

in this conflicted space is the focus of Chapter Six. The present-day institutional network of AVR in Europe shows how the balance between security and humanitarianism is being worked out between governments as funders, NGOs as counselors, and IOM as managerial mediator between – Chapter Five will further discuss the role of IOM and its humanitarian framing of AVR. Next, Chapter Four builds on this chapter's analysis by detailing the specific practices of AVR as it is implemented as migration management in Europe today.

CHAPTER FOUR

AVR in practice: Implementing AVR at the nexus of security and humanitarianism

I. Introduction

This chapter focuses on how AVR is implemented – from initial awareness-raising to counseling on the decision to return, to return travel and reintegration assistance. The previous chapter established the legal and historical context, as well as the institutional landscape, for how AVR has become incorporated with European migration management. I now move to detail the actual practices of AVR. In this project, I am interested in how AVR policy works both for the EU overall (as discussed in the prior chapter), and through specific nodes in the AVR network within the UK, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands and Switzerland. While these nodes provide scalar insights[6] into how AVR is implemented in both uniform and unique ways between different EU countries, my goal is not to compare and contrast case studies. Instead, I investigate how a network of organizations – all situated within the same EU landscape and operating on a spectrum of humanitarian to securitized AVR work – implement AVR at the nexus of humanitarianism and security. In this chapter, I analyze how the paradoxical tensions of humanitarianism are negotiated through the practices of AVR.

This chapter answers RQ3 by detailing how officials balance humanitarian assistance for migrants with state security priorities in their implementation of AVR:

> **RQ3:** How do officials from Europe's AVR network negotiate the humanitarian needs of migrants in relation to the security priorities of EU states? How is humanitarianism enrolled as a biopolitical form of government in the implementation of AVR as EU migration management?

[6] for example, in the dynamic between the national state and local NGOs – see the case study of Refugee Action and the UK Home Office discussed in Chapter Three.

Scholars have addressed how humanitarianism is a paradoxical practice with inherent tensions between assistance and governance (Fassin, 2012; Hyndman, 2000; Pallister-Wilkins, 2020; Redfield, 2005; Ticktin, 2011; Weizman, 2012; Williams, 2015). I unpack this paradoxical tension between humanitarianism and security through an investigation of AVR's practices in order to better understand the political nature of the encounter between migrants and practitioners. AVR programs are an institutional space of relational politics – where migrants and practitioners encounter one another and navigate the politics of bordering, migration management, and humanitarianism from vastly different positionalities (Crane & Lawson, 2020). Chapter Six will bring further nuance and humanity to the practical details discussed in this chapter through analyzing the experiences of how practitioners attempt, often frustratedly, to navigate the paradoxical AVR encounter in a caring manner.

This chapter is devoted to detailing AVR's different policy dimensions. In its focus on AVR practices, this chapter responds to Hyndman's (2000: xvii) call for "sustained examination of practices that cross borders, of policies that manage difference according to organizational and legal standards across space, and of strategies that aim to contain human displacement in highly politicized ways." AVR's practices are biopolitical in how they are about the "calculated management of life," involving power relations that work through knowledge and calculative techniques of governmentality with respect to migration (Foucault, 1990: 139; Foucault, 2007). Throughout this policy discussion, I make the case that AVR is implemented in Europe today at the nexus of humanitarianism and security.

II. AVR as policy: Dimensions of how AVR is implemented in Europe

AVR policies in Europe are implemented by both state and humanitarian institutions – and to this day, IOM has historically played a key role in how AVR is practiced. Overall, AVR policies

exhibit a strong degree of coherence across Europe. This relative consistency derives from the central role of IOM in AVR, and can also be attributed to EU-wide coordination efforts and shared funding structures (see Chapters Two and Three). In all, over 1.6 million migrants have been assisted by IOM in their returns via AVR since 1979 (IOM, 2018a), with over 400,000 of these being between 2005 and 2015 (IOM, 2015b). With 172 member countries and offices in over 100 countries (IOM, 2018a), IOM's institutional reach makes it ideally positioned to coordinate the different logistical details – chiefly finances and travel bookings – between host and home countries in AVR. This has ensured IOM a central role in Europe's AVR network over four decades. National and regional variations exist and are meaningful for how AVR is implemented – particularly considering the institutions involved and how strong their humanitarian mandate is. However, the central practices of AVR that are most common across Europe are reflected in IOM's policy framework, which I now turn to discuss.

Today in Europe, following IOM's lead, AVR is often referred to as AVR*R*, with the second "R" standing for "reintegration," representing financial and planning resources made available to migrants in their home countries after return. IOM describes AVR as including "the administrative, logistical and financial support provided to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country" and claims that successful implementation entails "the cooperation and participation of a broad range of actors, including the migrants, civil society and the governments in origin, host and transit countries" (IOM, 2015b). A wide range of migrants qualify for AVR programs, including:

> *stranded migrants in host or transit countries, irregular migrants, regular migrants, and asylum seekers who decide not to pursue their claims or who are found not to be in need of international protection […] migrants in vulnerable situations, such as victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children, or migrants with health-related needs* (IOM, 2018a: 2).

With this broad application, as discussed in the previous chapter, AVR has increasingly become a migration management tool for EU governments. This is particularly true in recent years, as AVR has been relied upon to encourage and facilitate the return of visa overstayers and 'failed', or appeals-rights-exhausted, asylum seekers residing in Europe. Despite being a humanitarian policy, AVR is continually enrolled in the governance of migration. Studying AVR's implementation allows us to see how this tension between assistance and governance is worked out in practice. This allows for insight into how AVR is a biopolitical practice, incorporated into the governmentality of EU migration management (Foucault, 2007).

According to IOM documents, a typical AVR case involves three temporal and spatial stages, each with its own practices implemented by IOM and partner humanitarian NGOs (IOM Belgium, 2016a):

Stage of AVR	**Location**
Stage ONE -awareness-raising on AVR -gather of country-of-origin information -outreach and information dissemination to migrant communities, including referral systems to public services -individualized counseling on return and reintegration assistance -specialized assistance and referral services to vulnerable individuals -facilitating travel documentation -travel arrangements -arrangement of escorts, if required	pre-departure assistance, in host countries
Stage TWO -assistance with travel in transit -assistance with escort in transit, if required	travel assistance, in transit

Stage THREE -assistance through immigration and customs on arrival at the airport, where possible -post-arrival reception arrangements, including information and referral to local services -onward travel to the final destination -reintegration assistance, including business set-ups, vocational training, formal education, medical assistance and capacity building activities"	post-arrival assistance, in countries of origin
Source: IOM Belgium, 2016a	

Stage One is the focus of this dissertation because it takes place within European countries, when migrants are consulting with humanitarian organizations regarding their decision to return via AVR. It is in this first stage where we can closely observe AVR's foundational tension between security and humanitarianism being worked out through the migrant-practitioner encounter. A deeper investigation of these stage one practices reveals AVR as an integral way in which migration is being managed in Europe today. In terms of EU security priorities, here we see how AVR serves as an integral backstop for the EU's asylum process, presenting migrants with an alternative to forcible deportation for returning when appeals rights are exhausted. On the humanitarian side, these stage one policies reveal how the AVR process involves a series of encounters between migrants and AVR practitioners, many of whom are working for humanitarian NGOs with migrant-centered missions to counsel and provide assistance to migrants who are navigating their return in often-difficult circumstances. For the rest of this chapter, I draw on interviews with practitioners and materials provided by AVR-implementing institutions to discuss six of these stage-one practices in greater detail.

II.A. Policy dimension one: Increasing awareness of AVR programs through outreach to migrants and migrant communities

Outreach and awareness-raising in migrant communities is an important facet of AVR policy to begin with. This is how migrants – particularly those who have received a negative decision in the asylum process – are notified about voluntary return programs as an alternative to forced removal. Migrants learn about AVR at different times: some at the beginning of their asylum procedure, some at the end of their asylum process upon receiving a rejection, some while in detention, and others while living in society (perhaps having overstayed their visa or lived for a period of time without documents). Informational brochures given to migrants about returning are valuable sources for understanding this first dimension of AVR, as they reflect how initial information about AVR programs is framed as a humanitarian service to migrants. These efforts to inform migrants about AVR reveal the biopolitics of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1990; Walters, 2011).

In Belgium, a Fedasil informational leaflet titled "return path," meant for asylum seekers and social workers, begins with the following:

> "*you have applied for asylum in Belgium. If you receive a negative response to your asylum application, you have to make a decision about your future. We can help you to arrange your voluntary return*."

We can see the securitized pressure of needing to make a decision, alongside the offer of help and assistance. This leaflet notes that migrants can request a voluntary return at any time, "even if you are no longer an asylum seeker or you are in Belgium illegally." Acknowledging the decision to return is difficult, the pamphlet offers a free phone number and Fedasil's "return desks" in many cities in Belgium (Fedasil, 2017a). In Belgium, another brochure is distributed by Fedasil among migrant communities that reads, "Thinking of returning to your country? Voluntary return can help you get there." The interior of the brochure addresses various questions, such as "what is voluntary return," "how can I apply," and "who will organize my

return." The brochure also provides a list of institutional contact points for migrants, organized by city, including Fedasil return desks, Caritas offices, and numerous other local NGO partners (Fedasil, 2017b).

In Nuremberg, Germany, the humanitarian NGO ZRB's AVR brochure, intended for migrants interested in returning, notes that the organization's "central voluntary return advice service […] is an independent help center" offered by "welfare organizations," and claims that "we offer support to those who have chosen to voluntarily return to their home country" (ZRB, 2017). This is followed by a list of services provided, including "unbiased advice, reimbursement of travel costs, additional financial support in additional cases (e.g., illness, disability, etc.), individual range of training courses, opportunity of support with setting up a business" (ibid.). In Hamburg, Germany, Raphaelswerk (also a humanitarian NGO) distributes a pamphlet that reads "do you have questions about returning to your native country?" It goes on to list various kinds of information the organization can provide:

> "-The social, political and economic situation in your native country
> -Financial repatriation assistance
> -Medical assistance
> -Reintegration projects in your native country
> -Passport, customs and visa matters
> -The return journey and transport
> -Possible claims to social security benefits from Germany, such as pension"

The pamphlet further offers support with finding contacts in the migrant's home country, obtaining a passport and making travel arrangements (Raphaelswerk, 2017).

How and when migrants receive such information from these pamphlets concerning AVR is a contested topic among practitioners. This is a noteworthy tension in AVR's balance between humanitarianism and security, particularly with respect to the integrity of the asylum process. A Caritas practitioner in Brussels reflected on timing in terms of how "human" AVR policy can be:

> *"Like the first day when they arrive in Belgium, they apply for asylum, they receive information about voluntary return. So, it's like "ok, you want to ask asylum? do know that if we say you can't stay here legally, you have to return?" And I'm not saying it's a bad thing, it shouldn't be a bad thing - it's the way how you say it; it's the way how you provide information. If you do it to deter the people, it's not a kind of human thing to do. […] You know, you have to work with the people, and they have to know their options"* (Interview, Caritas, Brussels, 12.12.16).

A Refugee Action official in London noted a similar issue with pressure around timing and results, reflecting how the UK government had become much more active in the AVR sector after the 2015-2016 influx of migration:

> *I mean, something we always said to the Home Office was: "look - yeah, we haven't made the targets. What we can tell you is we're working really hard to promote this program because we believe it's a really good program, an important program. We're seeing as many clients as we can. We're trying to make sure they've had really good advice. And when a client decides to return, we're trying to make sure that their return is a good one. And that we facilitate that so that it goes as smoothly as possible and they've got the best chance possible of making a life for themselves. That's what we're doing. We'll put adverts out, we'll do articles, we'll talk to whoever will listen to us about this program because we believe in it. And if that tics your boxes? great, fine. But ultimately, we're not going to persuade people to go home." And as I said, that was a question we were asked time without number, all throughout the program: "yeah but couldn't you just, these people they haven't got any other choices, surely you recognize the best thing for them is to go home." And, I mean, privately we might think "yeah, actually for you it's the best thing for you to go home." But that was never part of the discussion, because it couldn't be if we were to have any integrity* (Interview, Refugee Action Two, London, 12.7.16).

This reflects the working of governmentality in the Home Office's calculative biopolitical efforts to increase returns through persuading migrants to leave via AVR. The above quote reflects how Refugee Action negotiated these securitized pressures in relation to their humanitarian mandate. Humanitarian practitioners like Refugee Action and Caritas value the importance of initial comfort, trust and openness in how AVR is presented to migrants, as an *option*, as compared to how states want to push the programs as the only alternative to deportation. These tensions reflect real differences in how AVR is practiced, and have been heightened amidst the security

pressures that governments are facing to manage migration and asylum more effectively through increasing returns.

To facilitate confidential counseling, and to build trust with migrants, some AVR organizations invest resources into having people and spaces available for migrants to discuss AVR programs. For example, Fedasil operated "return desks" in various cities around Belgium. A practitioner in Antwerp described her work at the return desk as follows:

> *We are open for migrants every day, except Friday […] our openings are from 9:30-12 and its without appointment. People can just drop by and ask us a question. So we work with open hours. And also important to say: it's anonymous. So if people come here they can just ask us for information; they don't have to sign anything. It's just an open house to talk about if I would ever decide to go back, what are my possibilities. So that's one way migrants reach us, in these opening hours* (Interview, Fedasil #4, Antwerp, 5.04.17).

Refugee Action in London did direct outreach, sending practitioners out into migrant communities to offer "pre-decision advice," and also created designated spaces in their office for initial conversations. The idea was to meet migrants in a neutral and comfortable location:

> *We offered an outreach where we went out into communities to talk to people about the program and what it offered. We offered advice, what we called "pre-decision advice" - so advice before somebody made a decision to return or not to return. And it was specifically - obviously, it was confidential - but it was also non-directive* (Interview, Refugee Action #1, London, 12.7.16).

Another practitioner for Refugee Action reflected on the challenge of building trust while doing outreach work in communities:

> *RA: So, because we were allowed to be able to speak to clients in confidence, like in confidence without the Home Office knowing they even contacted us, that was the most attractive part of the Choices project, the voluntary return. But it took us time to regain, you know…for people to understand that really we are independent from the Home Office, because it was the Home Office money. […]*
>
> *AC: Yeah, so how did you build the trust around that?*
>
> *RA: Yeah, it was about like stories from clients that would refer. But then my outreach work was mainly to go and talk about that. To confirm with people, almost kind of: "I*

> *swear to god that we're not going to pass your information BUT there's a possibility that you may have something pending"* (Interview, Refugee Action #3, London, 5.9.17).

This practitioner then reflected on how difficult it was to share information about AVR in a humanitarian manner when migrants were already in detention:

> *"We used to work in detention and there were so many cases […] where people were, you know, were signing for voluntary return but they didn't get like proper legal advice where a case worker would look at their cases and say "Ok, you have contacted us so that we can book an appointment. You want to go, but what's the reason you want to go?" Then they say "well, I don't want to go. I'm in detention. My case is messed up, I don't understand. The Home Office said I need to go." […] And we would look at the case and then they would still have like a pending case and there was no decision. Which, I mean, they shouldn't even be in detention in the first place* (Interview, Refugee Action #3, London, 5.9.17).

For Refugee Action, in particular, being able to give "non-directive advice" was key for their humanitarian mandate, which the spatially securitized conditions of detention made nearly impossible.

This first policy dimension reveals how the politics of knowledge are central to the working of biopolitics (Lemke, 2011). Across these different forms of outreach and awareness-raising, interviewees shared that building trust with migrants was a recurring struggle. This reflects the difficult position many migrants are in when deciding whether or not to return via AVR, and how, based on their precarious socio-legal positions in Europe, migrants need to be able to trust that if they decide *not* to return after counseling, they will not be reported to the government for forced removal. These spatial and legal influences on migrants' return decisions reflect how AVR is implemented at the nexus of security and humanitarianism. For many NGO practitioners, this is why confidential counseling is vital for AVR to be a humanitarian practice.

II.B. Policy dimension two: Counseling migrants on their decision to return

In interviews, counseling was often described as the core of AVR's identity as a humanitarian practice. Practitioners, such as this Fedasil counselor, reflected that a key part of counseling is

taking stock of what life is like in Europe, versus what life will be like upon return in the migrants' home country:

> *So we have a lot of cases like this, where you think:"OK, for this person the situation in Belgium is really not good, it's very bad. But if this person also has no family, or no good contact with his family in the country of origin" […] then you have to really talk to them about: what for you will be the best solution now? Because, ok: "here you have this, and this and this issues. But you have these and these rights. In your country of origin, OK, you are a legal citizen – which is better in a way because you can, you have rights to be there, there is no one who is going to bother you for that. But on the other side, you have these and these problems." And then together with them we try to make a decision* (Interview, Fedasil #4, Antwerp, 5.4.17).

Refugee Action in London took a comparable counseling approach to this Fedasil practitioner. For Refugee Action, their counseling conversations assessed the quality of life in London versus the conditions in their home country, and tried to gain an understanding of their immigration journey up to this point. They claimed that counseling:

> *[…] involved speaking to people as they initially came in for advice about the voluntary return project. But that process would involve talking through their immigration history, what problems they were facing in the UK, if there were things that we could do to assist them in the UK that might affect their decision about whether to go back. So, for example, if someone is facing homelessness and that's why they are thinking about going home – but the country is still in turmoil – we would try as much as we could to address the homelessness issue* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

Part of this process, according to several Refugee Action counselors, was to see if the migrant sincerely wanted to go back, and this was assessed in counseling through a series of questions:

> *So, everybody who indicated a desire to return we would talk to them about "why now?" "what's motivated you?" "what are the triggers for you?" and for some people it was really, really easy they'd sort of resolved already and it was quite clear, and other people there was some agonizing to go through - some people were weighing real risk on return with a real desire to return, some people simply needed information about whether or not it was safe to go home […] So we saw people in a whole range of situations, with a whole range of motivations, and we tried to make sure that before they made a decision to go or stay, they knew what the deal was - as far as possible, and that we felt reassured that they were making their own decision, that it wasn't anybody else's, that they weren't being "leaned on" (or whatever)* (Interview, Refugee Action #1, London, 12.7.16).

A key part of humanitarian counseling that some practitioners identified was to see if there were any possibilities for the migrant to stay in Europe:

> *[…] Or cases where a client would come here to the office, to sign for voluntary return and then our in-house lawyer – if we're not sure, we'll speak to him and he'll look at the cases. And what this client has got – a good possibility of like submitting a fresh claim, because the situation has changed in the country since they left. And maybe the reason why they claimed asylum may be this, but then like at this moment the circumstances have changed in the country of origin, it's not safe for them to return. Or there was a confirmation of what they have said previously. And then we won't take the cases because we are not able to confirm. Then we will refer them to some assistance* (Interview, Refugee Action #3, London, 5.9.17).

These quotes show how counselling involves a series of iterative questions to understand migrants' personal history, present circumstances like the extent of legal impossibility in their case, and desires for the future. It is in counseling that many practitioners strive to provide a caring, humanitarian form of assistance and come up against the reality of Europe's securitized migration management regime. Chapter Six builds on this discussion of the counseling encounter to analyze the possibilities and limitations of humanitarianism in how humanitarian NGOs like Refugee Action and Caritas approach migrant counseling.

II.C. Policy dimension three: Assessing migrant vulnerabilities that could impact return

The assessment of vulnerabilities is a centrally biopolitical dimension of AVR counseling, particularly once the migrant has decided to return from Europe. Some EU countries offer more money upon return to migrants with specifically identified vulnerabilities, as is the case in Belgium. This counselor at Fedasil in Brussels notes that there is a European-level definition of "vulnerability," but that counselors at Fedasil seek to assess beyond this as well:

> *But then we check out what's the situation of this person, and not only because vulnerability has a definition at the European level - it's usually minors, pregnant women, or women alone with children, or elder disabled people - but we try to be, we are much larger in that. So for instance a single man going back to his country after 10 years is really vulnerable because he has no network, he knows no one there, he's nearly a foreigner to his own country. So we'll take all those elements in consideration and*

> *usually (points to other part of the room - "he's sitting there") they ask [him]: "Ok, will you agree that this person is considered vulnerable and give this allowance?" So you have the ones, the family with kids, they will receive 500 Euro. Ok, this vulnerability - you receive 500 Euro (this is like the pregnant woman, the elderly, the ones that need medical help)* (Interview, Fedasil #1, Brussels, 12.14.16).

For Fedasil in Belgium, the assessment of vulnerabilities is done through a series of questions that are aimed at "detecting" and then exploring specific issues, such as medical issues affecting their ability to travel, housing insecurity, etc.:

> *[…] they will start a conversation about the future, about what will happen once somebody returns. So, they are a little bit, if necessary, forcing the candidate to think about it. And during this conversation, you can start to talk about vulnerable issues […]. Like only medical we have to know if a person is fit to fly, in fact. So that will always be, not maybe in the first conversation, but will be talked about. […] And a lot of people, they start from the beginning to explain their experience in Belgium. So they will explain, "I am already five years here. I asked asylum and that didn't work" […] So you can already during this conversation, see if somebody is vulnerable or not. They also will talk about their housing problem, if they have a housing problem in their country of origin. About what they did before, what they want to do. […] So, I think our counsellors, and certainly the counsellors of IOM and Caritas, they are quite experienced in detecting all these needs or vulnerable situations* (Interview, Fedasil #2, Brussels, 5.2.17).

As mentioned above, for this Fedasil counselor in Antwerp, part of assessing vulnerabilities is considering the situation in Belgium versus at home, and making sure medical vulnerabilities are addressed in the migrant's home upon return:

> *We try to […] check the pros and cons of both sides. And it's a bit of a process, together with them, to decide what is the best option. And then sometimes if someone decided to return and signed the papers, it's funny, but then they want to leave as soon as possible. But then we are like, "Ok – but wait, we want to prepare; and we want to translate your medical file; and we want to have you see a doctor before; we want to check your medication if it's available […] and it will take some time." But (laughs) it happens a lot. Then if they decide it, it's like "Ok then now I will leave tomorrow." But we try to slow it down a little bit, because it's important for us* (Interview, Fedasil #4, Antwerp, 5.4.17).

This practitioner tries to allow for enough time in the process that the migrant has communicated with people who will be on the other side of the journey in their home country; this builds trust in the process:

> *Preparation here – it's very important that they can do a Skype call here. That's what Caritas and IOM are doing here, like they are doing Skype calls so that they already meet the assistant in the home country. Because we have some trust issues about this one with migrants, because if I explain the program and I explain, "OK I will buy you a plane ticket, you will get 250 Euros at the airport, and then you will get help from an NGO in your home country." So they are like: "ok the first part is fine by me, I believe you. I will get my plane ticket; I will get my budget (250 Euros). BUT I don't believe that there will be someone on the other side, because I know my country." Then they always ask – for example, if it's someone from Kenya – are Kenyan people working in these organizations? You say yes. "mmm I don't trust that it will be." Because some of them are, yeah, aware of the corruption in some of the countries. They don't believe that they will get this help […] and that's a thing we have to cope with – trust in these organizations on the other side. And that's why for us it's good to let them do a Skype call with the organization. […] And I give them my phone number, all the info, so that if there is anything that goes wrong they can call me. So it's something we've spent some time on, but which is very important, I guess, that people leave with the feeling: "OK, there will be somebody on the other side who will be waiting for me"* (Interview, Fedasil #4, Antwerp, 5.4.17).

This quote evidences how this assessment process is a hallmark of Fedasil's humanitarian approach to AVR in Belgium. Interviews with practitioners revealed such country-specific forms of assessing for vulnerability. This shows the value of studying particular nodes within the larger EU AVR network, as these country-specific differences can impact how migrants navigate the process of asylum and return between EU countries. These different approaches to assessing vulnerabilities also provide a basis for exchange of best practices between nodes in the AVR network – for example, in the EU-wide "Transnational Exchanges" discussed in Chapter Two (Caritas, 2011, 2014, 2018).

In Germany, one dimension of assessing vulnerabilities in counseling was helping migrants assess any debts or outstanding liabilities that need to be settled before leaving the country. Migrants were also encouraged to consult with a doctor regarding their health before returning:

> *Here in Germany, we are case managers. We talk to the returnees, as well as to IOM, as well as the social office, and (the Foreign Office). We talk to doctors whenever it's clear that they have medical issues. So, again, that's a humanitarian perspective: we always*

> *ask, "do you have any debts." Making sure that, you know – usually when you have debts, then you get another letter asking for this money. And then if you don't pay the sum, then the amount of the debts increase, you know? And then when you don't pay for like three times or something, then actually the police start looking for you, because you owe someone money. And this is registered; this information remains in the system. And even if you return after years and years, they will imprison you because you didn't pay your debts. […] so we really try to understand, OK is this person intending on coming back at any time? But we try really to figure out: can we make deals or good arrangements with people that still want money from the returnees. Then we also check, again, about the medical condition. Because, and so when they are really sick, we try to arrange medical escorts* (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg 11.22.17).

This quote provides two examples, debts and health concerns, of vulnerability-related concerns pre-departure. These kinds of assessments reveal a biopolitical concern with the calculative management of life, resonating with Ticktin's (2011) analysis of the interaction between biological and political life through the assessment of migrants' suffering.

However, AVR practitioners also consider vulnerabilities upon return. For example, assessing vulnerabilities was important to how Refugee Action approached AVR in the UK – particularly around certain "red flag countries":

> *And for certain countries – "red flag countries," I think we called them […] we would do an extra assessment with them, where we had information in a spreadsheet of all the main protection concerns around […] people in those countries. So, for example: you want to go to Iraq, we had a spreadsheet that had information from the Refwold website – that is the United Nations website collating reports on security from different organizations, Human Rights Watch, things that UNHCR officials have said and so on. So we would have these as bullet points and say, "well if you return there are reported risks for women, for homosexuals and so on – how do you feel about these things?" So we would explore these protection concerns with them. Now, it might be that somebody met that criteria one-by-one, you know, you ticked all the boxes, you would be a significant risk in returning there. But if they want to do that, our role is not to stop them. Our role is to be completely independent and just advise: "you would be at risk there, but if you want to do it – your call." But you are aware, you are informed – you make an informed choice. So for us that was really important* (Interview, Refugee Action 5, London, 5.9.17).

Another Refugee Action practitioner shared a similar approach to vulnerabilities posed by certain return destinations:

> *there were certain countries where, as an organization, we deemed there was a risk of return. And those had to be approved. Well, the policy changed at different times, but initially those had to be approved by a manager. And we had to talk through in detail what the risks were, what the client planned to do upon return, if they had any plan to mitigate the risks. I think, generally, organizationally, we were very reluctant to stop anyone from going back, provided that they were of sound mind and understood the risks, etc.* (Interview, Refugee Action 4, London, 5.9.17).

Both of these interviews reflect the tenuous balance in AVR counseling between humanitarian assistance and how migrants' choices around return are conditioned both by their legal circumstances in Europe and the socio-political conditions in their home country.

II.D. Policy dimension four: Assisting migrants in their AVR application

For the migrants who decide to return, a fundamental part of counseling, and qualifying for any assistance with vulnerabilities, is filling out the AVR application. Applications are typically filled out with the help of an NGO practitioner, submitted to IOM's logistical team, and approved by the national government. These application materials specify the services provided, and specify a declaration of what migrants are trading – their ability to make further claims for asylum status in Europe for a specified number of years – in exchange for return assistance. In this way, the application process reveals how AVR exists at the nexus of security and humanitarianism.

A Belgian REAB Application Form was provided during fieldwork. This application has standard blanks, to be filled in:

- "File number"
- "Reintegration (no; yes, with IOM; yes, with Caritas)"
- "Vulnerable case (no; yes, explain)"
- "Country of destination": "Airport Destination"
- "Desired Departure Date"
- "Place of Residence"
- "Travel Requirements (medical, wheelchair, escort, other)"

Below this is a box for the listing of personal information about the migrant and their dependents, with the following headers: “Family name on travel document,” “First name on travel document,” “Nationality,” “M/F,” “Civil Status,” “Date of Birth,” “Place of Birth,” and “Valid Travel Document (include a copy).” Then at the very bottom of the form there is a box with contact information for the migrant in Belgium, including:

- “Date of arrival in Belgium
- Phone in Belgium
- Other name(s) used in Belgium
- Address in Belgium”

On the back of the application form is a “voluntary return declaration,” which the migrant must sign to receive assistance, beginning with the following statement:

> *I, the undersigned,_____, express my informed decision to return voluntarily to my home country or a third country (where I’m having a permanent residence), which is _____, through the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (hereinafter, “IOM”). I understand that I will not be allowed to stop over in any transit country.*

This is followed by a “Declaration (collected on behalf of the Belgian authorities)”:

> *By signing this document, I declare my willingness to apply for the voluntary return programme (REAB) and that:*
> *-I want to leave Belgium voluntarily in order to return to the country of destination mentioned on the first page of this form.*
> *-All ongoing procedures aiming at getting a residence status can be stopped. After my departure, the Immigration Office can close my case and cancel the residence permit(s) I might have.*
> *-I am aware of the condition according to which I would have to reimburse all costs related to this return in case I come back to Belgium within five years.*

Finally, the migrant must either agree or disagree “that the Immigration Office is informed about my application for a voluntary return,” signing and dating the form (IOM Belgium, 2015).

It is clear from these application materials that a migrant agreeing to voluntarily return means contractually trading their ability to gain residence status within Belgium – and this is true in the other European countries of focus for this study as well. This tradeoff is accentuated by the

requirement to reimburse all costs if the migrant returns within five years. Such requirements and conditionalities highlight the security dimension of AVR, and what is at stake for migrants in their decision to return via AVR. This raises the question of exactly how voluntary AVR is in practice (Webber, 2011) – which the next chapter engages in depth.

II.E. Policy dimension five: Travel planning for return

Another important aspect of AVR is travel planning and airport coordination. This entails assistance with navigating the return journey and ensures actual departure and continual transit beyond Europe. In Belgium, IOM and Fedasil distribute a "Travel Guide for Returnees," which provides practical advice for migrants on travel (IOM Belgium, 2016c). It is designed for migrants to carry with them throughout the return journey and includes a blank section at the end for personalized "comments from your counselor or your social assistant." At the airport, migrants are encouraged to respect the number and weight of baggage requirements, and a meeting point at Brussels Zaventum airport is identified:

> *At Row 6 you meet with one of the IOM Airport Assistants, who are easily identified wearing a blue IOM jacket and cap.*

These assistants guide migrants through checking in, navigating security and passport control. This IOM travel guidebook also notes that "IOM airport assistants will accompany you to the boarding gate where they hand over your boarding pass." Returnees are reminded to use the "IOM bag" provided them, "for easy identification by IOM staff throughout your journey until the final destination" (IOM Belgium, 2016c). Throughout, these instructions paradoxically balance a helping and surveilling presence over the transit process.

Following departure, the handout provides "In Transit" advice. If migrants have a connecting flight at a "major European airport," then they will be met in the airport by IOM staff during their change over. This section notes again that "it is mandatory to carry your IOM bag"

so that IOM staff are able to identify the returnee. This section also mentions that any medical issues discussed pre-departure with counselors will be followed up on with the travel company and airport services. If overnight stay is required, then IOM will arrange this (IOM Belgium, 2016c).

Upon Arrival, the final stage of this handout states that "if agreed in advance, IOM will welcome you upon arrival at destination and ensures your onward transportation to your final destination in the country of origin." With a reminder again of the importance of carrying the IOM bag, it is noted that IOM will assist with navigating customs and immigration controls. If special medical care is needed: "IOM ensures the proper follow up with ground services (an ambulance and/or a doctor, for instance)" (IOM Belgium, 2016c).

The final page of this handout contains a "pre-departure" checklist:

> "*I shipped all my extra luggage. The amount of luggage and number of kilos allowed is clearly indicated on my booking sheet.*
> *-I have my IOM plastic bag and will carry it in a visible manner if needed for transit and airport arrival assistance*
> *-I have my original and valid Passport or Emergency Travel Document/Laissez Passez, as well as those of my dependents […]*
> *-I informed my counselor about special needs during my travel (meals, medication, wheelchair, illness, etc*
> *-For pregnant women; I have a doctor's certificate authorizing me to take the plan as a pregnant woman and specifying the number of weeks of pregnancy*
> *-I have all the medicine and treatment I need during my journey and the original doctor's certificate in my hand luggage.*
> *-Unaccompanied minors: I have all the required documents to travel as an unaccompanied minor, including my parents' and my legal guardian's authorization.*
> (IOM Belgium, 2016c).

These checklist items reflect the practical outcome of counseling meetings where practitioners help migrants prepare for their return by assessing vulnerabilities. These meetings ensure necessary accommodations are made in advance for travel, health and personal accommodations, taking into account social factors such as gender, age and ability.

Refugee Action in London had a specific "logistics team" that would handle the travel-related bookings and details around AVR, once a migrant had been approved. A Refugee Action practitioner described their experience as:

> *I then also worked in the logistics team, which was, if you like, the second stage of that process: that's once someone's been approved. It's assisting them with getting their travel documents and booking their flights, which would involve things like arranging for medical escorts if there are particular health conditions that need to be taken aware of. Potentially with travel documents there could be some sensitivity about how that's handled, or what information is given over to the embassy. And there might also be some sensitivity about people's plans on return. So, we did have some situations where people were looking to relocate away from their family, within their home country. Or sometimes people were even looking to actually relocate to another country in order to be safe, which we couldn't really directly be involved with because we were only funded to assist people to get back to their country. But as far as possible, we'd help them to sort of talk through their plans and want to be confident that it's a realistic plan: both in terms that it's possible and that it's going to keep them safe* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

These quotes illustrate that humanitarian needs and security concerns pervade not only the counseling and other dimensions of AVR in Europe, but also the transit process. The sorts of limitations reflected by this Refugee Action practitioner – of the partiality to AVR's humanitarian ability to truly care for migrants and ensure their well-being – is discussed in depth in Chapter Six.

II.F. Policy dimension six: Reintegration upon return

Though not in the "first stage" of AVR, Reintegration (the final "R" in IOM's frequently used abbreviation AVR*R*) is a crucial dimension for understanding how AVR policies are framed as humanitarian – insofar as they are not just about return, but also about reintegrating into life post-return. Reintegration funds are provided by the EU and IOM, Europe-wide, and have become much more of a priority in recent years for national governments who are keen to ensure the long term 'sustainability' of returns via AVR. IOM claims that the motivation for this assistance is based on the "recognition that addressing returnees' needs, particularly those in

vulnerable situations, and supporting their reestablishment back home is fundamental for the sustainability of the reintegration process" (IOM, 2018a: 1). Practitioners often reflected in our interviews how reintegration planning and funds are an important part of their AVR counseling with migrants.

IOM UK provided a reintegration guide to returnees titled, "Keep It Simple: Setting Up A Business" (IOM UK, 2015). At the beginning of this guide, they claim that the goal of reintegration assistance is to "help people restart their lives and to contribute to a sustainable return." It then details the reintegration assistance process in 4 steps: 1) before leaving the UK, migrants discuss reintegration options with migrants and "prepare an Individual Return Plan"; 2) as the migrant leaves they UK, they will be provided with contact information for the IOM office in their home country; 3) together with IOM, the returning migrant "decide(s) how best to use your reintegration assistance" and provides "supporting documents for your chosen activity"; 4) IOM approves the project and distributes funds. This guide has advice on matters such as identifying an opportunity to start a business, making enough money to live on, accounting and money management, purchasing supplies, and customer relations. To access the funds for reintegration assistance, migrants must contact IOM within a month of arriving, post-return, and reintegration assistance funds must then be used within six months of return (IOM UK, 2015).

In Munich, Germany, Coming Home distributed a guide to returnees titled "How to make reintegration work" (Coming Home, 2016). This guide emphasizes trust in the counselling process for reintegration:

> *Every person and every family receives individual support and assistance according to their needs and potentials. Individual and comprehensive counselling helps those seeking support to make an informed decision.*

This guide broadens reintegration assistance beyond the economic realm, to include assistance for "adequate medical care and social support." Similar to the IOM model above, support and assistance is coordinated with partner organizations in the country of return. Coming Home frames reintegration assistance in terms of development, which is an important political dimension of how AVR(R) is justified across Europe:

> *Humanitarian projects promote reconstruction projects in conflict affected regions and strengthen the infrastructure. Returnees organize these projects or participate in them […] We also promote the linkage of repatriation assistance with development cooperation* (Coming Home, 2016).

In interviews, reintegration was often discussed in ways that justified AVR as a humanitarian and best-case solution for migrants. Helping migrants think through what happens after return, and how reintegration funds will be used, is a key part of return counseling:

> *We see it as a humanitarian program. So, we think that with our reintegration program – it's not enormous, but it's at least something – that we offer people a new start. […] we keep on believing that reintegration should be more than just giving money. So we don't give money. So the budget is the hands of IOM and of Caritas in the home country. So people also have to prove their expenses. We believe that by this way people are also thinking about their return. So, in counseling here, the question is: "ok you want to return, but what are you gonna do?" So, they have to think about it, because for a lot of people, it's not an easy decision* (Interview, Fedasil 2, Brussels, 5.02.17).

A Caritas practitioner similarly spoke to how, in the state of Bavaria in Germany, reintegration discussions are part and parcel of how they approach return counseling:

> *Here in Germany, we don't make a difference between return counselling and reintegration counselling. So we actually offer A-V-R-R, yeah? So, return and reintegration counselling. […] We work with the client from the beginning to the end. And what we can do is that we usually, in that preparation phase – again, while talking about how they want to live in the country of return, how they want to work and so on, what they think they will need in the country of return* (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg, 11.22.17).

This quote evidences how humanitarian NGOs like Caritas see counseling and assistance for return *and* reintegration as crucial to AVR being sustainable and beneficial for migrants.

Many AVRR reintegration assistance schemes are tailored to specific host countries that have historical migration ties to particular European countries of destination (the funding government). For example, Fedasil and IOM in Belgium maintain a list of "jobs on demand" in particular countries, where, for example: village teachers, nurses, driver-distributors, and house renovators are in demand in Armenia (Fedasil, 2016). A good case study of reintegration is a program that IOM Belgium ran, financed by Fedasil, in the second part of 2016 for migrants returning to Afghanistan, titled "Offering Tailored Assistance to Returnees." This program offers post-arrival counseling and resource referral, temporary accommodation in Kabul at the IOM reception center, medical assistance, job counseling and connection to potential employers, as well as vocational training and/or assistance to start a small business. IOM maintains field offices in eight Afghan cities that coordinate this reintegration assistance (IOM Belgium, 2016b). There are many other similar examples of tailored reintegration programs, for example, one offered to Nigerians, titled "Restart Nigeria" (IOM Belgium, 2016d). Another tailored reintegration example from Belgium applies to several Post-Soviet countries: Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and The Russian Federation (IOM Belgium, 2016e). A Caritas practitioner in Belgium noted that specific country-oriented criteria have become more common with reintegration assistance in recent years, in relation to government priorities:

> *There was an increase of people returning and the government decided to invent criteria, to decide who was entitled to receive support or not, which is still the case in many EU countries. And these criteria are strongly linked with […] asylum procedures. […] So that was hard to feel for the first time: Ok, there's like some pressure from the government - more control.* (Interview, Caritas, Brussels, 12.12.16)

This pressure from the government is a key tension that humanitarian practitioners have to navigate in their work with respect to control over the allocation of AVR reintegration funds.

Ultimately, for many involved in AVR, reintegration assistance is a key part of what distinguishes AVR as a humanitarian program from forced return. This is because it provides tangible assistance and advice to help returnees to establish their lives upon return, which is certainly more than is offered to migrants in forced removal. However, for European governments, there is a calculative biopolitical security motive at play. From the perspective of states, reintegration assistance also ensures the 'sustainability' of returns, disincentivizing circular migration and multiple asylum applications over time. As evidence of this securitization, a BAMF official in Germany told me the government is keen to ensure migrants only access these funds once:

> *BAMF: But people get only once the assistance here via the REAG-GARP program. Only once. And IOM is checking every departure, or every application, if there has already once been paid an assistance. And many people have also to refund their assistance once paid, because when if they are identified by the next entry, or third or fourth entry (laughs), when they will be identified they have to pay back.*
>
> *AC: Ok, interesting. And that's true for a migrant from anywhere in the world? Not just the Western Balkans?*
>
> *BAMF: From anywhere in the world. There is no discrimination in that regard, everyone has to pay back when he has received the assistance. Because the assistance is actually considered only getting once the assistance and for the whole life* (Interview, BAMF, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

As is the case with much of AVR's implementation, the politics around reintegration are contested. The quote above reflects active debates around who these funds should apply to (asylum-seekers in progress, rejected asylum seekers, irregular migrants).

These kinds of debates tend to center on a politics of deservedness in relation to legal status, and also reflect state security priorities. As a particularly calculative example of biopolitical management starting in February of 2017, Germany's "Startehilfeplus" reintegration

funds were designed to incentivize migrants in the country's backlogged asylum system to return home:

> BAMF: *The Starthilfeplus program was implemented, or was developed, last year I think … yeah, of course, (one) of the first options was to produce more departure numbers. Of course, to increase the number of departures. And also in last year, or this year, as you know, we had also federal general elections (laughs). I guess this was also a reason to implement this program.*
>
> AC: *To say, like, "we're doing something about migration"?*
>
> BAMF: *"We're doing something about migration. We want to assist." Yeah, when you see the situation it's not a surprise because we have about 200,000 – in 2017 – 200,000, more than 200,000 persons who have actually no legal stay in Germany. But they are here […] and they have no residence. Many of them, of course, have temporary suspension of the departure, or return, due to family reasons or personal issues like heath issues, or something like that. Nonetheless, they have no legal stay. And this is a number which is not acceptable any more for the parliamentarians to explain to the public: "there are 200,000, they are still here – what's that?" "Why don't you do more in that regard?" Yeah, it's not surprising.* (Interview, BAMF, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

In relation to the previous chapter, this shows how much AVR has become incorporated within migration management, particularly in times of perceived crisis. A NGO practitioner reflected on this new reintegration assistance program in Germany in terms of its politics, but also potential benefits:

> R: *And they have a new motto. This Starthilfeplus didn't have a motto, now it has one: "your country, your future, now!"*
>
> AC*: Wow…*
>
> R: *That's clear. I mean, it's transparent. I hate these slogans, actually. But, it's transparent! Nobody at the government level is trying to cover up. "Your country, your future, now." Exclamation mark.*
>
> AC: *"Germany is not your country"*
>
> R: *Yeah! Yeah! And that's, I feel, this is more directed to voters (laughs). […] We have been surprised in February, when we were informed about Starthilfeplus. In a positive way, surprised. Because the more, from our perspective, the more start-up assistance a returnee can get, the better. The higher the chance to stay, reintegrate, and make a living* (Interview, Raphaelswerk, Hamburg, 12.2.17).

For this practitioner, more financial assistance for migrant reintegration is positive from a humanitarian standpoint, but also remains frustratingly structured by Germany's securitized political climate around migration.

An IOM practitioner in the UK self-reflectively noted the paradoxical application of reintegration assistance as development, amidst the destitution migrants face in limbo:

> *So, I would definitely say for IOM, it falls more under the migration management tool, toolbox, or whatever, tool kit that we would talk about. But then at the same time I suppose, the humanitarian angle is, well you can't just kind of pick people up and drop them on the side, having been outside their country of origin for so many years, and having gone through what could have been quite a difficult experience. We need to support them in a way that kind of helps them to rebuild their lives in their country of origin. And that's where the humanitarian element comes in. So, for me, reintegration assistance is more of a humanitarian tool, within the AVRR framework.*
> (Interview, IOM UK, 12.9.16)

The next chapter will further unpack quotes like this, in relation to IOM's humanitarian framing of AVR as migration management, and the conflicts that humanitarian practitioners experience in implementation around the 'voluntariness' of AVR.

III. Conclusion

To begin our interviews, I would often ask practitioners to describe a typical AVR case from their own experience. The practice-related details provided in this chapter reflect the nature of their responses, as well as the organizational documents they provided. Our conversations largely focused on counseling migrants on their return decision (discussed further in Chapters Five and Six), where practitioners would share a fuller picture of how they assist migrants in navigating the AVR decision and process. As detailed in this chapter, the process begins with welcoming clients, assessing what language they speak and finding translation if needed to ensure good communication. Next practitioners typically introduce what AVR is, what services are offered,

and what migrants can expect from counseling (confidentiality, etc.). Then counseling addresses the migrant's situation (including vulnerabilities) and if returning via AVR is right for them. Should the migrant decide to return, an application is processed, travel preparations and bookings are made, and possibilities for reintegration assistance are assessed. Migrants are assisted at the airport and throughout their journey at transit contact points. For those receiving reintegration assistance, this is then coordinated in the country of return. This chapter has shown how security and humanitarianism are in dynamic relation along every step of this process – a tension which was only heightened in the 2015-16 migration crisis in Europe.

The various policy dimensions of AVR reveal the working of biopolitics to analyze processes on the level of population and "govern individuals and collectives by practices of correction, exclusion, normalization, disciplining, therapeutics and optimization" (Lemke, 2011: 5). Through unpacking these different policy dimensions of AVR, from counseling to travel planning, this chapter has analyzed how the tension between humanitarianism and security is being worked out by practitioners. These practices of AVR show how humanitarianism's sovereign power extends beyond spatially contained camp-like settings (Agamben, 1998; Fassin, 2012). The two chapters that follow will further detail how practitioners navigate these inequalities through AVR's conflicted humanitarian implementation within the EU's securitized climate. The next chapter unpacks IOM's influential discursive framing of AVR as humanitarian and analyzes IOM's role in spearheading AVR over nearly five decades as an EU policy of migration management; this allows me to bring the questions of AVR practitioners regarding the 'voluntariness' of AVR into conversation with these humanitarian framings.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Voluntary" return? Discourses of AVR as humanitarian migration management

I. Introduction

AVR has been described throughout this dissertation as humanitarian. Over the years, IOM has promoted the hegemonic framing that because AVR is voluntary, it is humanitarian, and as such, can be apolitically incorporated into European migration management. This has enabled AVR to become part and parcel of how Europe governs migration today (see Chapter Three). AVR's humanitarian framing maps onto European spatial imaginaries of the EU as a liberal democratic place with egalitarian standards and values, represented in the EU's frameworks for accession and integration through its "neighborhood policy" (Kuus, 2004; Casas Cortes, et al., 2013; Celata & Coletti, 2016; Crane & Levy, 2014). However, the reality of legal impossibility (discussed in Chapter Three) shows there is a need to unpack this hegemonic apolitical discourse of AVR in order to understand its political implications. The end of this chapter situates AVR's discourses in political context by highlighting the questions practitioners themselves raise about AVR's politics, in particular: how 'voluntary' is Assisted Voluntary Return?

Chapter Three showed how AVR's humanitarian identity derives, in part, from the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) establishment of the policy in Europe over the past four decades. While the previous chapter focused on practice, how the policy is implemented, this chapter concentrates on discourse, how AVR is framed as a policy. In particular, I analyze how IOM has influentially promoted discourses that frame AVR as a humanitarian policy of migration management. In its focus on the role of IOM and the discourses of AVR, this chapter primarily responds to RQ2:

RQ2: How has AVR been framed over time as a humanitarian policy, and what are the spatial and political implications of this discursive framing?

It is important to situate IOM's discursive framing of AVR in spatial and political context; this allows us to see how AVR is justified, promoted, and circulated through particular knowledges and power relations. Juxtaposing the discourses of AVR with the experiences of AVR practitioners allows me to consider the political and spatial implications of AVR's framings in today's European context.

This chapter responds to calls from feminist political geographers to research the institutional sites, actors, and processes through which influential knowledge about migration management and humanitarian practice is constructed, negotiated, and enacted (Billo & Mountz, 2016; Massaro & Williams, 2013; Hyndman, 2019). This entails an attention to how discourses are "taken up and used by people who make meaning of them in […] different global contexts" (Dowler and Sharp, 2001: 169). In line with feminist geopolitics (Hyndman, 2004) and critical development studies (Lawson, 2007a), this chapter builds from the recognition that institutions of the 'first world' represent an important field site to understand how knowledge is constructed and circulated in significant relations of unequal power to the rest of the world (Mountz, 2010; Pécoud, 2018; Roy, 2003, 2010; Sheppard, Leitner & Maringanti, 2013; Ticktin, 2011). Investigating how humanitarian discourses, practices and institutions articulate with other scalar processes of differentiation, care and control in particular places allows us to understand humanitarianism's entanglements with EU migration and border management via AVR (Walters, 2011; Williams, 2015). This attention also allows us to see a foundational inequality that pervades IOM's management, despite its framings of development and humanitarianism: the unequal power and the exclusion from privilege that comes from basing migrants' inclusion on

their country of origin (Duffield, 2007; van Houtum, 2010). Studying IOM as an institution provides valuable insights into how influential knowledge about migration, such as framings of 'migration management for development', are constructed and circulated in ways that shape the common sense of governmentality for migration today (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010; Koch, 2014; Pécoud, 2018).

This chapter begins by exploring how IOM incorporates humanitarianism in its framing of AVR as migration management. This framing matters because IOM is the founding institution for AVR policy in Europe and remains logistically central to AVR's funding, promotion, coordination and implementation today. IOM is a key service provider for states, who rely on the institution to contract out policies for migration management (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; Pécoud, 2018). Therefore, IOM enhances the EU's biopolitical selectivity aimed at differentiating flows of migration, to include and exclude certain migrants (Georgi, 2010). However, IOM tends to deploy depoliticizing discourses that frame migration as a technical process outside of politics; for example, scholars have found that IOM's frequent use of humanitarian language has a depoliticizing effect in legitimizing programs like AVR (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011). AVR shows how migration management maintains an essential filtering function of selectively including or excluding certain migrants from particular spaces (Collyer, 2012). In framing and function, AVR crystallizes how humanitarianism and security meet in migration management today.

I employ critical discourse analysis of IOM's migration management framing to understand how common-sense understandings and assumed problems are constructed and addressed (Fairclough, 2003; Jensen & Glasmeier, 2010). This reveals both the exercise of institutional power and the circulation of influential knowledge with respect to AVR. AVR

practitioners are realists who aim to achieve best-case-scenarios in difficult, imperfect arrangements – balancing the humanitarian and security dimensions of migration management in a context of legal impossibility and highly unequal power relations (Hyndman, 2000; Redfield, 2005; Fassin, 2012). Understanding discourse to articulate language and practice, I aim to situate IOM's influential knowledge production in relation to the experiences of officials implementing AVR as migration management (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Müller, 2008). Edward Said's work points to the relationship between "knowledge and geography" in discourses of development and humanitarianism (1979: 53). Escobar (2011) draws on Said to show how Orientalist representations justify numerous interventions to assist, reform, discipline, and control the Other. For Escobar, discourse is not merely language; it "results in concrete practices of thinking and acting" (Escobar, 2011: 11). With respect to migration, IOM's humanitarian discourse of AVR is an example of how powerful institutional actors govern citizenship today by "shaping the discourse and framing of policies, the administrative and legal rules, and the managerial structures" (Rygiel, 2011: 17). I analyze IOM's influential framing of AVR in order to understand how the program is integrated into Europe's governance of migration today.

Section two draws on fieldwork to unpack a key spatial and political implication of IOM's humanitarian framing of AVR: the depoliticization that is characteristic of IOM's migration management approach. Scholars have noted how IOM's deployment of humanitarian discourses serves to legitimize its coordination with powerful (funder) states in migration management (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010; Collyer, 2012). Today, as the EU's governance of migration merges care and assistance with control and enforcement, the discourse of migration management renders these practices as necessary, technical, and objective. I argue that the discursive power of migration management comes in large part from its seamless integration

with processes of development, human rights, and humanitarianism. IOM and the EU frame migration management in terms of development, claiming to create 'triple win' scenarios for the migrant, home country, and host country (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). Within this framework, enforcement practices like deportation and detention are considered unfortunate outcomes for those who broke the law – and yet, even migrant return becomes a site for humanitarian management through policies like AVR.

In this way, I unpack how migration management's discourse depoliticizes what are fundamentally biopolitical demarcations that value lives differently. The aim of managed migration reflects the central administrative, calculative and regulatory concerns of biopolitics (Foucault, 1990; Lemke, 2011). For Agamben (1998: 131), one of the defining features of biopolitics today, tied to the formation of political community, is the "constant need to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside." This selectivity defines the governmentality of migration management. As a currently hegemonic approach to governing mobility, migration management is defined by collaborative partnerships between states and international security, development and humanitarian actors (Crane, 2020; Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). My examination of these partnerships with respect to AVR reveals how states are "collaborating and contracting out" tasks related to migration management with institutional actors like IOM (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011: 21).

At the close of this chapter, I draw on interviews with AVR practitioners to unpack their conflicted understandings of how voluntary AVR actually is, in relation to IOM's hegemonic framing of migration management. This section juxtaposes the humanitarian framing of AVR as voluntary with the realities practitioners face when helping migrants navigate the "choice" to return via AVR. In line with Mountz's (2010: 88) work on the "embodied state," I convey the

complexity of human subject positions within bureaucratic sites of institutional power. This means engaging with the contradictory and competing positionalities that embody institutions and enact policies: "like people migrating between states, bureaucrats act on geographical imaginations that simultaneously reproduce and transcend international borders" (Mountz, 2010: xxi). In this way, this chapter unpacks AVR's humanitarian framing through both institutional (IOM) and embodied (practitioner) perspectives. I conclude with a discussion of how AVR is situated in political and spatial context.

II. Discourses of humanitarianism in IOM's framing of AVR as migration management

> *[…] there is growing social and political recognition that AVRR programmes, pioneered by IOM in 1979, can benefit migrants, governments and civil society, not only because of their humanitarian value but also because of their crucial contribution to migration management…The reasons underlying migrants' decision to go home differ widely, and a common ground for IOM, NGOs and civil society in the field of voluntary return is the mutual effort to ensure that a migrant in need is a person to be helped in the most humane and dignified manner* (IOM, 2011).

IOM is a self-defined humanitarian organization that has pioneered migration management, as an approach to governing migration, with the slogan "migration for the benefit of all." The above quote exemplifies how IOM joins managerial and humanitarian discourses together in its framing of AVR. Its juxtaposition of identifying AVR as a "crucial contribution to migration management" with the recognition that "a migrant in need is a person to be helped in the most human and dignified manner" neatly pinpoints the merger of humanitarianism and migration management in IOM's approach. In this section, I discuss how IOM frames AVR in terms of humanitarianism and development, with an analytical eye towards how this framing depoliticizes deportation and the securitization of migration.

IOM was founded in 1951 as an intergovernmental membership organization, the same year as UNHCR. IOM became a related organization of the United Nations in 2016, based on the UN's recognition of IOM as "an indispensable actor in the field of human mobility" (United Nations, 2016). In 2019, IOM had 172 member countries and an operational budget of over 1.8 Billion USD in 2019 (IOM, 2019). As an intergovernmental organization, 97% of IOM's budget comes from "voluntary contributions for projects," reflecting how, despite humanitarian identification, the organization is highly beholden to the politics of funding (IOM, 2021d). In a 2016 IOM booklet titled "Return and Reintegration to Nigeria," featuring the IOM and EU logos on the front cover, IOM describes itself as:

> *The leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration that works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. At the core of The International Organization for Migration is the objective of ensuring the orderly and humane management of all types of migration, while enhancing international cooperation on migration issues.* (IOM, 2016: 5)

This quote describes how IOM operates in a key institutional role of logistical coordinator between states, migrants and NGOs, in Europe's AVR network. Continuing this same quote, now note how IOM explicitly frames its Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programs as migration management:

> *To efficiently achieve this objective, IOM has developed Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes worldwide as a humane and dignified tool to support migrants who are unwilling or unable to remain in a host country and wish to return voluntarily to their country of origin or a third country where they have a permanent residence permit*" (IOM, 2016: 5)

In the above quotes, we first see the appearance of "orderly and humane" in IOM's framing of migration management. We then see the utility of AVRR towards this management described as being "efficient," while also "humane and dignified." Here, a political question emerges: if

IOM's chief objective is to ensure 'orderly' migration, what and whose order is migration being managed according to (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002)?

I conducted interviews with IOM practitioners in Belgium, Geneva, The Netherlands, London, and Germany[7]. In these interviews, AVR was consistently framed as a humanitarian policy that represents an integral component of how states manage migration today. For example:

> *AVR […] is part of a more global and comprehensive migration management program. We present AVR as an option, and often as a solution to any irregular status, or to a situation where the migrant cannot stay any longer in the territory […]. So we are convinced that migrants who leave their country, […] their biggest desire or dream is to go back. […] So, it's true that we like thinking about migration (as) a circular process. […] We are convinced that AVR can better help to manage migration […] But also presenting AVR as an option, as a good and a humanitarian option. It's not like a failure that you go back, you know* (Interview, IOM Brussels 1, 12.14.16).

This quote frames AVR as a humanitarian "solution" to the conundrum of legal impossibility discussed in Chapter Three. The above quote also reflects how IOM prefers to discuss migration in managed, circular terms (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). In a similar vein to the quote above, an IOM policymaker in Geneva described how AVR fits within the organization's comprehensive migration management framework:

> *AVR is ONE of the tools – certainly not the only one […] that governments have to manage migration, to respond to the challenges that migration poses. […] And in doing so, obviously taking into account the needs of the migrants themselves. And taking into account what the international principles are: first and foremost, the sovereign right of the governments to decide who can stay on their own territory or not* (Interview, IOM Migrant Assistance Division, Geneva, 5.7.17).

This quote reflects the fact that, while IOM identifies as a humanitarian organization, they fundamentally adhere to the security priorities, the "sovereign right," of European governments

[7] IOM interviews in Berlin were requested to be on background, and therefore are not quoted directly in this chapter.

to selectively determine which migrants are welcomed versus rejected and returned. This selectivity is a hallmark of migration management's ordering and bordering in Europe today. IOM reports to have assisted more than 1.3 million migrants through their AVRR programs, with an average of 30,000 returns/year (IOM, 2016). An IOM policymaker described how these return figures increased to about 70,000 voluntary returns in 2015 and around 100,000 via AVR in 2016 with the large influx of immigration into the EU (Interview, IOM Migrant Assistance Division, Geneva, 5.7.17). AVRR funding has historically been quite important to IOM from a funding standpoint. In the quote below, a UK AVR practitioner with IOM reflected on how the AVR programs were IOM UK's "bread and butter" up until 2011 when the contract went to Refugee Action:

> *AC: What role does AVR play within the larger suite of migration management for IOM?*
>
> *IOM: I would say it's our bread and butter […] in Northern Europe. […] And I think that with the recent increases in the numbers of migrants and refugees within Europe, that's probably going to continue. […] For IOM-UK […] we had 6 sub-offices, we had national coverage, we had 100+ staff. When we lost that project, we shrunk to one office and 12 staff. […] But I think for a lot of European countries […] AVR is the main project that covers costs, and keeps things going* (Interview, IOM UK, London, 12.9.16).

An IOM staffer in the Netherlands similarly reflected on the centrality of AVR to their work:

> *AC: So, in the context of this office, how do you feel like AVR fits into the larger picture of migration management?*
>
> *IOM: Yeah, IOM is a big organization worldwide, and you know, you see lots of differences as well between countries, and between programs. And if you focus on the Netherlands, I think AVR is a big, big part of our job. I would say, maybe 70-80% of our job is around AVR. Then it's also about relocation, about integration, you know, matching people to a job – that's a new project; labor migration – there's a little project. So, we do have some other projects, but the main project is AVR.*
>
> *AC: Ok, so most of the people that are in this office would be working on AVR in some capacity?*
>
> *IOM: Yeah, yeah, I think a majority works for AVR. And we have like 19 people in the field who counsel and do the job as I have, about nineteen. So that's already a big part of*

> *the organization [...] So, yeah, it's an important project, I think, for IOM since we started it in 1990* (Interview, IOM Netherlands #1, 11.29.17).

Again, a similar institutional reality was said to be true in Belgium:

> *Indeed, the Belgian office is really well known due to AVR, because it has always been the most funded program but also the most people. So we are a team of, I think, 20 people working for the AVR, out of a total of 35 people within the country of the Belgian office. So it's a lot. It's a lot in terms of funding, because all those people are funded by Fedasil, but in terms of activities* (Interview, IOM Belgium, 12.14.16).

Chapter Three discussed how IOM has historically served as a key institutional node in Europe's AVR network; the fact that IOM has offices worldwide means it can coordinate return logistics in home and host countries. The quotes above show how AVR remains central to IOM's missions to manage migration in Europe. Today IOM is a "major source of intelligence, assessment, advice, and technical assistance in connection with national and regional border policies and practices" (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010: 979). This position of influence means that the ways in which IOM frames AVR are quite consequential.

Discourses of migration management often justify selectivity in the name of development. IOM's migration managers claim to be in the business of creating 'triple win' scenarios for the migrant, home country, and host country (mentioned in numerous interviews, also see Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). The 'triple win' philosophy is evidenced in the quote below from IOM's Department of Migration Management, which describes the three levels of benefits from AVRR in its publication "AVRR at a glance":

> *For a migrant: AVRR represents a more humane and dignified approach to return, enhancing reintegration perspectives at home. For migrants who need to return home but lack the means to do so, assisted voluntary return and reintegration is often the only approach to address their immediate plight. AVRR allows the migrants concerned to prepare for their return, encouraging them to identify potential opportunities for socioeconomic reinsertion into communities of origin, thereby facilitating the sustainability of their return.*

> *For the governments of host and transit countries: AVRR is a consensual and cost-effective option that allows strengthening the integrity of asylum and immigration systems, without the systematic (and generally costly) use of law enforcement and detention.*
>
> *For the governments of origin and for the migrants' communities: AVRR is an acceptable option to support the reinsertion of returning nationals. IOM assists the governments of origin in the development of strategies and programmes facilitating the management of return migration and strengthening capacities for reintegration in these countries. AVRR also facilitates and enhances a cooperative approach to return between the relevant authorities in host, transit, and origin countries.* (IOM, 2015b)

This delineation of the three primary stakeholders is instructive for IOM's vision of managed migration: humanely addressing the immediate plight of migrants; incorporating orderly migration in line with their funder's priorities; and supporting the development of countries of origin.

In this way, one of the key discursive tactics through which IOM frames migration management as a generally agreeable and apolitical approach is by promoting migration and development as interdependent processes – to "harness the development potential of migration for the benefit of both societies and migrants" (IOM, 2021b). We can see this in how IOM frames AVR as the right choice for development:

> *Return is today one strong element in the migration cycle, whose potential has not yet been fully harnessed. Being spontaneous or assisted, return can play a pivotal role in the development framework of the country of origin, if adequately managed* (IOM, 2011).

This quote nicely summarizes IOM's approach to return through a development lens, noting how proper management is crucial to harness return migration's development potential. IOM is keen to promote the reintegration component of AVR*R* as being about development. To appeal to state funders, reintegration is promoted by IOM for how the process "aims to make voluntary return sustainable by helping individuals and families settle back into their home countries." A London-

based IOM practitioner reflected on how the reintegration dimension of AVRR represents the ongoing presence of humanitarianism in the policy:

> *[...] I suppose, the humanitarian angle is, well, you can't just kind of pick people up and drop them on the side, having been outside their country of origin for so many years, and having gone through what could have been quite a difficult experience. We need to support them in a way that kind of helps them to rebuild their lives in their country of origin. And that's where the humanitarian element comes in. So, for me, reintegration assistance is more of a humanitarian tool, within the AVRR framework* (Interview, IOM UK, London, 12.9.16).

IOM newsletters contain many testimonials from migrants who used reintegration funds. For example, one returnee started a hairdressing salon in Kampala; another established a take-away food business in Zimbabwe; and another used reintegration funds to buy fishing nets and equipment for their fishing business in Sri Lanka (IOM London, 2004; IOM London, 2005). IOM's Migrant Assistance Division prioritizes the following "values" with respect to reintegration assistance: "tailored approach, opportunity, empowerment towards sustainability, partnerships" (IOM, 2015b). Reintegration, however, is not the only way in which AVR is framed as humanitarian.

Organizational documents make clear that AVR assistance is provided "in response to the returnee's humanitarian needs" (IOM, 2011: 15). IOM claims that "for migrants who need to return home but lack the means to do so, IOM's AVRR programmes are often the only solution to their immediate plight" (IOM, 2021a). In implementing this assistance, IOM is uniquely positioned as an intergovernmental organization between states and migrants:

> *For us at IOM, the importance is that – and this has been our role in the past few months – to remind the states, particularly the EU member states, that voluntary return is important, that it is important also to maintain the distinction between voluntary return and forced return. And as I said before, we don't question the legitimacy of forced return if done in accordance, and pursuant in respect to international obligations that every government has. But it is important to keep the distinction. It is important that the message about return is not watered down, that there is no confusion for the migrant who*

> *does what, and what is what* (Interview, IOM Migrant Assistance Division, Geneva, 5.7.17).

This policymaker then spoke to the increased pressure on returns in the wake of the 2015-2016 migration influx:

> *So, it is important that these two streams are kept very separate, and that voluntary return IS still done – despite the increase in numbers – is still done according to certain principle and according to certain criteria, taking into account the fact that in some countries return is not possible due to [...] the security situation. I'm thinking of Syria, for instance. [...] Obviously when you have a critical mass of returnees, and when you have a high-pressure, high political pressure to do more returns, then it becomes increasingly difficult. BUT that is our role as an intergovernmental organization. And considering that AVR has for forty years been the core of IOM's mandate and IOM's activities in Europe* (Interview, IOM Migrant Assistance Division, Geneva, 5.7.17).

This policymaker, from IOM headquarters, reflects on the centrality of AVR to IOM's work as an intergovernmental organization for over 40 years in Europe.

IOM Newsletters, obtained through archival research at the University of Oxford, reveal the ways in which IOM frames AVR as humanitarian in the UK context. A 2004 IOM London newsletter discusses the expansion of voluntary return programs to include "Irregular Migrants," defined as "someone who has entered the country without the required legal documentation" or persons who "have remained in the country after the expiry of their visas" (IOM London, 2004: 1). In discussing Britain's population of irregular migrants, the newsletter raises humanitarian concerns about the "precariousness and vulnerability of people who have been trafficked into the country and who often are at the mercy of unscrupulous racketeers" (ibid.). Mountz (2010) discusses how concerns over smuggling and trafficking, real as this exploitation can be, are often used by governing institutions to justify increased securitization (Mountz & Hiemstra, 2014), even recently enrolling military-humanitarian measures (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2018). In this newsletter, IOM describes the overall objective of the AVRIM program as being the "humane and orderly return of irregular migrants living in the UK," ensuring their return home to their

home country is “voluntary, safe, informed, cost-effective and sustainable” (ibid.: 2). The newsletter quotes then IOM Chief of Mission for London, Jan de Wilde with an offer of help:

> *If you are in the UK without a legal status and would like to go home, IOM can help you. Call us for a confidential meeting* (ibid.: 2).

A close reading of other archived IOM newsletters between 2000 and 2005 reveal a consistent framing of AVR as humanitarian through emphases on advice, help and support, assistance, protection, confidential counseling, and the humane treatment of migrants. IOM’s Migrant Assistance Division (part of the Department of Migration Management) identifies the “key values” of its AVRR programs to be: “voluntariness, dignity and respect of human rights, holistic and gender-sensitive approach, support to migrants, confidentiality” (IOM, 2015b). Through these institutional communications, we can see how IOM’s framing of voluntary return very much emphasizes a humanitarian identity.

In my interviews with IOM practitioners and policymakers, I tried to ask probing questions to understand the meaning around AVR as a humanitarian practice. In response, many spoke to what differentiates AVR via IOM from forced return by states:

> *The dignified, kind of humane aspect is a really strong aspect for us. And I think, when you compare it to what an alternative returns process might look like in the UK, you know, it's pretty harsh. I mean, it's handcuffs, it's violent, with cages, it's detention centers, you know, it's accompanied all the way back on the flight, it's a pretty aggressive, undignified process. And I think that there's a lot of fear around that, well-placed fear. And people just suddenly say, 'You know what, I don't want that to be me. I don't want to ever have to, you know' [...]* (Interview, IOM UK, London, 12.9.16).

Then this official contrasted AVRR as a humanitarian alternative to forced removal:

> *So even the process of getting a travel document under the voluntary returns process, where you turn up like anybody else [...] you would have a letter from IOM stating that the person is taking a voluntary returns process, and that would normally expedite or help the process. I mean, even that in itself, is an opportunity for dignity and self-control, self-empowerment, that you lose entirely under the forced return angle. So I think for a lot of people it was, you know, 'I know probably that I can't stay, or if I choose to stay my life is going to be so difficult that I'm probably going to take voluntary return because the*

> *forced return is the one that I just want to avoid at all costs.' Yes, so there's the dignified and the humane kind of aspect to it that touches on the humanitarianism, plus the reintegration assistance* (Interview, IOM UK, London, 12.9.16).

The above practitioner gives a sense of the difficult position migrants are in when 'choosing' AVR, while also delineating how voluntary return via IOM is a more humane process than deportation with the UK Home Office. A practitioner in The Hague similarly spoke to this differentiation between forced and voluntary return in the Netherlands:

> *And there you see a difference, you know? If we facilitate return, we try to do it in an orderly and humanitarian way. Also, if it's a medical case. For them, it's different. For them, it's important to get a travel document and to put somebody on a plane. And maybe they provide some money, and that's it: "take care of yourself." [...] So that's not a service, or a quality of service, I believe. So, I'm really curious to see what will happen in five or ten years from now – if we still will be able to execute our programs. I'm really curious to see that* (Interview, IOM Netherlands #1, The Hague, 11.29.17).

This practitioner differentiates IOM's approach to AVR as "orderly and humanitarian" as opposed to the Ministry of Justice's ("them," in the quote here) focus on enforcement.

A policymaker in Geneva spoke to the importance of maintaining IOM's approach, despite increased pressures on return:

> *So, it is in the interest for all to safeguard, if you want, the voluntary return as we know – despite the increase of candidates, of potential candidates for voluntary return. And to make sure that those standards that we have worked on and consolidated in the past 40 years, nearly 40 years of implementation of voluntary return, are still respected. Because they are valid, and because they have an added value for the migrants and for the governments in the host countries, and in the countries of origin. So it is important for us to remind everyone that this tool has an important role, and can play an important role for different parties. But to do that we need to preserve the foundations of it. And the foundations of it are, again: respect for state sovereignty, voluntariness, and respect for migrant rights* (Interview, IOM Migrant Assistance Division, Geneva, 5.7.17).

This quote well encapsulates IOM's institutional positionality between migrants and states, advocating for migrants' rights but ultimately respecting state sovereignty. The above quotes reflect the pragmatic ways in which humanitarianism, development and security meet in IOM's framing of AVR as migration management.

In this way, IOM practitioners were often quite practical in our interviews about what it means to implement AVR in the real world, where they, as an intergovernmental organization, must balance state security pressures (their funders) with the humanitarian needs of migrants. A practitioner in the IOM Belgium office reflected on how he feels his work is humanitarian in relation to counseling and the assistance IOM is able to provide:

> *In my personal job, I think on a humanitarian level, [...] I really still do believe in the assistance we give. And even that we, under difficult circumstances, that we reach really good results. [...] Of course we also realize that it's a very temporary thing that we do - a small drop. So, but I still, yeah, at the Belgian level, I think we have a social program, and we do a humanitarian – it's really in my view a humanitarian assistance. The feedback that we get from returnees is that they really appreciate it a lot. [...] It doesn't change their life fully. But for most of them, the fact that they have someone there, the fact that there is a minimum of budget that they can use - which allows us also to follow up and to have more chances to guide and to gain a bit of confidence. Because sometimes there is a lot of information, there are a lot of possibilities, but they don't believe in it. So, I think that's a good thing* (Interview, IOM Belgium 2, Brussels, 12.14.16).

Another IOM practitioner in Belgium spoke to how other humanitarian programs that IOM offers can work in tandem with AVR:

> AC: *Is part of IOM's work here to do that communication: here's what AVRR is a humanitarian program versus, kind of, the forced dimension?*
>
> IOM: *Yes, exactly. Because our added value being IOM, is that we offer much more than just assisted voluntary return [...] we do a lot of humanitarian programs: resettlement, relocation, family reunification, migration and health, labor migration, helping also victims of trafficking [...]. So it's really, really large, you know the assistance we provide. And then now, I mean, we are still very keen, and Fedasil is also very keen, on keeping this humanitarian approach to the program in Belgium* (Interview, IOM Belgium 1, Brussels, 12.14.16).

A practitioner in the Netherlands reflected on what it looks like to keep the humanitarian dimension of AVR intact today:

> *So, in the Netherlands, the atmosphere is pretty relaxed. And still deportations are taking place, but it's not in every case that this pressure is there. Because there's the main focus on voluntary return. And as IOM, yeah, we try to make a difference between them in the counselling we provide. Because we always try to look at the individual situation of a migrant. And we want to make sure that people make a well-informed decision. Because*

> *return is not always the best option. So, for example, we have cases of asylum-seekers with psychological problems – sometimes they have a residence permit in the Netherlands, they are frustrated, and they want to go home. [...] And then we really investigate and see what happens, and sometimes we find out that the person was kicked out of the reception center. So, we try to get him back in the reception center instead of him returning voluntarily to Iran, with his mental problems. Sometimes we see that people have no social network. We also see migrants who have a residence permit in the Netherlands who still want to return home, and we really counsel on the reasons, and see if we can make the right referral: maybe the person needs some counseling, or needs to find some friends; maybe we can match him with a key figure in the community. So, the focus is not only on return. We refer cases to lawyers, because people do not know their legal rights. [...] So we really look into all of these – we try to look into different options, and not only return* (Interview, IOM Netherlands, The Hague, 11.29.17).

A key point in our conversation was that, despite increasing return pressures from the government, it was important to counsel migrants on different options beyond only return.

However, per Chapter Three's discussion of legal impossibility, many migrants do not have legal options outside of return, and this is where AVR is recognized as a part of EU state-centric migration management:

> *I think for IOM it probably fits more in the migration management side of things. [...] There have been, are a lot of asylum seekers who've been unsuccessful or irregular migrants who are in limbo. Their current situation is not good, let's see it that way. And there's a recognition of kind of destitution and hardship amongst that population. But I think that there's also, like, 'OK, so voluntary return is a way to manage this population who've fallen out of the system and are at the end of a process that they can't get any other kind of status from'* (Interview, IOM UK, London, 12.9.16).

This practitioner reflects on the systemic role AVR plays in European migration management, providing a pragmatic best-case-scenario response to migrant destitution, which is produced through Europe's securitized system. IOM's paradigm of migration management incorporates exclusionary enforcement practices like detention and migrant return (forced or voluntary) as necessary outcomes for some, based on their standing in relation to the law and the host countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is precisely these exclusions that produce migrant return, which becomes a site for humanitarian management through AVR.

In an arrangement where some migrants are a threat to be controlled, but others are a potential benefit to be realized, the productive power of migration management's discourse is to seemingly remove the biopolitical techniques of selection and control from the arena of the political. We can note a common sense antipolitics (Ticktin, 2011) and "consensus" (Rancière, 2010) in how IOM's discourses of management respect the legitimacy of forced return and promote the humanitarian differentiation of AVRR. In Europe today, the fact that AVR is framed as a humanitarian practice – a sort of rescue – is precisely what differentiates it discursively from deportation. While it is quite apparent to all that an element of coercion is involved in AVR (due to legal impossibility), IOM and funding governments are keen to distinguish between voluntary and enforced returns, as reflected in the interviews above (Collyer, 2012). Appeals to choice, humanity, and human rights are how this differentiation is accomplished. These discourses evidence how humanitarianism's common sense, apolitical nature is useful for states in managing spontaneous migration, allowing for a governance that seems "beyond politics" (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010; Fassin, 2012). This section has provided evidence for how IOM frames AVR as a pragmatic, best-case scenario considering: the humanitarian needs of migrants; the securitization of borders; and the anxieties of rich nations regarding migration (Hyndman, 2000; Redfield, 2005; Fassin, 2012).

Before closing this section, I want to be clear that many of the IOM practitioners I spoke with were motivated by sincere intentions to practice AVR in a humanitarian manner. At times, this even brought them into conflict with their respective governments, for example:

> IOM: *you know, I work in the Hague here in the center, and that's not an asylum-seeker center. But if I go to Katwijk, in one hour from now, the majority is being pushed by the Ministry of Justice to "go to IOM, and if not, we will deport you." Which happens! [...] Last week a family was deported to Armenia, or put in detention to be deported.*
>
> *AC: Wow, so that's a real threat.*

> *IOM: People are really scared about the police, also. They come to me in order to comply. To work with them. But then, after a few minutes, I ask them:*
> *-"do you really want to go back?"*
> *-"are you kidding me? No not really, but I have to cooperate"*
> *-Then I try to explain, "listen, I work for IOM. This is about voluntary return. It's your decision, but you have to figure it out, and if you really want to cooperate on return, then we can discuss it."*
> *But we don't want, like, to be used, as to be a part of the Ministry of Justice – in order for them to facilitate return. That's their job* (Interview, IOM Netherlands, The Hague, 11.29.17).

In this way, the practitioners from IOM whom I spoke with often reflected humanitarian motivations for AVR to help migrants and to not be instrumentalized by states for security purposes. This is important to note because while these officials do see the political context and inequalities of their work, they still view managed migration as a best-case-scenario according to a pragmatic, real-world, development-centric logic. These nuances are precisely why my analysis attends to the scale of the individual encounter between migrant and practitioner, in relation to the larger-reaching scales of national governance and EU-wide migration management, in which IOM is deeply enmeshed and influential. While attending to how institutions are embodied and diversely constituted, it is important to also analyze the political effects of the discourses and practices they enact. I now consider this in the spatial context of this project's fieldwork, when many migrants were navigating numerous inequalities amidst the 2015-2016 migration 'crisis'.

III. Political implications of IOM's depoliticizing migration management discourse

This section addresses how IOM's managerial framing of AVR in the language of human rights, assistance, and humanitarianism is politically influential for the governance of migration today. In Europe and the United States, though part of a long history of expulsion (Ngai, 2004; Walters, 2010), migrant return and removal have become normalized and governmentalized as calculated outcomes of managed migration today (De Genova, 2017). In this securitized climate, migration

management operates as a politically powerful discourse, because it renders laws and practices that criminalize, detain, and remove migrants as seemingly apolitical and objective. This framing elides the exclusionary and often-violent political realities of what a climate of securitization means for migrants' lives (Coleman, 2012; Ehrkamp, 2019; Staeheli & Nagel, 2008). Unpacking practices of "global governmentality," like AVR, can help us understand the "ethos" and "rationality" of the international governance of borders today (Walters, 2010).

While AVR in some cases does help migrants realize more livable circumstances (Collyer, 2012), it does not address the political forces that produce the need for migration, nor the security impulse of bordering that undergirds legal impossibility. Ticktin (2011) analyzes the "anti-politics of care" with respect to immigrants in France in a manner that could be well-applied to IOM's humanitarian discourse of management, noting how the provision of humanitarian assistance can transform the migrant from potential citizen to a patient who is provided assistance in a manner divorced from the wider political context. Ticktin (2011:19) notes two qualities of "anti-politics" with respect to care for migrants: 1) institutional actors who frame their work as humanitarian "generally claim to be antipolitical–beyond of outside politics"; 2) however, rather than remaining outside of the hegemonic system of governance in their desire to be nonpolitical, their work "reinforces the status quo, the established order." In this sense, IOM is in the business of liberal humanitarian assistance as part and parcel of today's "antipolitics" of migration management in Western countries.

Humanitarianism's functional integration into migration management is a growing topic of focus in scholarship, to which this study of AVR contributes (Collyer, 2019; Pallister-Wilkins, 2020; Williams, 2015). For example, the EU's Mediterranean rescue missions and Australia's off-shoring, as "compassionate bordering" projects (Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2016: 3),

illustrate the power of humanitarian discourses and practices in "framing" and "giving meaning" to migration policing as saving lives (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015: 65). In this way, AVR exemplifies how migration management discursively and practically incorporates humanitarianism's common-sense nature, derived from the ethical injunction to save and manage lives in crisis (Redfield, 2005). In the same way that the humanitarian motivation to care for lives in crisis can facilitate containment (Agier, 2010; Hyndman, 2000; Redfield, 2005), AVR provides assistance to migrants at the cost of their expulsion. This is why Andrijasevic and Walters (2010: 994) define AVR today as a uniquely neoliberal form of deportation in how it "explore(s) and experiment(s) with ways of enlisting the cooperation of migrants in their own expulsion through the provision of forms of information, assistance, and financial inducement."

The political implications of IOM's approach to migration management are apparent at different scales. At a national and EU-wide scale, IOM's management of migration is in lockstep with the sovereign right of rich nations to selectively accommodate the short-term inclusion of low-skilled labor migration in accordance with demographic and economic conditions, all the while maintaining aggressive policies of detention, bordering, and deportation against spontaneous migration (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011; Kofman, 2008; Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). When states partner with institutions like IOM in migration management, this allows for undocumented migrants and appeals-rights-exhausted asylum-seekers to be (b)ordered in a "global apartheid geopolitics" that produces illegality and marks certain bodies as disposable or out of place accordingly (van Houtum, 2010: 973). These political effects are felt acutely at the scale of the individual migrants and asylum-seekers' journeys. The production of detention and liminality, and the tortuous process of seeking asylum, are key aspects of how migration management has been critiqued (Crane, 2020; Hyndman & Mountz, 2008; Hyndman & Giles,

2011; Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; Tazzioli, 2018). In line with Chapter Four's argument, IOM's framing of AVR as migration management means the merger of security and humanitarianism is a foundational paradox upon which AVR policy is negotiated by migrants and practitioners at multiple scales.

There is a growing body of work among migration scholars that situates IOM's discourses and practices in political context (Geiger & Pécoud, 2020; Georgi, 2010; Pécoud, 2018). Scholars have critiqued IOM's management framing as depoliticizing in how discourses employed by IOM often frame migration as a technical, calculative, and development-focused process that can be managed outside of politics (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011). In response to this hegemonically apolitical discourse of migration management, it is important to foreground that "politics happens in technocratic spaces" (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010, 995). Duvell (2015) claims that IOM "exports the European model of migration control" to other countries of the world, building capacity in the latest migration control technologies, policies, running "migration discouragement schemes," assisting detention and border control, and removing or recruiting migrants as needed. This wide array of practices reveal how the organization is a central node in globally ordering the movement of people across borders. Collyer (2012) notes that IOM's AVR policies minimize interactions between state governments, allowing for a more efficient and less noticeable process of removal:

> "*IOM acts as a facilitator, allowing the deportation process to appear as a technocratic and essentially depoliticised problem-solving exercise. The necessary violence of transferring an individual from a country where most would wish to remain in different circumstances, to a country where most do not wish to go is obscured. Indeed IOM has been so successful at this that without exception, the individuals interviewed for this research expressed a genuine gratitude towards IOM*" (Collyer 2012, 290).

Through his study of AVR and Sri Lankan asylum seekers in the UK, Collyer (2012) describes how IOM's increasing involvement in migrant removal through policies of AVR allows for

deportation to exist under the radar in a technocratic fashion. Ashutosh and Mountz (2011: 29) similarly note how IOM "facilitates collaborative measures of exclusion" in returning and removing migrants; framing AVR in a language of human rights allows policies of migrant return to function through state sovereignty and yet transcend it in the name of "consensual legitimacy."

As discussed in Chapter Four, many of IOM's AVR programs tend to be tailored to specific asylum-seekers from particular countries (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010). For example, in the case of cross-Mediterranean migration to the Italian island of Lampedusa, Andrijasevic (2010) describes how IOM brokered partnerships between the EU and Libya for the detention and eventual return of irregular migrants and asylum-seekers. This points to how biopolitical practices of control over migrants' mobility articulate with the geopolitical relationships between states (Collyer, 2012; Hyndman, 2012). As seen in Readmission Agreements between the EU and neighboring countries, coercion is usually necessary to encourage cooperation from poorer countries with deportation measures, which is why the EU has increasingly tied them to wider development measures and partnered with humanitarian institutions for policies like AVR (Crane, 2020).

Fassin (2012) cites an example of AVR in practice at the infamous Sangatte camp in France, which was co-managed by the Red Cross and French Police to hold 'illegal' migrants found in France, with additional assistance provided by IOM. The transiting of migrants through this camp reveals how the "tension between humanity and security, between compassion and repression" is made real for refugee's lives in today's immigration politics (ibid.: 135). Upon arriving to the camp, migrants received a pamphlet from IOM reading the following:

> *You are currently a resident of the Sangatte reception center which is managed by the French Red Cross. This center was set up by the French Government in order to provide*

> *short-term humanitarian assistance to irregular migrants like you. However, this situation is and can only be a temporary or precarious one* (quoted in Fassin, 2012: 140).

My findings similarly show that disseminating informational materials that aim – in the name of humanitarianism – to dissuade 'illegal' migration, or to encourage AVR after 'illegal' immigration, is a component of IOM's migration management (see also, Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011; Collyer, 2012). In the Sangatte camp, the option was clear: risk your life and imprisonment by leaving and remaining illegally in France or take the funded option from IOM to voluntarily return. In this context, Fassin identifies this enrollment of AVR as a key example of "the replacement of the right to asylum with humanitarian reason" (Fassin, 2012: 141).

Chapter Three discussed legal impossibility as a reality that many migrants face today, where no legal option remains for them to remain or seek protection in Europe. In this context, activists and scholars – and as we will see below, many practitioners themselves – have questioned just how "voluntary" such removal can be (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011; Cleton & Chauvin, 2020; Collyer, 2012; Webber, 2011). Ashutosh and Mountz (2011: 29) quote a sharply-worded 2009 No Borders release which describes IOM as "a Janus faced organisation, aiming to win trust, cooperate with and using (sic) NGOs on the one hand but acting as a reliable partner of national governments. Be aware!." Human Rights Watch has also been critical of IOM for employing language of humanitarian protection, when it actually has "no formal mandate to monitor human rights abuses or to protect the rights of migrants and other persons, even though literally millions of people worldwide participate in IOM-sponsored programs and projects" (Human Rights Watch, 2003). IOM is sensitive to these critiques, and deploys the pragmatic logic of humanitarianism to defend itself, represented in the following passage:

> *In a world of political, economic and security instability, with very limited options for migrants to move and work legally, and countries with restrictive migration legislation (detaining, penalizing or criminalizing irregular migrants), it is not surprising that the*

> *voluntary nature of returns facilitated under AvRR programmes is questioned and debated by civil society at large. For instance, in the case of migrants detained for immigration-related offences, the return assistance provided by IOM and its NGO partners might be better qualified as "humanitarian assistance to return"; while the assistance is based on the personal will of the migrant, there are fewer alternative options available* (IOM, 2011: 21).

Here we see IOM's antipolitical pragmatism on display, rendering humanitarian assistance as part and parcel of today's migration governance regime, where migrants have few alternatives aside from return. The political question of whether or not this is truly a choice, and why migrants face such conditions is elided by the "gift" of humanitarian assistance (Nguyen, 2012).

The above IOM quote evidences, and this section has discussed, how the discursive merger of humanitarianism and migration management in AVR is powerfully functional towards bordering, ordering, and othering today (van Houtum, 2010). Any process of migrant removal is "necessarily violent" (Collyer, 2012: 290). AVR is managed in relation to a foundational inequality, a "life chance divide" (Duffield, 2010), evident in the multitude of unequal political, social and economic processes that undergird people's decisions to migrate and seek asylum. As discussed in the Methodology and Chapter Three, a wide range of organizations implement AVR within Europe's AVR network. This means that humanitarian NGOs, like Raphaelswerk in Hamburg, who have a clear advocacy mission on behalf of migrants must negotiate their work in relation to IOM's apolitical, managerial approach to AVR:

> AC: *[...] as long as you've been working in voluntary return, what's the nature of cooperation been between Raphaelswerk and IOM? What kind of role do you see IOM playing?*
>
> R: *A working relationship. It's very clear – we are … not in migration management. We know it's a very difficult issue, if you are active in return counselling. It's very difficult. But we don't consider us doing migration management. And IOM always said, "we are operating the Assisted Voluntary Return programs, and we do migration management." "We do not lobby" – that's what IOM usually said in the past – "we do not lobby and we can't do any kind of advocacy work." And, for the civil society organizations, we do advocacy work, lobbying and yeah, as I mentioned, it's client-focused, client-centered, that work.*

AC: *Right.*

R: *And we have a working relationship. We have to have, because they operate the Assisted Voluntary Return program.*

AC: *Of course. Anyone who fills out a REAG-GARP form, it goes to IOM, right?*

R: *Yeah. And it works. Because IOM knows it. And my colleagues at the counselling offices, they know it's necessary. But we are not affiliates. Sometimes we join hips, like when there are tendencies at the federal government level, or EU level, where even IOM says, "not a good direction you're going to." But usually it's a work relationship. And of course we wonder sometimes about the policy of IOM.*

AC: *Like the neutrality? Is that what you mean?*

R: (*nods head*). *Yeah. Yeah.*

In the institutional space between state security, migrant precarity, and IOM's apolitical management, there is a Europe-wide network of humanitarian NGOs that counsel and advocate for migrants. The next chapter addresses how several humanitarian NGOs, including Raphaelswerk (above), navigate and negotiate the implementation of AVR in this conflicted political and spatial context. As a segue into the next chapter's discussion, I now turn to focus on questions practitioners themselves raised about how voluntary AVR actually is. In our interview conversations, practitioners from different nodes of the AVR network honestly acknowledged the limitations they face in implementing AVR as a humanitarian policy. Reflecting on these discussions allows me to situate AVR's humanitarian discourses, such as choice and voluntariness, in relation to Europe's present political and spatial context that securitizes and criminalizes migration.

IV. How voluntary Is voluntary return? Situating AVR's humanitarian discourse in political and spatial context

"Voluntary return," this term that was kind-of invented by IOM decades ago – it refers only to the act of voluntary departure. And it's very difficult to erase this term. Because

> *it's (been) there since decades, and lawyers [...] say "it's voluntary return as long as it's not a forced removal." And there's IOM with this term. So it's really difficult. We here, in Raphaelswerk, we tend to call it "accepted return." Because the majority of these people going for a voluntary departure, they feel forced because they want to avoid removal, forced removal. So that's a kind of voluntary departure, or accepted return* (Interview, Raphaelswerk, Hamburg, 12.2.17).

In the above quote, a humanitarian practitioner in Germany reflects on how IOM's influential humanitarian discourse of voluntary return meets the reality migrants face in Europe today. For many migrants, it is clear that the choice to return voluntarily via AVR is often made based upon a limited range of non-positive options: remain without legal status in the shadows, endure the looming threat of deportation, or take the assistance from IOM and leave voluntarily. Practitioners at IOM and their partner NGOs are acutely aware of this paradoxical climate in which they implement AVR. Fassin (2012: 13) claims that qualitative studies are important for understanding humanitarianism because they "provide() insight into the convictions and doubts of actors, their blind spots and their lucidity, their prejudices and their reflexivity." In this section, I draw on interviews with practitioners at IOM and partnering humanitarian NGOs to relay their reflexive questioning of how voluntary AVR really is. The reality they describe points to the paradoxical nature of humanitarian assistance, in how they acknowledge the securitization of AVR, but also believe it represents an important humanitarian policy as compared to the harsh alternative of states returning migrants forcibly.

It was common in our interviews for practitioners to reflexively question how voluntary AVR actually could be in today's political context of migration, while also defending the humanitarian importance of their work:

> *[...] it's important to have voluntary return. They should always be able to return optionally, I think. But […] when we were running the program, we saw a lot of people coming forward for AVR because they really didn't have another choice. And that for me was the struggle. How humanitarian is it?* (Interview, IOM UK, London, 12.9.16).

This IOM practitioner goes on to address the UK's political context of "destitution" for migrants:

> *I mean it is important, I think, it is important that you have voluntary return and that you have reintegration assistance, but at the same time you need to be dealing with the fact that ... the processes in the UK were creating so much destitution. Because then, how voluntary is the decision, when you've basically eliminated all other options, you can't access any other type of support. Then OK, voluntary return becomes an option, but it's because you've been kind of ... everything else has been narrowed and pointing you towards it. So, and now that the government does that process themselves, we know that that's really what they're aiming for* (Interview, IOM UK, London, 12.9.16).

This question – how voluntary and humanitarian can AVR really be when the only legal alternative is deportation? – succinctly represents the conflicted political and spatial context AVR is implemented within.

Interviewees, from IOM to small NGO practitioners, were candid about the fact that racism and xenophobia motivate much of Europe's anti-immigrant sentiment today – to such a degree that AVR was even contested from the right as being too generous for people who have broken the law. The same anti-immigrant nativism that motivated the UK's Brexit decision influences the country's "hostile environment" towards migrants:

> *RA: And being able to allow people the option, and allow people the space as well to have somebody that will sit down with them, discuss their options, show them respect – you know, allow them to have personal dignity, which is something that really I think they really lack in the UK.*
>
> *AC: Because they are in the shadows so much?*
>
> *RA: YES! They are. I think if you're an irregular migrant right now, you will not – first of all, the government is against you; the vast majority of the population is also against you, because of course we have issues around anti-immigration feelings and sentiment in the public.*
>
> *AC: That was a big part of Brexit, right?*
>
> *RA: Yes! It is. And I think last summer I read "hate crimes have gone up by 57% after Brexit."*
>
> *AC: Yeah. It's the same in the U.S. after our election.*

> *RA: Yeah. President Trump! Yeah it's not pleasant to see that. And of course there's that conflation between asylum-seekers and irregular migrants that's not helping. You have extremely right wing press here – Daily Mail and newspapers like that creating that hostile environment. So it was – people wouldn't have, you know, anyone they would be in touch with, they wouldn't be given space and informed advice. So, charities like us were amongst the very few that would do this* (Interview, Refugee Action #5, London, 5.9.17).

This UK's "hostile environment" was said to be a forcing function with respect to return:

> *you see, return, voluntary return can be something that people feel forced to do because they don't have any other options, they've exhausted their legal options here in the UK: they are homeless, destitute…and there's the "hostile environment," which is making things really difficult for people here* (Interview, Refugee Action #5, London, 5.9.17).

Similarly, in Germany, the fact that migrants cannot return to Europe for five years after a forced removal was stated to be a motivating factor for migrants taking up AVR:

> *15 years ago, this was the first time that some Bavarian welfare organizations started to think about what we can do for people who have to return. Because it's not a voluntary return. In my case, it's an independent return – because the government forces the people to go back! Because you have only the option to go back on your own, or with a project like ZRB, or you pay it on your own, or you wait until you get deported. So if you get deported, so you cannot go five years into the European Union for work or [...] to settle down, or to create a family or something like that* (Interview, ZRB, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

This practitioner spoke to the then-current ban on family reunification in Germany (a government response to the 2015-2016 influx), reflecting on the case of returnees to Syria:

> R: *For example, if you're a guy from Syria and you came alone, and now you try to bring your wife and your children to Germany, and Germany says it's not possible for the next two years.*
>
> AC: *Do you want to be separated from your family for two years?*
>
> ZRB: *Exactly! Then, in my case, it's also not a voluntary return. Because this person is going back to Syria, not because Syria is the most beautiful country at the moment in the world, he has to go back because his wife and the children are alone; they need support; they cannot stay alone in this chaotic war land. And the guy is here, and also the women are making problems! Because the women are calling the men, saying "I don't believe you. Are you now in love with a German woman? Why don't you pick me up and the kids?" [...] And this person says, "no! it's not possible." And the wife doesn't believe it, of course. Because she says, "what crazy country is this that the man can stay and the*

> *wife and the children have to stay in the war country?" [...] These are the biggest problems. And that's why, also, in these cases, I don't call it voluntary. Because it's not voluntary. He's only going back because he cannot stay separated, like you said, for the next two years* (Interview, ZRB, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

These quotes show how it is vital to situate humanitarian discourses of choice and voluntariness in the social and political context that migrant's face in navigating their return decision.

In Germany, practitioners saw the rise of the far-right "Alternative for Deutschland" party as a downstream effect of the 2015-16 migration 'crisis' as well. At the time of my fieldwork in late-2017, Germany witnessed a prolonged failure of the government to form a coalition, which was in large part due to conflict over asylum policies and migrant return. A practitioner in Germany reflected on how the racialized fears that many Europeans have with respect to migration from Africa is a motivating factor for managing migration, and to the growing importance of AVR in the EU's migration management system:

> *AC: Is (AVR) becoming more important to facilitate the asylum process and the larger migration management picture in the country? From the government, political perspective, do you feel like it's becoming a more important program?*
>
> *R: Rapidly. Over the last years. Rapidly. There was always the term "migration management." And the EU Commission, since years, is providing planning and plans and discussions about migration management. I mean, it's not the first larger refugee influx we've had, you know.*
>
> *AC: Of course, yeah.*
>
> *R: Since 2014, this has increased extremely. The EU is coming out with strong plans and policies, and, I would say, each and every European member state government is aware of a kind of threat. That's what they feel – a threat, if they look towards Africa. And also if they look towards Asia. I mean, there are not only civil wars, there are humanitarian crises, climate change, and, I mean – […] The migration pressure in some African countries is high. We're not surprised. If you look at policies of the last decades. Syria and surrounding areas, it's high. Of course. So all policies, nowadays, being discussed, they go towards closing the door. I mean, I don't know whether you have read, or somebody told you, that they are planning these offshore asylum centers – that's one of the plans. So what the politicians say – and it's not only the German politicians: "people should not be forced to Europe, to the EU, by boat, for example. Dangerous journeys. We want to set up asylum centers in countries of first entry." They talk about setting up such*

> *centers in some African countries – not Libya. At the moment they are discussing about evacuating migrants from Libya, so that they don't jump on the boat. Evacuating, I wonder, to Niger, to Chad, I don't know. I mean, that's clearly closing the door* (Interview, Raphaelswerk, Hamburg, 12.2.17).

Here we see a clear association of migration management with "closing the door," an example of how the practices of humanitarianism today are underpinned by colonial histories and racialized classification (Nguyen, 2012). This quote highlights the perception of a racialized threat, an ongoing construction of Europe's "others" (Kuus, 2004, 2011), that underlies its securitized climate and bordering practices. The foundational presence of racialized impoverishment in European bordering is something many AVR practitioners are deeply aware of, as reflected in interviews – particularly as far-right groups across Europe stir racialized resentments and policy makers respond with calls for more efficient 'management'. These conflicts have as much to do with race and class positionings as they do with (geo-)political and economic influences on migration policy (Burrell & Hopkins, 2019; Ehrkamp, 2019).

In our interview conversations, some practitioners reflexively considered the politics of their work in relation to the limited range of choices migrants have in navigating their return. The remaining quotes below evidence how many remain conflicted about their work in what one practitioner called a "grey area" of AVR (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg, 11.22.17). The next chapter will discuss in further depth how practitioners at NGOs like Caritas navigate providing care in this conflicted context, out of a firm belief that it is better for migrants to have voluntary return as an assisted and dignified alternative to the violence of forced removal.

The following practitioner's voices further situate AVR in its political and spatial context, by directly engaging this question of how voluntary is voluntary return:

> *Alongside the real dilemma about how you maintain your integrity when you're getting a massive shed-load of money from the Home Office....alongside that dilemma, there was a second dilemma which is: what do we do about people in immigration detention? Do we*

> *offer them Assisted Voluntary Return advice? Because how voluntary is it, if they are in detention awaiting removal?* (Interview, Refugee Action 2, London, 12.7.16).

Another Refugee Action practitioner, who was involved with community outreach, discussed the difficulty of gaining migrant community organizations' trust in relation to the reality that "voluntary return" is not voluntary:

> *The difficult part was the beginning, to even get people to sit down and listen to us. [...] It was like "oh we have a drop in, we have invited Refugee Action to come and talk about voluntary return" – because obviously, you know, it's not voluntary in a way. It's like – [...] "no, no, no we don't want it" – and they wouldn't even turn up. But with time, it took us time* (Interview, Refugee Action 3, London, 5.9.17).

In this vein, a former counselor at Refugee Action candidly shared his conflicts around AVR:

> *I think everyone that worked on the program had some concerns, or some internal issues to address themselves. I think probably, sort of conceptually, the idea that it's a voluntary return program is quite difficult. Because, I mean, just to completely pull a figure out of the air, maybe one in ten of our clients, you know, had a realistic option that was in their home country that was probably better than the situation they were facing here. Most of the time it's enforced to some degree or another* (Interview, Refugee Action 4, London, 5.9.17).

Recognizing the political reality of coercion, in relation to legal impossibility, this practitioner then speaks to how they still felt the program played a meaningful role for migrants in navigating the UK's migration and asylum system:

> RA: *[...] And I think we felt that, particularly for me, the way I was able to relatively easily justify this service is that there was (sighs) – I mean, services have been cut so much. I've been working in this sector for about 10 years or so and broadly speaking, year on year funding is reduced.*
>
> AC: *In terms of pro-migrant services? Is that what you mean?*
>
> RA: *yeah, yeah, broadly. I mean, legal services particularly used to be very widespread. That's what I started off doing. [...] so that's, I mean, I think in instances I've felt uncomfortable, but broadly speaking I felt it was, in short, much better that Refugee Action was doing it rather than a private company or the Home Office. So I didn't feel too uncomfortable at an organizational level. […] you know, some people in this sector would argue to the hilt for people to stay in the country and push asylum claims further and further forward – which, obviously, if there are grounds to do so, by all means pursue. But I don't think you should completely close your mind to the fact that, for some*

> *people in some circumstances, they may objectively or subjectively feel that there are better options for them in returning home. And particularly having worked with asylum cases, you know that there [...] are situations where you know someone walks through the door and [...] you will tell them that "you have a very limited chance of this case succeeding" [...] So if they're able to return at a time of their choosing in a managed and supported way then that – there's at least a realistic chance that that is better than them living clandestinely in the UK for an extended period. Who knows? Because you can do that quite successfully and make a good life for yourself. But as long as that person is given the options, then if they wish to pursue that I didn't really have a problem with that in a general sense* (Interview, Refugee Action 4, London, 5.9.17).

This practitioner's reflection of migrant services – legal assistance, for example – being cut year after year reflects how Western states like the UK and US have been "hollowed out" by decades of neoliberalization (Mountz, 2010: 91), remaining obsessed with governing circulation (Foucault, 2007), while also retreating from social responsibility – particularly towards those from outside of its borders (Brown, 2010; Hyndman, 2000). In this political climate, the above practitioners collectively reflect a conflicted yet also committed perspective that it is better for migrants to have the option to voluntarily return, as a possible alternative in the choice between navigating undocumented life versus deportation. This is the conflicted context of care the next chapter engages.

V. Conclusion: The politics of implementing AVR, in contrast to depoliticizing discourses

To answer RQ2, this chapter has established three key points. First, discourses of humanitarianism are integral to IOM's framing of AVR as migration management. Second, these discourses have the political effect of depoliticizing migration management, framing the selective inclusions and exclusions, so acutely felt in returns policies, seem apolitical, technical and like a best-case scenario. A primary contribution of this chapter is to situate the seemingly apolitical discourses of AVR as humanitarian migration management in the spatial and political context of migrant exclusion amidst Europe's 2015-2016 migration 'crisis'. Third, AVR

practitioners at IOM and smaller NGOs are aware of the foundational paradox of care and control in AVR, as reflected here around their questioning of how voluntary is voluntary return? This brings us to the conflicted spatial and political context in which AVR is implemented – and the next chapter focuses on how practitioners navigate and negotiate care for migrants in this conflicted context.

This chapter has attended to the politics of IOM's framing of AVR, which, while being humanitarian, also maintains a consensual border between lives and life chances (Rancière, 2010; Duffield, 2010). Rancière (2010) claims that the activity of politics ("dissensus") is to trouble such borders between lives (and life-chances (Duffield, 2010)) that are politically qualified and those that are not (Rygiel, 2011; Isin & Rygiel, 2007). These borders are not immutable; they are socially constructed, and yet are maintained with convincing effect by powerful actors like the EU and IOM.

AVR policies reflect a fundamental inequality in how they allow wealthy countries like the EU, US, Australia and Canada to contract with IOM to spatially enforce migrants' proper place in a world of bordered nation-states. In the same way that managed borders point out the two-faced contradictions of neoliberalism's doctrine of freedom and openness, humanitarianism's ethical injunction of compassion also meets up against territorial, legal, economic, and social limits (Fassin, 2012; Reid-Henry, 2014). Thus, while liberal humanitarianism offers assistance for precarious lives, we can see it also governs through justifying and managing migrants' place in today's uneven spatial and political landscape of migration (Nguyen, 2012; Hyndman, 2000).

AVR shows us how institutional practices of care for poor migrants today are increasingly integrated with the control of their mobility – which we see in IOM's focus on

"orderly" and "managed" migration, as compared to spontaneous mobility (Ticktin, 2011). Under the management paradigm, migration is framed by IOM as a tool for development – but always in an ordered fashion, accommodating the security-centric fears of IOM's primary donor countries. The manner in which AVR programs juxtapose migrant assistance with migrant return reflects how humanitarianism is essentially paradoxical, balancing care and control, inequality and solidarity (Fassin, 2012; Redfield, 2005; Ticktin, 2011). IOM's institutional positioning between states and migrants helps to manage this spatial and political contradiction. This matters precisely because the interventions of humanitarian actors like IOM (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011; Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010), UNHCR (Hyndman, 2000, 2013), the Red Cross (Ticktin, 2011), MSF (Fassin, 2012; Redfield, 2005) or even state-based institutions claiming the mantle of humanitarianism and development (Essex, 2013; Ticktin, 2011) are so often depoliticized discursively. A recurring theme in much of the critical development and humanitarianism literature is how development, humanitarianism, migration management, and the law enact depoliticizing discourses that gloss over political differentiations and exclusions. To contribute to this field, this chapter's analysis described the depoliticizing framings through which IOM enrolls AVR as migration management, while also arguing that the political stakes of these practices are in fact quite significant for migrants. While state and IOM practitioners have varying interests in securitized management, the following empirical chapter describes how practitioners at specifically migrant-focused NGO's navigate their humanitarian mandates to assist migrants amidst this conflicted spatial and political context of AVR.

CHAPTER SIX

Humanitarianism as conflicted care: Negotiating migrant assistance in AVR

I. Introduction

A fundamental argument of this dissertation is that humanitarian institutions, discourses, and practices are thoroughly imbricated with securitization through Europe's management of migration. In this context, studying AVR reveals how humanitarian practitioners provide assistance to migrants in ways that are often caring, but also paradoxically interwoven with the security interests of states as they govern spontaneous migration (Fassin, 2012; Williams, 2015). This chapter analyzes humanitarianism as "conflicted care" within conditions of extremely unequal power between migrants and migration managers[8]. To answer RQ4, I investigate the AVR encounter between practitioner and migrant:

> **RQ4:** What politics and care ethical practices of humanitarianism are possible in implementing AVR across European sites? What limitations do practitioners face in providing caring humanitarian assistance to migrants through AVR?

This encounter provides a lens onto the limits and potentials of humanitarian assistance for migrants in Europe today.

Previous chapters have established several key empirical realities about AVR's implementation, which form a foundation for the arguments made in this chapter. First, AVR programs entail return counseling and the provision of monetary and logistical support for migrants who decide to return to their country of origin. Second, AVR is discursively promoted as a humanitarian policy of migration management. Third, in practice, AVR is often an

[8] This chapter is derived from a co-written article with Victoria Lawson, published in 2020 in Political Geography (Crane & Lawson, 2020). In this chapter, I have changed all plural pronouns to singular for the sake of consistency with the rest of the dissertation.

alternative to formal deportation for undocumented immigrants and "appeals-rights-exhausted" asylum-seekers. Fourth, AVR is implemented through a broad range of organizations, from small humanitarian NGOs, to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to the UK Home Office. All of this means that, amidst recent influxes of spontaneous migration into the European Union, many AVR staffers are negotiating the realities of implementing a humanitarian program for migrants in a political climate that is increasingly hostile to their existence, where many EU leaders prefer to govern migration through deportation.

Chapter Three discussed how migration management and humanitarian policies for migrants have become increasingly contested amidst the 2015-2016 migration "crisis" in Europe (McConnell, et al., 2017). In the wake of Brexit, with nationalist right-wing parties ascendant, policymakers across the continent are reacting against spontaneous migration with bordering practices that assert sovereignty at multiple scales (Jones, et al., 2017). For policymakers in Brussels, the perceived lack of effective migrant returns policies poses an existential threat for the future of the European Union in this climate. AVR has thus drawn varying, often contested, attention from politicians, media and diverse constituencies. Chapter Four addressed how this means that practitioners implement AVR in conflicted spaces that are funded and framed by the dueling imperatives of humanitarian assistance *and* securitization. This chapter's analysis begins from Chapter Five's conclusion: that AVR programs operate within a conflicted political and spatial context that paradoxically maps onto the policy's humanitarian framings of voluntarism, dignity and choice.

This chapter draws on interviews with AVR staffers in four humanitarian organizations across Europe. These four organizations are particularly committed to humanitarianism: all non-profit, pro-migrant, engaged in advocacy work, and critical of the idea of migration as something

to be "managed." And yet, in order to enact their humanitarian mandates, all received funds from states that were investing in migration management. Though these organizations partner with IOM, they also tended to differentiate their approach from IOM's as not being about "management." Chapter Three discussed the Refugee Action and Home Office relationship, which provides some context for how these four NGOs are institutionally positioned relative to states in the AVR network: logistically cooperative, but politically and operationally divergent in their approaches to AVR. Because these four organizations are among the most committed to maintaining humanitarian principles, I explore the constraints and possibilities they face in implementing AVR from this standpoint. This chapter provides a situated, on the ground perspective of how these four NGOs negotiate providing care and assistance in Europe's securitized climate of migration management.

The first of these organizations is Refugee Action, a UK-based NGO that took a principled humanitarian line with AVR from 2011-2015, amidst governmental pressure to instrumentalize the program for security. As discussed in Chapter Three, the UK Home Office fully took over the country's AVR program in 2016. Second and third are Caritas in Belgium and Germany and Raphaelswerk in Germany – both of which are Catholic organizations, deriving their humanitarian mandate, and independence from governments, on this basis. Finally, ZRB is a pro-migrant assistance organization in Germany who counsels and works with migrants on their decision to return. Each of these organizations receive state funding, but strive to maintain independence so that they can implement AVR in a manner they understand to be humanitarian. These four organizations collectively provide a case study of the conflicts, possibilities and limitations of humanitarian assistance in the European migration context today.

Inspired by feminist geopolitics, this chapter examines how AVR staffers at these NGOs, as relatively privileged humanitarian actors, provide care to vulnerable migrants in a politically uncaring context (Hyndman, 2004; Massaro & Williams, 2013). Feminist geopolitics foregrounds the embodiment of institutions, which focuses an attention on how individuals within institutions politically enact both governance and change (Mountz, 2010). As an analytical lens for this chapter, feminist geopolitics allows me to consider biopolitical and geopolitical relations of care and governance (Hyndman, 2012). The practitioners in this chapter enact the fundamental humanitarian impulse of alleviating suffering amidst adverse conditions, what Redfield (2005) terms a "minimalist biopolitics." I consider these acts, which are consequential in the daily lives of migrants, as "minor acts of care." But I further ask whether implementing AVR only ever allows for minor acts of care or whether migration managers can enact a more disruptive politics that challenges the structural conditions of migrant removal policies.

As I have argued elsewhere (Crane & Lawson, 2020), humanitarian institutions are always embodied, meaning the paradoxical arrangements of humanitarian assistance are daily negotiated by practitioners in relation with migrants (Hyndman, 2000; Mountz, 2010; Ticktin, 2011). However, we know relatively little about how these tensions are managed by people at the ground level of policy implementation. Having previously established the paradoxical and conflicted context of AVR, engaging with feminist care ethics now allows me to examine how staffers engage in decision-making about which needs of migrants can be addressed and in what fashion. Care ethical analysis of humanitarian interventions takes seriously the idea that care ethics are not practiced in the abstract, but rather that care must be understood in context of social relations in particular times and places (Lawson, 2007b). Therefore, this chapter's analysis

draws from interviews with AVR practitioners at four explicitly-humanitarian migration NGOs in Germany, the UK and Belgium to understand how they navigate the politics of caring for migrants in the post-2015 European context.

Though embedded in highly unequal power relations, AVR is not a 'command and control' operation. In this chapter, I investigate the situated perspectives and practices of staffers attempting to run a caring program in a decidedly uncaring context. This chapter contributes to emerging literatures in political geography by exploring AVR as a lens onto the conflicting, and yet constitutive tensions between humanitarianism, care, and securitization. My interviews reveal the negotiations involved in implementing AVR wherein staff attempt to provide care for migrants who are in spaces of limbo and near-impossibility to remain in Europe legally. Focusing on humanitarian AVR practitioners who are providing care for vulnerable migrants, I ask what are the possibilities for care ethical actions in a context where privileged people are mobilizing resources and could challenge political norms?

II. Placing humanitarianism and care ethics into conversation

The key question for this chapter is to what extent and how do AVR practitioners negotiate the conflicts around caring for migrants in post-2015 Europe's decidedly uncaring context. I analyze the politics of humanitarianism as conflicted care in migration management, inspired by Walters' (2011: 158) call to "undertake a fuller mapping of the humanitarian border in relation to certain trajectories of government." I explore the extent to which staffers enact a care politics that enunciates responsibility for processes producing the need for AVR. In this sense, care is more than something administered to precarious migrants; it is a lens for exploring the conflicts experienced by staff engaged in AVR.

AVR staffers at humanitarian NGOs are on the frontlines of conflicted care. I explore whether staffers enact "double agency" in their work. Double agency refers to how practitioners both engage in practices of conforming to institutional norms while also deploying their positions of relative power to question how their institutions implement AVR (Roy, 2010). My interviews explore the extent to which staff build an insider critique of AVR policies, calling into question the ethics and limits of these practices. At the same time, I investigate their ongoing compliance with AVR and the ways in which their work continues to reproduce these very forms of migration control. In this sense, I explore both the possibilities and limitations for transformation within AVR practices and humanitarianism as conflicted care by unpacking this situated and unequal practice.

How then is the management of migration entangled with humanitarian practices of care? Ticktin (2011) and Williams (2015) both connect migration management and humanitarianism, arguing that they produce oppressive regimes of care that depoliticize conditions of suffering and operate to securitize borders. Williams (2015) explores humanitarianism as "contingent care," analyzing how the discretionary practices of border patrol agents at the US-Mexico border link medical care and enforcement in ways that facilitate deportation. Ticktin (2011) explores care as a regime of power over immigration. Discussing how humanitarian actors in France end up "doing politics" despite not having a political mandate, Ticktin (2011: 24) shows how a "politics of care reproduces a second-class status for immigrants in France." Despite their valuable contributions to understanding humanitarian care as governance, neither of these projects theorizes care as an analytic. Rather, care is conceptualized only as something provided for extreme needs of undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers under emergency circumstances as defined by the government. Conflating medical care and humanitarianism, framing issues of care

as only for qualified sick and injured bodies, narrows conceptualizations of care in ways that can reinforce existing structures of governance and power.

Ticktin (2011) distinguishes between *caring* and *curing.* Caring refers to a depoliticized and moralistic set of responses addressing immediate, embodied needs for assistance; a form of caring that often produces relations of dependency. Curing, by contrast, is an analytical move that attends to the emplaced social, political and material conditions that produce precarity. Curing is a central concern of feminist care ethics (Lawson, 2007b; Massey, 2004; Raghuram, 2016); it politicizes care by insisting that attention be paid to society's collective responsibilities for processes that produce migrant vulnerability in the first place. Within European and U.S. societies, citizens and migrants are interdependent, even as North Atlantic economies and lifestyles are continuously constructed through a range of policies that render certain subjects unequally vulnerable. North Atlantic countries depend on the cheapened labor of vulnerable migrants to sustain high consumption lifestyles; and yet North Atlantic governments resist taking responsibility for people made vulnerable by those very policies.

Therefore, in the context of the larger dissertation, care ethics provide a lens for this chapter to consider the limits of humanitarianism in AVR. Looking at the political limits for humanitarian practitioners to make fundamental change to migrant conditions and possibilities precisely reveals the imbrication of humanitarianism with security. Care ethics, then, frames the political possibilities of humanitarian assistance in new ways by focusing on the relationship between how care is provided and how the need for care (i.e., migrant precarity) is produced by larger inequities. Care is a political concept when we employ it to interrogate who cares for whom and under what conditions (Tronto, 1993). The discursive construction of migration management as apolitical is only possible under conditions where the vast majority of European

residents can ignore the ways in which their privilege rests on unequal power relations that send vulnerable people to Europe from around the globe (Butler, 2004; Robinson, 1999). By contrast, feminist care ethical analysis argues for a politics of responsibility and action precisely because European lives have benefited from histories and practices that shape the vulnerability of some migrant lives.

Much research on migration and care has focused on relatively vulnerable workers migrating to North Atlantic states to provide care for privileged people (England & Henry, 2013; Lawson, 2010; Parreñas, 2001a; Williams, 2011; Yeates, 2008). These global migration flows have consolidated privilege for middle class households precisely because immigrant care workers are positioned within a double move: the privatization of care in North Atlantic states depends upon the production of outsider subjects as vulnerable workers and this is accomplished through border enforcement and migration management. European bordering practices define some immigrant care workers as undocumented and so produce vulnerable, racialized and low-wage workers whose labor bolsters public disinvestments and supports the privatization of what was once publicly funded care into homes and markets (England, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003; Parreñas, 2001b). At the same time, the representation of racialized and 'illegal' others strengthens narratives of exclusionary citizenship and the urgency of controlling borders against spontaneous migration (Rygiel, 2011).

However, this dissertation's study of AVR illustrates that care is not always performed by the vulnerable for the powerful. Indeed, AVR is precisely the opposite: a site wherein privileged actors perform care for the vulnerable. Butler (2004) argues that encounters across difference hold the possibility for critical awareness of how privileged actors are implicated in the suffering of those framed as other, and of the need for solidarity. Feminist care ethics provides an analytic

to explore what caring looks like under highly unequal power relations. Recognizing that all humanitarian work occurs on a continuum of care and control, I analyze what being care ethical means when AVR is short-term and limited. Thinking about care as politics takes us to how the tensions of care versus control are enacted in the daily work of practitioners. Does the work of AVR ever shift attention and action on the part of staffers to structural inequalities and the securitization of borders? In this chapter, I explore minor acts of care, the immediate provision of care for returning migrants. Further, I investigate the extent to which AVR leads staffers to move towards a disruptive politics of care focused on the underlying political-economic causes of migrant vulnerability.

III. Researching humanitarian care in the securitized context of EU migration management

III.A. The Shifting Political Context for AVR

Previous chapters have established that AVR operates within an increasingly securitized context of EU migration management. In the larger context of EU migration, some migrants are much more likely to get asylum than others, based on the perceived humanitarian condition and geopolitical relations surrounding their country of origin. As discussed in Chapter Three, the majority of spontaneous migrants within EU territory will not qualify for asylum and this creates substantial demand for AVR as states seek to return them. Not all migrants who return via AVR are 'failed' asylum seekers; some have familial or other personal reasons to return home. Nonetheless, the majority of migrants experience AVR as a conflicted space in which AVR staffers offer counseling assistance and state migration authorities promote expedient removal.

For the organizations of interest in this chapter, all humanitarian NGOs, this political climate had four key effects on how they implement AVR. First, AVR is a heightened priority

for EU governments, bringing increased funding. Many government and NGO officials mentioned that AVR is considerably more cost-effective for states compared to forced removal. Though AVR lacks the performative visibility of forced removal that some on the far-right demand, interviews with government officials explained that it is difficult and expensive to forcibly deport migrants to certain countries. AVR still signals to right-wingers that 'something is being done' about the number of appeals rights exhausted asylum-seekers – and this, combined with its cost-effectiveness, has made it a top priority for many EU and national government members. This has led many humanitarian practitioners to feel that

> *Voluntary Return has become a management tool at the moment. So it started really as a social program: "if you want to, we can help." And now it's "you have to return […] if you do not return voluntarily, it will be forced"* (Interview, Caritas Belgium, Brussels, 12.12.16).

In this political context, preventing their humanitarian programs from being instrumentalized is an ongoing struggle for NGOs implementing AVR.

A second effect of this political climate is increasing state involvement in what for years was primarily an NGO-run program. This leads to a confusing situation for migrants, described by an AVR counselor in Germany:

> *C: So what happens is – because the government is highly interested in enforcing return [...] the German government now opened lots of return counseling centers itself. [...] So they say, "look, you can sign here, you can leave voluntarily, or I give your folder right away to the deportation department."*
>
> *AC: So the idea of confidentiality – it's not a confidential counseling?*
>
> *C: No. You can't go there to just get information. [...] But it's because the government sees such a need for higher return numbers. So for us as NGOs, that's actually a big struggle now. The NGOs offered AVR for a really long time, maybe at least fifteen years. And now it feels like the government is stepping in and says, "I think we want to do it ourselves"* (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg, 11.22.17).

This practitioner highlights how AVR has become the most expedient, politically palatable and cost-effective measure for migrant return, leading to increased governmental involvement which challenges NGOs' humanitarian principles.

The loss of confidentiality mentioned above reflects a third effect of this political climate: how AVR can actually be practiced in a humanitarian manner. Many EU countries have shortened the period migrants have to voluntarily return before being subject to deportation after receiving a negative asylum decision. This means that migrants feel pressure to decide quickly, often without adequate time for proper counseling. An AVR practitioner in Germany voiced concern around the issue of timing:

> *There is rarely much time, nowadays, for counseling. [...] Many people in need of counseling, we don't even see anymore. And those we see, too many have only some days for a decision [...] this is not a humanitarian policy anymore* (Interview, Raphaelswerk, Hamburg, 12.2.17).

Government policies structure the daily work of NGOs with migrants and condition how migrants decide about returning. The government's speeding up of the return timeline translates into uncaring practices – migrants lack time to understand their options and/or process their own decision.

A final effect of this political climate is that some organizations, for whom AVR was anathema, have now entered AVR practice on their own terms – precisely because they feel like they can do it in a more humanitarian fashion than state agencies. Refugee Action was a good example of this progression, as reflected by this practitioner:

> *At the beginning, we took the contract and I'm telling you the truth, within the staff of Refugee Action we were fuming, saying "yes, we need the money" – because we had lost our advice contract as well – "but we shouldn't really just take this kind of program." But THEN when you looked at the numbers of people signing for voluntary return without proper advice, who can have a better service, better legal advice – it was the right thing to do* (Interview, Refugee Action #2, London, 5.9.17).

This quote reveals the institutional reality of NGOs needing money to survive, but also finding it within their humanitarian mandate to provide a better AVR service – even though it can be an unpopular program in the NGO sector. This was echoed by a third official at Refugee Action:

> *I think in instances I've felt uncomfortable, but broadly speaking I felt it was [...] much better that Refugee Action was doing it rather than a private company or the Home Office* (Interview, Refugee Action #3, London, 5.9.17).

Taken together, the changing political climate in Europe has increased state funding and direct state involvement in AVR, reducing the amount of time migrants have to process vital decisions about their futures. As discussed in Chapter Three, many of the migrants who meet with AVR counselors typically have very few, if any, legal options to stay in Europe. This means they face a choice between undocumented life – with the ever-present threat of deportation, and a multi-year ban on returning to the EU following deportation – or voluntary return with travel and financial assistance. The presence of appeals rights exhausted asylum-seekers in EU countries means that governments are keen to see numbers of returns rise, and so they are channeling government resources to AVR. Humanitarian organizations need this money for funding but seek to avoid being instrumentalized by focusing their work with migrants who they believe really need humanitarian counseling through AVR. All of this creates a conflicted context of care that staffers from these humanitarian NGOs must navigate in implementing AVR programs.

III.B. Implementing AVR as conflicted care

How do AVR practitioners navigate the conflict between humanitarianism and securitization in European migrant return policies? As detailed in Chapter Four, AVR policy involves a suite of practices from information campaigns in migrant communities, to booking one-way travel for migrants to return home, accompaniment of migrants at the airport and reintegration assistance for migrants upon returning home. However, counseling sessions between migrants and

practitioners are at the heart of AVR as a humanitarian policy. Practitioners are challenged at the outset in that the majority of migrants arrive to their counseling sessions already in undocumented status, at risk of deportation. This means that AVR practitioners often provide counseling and advice for migrants based upon a very limited, sometimes nonexistent, range of legal options for them to stay in Europe. In this section, I explore how AVR staffers from four humanitarian NGOs navigate internal conflicts with their own humanitarian impulses as they navigate the broader political terrain.

Counseling is a key practice that differentiates AVR from forced deportation. These counseling conversations between practitioner and migrant happen at appointments and open "return desk" hours, and center on the migrant's current circumstances in Europe and their decision to return:

> *[...] you'll ask about immigration status; you'll ask about if they have any protection concerns if they return, if they need a solicitor; you'll ask about their housing situation - some people might be homeless, some people might need support from social services; you do the referral to social services, and so on* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

Other questions counselors would typically ask include nationality, how long migrants have been in the country and if they have applied for asylum. Many of the AVR counselors saw this conversation as key to the humanitarian implementation of AVR, to first understand the individual migrants' circumstances and then provide "non-directive" advice to help them navigate a confusing system:

> *[…] I think to an extent we were able to fill in some of the gaps in service provision, at least in terms of advice and signposting, and making sure people were aware of their options […] you know […] A lot of people have had very bad legal advice and one thing we were able to do quite straightforwardly is to refer them to the appropriately accredited solicitors for legal aid, advice, and assistance, potentially. So, I think that was how I kind of squared the circle in my own head. [...] We stuck very clearly to the ethos of non-directive advice. It was the client's decision to go back, even when we were uncomfortable with it* (Interview, Refugee Action #3, London, 5.9.17).

The practitioner's need to "square the circle in my own head" reflects the fraught nature of these programs and how NGO staffers navigate personal politics in relation to governmental realities. Counseling operates as a caring practice that attends to immediate needs of the migrant, providing non-directive advice. However, AVR counseling does not cure the migrant's precarity, in a feminist care ethics sense, because nothing in this process allows staffers to address the political, economic and social conditions giving rise to their precarity.

Indeed, for many practitioners AVR involves an ongoing set of negotiations – with the migrant they are counseling, with the state as funder, and with themselves. This is illustrated by a counselor at ZRB:

> *[AVR] is a really interesting field. But it's also a field where you really have to be careful. [...] You always have to reflect on this work, because this is a critical political work that we do here in our project. But we in our welfare organization, we are 100% pro-asylum. But we have to accept our law, and the law says these people have to go back. My personal opinion is, of course, something else. But in my work, I have to inform my clients about the law situation and where they are standing with their asylum case at the moment* (Interview, ZRB, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

The practitioner considers how AVR is "critical political work," affecting migrants' futures and directly intervening in the fraught politics around migration in Europe. And yet, despite their personal politics, the law is the ultimate structuring condition for political possibilities for migrants in AVR.

As discussed in Chapter Five, the reality of legal impossibility, of hard legal limits on migrants' possibilities to stay, led practitioners at these NGOs to consider just how "voluntary" AVR actually is. After telling two particularly heart-wrenching stories – one of a young migrant with a rare disease that could not be treated in their home country still deciding to voluntarily return in order to reunite with his mother who was not allowed to remain in the UK; and another about an undocumented migrant with cancer voluntarily returning because they were not eligible

for chemotherapy from the NHS – an AVR practitioner reflected on their own citizenship-based privilege:

> *Helping that family leave was heartbreaking [...] I don't feel conflicted about my helping them, because this is what Refugee Action was about: client choice is first, we were adamant about that. That was what they wanted. We felt that young person had the capacity to make that decision [...] and that was something we had to respect. Now on a personal level, of course, your heart breaks, you know? [...] It's related to me as a human being. How can I have people in front of me that are less of a human being than I am? Just because they're less lucky than I am to be born in an EU country* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

This counselor goes on to question whether AVR is truly voluntary, reflecting on the challenges of caring in an uncaring context:

> *So [...] those two perhaps were the most challenging moments for me [...] It was related to how a very cruel or harsh environment – anti-immigration sentiment in a country – can force people with choices that are really not choices. [...] You know, you want to return because that's what you've chosen, it's best for you, you want to die with your family, you want to die with your Mom. But is it really a choice? [...] And we fought really hard for that young man, for example, to gain access to legal advice and find a legal route for him to stay here if he wanted to […] but we couldn't do that for his mother. It was not possible* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

Referencing the name of Refugee Action's AVR program, "Choices," this counselor challenges the framing of AVR as a free choice, considering how the options available to migrants are often uncaring. The staff could advocate for this boy to remain in the UK and receive treatment, but this option was impossible for his Mother. This staffer's experience with implementing AVR starkly reflects the violence of how the EU bordering regime constructs migrant deportability and produces ongoing vulnerabilities. Humanitarian NGOs' advocacy for migrants' stay from forced removal is often based on a logic of choice as a human right. However, in such an uncaring context, the liberal framework of rights and choices cannot be fully care ethical due to its necessary appeal to, and indeed empowerment of, the state as "responsible agent and source of redress" (Engle Merry, 2009: 216).

Many practitioners were keen to note that not all migrants who return voluntarily do so under such legally constricted circumstances. The same counselor above reflected on how AVR was not always coercive and that it was possible for AVR to be humanitarian by offering an "empowering choice" that cared for migrants' individual circumstances:

> *And one thing that really struck me when I started this job is that not everybody will leave because they don't have any options. For many people this will be the best option for them – because that's what they want to do. Something that I encountered really often is that someone would return because they missed their family. Somebody would return because their father or mother or a parent was dying and [...] it was really important for them to be with them. So I'd say, people that didn't have any options were, of course, a good majority of the people that we'd work (with), but it wasn't everybody. It was an empowering choice for some as well* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

Cases such as these are clearly less-conflicted moments of humanitarian assistance, where AVR facilitated travel consistent with migrants' own desires for their future. However, many staffers interviewed realize that the majority of clients don't have a feasible legal option to stay:

> *C: So, the problem is (sighs) if we really said we want to offer voluntary return counsel in its purest form, we could only really counsel the ones with the right to stay in Germany, and maybe the ones who haven't received their first reply from the BAMF [German asylum authority]. Because then it's really voluntary. Right?*
>
> *AC: Sure, right.*
>
> *C: But that's not the majority of our clients. So that's why I say it's always a grey area […] But still we say, for us, it's important that it's a free choice. It's on their terms. They can return with dignity* (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg, 11.22.17).

The "grey area" described here and in the previous quote, advising migrants on returning "voluntarily" who have no legal option to remain, was a common theme amongst interviews with AVR practitioners. Within this structurally uncaring context, staffers are often limited to offering minor acts of care.

IV. AVR as care (ethical)

Does the conflicted work of AVR move staffers towards more care ethical practices and politics? Are practitioners willing or able to take actions in response to the larger inequities that produce undocumented migration and anti-immigrant politics? Practitioners often spoke about specific humanitarian commitments they maintain in their AVR work, which they believe differentiates them from state governments. Staffers are aware of the structural context within which they are working, meeting with clients who are often already in undocumented status. This section explores the ways in which staffers mobilize their relative privilege (vis-a-vis their clients) to engage in care ethical practices in the context of regimes of migration management. I consider whether their conflicted work shapes their politics and the possibilities and limits of their humanitarian interventions.

IV.A. Minor acts of Care

As I have argued elsewhere (Crane & Lawson, 2020), while enacting humanitarian practices, many staffers engage in 'minor acts of care': practices that are meaningful in the context of daily lives, but that do not rise to the level of a disruptive politics of care in the context of EU border securitization. These minor acts of care do allow migrants to understand the rules, constraints and options ahead for them – and to choose whether to proceed with returning via AVR or remain in the country.

The first minor act of care, which practitioners saw as essential to earning migrants' trust, was giving non-directive, impartial, confidential advice:

> *I would try and create a safe space for them by starting immediately and saying, you know, "everything you tell me will be confidential [...] I do not work for the Home Office. If you do not want me to disclose something to the Home Office I will not do that. I will help you submit an application to them. But anything else you tell me will be confidential." [...] I tried always to reinforce the fact that we are independent* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

With the UK Home Office referring migrants in London to Refugee Action for return counseling, while also pressuring Refugee Action to increase the number of returns, this is what confidentiality looked like in practice:

> *The Home Office used to ring us up and say, "what happened to so and so?" and we would say, "I can't confirm, I can't say anything about them [...] we can't confirm anything about whether they saw us, and if they saw us, what their thinking is. Because that's something for them to decide. If and when a client says, "yes I'm going home," we will fill in the form, we'll send it to you (HO) and then you'll know. But that's the only point"* (Interview, Refugee Action #1, London, 12.7.16).

This same practitioner further explains the principle of non-directive, "pre-decision" advice:

> *Our basic line was "we have no interest in whether somebody returns or not, what our interest is, is in whether somebody has been able to make an informed decision on the information we've given them that is as is good as can be made for them in their circumstances. And sometimes those circumstances were very, very difficult because of the system, etc. – and because of what they faced if they went home* (Interview, Refugee Action #1, London, 12.7.16).

This reflects the principle that migrants are making their own decisions, however limited by the legal system; that they are not being told deterministically to return or stay in the AVR counseling process. For many practitioners, this involved assuring migrants that their confidentiality would be protected and maintaining an open-door policy:

> *When the person comes, I usually introduce myself, and introduce my counseling center, what we do. Because clients need to understand exactly what services we offer. [...] Then I tell them that everything we discuss will remain in this room, unless he gives me permission to talk to third parties. [...] I work for an NGO, and all of our discussions have no legal consequences. [...] Just because he is here doesn't mean that he needs to return right away, but that it's really very much free. And yeah, he can walk out of here and never come back, and that's also fine* (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg, 11.22.17).

This quote reflects the importance for potential returnees to be able to take their time with the decision and have the freedom to walk away without legal consequence.

A second minor act of care is listening to migrants' stories, ensuring they feel heard, have a chance to tell their story, and understand their options regarding returning or staying in Europe:

> *So it's a kind of humanitarian work. Of course, we often cannot avoid that you are due to leave – either removed, forcibly returned, or leave by yourself. But at least to listen to you on a kind-of eye-level, and give you some choice and time to consider it* (Interview, Raphaelswerk, Hamburg, 12.2.17).

This act of listening was explicitly connected to the notion of care by another practitioner:

> *RA: People [...] wouldn't be given space and informed advice; so charities like us were amongst the very few that would do this. And I really loved it that we had the capacity [...] to sit down with people and talk to them, and offer legal advice, and signpost them, if need be, to other organizations. And just, sometimes, just to say "you know what, I'm here. I'll listen to you. I care for you." I mean, obviously, I wouldn't say that during the appointment in those words, but for me that was what was important.*
>
> *AC: To treat the interaction in a caring way?*
>
> *RA. Yeah, yeah. Because it's people, you know. [...] I think for all of us that worked here, it was really important to us, what we did: you care. You care about people* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

Evidenced by the quote above, minor acts of care are caring practices by staffers that provide the most support possible to migrants within the existing system. This practitioner engages in acts of attentiveness, mutuality and other-regardingness, a key part of care ethical practice (Tronto, 1993). In this quote the same practitioner affords their client dignity and respect, explaining all the possibilities and supporting the client's choice to remain undocumented in the UK:

> *What I really valued is that we would never push clients to return. What the clients want to do was at the heart of everything we did. So we would meet people where they would be street homeless, no future at all here in the UK – still wouldn't want to leave. "That's fine with me, I respect that." And being able to [...] allow people the space as well to have somebody that will sit down with them, discuss their options, show them respect – you know, allow them to have personal dignity, which is something that really I think they really lack in the UK* (Interview, Refugee Action #4, London, 5.9.17).

In a migration system focused on enforcement, humanitarian AVR counseling counters the lack of respect and the denial of dignity that migrants face in a European context that frames migrants as 'deportable others.' This is a paradoxical climate in which liberal humanitarian policies coexist with the creation of deportability and exclusion, which maintains privilege for citizens. Care ethics keeps this broader context front and center as we consider the limitations of caring versus curing.

Related to the above, a third minor form of care in how counselors practice AVR is honesty – a frank model of communication that allows migrants to understand their options and make an informed decision:

> *And then they are coming to us, they are crying, crying, crying: "what should I do? I got my negative answer." [...] We inform the people about every possibility they have: what possibility is left to stay here OR if there is no possibility, then you have to tell it to your client openly [...] you have to tell them the truth* (Interview, ZRB, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

For this practitioner, helping migrants ascertain an accurate understanding of where they stand in their asylum process is an act of care:

> *You have to tell your client, "OK, you have these three options, and now you have to make a decision." The most important thing is to inform the clients about their asylum case: is everything finished? Is there another way? Which would be the way to stay here? If everything is finished, and there is [...] no possibility to stay in Germany, then we take a look at what can we do for you if you really have to return. Can we help you with finding work? Or [...] with money so that you can rent an apartment, that you can buy clothes or send the children to school, buy schoolbooks, whatever? [...] And this is always the second step. The first step is: is there any possibility to stay?* (Interview, ZRB, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

Many practitioners said one of the first steps in AVR counseling is to figure out if migrants have any legal possibility to stay, or if their appeals rights are exhausted. The above quote reflects the importance of honesty and being realistic with migrants in this determination, but also channeling that towards proactive assistance.

This connects to a fourth minor act of care: that of providing material relief for migrants, such as commercial flights (as opposed to securitized charter flights used in formal deportation), cash-in-hand and reintegration assistance:

> *Personally, I just see the need for someone to facilitate the migration for the less-privileged people. And usually when they come to my office to pick up the ticket and some of the money, and you know, all the documents, you can tell that they are really grateful. They receive the assistance – you know, when facing the bureaucratic jungle. They receive the possibility to travel, even though they have no money. So, I can just tell from my daily experiences that it is really helping people. [...] This Iraqi lady, she tried to return on her own, but it didn't work. It was just too complicated, and she had medical*

> *issues [...] we just took it step-by-step – and it's a lengthy process, but I can tell that she feels safe, and that she feels well taken care of. Yeah, so it's actually really gratifying, seeing people feeling taken care of [...] even though it's a grey area – but you are still helping* (Interview, Caritas, Augsburg, 11.22.17).

Clearly these staffers find satisfying opportunities to help migrants feel "taken care of," despite the uncaring context that makes AVR a "grey area." However, considering care as politics, I note the distinction between caring and curing in the practices of these NGOs (Ticktin, 2011). These minor acts fall short of curing, in a fully care ethical sense, in that they do not address society's collective responsibilities for producing migrant vulnerability, nor do they challenge the criminalization of migrants. While staffers are intentional about potential returnees feeling cared for in the counseling encounter, these acts of care are only for specific individuals. As such many AVR counseling sessions cannot account for the ways in which conditions of class, citizenship, gender and racialization produce the vulnerabilities they are addressing. In this sense, care provided with humanitarian intent is nonetheless in the minor register, it is caring in the moment and for that person in limited ways, but it cannot address the underlying conditions producing migrant precarity.

IV.B. Disruptive care politics

Occasionally AVR practitioners do engage in actions that are more disruptive of Europe's migration management regime. The first involves ways in which practitioners try to bend the law when possible and find any openings within the system for their clients. However, part of AVR counseling is also helping migrants keep the future open – knowing migrants can come back to Europe if they voluntarily return; whereas, if they are forcibly deported, they cannot come back for 5 years.

> *This is the difference [...] You can also return voluntary with the Foreign Office, but [...] you are just a number. And the Foreign Office only sees: "Ok, he's got a negative answer [...] this person has to leave the country as soon as possible. And I, as the Foreign Office,*

> *support to enforce this situation." And we are in this lucky situation that we don't have to go in this direction. So, it's up to us how many people will return with our project, or how much money I give. Or if I say, "let's go one last time to the lawyer, let's check it again" or "please go to the doctor, let's go to the hospital, maybe you cannot travel for the next six months and we can win some time and take care about another solution so that you get the permission to stay." [...] So we are absolutely open in our work in this. Yeah, I think if this wouldn't be like that, I would say, 90% or maybe nobody of my colleagues would work here* (Interview, ZRB, Nuremberg, 11.24.17).

Counselors work to exert political discretion, and occasionally a space emerges for resisting the exclusionary bordering regimes of migration management. For humanitarian NGOs like ZRB in Nuremberg and Raphaelswerk in Hamburg, staffers work to find any way that migrants have a chance to stay legally. A negative asylum decision from state migration authorities need not automatically trigger the voluntary return process. Instead, other possibilities besides return are thoroughly explored:

> *They listen to your story: what do you want to do? Why are you here? Are you really motivated to leave? If not, [...] why do you feel you cannot return? What's behind this? If the counselor feels the procedure was not proper, the asylum procedure – there was a mistake in the procedure, or it was not properly looked into – they would check your hearing protocol, the decision, and [...] they will go back to a refugee lawyer and ask this person to check the case. [...] So, as Refugee Action called it, "Choices": my colleagues, they will inform you about the options you have, and also the assistance you can get, and whether we have partners in the country of return. And if you say, "I cannot, I'm not protected; I would be persecuted when I return," they look into your case again. And then they leave you, like, "now think about it"* (Interview, Raphaelswerk, Hamburg, 12.2.17).

This practitioner in Germany speaks to having a similar approach to Refugee Action's in the UK, being open to any possibility for migrants to remain, if they wish, and to take this as far as possible in the courts.

The second more disruptive act of care, one that is expressed through double agency (Roy, 2010), involves political advocacy work by staffers on behalf of migrants directed at state policy:

> *I mean, we never get tired of lobbying, of advocacy, work. It's our job. There might be minor changes possible by talking to them all the time, but in the current climate, I consider it very difficult to get through [...]. As long as there are elections, and politicians are looking towards elections, and voters. Of course we often argue that we are citizens, we are taxpayers – but they argue the same: there are other taxpayers not happy with the situation. [...] The new right-wing party, the Alternative for Germany, they of course also are lobbying against any of this humanitarian stuff. [...] My colleagues on site at the counseling services, they tell me, yes, we can make a difference and we make a difference. It starts with sitting with you on eye level. They say it's extremely obvious and important, this issue of trust. And they say, you see these persons, they have made it to Germany, they are strong. They also know that we can't change the law. But to discuss the issue in a safe atmosphere, in a climate of trust, seems to be very important. And that someone is listening and not just opening a file - listening and not pushing towards any decision* (Interview, Raphaelswerk, Hamburg, 12.2.17).

This quote encapsulates how double agency is a complex position of both constraint and political possibility. The conflictedness of care in AVR reflects this, resonating in the minor register but continually coming up against larger uncaring/limiting conditions of the EU's bordering regime. This staff member seems painfully aware that ultimately curing takes place on a longer timeframe and in different sites, such as lobbying the government and pushing for structural changes.

AVR takes place in institutional spaces where migrants and practitioners encounter one another and navigate the politics of migration management and humanitarianism from vastly different positionalities. AVR practitioners implement humanitarian principles as privileged subjects striving to maintain the dignity of migrants and dealing with the criminalization migrants face in Europe's post-colonial context of migration management, particularly with racist right-wing parties ascending. In this political climate, the network of humanitarian NGOs discussed in this chapter remain committed to staying in the sector and not surrendering it solely to states, who are decidedly less caring. Some of these practitioners/organizations do advocacy work whenever possible around the broader structural conditions that produce the need for care, but for many counselors this is above their paygrade. In the daily encounters of AVR counseling,

minor acts of care do make a difference for migrants navigating an uncaring system, but rarely rise to the level of disrupting the EU's migration management regime (Crane & Lawson, 2020).

V. Conclusion: Toward a care politics?

In a time of resurgent nationalisms, and rising anti-immigrant sentiment, AVR plays an increasingly central role in Europe's management of migration, ensuring the 'integrity' of EU borders, as well as individual states' asylum systems. Previous chapters have established that AVR exemplifies how humanitarianism is enrolled in migration management's justification and implementation in Europe today. However, AVR officials represent a broad range of political commitments, which do matter for how the policy is implemented and negotiated. This chapter has analyzed how a subset of officials from four committed humanitarian NGOs negotiate caring for migrants against securitized enforcement. Their work is structured by the fact that many migrants face the decision to 'voluntarily' return in relation to a limited, often nonexistent, range of legal options for remaining in Europe. AVR reflects humanitarianism's paradoxical nature as practitioners from these NGOs come up against the law and the violence of borders in their attempts to be caring.

This chapter has explored care as politics to unpack the conflicts of practitioners and the paradoxical practices of humanitarian assistance for migrants facing deportation. By employing care as an analytic, I have considered the potentials and limits of humanitarian assistance in AVR and explored the extent to which privileged staff mobilize resources and/or challenge political norms that perpetuate these forms of migration management. I argue that AVR staffers engage in minor acts of care: services administered directly to precarious migrants, allowing for a more humane and compassionate space to navigate return. For staffers, AVR's political possibilities

offer a meaningful program of humanitarian assistance that at least provides minor acts of care in contrast with state violence.

There is little evidence of care ethical practices that address the social, political and material conditions that produce the need to migrate, conditions of migrant deportability and criminalization, and EU policies of migrant removal. AVR is an individualized, choice-based (neoliberal) practice that does not provide space for recognizing nor repairing the interdependence of EU lifestyles with the vulnerability of migrants, nor with the forces producing migration from countries at war: many former colonies of Europe. As such, I argue that AVR is fundamentally limited: it cannot cure the conditions that produce migrant precarity in the first place. I conclude that AVR, as implemented by these humanitarian NGOs, offers care in the minor register, but not in the fully care ethical register of addressing the systemic exclusions of migration management.

This chapter demonstrates the potential of feminist care ethics to reveal the myriad scales and embodied paradoxical practices of humanitarianism in today's politics of bordering. Specifically, care ethics offers a language for thinking politically about humanitarian assistance in migration management, rather than framing care as only compassion. To be sure, minor acts of care for people rendered deportable is a political intervention. At the same, feminist care ethics insists that we analyze not only how care is experienced but also how the need for care is produced structurally. From the vantage point of care politics, AVR does not embody EU society's collective responsibilities to those who migrate. Ultimately, because AVR programs operate within a governmental project of border securitization they represent humanitarianism as conflicted care.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Questioning the (anti-)politics of humanitarianism and migration management

> *For the issue is to know precisely where to draw the line separating one life from another. Politics concerns that border, an activity which continually places it into question (Rancière, 2010: 68).*

What does it mean for the spaces and politics of humanitarianism when the return and removal of Europe's undocumented or appeals-rights-exhausted migrant populations is framed as a humanitarian project? To answer this question, this dissertation has outlined a powerful "orthodoxy" of knowledge (Said, 1981) in the merger of migration management and humanitarianism through AVR that can be identified as "consensual" anti-politics (Rancière, 2010; Ticktin, 2011). Rancière's claim above makes clear the stakes of this antipolitical ("post-political") move: the questioning of how borders are drawn between lives. Institutional discourses of migration management and humanitarianism both have depoliticizing effects – purportedly claiming to be outside of politics. However, this study has argued that both make meaningful political interventions in migrants' lives – particularly in the context of legal impossibility and migrant deportability. The fact that institutions and actors assuming the mantle of care and humanitarianism are among those at the forefront of managing and distributing precarity today means that the political and ethical dimensions of their biopolitical interventions need to be understood (Butler, 2012; Ticktin, 2011; Fassin, 2012, Nguyen, 2012).

With the discursive partitioning of humanitarianism from politics (or migration management from politics, see Chapter Five), the right to life has increasingly moved from a political arena to a humanitarian one (Lemke, 2011: 88). Therefore, humanitarianism's anti-political framing remains situated within the biopolitical reality of the camp:

> *A humanitarianism separated from politics cannot fail to reproduce the isolation of [bare] life at the basis of sovereignty, and the camp – which is to say the pure space of exception – is the biopolitical paradigm that it cannot master* (Agamben, 1998: 134).

In this context, AVR exemplifies how humanitarianism's politics of life are situated within a "radically unequal order" (Fassin, 2012: 253). Beyond the motivations of individual practitioners, the entire AVR network is structured by the antipolitics of migration management and the socio-legal reality of legal impossibility. Judith Butler (2012: 148) reminds us that "every political effort to manage populations involves a tactical distribution of precarity" articulated through uneven development, and dependent upon "dominant norms regarding whose life is grievable and worth protecting and whose life is ungrievable, or marginally or episodically grievable." In this way, migration management represents a "geographical indexing of life itself" (Reid-Henry, 2011: 99). AVR's fundamental inability to address the source of migrant precarity (securitization and criminalization) points to the difference between caring and curing (Ticktin, 2011).

This dissertation project set out to understand AVR as a spatial and political practice of humanitarian assistance. The stakes of this research are contextualized by the 2015-2016 EU migration 'crisis' – a moment where the humanitarian needs of migrants seeking asylum confronted Europe's managed system for asylum and security. During this time period, migrants arrived at Europe's borders, in many cases, fleeing destitution and life-threatening circumstances in countries like Syria, Libya and Afghanistan, seeking refuge and in some cases aiming to reunite with family members already living in Europe. Though many within EU societies welcomed the new arrivals with hospitality, at the same time far-right sociopolitical movements responded by constructing these migrants as a threat – and this securitized position became increasingly politically influential over time. The Brexit process underlines how the EU sees

migration management as an existential issue, politically and socially speaking, for the future of the union. In response to the anxieties of their constituents, EU governments have come to see AVR as a politically expedient, socially palatable, and economically affordable alternative to forced removal for those migrants who receive a negative decision on their asylum status, as well as migrants who are undocumented and residing in the shadows across Europe. Between migrants and states exists a network of AVR practitioners, the majority at humanitarian organizations, who negotiate caring for migrants against increasingly strong government pressures for security in the form of expedient return.

Situating my study in this regional and temporal context has allowed me to deploy AVR as a lens onto the paradoxical politics of how EU migration management brings together imperatives for security and humanitarianism. Studying AVR's implementation allows for an in-depth theoretical engagement with the spatial politics of how humanitarian assistance is enrolled into the governance of migration. This approach has allowed me to theorize the biopolitical and geopolitical practices of bordering involved in implementing AVR – including practices of care. At the level of discourse, this study of AVR contributes a unique insight into how discourses of migration management incorporate humanitarianism and development. Through its humanitarian framing, AVR maintains the EU's liberal identity as a domain of decency and human rights, while also providing a 'solution' to the politically thorny issue of appeals-rights-exhausted asylum-seekers.

This project's four research questions are tied together by how AVR is justified, how it is implemented, and how practitioners navigate the conflicted political terrain this humanitarian practice exists within. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, there is a foundational inequality to the AVR encounter. The differentiated positionalities of practitioners versus

migrants are conditioned in large part by legal status. I theorize AVR's potentials and limits as a humanitarian practice in light of this inequality. The large majority of practitioners I interviewed for this project are committed to humanitarian principles and recognize the limitations of how caring AVR can be. However, they see AVR as an often-best case scenario in light of the reality of legal impossibility. Within this context, there are some degrees of freedom for practitioners to be caring, as discussed in Chapter Six, but these are ultimately limited.

A key lesson from the literature on humanitarianism is that governance happens in the spaces of best-case scenario management (refugee camps being the prototypical example (Agier, 2011; Redfield, 2005)). From a policymaking standpoint, the EU continually invests in AVR in order to protect its own privilege, economy, and social systems. At the level of AVR's implementation, there are possibilities for minor acts of care through practices like counseling and reintegration assistance that meaningfully impact how migrants navigate return. However, practitioners face significant limitations when it comes to more disruptive, systemic changes, such as those that would address legal impossibility, securitization, and migrant criminalization. This (b)ordering allows the EU's system of migration management to perpetuate itself. Therefore, it can be concluded that AVR is a minor act of care, writ-large, in how it is always already enrolled in EU securitization and migration management.

This project has made several empirical contributions. First of all, Chapter Three provides an analysis of the spatial and political processes through which AVR became a key policy for European governments to manage the 2015-2016 migration 'crisis.' Here I investigated how this management enrolls a network of institutions to implement AVR, on a spectrum from state-based to humanitarian and migrant rights focused actors. The dissertation then contributes an analysis of AVR as both practice and discourse. At the level of practice,

Chapter Four contributes an understanding of how officials balance humanitarian assistance for migrants with state security priorities in their implementation of AVR. At the level of discourse, Chapter Five contributes a critical analysis of the ways in which AVR is framed and promoted as a humanitarian policy of migration management. Here I address the unique role that IOM plays in migration management in Europe, and how they have designed and promoted AVR as a policy of migration management. By situating the discourses and practices of AVR in political context, we arrive at a key question, echoed by many practitioners themselves: how 'voluntary' can AVR actually be when there are no legal alternatives for migrants to remain? In this light, Chapter Six contributes an understanding of how humanitarian practitioners negotiate providing care for migrants in this uncaring, securitized context of EU migration management.

These empirical insights have allowed me to make several key theoretical contributions through this study. First, studying AVR as migration management allows us to see the working out of biopolitical governmentality through calculative attempts at achieving selective inclusion and exclusion (Foucault, 2007). AVR shows how humanitarianism paradoxically becomes a form of governance over migration, spatially extended beyond contained camp-like settings where the politics of humanitarianism have traditionally been studied (Agamben, 1998; Agier, 2011; Redfield, 2005; Fassin, 2012). Engaging with feminist geopolitics allowed me to analyze how this governance happens through institutions that are embodied and shot through with individual's decisions. Finally, I invited care ethics analysis to think more about the control of people's movement through migration management. Lawson (2007b: 7) argues that a critical ethic of care, in its attention to the personal, must be coupled with an analysis of "how inequality is produced through ongoing spatial relations" – such as those of institutions and structures that "reproduce exclusion (and) oppression." My analysis has unpacked the inequalities and

limitations of AVR as a humanitarian practice; and because care ethics are always contextual (Tronto, 2017), we see that AVR remains a minor act of care in the EU's securitized political context, conflicted in its humanitarian identity and not politically transformative.

Several gaps in this study provide directions for future research. For methodological reasons discussed in Chapter Two, I did not interview migrants for this project, focusing instead on networks of practitioners for their insights into humanitarianism's paradoxical politics. Future research might address how migrants navigate the decision to return, or not, in relation to the state and humanitarian forces and actors that influence that choice. What happens after return is a large part of the picture of AVR, which is not accounted for in this project's research design. How is reintegration assistance administered upon return, does AVR facilitate a safe and 'sustainable' return, and do migrants attempt to immigrate to Europe again after returning to their country of origin via AVR? These are the kinds of questions that a perspective from migrant-sending countries of origin could provide. While this dissertation's central focus was on the AVR network, rather than states, there are moments (such as the Refugee Action – Home Office tension in Chapter Three) that provide insight into how the variance of state behavior matters. Future research on AVR can account for how state mediation is politically important in particular national contexts, as they are nested within the EU's larger concerns with managing markets and borders. Though discussed here, a deeper engagement could be sustained with the gendered, racialized, and citizenship dimensions of AVR, and the role migration management plays in bolstering far-right, white supremacist forces in the EU context. In other words, for a region rooted in liberalism and values of decency and inclusion, how do European investments in security (political, social, identity) sustain an exclusionary and racialized regime of migrant removal?

With respect to migration management, this dissertation has aimed to produce what Said (1981: 149) calls "antithetical knowledge": knowledge that is consciously produced "in opposition to the prevailing orthodoxy." Through its study of AVR, this project has contextualized and situated knowledge concerning migration management and humanitarianism, thereby destabilizing truth claims that justify migrant exclusion in the name of assistance, voluntarism, and humanity. As a contribution to critical geographical scholarship (Bauder & Di Mauro, 2008), my study has questioned the anti-migrant presumptions of securitization and the exclusions of migration management, while recognizing that both I ("the researcher") and my participants ("practitioners") are socially and politically embedded in systems of power and privilege.

I have been careful throughout to avoid comparatively evaluating the moral seriousness or humanitarian quality of individual practitioners' actions. In learning from practitioners about their work, my goal, in line with Redfield (2005: 330), has not been to "unveil and denounce untruths and violations," but rather to gain a close understanding of "particular embodied, situated practices emanating from the humanitarian desire to alleviate the suffering of others." This analytical attention creates space for "the lucidity and reflexivity" of practitioners to raise questions, many of whom are clear-eyed and ambivalent about the political realities of their work (Fassin, 2012: 246). The struggles of humanitarian practitioners around how voluntary AVR is, and what its limitations are, show that the research questions of this project are not only academic, but represent real questions and struggles in the field. Many practitioners are constrained and conflicted by the political reality of AVR, but stay within its confines and logics in order to help migrants navigate the spaces of asylum, liminality, and return.

My concluding argument steps outside of the best-case scenario logic of humanitarianism to make a simple but significant point: migration management is a *political* regime of governance, within which AVR is situated. Rancière (2010: 35) claims that "the essential object of political dispute is the existence of politics itself," and that the activity of politics is to question the borders that are drawn between lives – and between life chances (Duffield, 2010). This brings us to a larger-scale rejection of the antipolitics of migration management, and within it, the idea that any human being is illegal and can be accordingly denied access to and removed from space. Here, I agree with van Houtum (2005: 676) that we should risk questioning *why*: "Why are there borders in the first place? Why do we see borders still as given? Are there no alternatives then to the current compartmentalisation of the globe?" Hegemonies are not totalities (Massey, 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985); a more relational, care ethical migration politics is possible through re-politicizing processes of impoverishment and raising unthinkable questions about today's (anti-)politics of humanitarianism and migration management (Crane, Elwood & Lawson, 2020; Elwood & Lawson, 2018; Tronto, 2017). I conclude in agreement with a practitioner in London regarding the politics of AVR:

> *It was really like, the people you were helping were really destitute. There's a humanitarian issue there. And resolving that humanitarian issue isn't necessarily just getting them all out of the country. That isn't really responding to migrant destitution* (Interview, IOM UK, London, 12.9.16).

Managing migration through deportation and return reproduces a world of migrant destitution. AVR, while a minor act of care, remains enmeshed in how the inequalities of citizenship, the borders drawn between people's lives, are politically managed today.

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