Migration, vehicles, and politics: Three theses on viapolitics

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Abstract

This article argues that vehicles, roads and routes merit a much more central place in theorizations of migration politics. This argument is developed in terms of three theses. First, the study of migration politics should examine how vehicles feature in the public mediation of migration and border controversies. Second, it is important to analyze vehicles as mobile sites of power and contestation in their own right. Third, an understanding of the materiality of transportation helps to explain how the vehicle can sometimes become a site of strategic political action. These arguments are in turn used to develop a concept of viapolitics as a contribution to literatures on migration, mobilities and power. Viapolitics orients us to see migration from the middle, that is, from the angle of the vehicle and not just the state. It also seeks to connect migration studies to the history of problematizations, cultural types and the mythopoetics of the road.

> Daedalus now had come to detest his protracted exile in Crete and was longing to visit his native country again, but his way was barred by the sea. 'King Minos can block my escape, by land or water,' he sighed. 'The air, at least, is still open; my path lies there. He is lord of the world, but not lord of the sky.' So saying, he put his mind to techniques unexplored before and altered the laws of nature.
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> (Ovid, 2004: 303)

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The people in flight streamed out on 66, sometimes a single car, sometimes a little caravan . . . In the day ancient leaky radiators sent up columns of steam, loose connecting rods hammered and pounded. And the men driving the trucks and the overloaded cars listened apprehensively. How far between towns? It is a terror between towns. If something breaks . . . Listen to the motor. Listen to the wheels. Listen with your ears and with your hands on the steering wheel; listen with the palm of your hand on the gear-shift lever; listen with your feet on the floor boards. Listen to the pounding old jalopy with all your senses; for a change of tone, a variation of rhythm may mean – a week here?

(John Steinbeck, 2002: 119)

Without roads which one is free to use at will, men might almost as well be castaways on a desert island.

(John Dewey, 1954: 60)

Migration politics was for many decades something of a non-issue for scholars of social and political theory. Not so any longer (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2013). But while the subject of migration politics has multiplied, drawing in new perspectives, methods and issues, at least one theme remains peculiarly marginal to this multifaceted research area. Transport. Latour famously wrote that the non-human, actant 'masses' are missing from social theory (Latour, 1992). The vehicle, its road, its route – these particular materialities are not entirely missing from scholarship on migration politics. But, with certain notable exceptions (e.g. Mountz, 2010), they rarely feature as a central focus in theorization and investigation of migration worlds.[1] This is surely a paradox. All migrations involve journeys and those journeys are more often than not mediated by complex infrastructures, authorities and norms of transportation. Granted, in many instances those journeys may be rather uneventful and not in the least bit life-changing or politically salient. After all, as Ghassan Hage (2005) reminds us, many 'migrants' do not lead particularly 'mobile' lives: it is mistaken to automatically associate migration with journeying. Nevertheless, in many other instances, the journey *is* politically salient, perhaps even a life-or-death experience. This is especially so for those who cross borders without state permission. As such, it is rather curious that transportation should be so marginal to the study of migration politics today.

That vehicles should be largely missing from theoretical reflection on migration politics is also a puzzle when we consider the important role that vehicles have played in the western political imagination. Everyday political speech and policy talk abound with vehicular and transportation metaphors. Think of the ship of state, the reins of power, the road to power, or that conceptual relic of futures past, the information superhighway. As Foucault has noted, these associations between governance and the ship run very deep: 'the metaphor of the rudder, the helmsman, the pilot, and the person who steers the ship' are frequent references in the literature of the Ancient Greeks (Foucault, 2007: 97, 122–3). Meanwhile Sabine Höhler (2008: 69) reminds us of other ways the ship has featured in the cultural imagination. Of particular interest is the enduring image of the ship as what Sloterdijk has called 'an ontology of enclosed space'. The biblical ark is the 'primal ship' in this sense, 'a storm-tossed place of survival and salvation in the face of catastrophe'.

In this article, I argue that vehicles, roads and routes merit a much more prominent place in critical thinking about migration politics. I make this argument in terms of three theses. These address a set of overlapping questions: How do vehicles typically feature in the mediation of migration controversies? How do vehicles function as irreducible and mobile sites of power within extended strategies of migration and border control? Under what conditions does a vehicle become a stage for political action? How might a focus on vehicles change the angle of inquiry, furnish a 'diagonal line' (Deleuze, 1988: 18) capable of opening new perspectives on migration?

I advance these arguments as contributions to the idea of *viapolitics*. I propose this neologism as an umbrella term to bring together some overlapping concerns. I imagine it not as a new theory of migration and mobility so much as a zone of linked inquiries motivated by the shared conviction that it is time to take vehicles more seriously. I will flesh out this idea of viapolitics in the course of unfolding my three theses. But as a preliminary move I will expand on the definition and etymology of via since this informs my argument.

First, via can be a preposition that refers to the in between, the en route, the places on the way. Hence I might say: I travelled to Athens via Istanbul. The political science of migration has sometimes been justifiably criticized for 'seeing like a state' (Bigo, 2002: 66–7). Terms like 'immigration' risk naturalizing the state's way of defining issues and coding populations. Viapolitics takes seriously the insistence of Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 25) that critical thought should situate itself 'in the middle, between things'. To be clear: this is not a matter of reifying the moment of passage – something certain interpretations of their nomadology could be accused of. Instead, it is a tactical move, a decentring of the otherwise familiar. All sorts of political phenomena become newly thinkable once we approach the migration complex from the angle of its vehicles. Land, territory, and sovereignty look different when we see migration like a ship (Walters, 2008) or cultural identity from the angle of a train (Presner, 2007).

Second, via draws our attention to the specific *means* of transportation and communication in question. Hence I might say: I am travelling to Greece via ferry. A great deal of talk about global migrations or mobile flows gives the impression that movement is rather generic. At its worst, the idea of mobility serves to render the world as 'formless "gloop" [Adey 2006] of liquidity' (Morley, 2011: 744). Greater attentiveness to the materials, infrastructures, knowledges, economies and authorities that both facilitate and constrain, sort and shape, accelerate and impede movement is warranted. For instance, ship and air travel are very different media. Not only do they generate different experiences and cultures of mobility; they also have different affordances for political action. Viapolitics can contribute to the necessary work of better understanding these differences.

Third, we should note that via can refer to the Latin word for road or way. Here I propose to use via in a way that echoes Rabinow's (2003) treatment of the figure of anthropos. This anti-essentialist figure denotes for Rabinow the space in which one can observe the emergence and transformation of different problematizations and contingent instantiations of the human. Understood in this sense, via reminds us that the road and the journey are remarkably powerful and recurrent motifs in the cultural imagination of the West. As anthropologist Kari Lehari (2000) notes, the road, the trip and the journey are

'archetypes' and 'mythogenic universals'. With via, as with anthropos, it is not a matter of identifying the existence of a 'new, hidden, deeper, unifying rationality or ontology' that might unify its space (Rabinow, 2003: 15). Instead, via might operate much like Foucault's key concepts like discipline or governmentality: it can equip us with 'lines of [continuous] variation' (Deleuze, 1992: 166) that allow us to plot the different ways that questions of life on the road have been assembled. Vehicles, routes and journeys matter not just because they shape migration worlds; they matter because the ship as well as the city, and the road as well as the agora have provided a locus for problematizations of the human and for the possibility of politics.

I argue that viapolitics should be a contact zone for inquiries informed by these kinds of sensibility, and aim for an account of migration that is much thicker with things and their entanglements with humans. That said, viapolitics is not a matter of reinventing the wheel! While I maintain that the study of migration politics has often failed to accord the vehicle and its route much in the way of sustained theoretical or empirical attention, the same charge cannot be levelled at other cognate areas. Here we should mention ethnographies of travel (Clifford, 1997), transit migration (Tsianos and Karakayali, 2010; Hess, 2012) and clandestine journeys (Coutin, 2005; Khosravi, 2010; Andersson, 2014); transportation history (Mom, 2003); cultural histories of transoceanic worlds and their social struggles (Gilroy, 1993); and critical geographies and sociologies of borders (Rumford 2006; Mountz, 2010; 2011; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013) and logistics (Neilson and Rossiter, 2010). Particular mention should also be made of research that is bringing the methods of material semiotics and forensic analysis to bear on the study of vehicles and their place in migration controversies and campaigns for justice (Heller et al., 2012). Any future attempt to give the vehicular a more prominent place in accounts of migration politics will find much to build upon in these literatures.

Migration, mobilities, and the history of the present

In addition to the literatures just mentioned, there is one particular body of work that merits serious attention in any move towards a more materially rich account of migration in terms of transportation. This is, of course, the diverse set of studies that are today grouped under the rubric of mobilities. The so-called mobilities turn in the social science has undoubtedly been of major significance in challenging the sedantarist assumptions embedded in much social thought. This article builds on those strands in the mobilities turn which reject a generic conception of mobility in favour of a view of mobility as an accomplishment that is always contextual, and enacted by means of specific assemblages of bodies, machines, infrastructures, communication devices, conduct, and so on (Adey, 2006; Cresswell, 2006; Urry, 2007). It also builds on the move to expand the discussion of mobility beyond the experience of fleet-footed elites in order to consider subjects whose journeys and experience mix speed and stillness, abandonment and containment, and much else (Martin, 2012).

If I diverge from the mobility paradigm, and if I use the term mobility somewhat sparingly and cautiously, this is out of commitment to the idea of a history of the present. We encounter significant limits in our attempts to think critically about the present if our thought remains too wedded to some of the present's most privileged concepts. Few

terms are more laden with desire, more implicitly affirmed today than mobility. Like community, who is not warm about it? By utilizing the neologism viapolitics I want to move analysis 'to the outside' (Foucault, 2007: 116–18); to peer around the edges of mobility, tracing its lines of emergence and crystallization. As with Foucault's histories of sexuality or criminality, I insist we should understand mobility as an assemblage and not as a universal. In this respect, the project of a *theory* of mobility is misguided and only essentializes this multiplicity. What we need instead is a *history* of mobility.

Via is a line of inquiry that invites examination of the diverse and always historicized ways in which life on the road has been problematized. Rather than make the anachronistic move which projects the idea of mobility back onto historical societies that did themselves not recognize it, we ought to take seriously the epistemological-material forms in which the problem of roads and lives was coded. This is not so much a matter of getting the past right as it is one of defamiliarizing the present. In order to loosen the hold that the present exercises on our imagination, it is widely recognized that Foucault made a number of key methodological moves (Walters, 2012). We have already noted one of these, namely the crafting of neologisms such as biopolitics and governmentality. Let us note here another. It is the excavation of archaic or long-forgotten concepts like *polizei*, and their repurposing in such a way that our understanding of contemporary political reason is deepened.

The more historicized investigation of migrations, routes and roads that I envisage – but which for reasons of space I can only gesture towards in this article – will surely need to excavate archaic and forgotten concepts, and the practices they rationalize. For example, who today has heard of the *ars apodemica?* We know now the absolutely pivotal role that the rise of statistics played as a form of knowledge in constituting the possibility of modern government. But, to paraphrase Hacking (1991), how should we do the history of apodemics? According to Feuerhahn, apodemics emerged in Europe at the end of the sixteenth century (Feuerhahn, 2001: 144–5; see also Kleinschmidt, 2003: 163–5). The word derives from the Greek 'to travel'. Apodemics was closely related to the emergence of 'Statistiks' in the Germanies, and to colonizing projects. One of its goals was to train the traveller to become a reliable observer who, when dispatched on long journeys to foreign lands in the service of the sovereign, could return with useful intelligence. Apodemics offered instruction on how to travel so as to make the long-distance journey into a machine for knowledge accumulation. A whole history of this rather obscure knowledge waits to be written, a history that would surely also be a contribution to the history of mobility. We will revisit apodemics below.

Three theses on viapolitics

1. Research on migration politics should be more attentive to the way vehicles feature in migration controversies: the way that ships, trains, buses and other vehicles mediate the public understanding of migration and border-crossing is rarely neutral.
2. Vehicles matter because they are mobile zones of governance and contestation in their own right.

3. Under certain circumstances, vehicles and their infrastructures become the
    objects and settings of political action.

Research on migration politics should be more attentive to the way vehicles feature in migration controversies: the way that ships, trains, buses and other vehicles mediate the public understanding of migration and border-crossing is rarely neutral

On February 21, 2011, the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, was photographed alongside his Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, Jason Kenney, standing on board a rusty freighter, the MV *Ocean Lady* (*Toronto Star*. 2011). The photograph is a little odd due to the fact that these political leaders are positioned at the stern of the ship, looking backwards, and not its bow. But this fact makes perfect sense once we learn that this was a photo opportunity. The two Conservative politicians are standing at the stern so that the frame can capture the name 'Ocean Lady' which is emblazoned across its rusty hull. The *Ocean Lady* had come to prominence in Canadian and international media when, in October 2009, it arrived off the coast of Victoria, British Columbia (BC), carrying 76 Sri Lankan refugees seeking asylum in Canada. It was followed the next year by a second 'refugee boat', MV *Sun Sea*, this time transporting nearly 500 Sri Lankan migrants. Media coverage in Canada focused repeatedly on themes of illegality and the suspect identities and motives of the migrants. Speculation about connections to terrorism was rife. The tone of the coverage was shaped by government ministers who voiced claims about the abuse of Canada's asylum process, and sought to frame these ship incidents in terms of a problem of human smuggling and organized crime (Bradimore and Bauder, 2011).

The ships played a very prominent role in the public understanding of these two incidents. Moored in Delta, BC, its passengers long since removed for detention and interrogation, the *Ocean Lady* resembled a crime scene in many photos. It also became a rather popular destination for government ministers. Harper held a second photo op there, this time during an election campaign. The decrepit freighter was also used as a backdrop when Kenney stood on the quayside alongside present and past Ministers for Public Safety to announce reforms to the government's law on human smuggling (CBC, 2011). Meanwhile the *Sun Sea* made for more dramatic imagery. Its image had been captured at sea by a Canadian armed forces war photographer. These pictures of the dubious vessel, crammed with 'human cargo', would regularly accompany media stories. And when ministers Kenney and Toews unveiled new proposals about refugee policy before the National Press Theatre in Ottawa, they did so standing in front of a large projection of the *Sun Sea* (*Globe and Mail*, 2011a). These proposals sought to make 'irregular arrival' a distinct category in refugee policy, one that would warrant up to 12 months in detention. Just in case there was any confusion, the image of the crowded vessel made it quite clear what an irregular arrival looked like.

But the ships were more than just visual props. They also became material evidence in the controversies. This was especially true of the *Ocean Lady*. As Bradimore and Bauder (2011: 653) report, in the press, the vessel became a 'mystery ship'. A number of articles focused on the ambiguity of its ownership, its origins, and even its true name. It was as though the truth

of the ship would establish whether its Tamil passengers were genuine refugees or bogus claimants and fleeing terrorists. Towards the end of 2011, it was announced the 'Tamil migrant ship' was to be sold off (*Globe and Mail*, 2011b). Ministerial briefing notes explained that a policy of 'seizure and sale' of such vessels would provide a further weapon in the government's campaign to discourage future unauthorized arrivals and deter human smuggling organizations. If the *Ocean Lady* had, like other 'refugee boats', been cast as a kind of anti-ship of state, this was to be the ultimate act of restitution: with the ship's liquidation, the lines of sovereign order were to be properly restored.

The arrival of 'migrant ships' on Canada's coasts is a somewhat infrequent event (Mountz, 2010). This is perhaps why the arrival of the *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady* were grasped by the Conservative government as though they were a precious political opportunity to restructure the nation's refugee and asylum regime. By contrast, in Australia, Europe and North Africa, the encounter with fishing boats, freighters and other vessels used as means of unauthorized border crossing and travel has become a more common occurrence. The overcrowded vessel has become a visual type that migrates across information and media platforms. It is today's 'Raft of the Medusa', but in reverse. Not only does this image frequently accompany news reporting of maritime migration crises. It also appears in the PowerPoints of scholarly presentations, the covers of humanitarian reports about migration, and now the infographics of border policing agencies like Frontex. The popularity of this image speaks to the heterogeneous social forces and powers that converge and hybridize in the governance of the roads and routes of migration.

Today's mediascapes of migration are thick with images of vehicles repurposed by migrants and scenes of dangerous border crossing. In addition to the overflowing fishing boat or freighter, as publics, we are familiar with the scene of itinerant workers clinging precariously to the sides and roofs of freight trains, of small groups of people crossing inhospitable desert terrains, or the rear doors of trucks and containers prized open to expose the 'hidden cargo' within. Sometimes the act of public exposure is multiply layered. When newspapers and blogs feature X-ray images of trucks, their interiors made to disclose diaphanous figures huddled amidst the cargo, the technological gaze of the scanner places the hidden before the public, setting up a dynamic interplay between the clandestine and the revelation. The resemblance between these X-ray images and the famous diagram of the slave ship, *Brookes* – a print that proved one of the most widely circulated objects within the movement to abolish the transatlantic slave trade in the late 1700s – is eerie and troubling. In both formats we see endangered life taking the form of cramped, silhouetted figures – packed, contained, helpless. The human subjects wedged into these spaces resemble not agents so much as victims awaiting the intervention of a humanitarian public.[2]

This is an admittedly rough and incomplete sketch of some of the key visual tropes and images that feature prominently in public representations of migration crises today. Why should research in migration politics be more attentive to these scenes of cramped and dangerous travel, these 'desperate' (Martin, 2012) and 'contained mobilities' (Biemann, 2004)? What might a focus on the place of vehicles in these scenes tell us? At the risk of generalizing about a complex, polysemic field, I offer some preliminary remarks about vehicles and migration controversies.

First, vehicles, containers, harbours and depots are key to the way in which publics 'see' the problems that are associated with terms like 'illegal immigration' and 'asylum

seeking'. These spaces stage scenes in which migrants appear in and out of place. They are an integral part of the visual dramatization of these issues. It is well established that the modes by which non-nationals become unauthorized migrants are multiple. For example, they can enter a country legally, then overstay their visa (Morehouse and Blomfield, 2011). In countries like Australia, and probably most EU states, illegal border crossing is by no means the major pathway to irregularity (Parliament of Australia, 2011). Yet it is the boats, the truck journeys and the desert crossings that tend to make the headlines. In this visual economy of migration, the association with particular vehicles deepens the sense of unease, desperation and scandal attaching to the migrants. As we saw, the Canadian government went out of its way to place the 'migrant ships' in the forefront of media attention. The rust on the *Ocean Lady* is not innocent. Key elements of the controversy were scripted. Similar elements of staging were evident in the 'Sangatte' migration controversy that involved migrants seeking to get to the UK from Calais in France in the early 2000s. There Schuster notes how Eurotunnel, the owners of the Channel Tunnel, granted journalists special access to their railway yards in order that they could generate newsworthy images of migrants climbing onto trains (Schuster, 2003: 510). In sum, there is a particular 'partition of the perceptible' here (Rancière, 1999: 24). Only some journeys and their transportations are marked, remembered, and often vilified. Certain subjects are named in terms of the journeys and vehicles they may have employed – as boatpeople, wetbacks, stowaways, hobos, etc. Frequently there is an act of misrecognition: it seems that the motor of the boat is the engine of migration itself, or that the traffic in clandestine movement is the only economy we need to consider in order to understand migratory movements.

Second, we need a fuller understanding of how certain images of vehicles function as visual operators in what is emerging as one of the most significant developments in migration politics, namely the humanitarianization of migration control (Hyndman 2000; Walters, 2011; Fassin, 2012). For many years critical scholarship debated the securitization of migration, where insecurity was figured in terms of the threat which migration posed for cultural identity, the welfare state, public order, etc. Today we can see that the logic and legitimation of migration control are changing, and that the securitization thesis is, while still valid, also quite incomplete. The legitimacy and expansion of control today rest on a multi-sided and contradictory move of detection, deterrence *and* salvation. If Frontex is expanding its operations in the Mediterranean, this is by appealing not just to its mandate of defending the EU's frontiers but saving migrants from suffering and death at sea, and exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous criminals. Increasingly the Maréchaussée and the Good Samaritan join forces on the road.[3] Images of the drifting boat or suspicious truck are some of the scenes *par excellence* of this tense and contradictory move (Brigden and Mainwaring, 2014). They depict both bodies in motion, but also vulnerable, endangered lives. When vehicles appear in these border and law enforcement 'spectacles' (De Genova, 2013), they mix fears of the violation of borders and sovereignty by unauthorized migration and the horror of vulnerable people being contained and asphyxiated.

Third, I want to stress that the depiction of vehicles and routes in visualizations of migration is complex and multi-sided. This is not a monotonous tale in which the vehicle is only a symbol of risk and nothing more. Vehicles can be mobilized in counter-

narratives where they offer means to articulate a politics of hope and injustice as well. There are today many ways that ships, trains, trucks and cars are becoming vehicles of protest or sites of commemoration in the hands of artists, activists, and migrants. In some cases it is a matter of staging protests using the boat, where the path of its movement invokes a political dream of free movement. In others, note how artists are repurposing the standard image types we highlighted earlier. For example, we mentioned the problematic image of the X-ray of the truck. But in Hans Op de Beeck's short video *Border* (2001), the viewer is confronted by a life-sized projection of an X-ray truck with migrants hidden among its cargo. We can hear the hushed voices of the migrants speaking in Arabic. In *Border* they are still silhouettes captured by this apparatus of control. At the same time their conversation suggests they are also subjects who hope, worry, dream, despair, argue, and much more. They are, in short, complex human beings. But Op de Beeck also challenges us as a public. Who are we, the watchers? Are we the border police? Or perhaps a voyeuristic audience consuming images of contained mobility?

Finally, we should consider what the contemporary fascination with vehicles and journeys may mean when set within the much longer trajectory I mentioned at the outset – via as the road or the way. From Homeric odyssey, through biblical exodus, pilgrimage and wayfaring (Ladner, 1967), to the modern road story and road movie (Leong, 2012), the journey has had an enduring cultural appeal. This is hardly surprising given how it pulls together such themes as escape and encounter, transformation and discovery, peril and salvation. I have dwelt largely on the visual aspect, but typically in newspapers and on websites these images of the vehicles of migration are embedded in narrative accounts of the journeys migrants are making. If these narratives are finding a wide audience, it is not just because they connect with (and sometimes personalize) hot issues of migration and borders, or crime and exploitation. Perhaps it is also because they revisit and revive the great story of the voyage. When commercial aviation replaced the steamship as the dominant means of long distance travel, telescoping actual movement across great continents and oceans, it did something else. It transformed the phenomenology of migration. Within the public sphere of Western countries, we stopped seeing migration in terms of those storied scenes of the steamship in the port, and its theatre of mass arrival and departure. The thickening of borders which is associated with the ongoing securitization of migration has definitely not put a stop to irregular migration. Instead it has made the act of migration much more protracted, dangerous and even lethal – as many observers have noted (Tsianos and Karakayali, 2010). What it has also done – and this is far less noted – is to reconnect the public experience of migration with the voyage.

Vehicles matter because they are mobile zones of governance and contestation in their own right

Migratory struggles play out not just in fixed settings and structures but in and around vehicles, routes and infrastructures. A research focus on vehicles can therefore deepen understanding of migration as a field of struggles and borders as a topology of power.

The study of migration politics has been greatly advanced by critical approaches that insist we should understand migration from the angle of social struggles, capitalist processes, social movements and the complex games of inclusion/exclusion (e.g.

Papadopoulos et al., 2008; De Genova, 2013; Garelli and Tazzioli, 2013; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). A perspective of viapolitics shares this theoretical sensibility but seeks to bring a more sharpened and differentiated understanding of mobility to this debate. Viapolitics is not a synonym for the biopolitics of mobility, migration politics, or the autonomy of migration, though it does intersect these domains. What it does represent is a particular angle of inquiry, one that treats the interaction of humans and vehicles as an irreducible feature of migratory struggles. At the same time it is not a call for a general theory about migration, vehicles and politics. It is not a general theory because the ways in which vehicles, struggles, power and vehicles interact is quite heterogeneous and defies any simplistic schema.

To better appreciate that vehicles merit greater attention, and that the forms of struggle defy a general theory, let us consider just a few of the ways in which these entanglements take shape. I offer these fragments in order to illustrate how vehicles are embedded within diverse knowledges and practices that in turn shape experiences of mobility, immobility, capture and flight.

To begin, let us note that under certain circumstances a vehicle can become a mobile border zone (Walters, 2006; 2008). With the cargo ships that plough the world's sea lanes, the trucks that travel major supply routes, and the commercial airlines that girdle the earth, one sees a dispersed economy of power that now enmeshes the vehicle itself. A particularly good cut into of this economy is offered by the simple checklists and instructional materials that police, border authorities, and shipping insurers target at drivers, ship captains and crews. 'Secure, check, record. Have you carried out your checks?' So asks the UK Border Agency's (2014) vehicle security checklist aimed at cross-border trucking. Similar in orientation are the loss prevention bulletins that form a part of the risk governance of shipping. In one such bulletin (UK P&I Club, 2005), operators are warned of an alarming new method being used by stowaways on ships entering the port of New Orleans. They are advised to check for migrants hiding in the 'rudder trunks' of 'deep draft vessels'. Unlike the checklist, the loss prevention bulletin is constantly being updated and expresses, albeit with an inevitable degree of lag, the shifting 'extra-logistical' tactics (Martin, 2012) that seem to circulate among stowaways.

These instructional materials diagram the vehicle as a surface to be secured and a volume to be inspected. They work in tandem with the system of laws, fines and incentives (e.g. carrier liability practices) which governments have created to enrol transportation companies in the border regime (Guiraudon and Lahav, 2000). They also find support in an entire security industry whose products range from specialized locks and seals for containers, to human detection technologies and sniffer dogs. As Verstraete (2001) has shown with the human heartbeat detector, each of these devices can be treated as the subject of its own little history. Each device materializes and capitalizes on the struggle over migration.

No doubt these measures are implemented in ways that are highly uneven and imperfect. Nevertheless, they do suggest in quite tangible ways that the border is neither a fixed line, as used to be said, nor entirely ubiquitous (Balibar, 2002), but more accurately described as taking new shapes and topographies that, in this case, materialize within strategic zones of the transportation system. This risk governance of transportation seems to be consistent with a much wider project of identifying and policing of migration

routes, and not just borders, that has become central to migration control in recent years (Hess, 2010).

But this risk governance of the vehicle, and its microphysics of mobile border control should be cross-referenced with another factor. Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013: 190) speak of a mobile commons – 'innumerable uncoordinated but cooperative actions' – by which migrants on the road share advice and support using a variety of communicative practices (see also Trimikliniotis et al, forthcoming). Locating this commons in one possible genealogical trajectory, I call this dynamic fund of knowledge a *counter-apodemics*. Recalling that apodemics was advice *about* travelling, and knowledge derived *from* travelling, rendered in a form that would advance the interests of the state, this counter-apodemics is animated by the challenge of negotiating or evading migration control and surviving the difficult life of the road. But note that counter-apodemics is multi-sided. It concerns not just how to deal with the gaze of the border guard or the surveillance practices of the ship operator. It also addresses survival amidst the ecology of extra-legal actors who facilitate and/or endanger migrant life on the road. Which smuggler should you engage? On which route are you less exposed to gangs and brigands (Brigden and Mainwaring, 2014)?

The question of how migrants access large-scale networks of commercial transportation is but one of the contexts in which the vehicle becomes a site of mobile governance and contestation. The picture is of course somewhat different when we consider migrants' tactics with regard to the small boats that are navigating pathways through the heavily patrolled Euro-African maritime borderlands. Here a different set of challenges comes into play, as ethnographies of migrant journeys and clandestine routes are beginning to reveal (Poeze, 2010; Andersson, 2014). For example, based on fieldwork with West African police forces, aid organizations and migrants, and focusing on the 'migration circuit' between the Sahel and Spain, Andersson reports that certain visible characteristics serve as markers of people who are planning to undertake unauthorized boat migrations. Often they will carry small backpacks, a supply of biscuits for food and to inhibit bowel movements while at sea, some euros, sandals or sneakers in case they get wet, and a second pair of trousers to survive the cold. Yet these resources, while helpful to negotiate the passage, also serve as tangible risk indicators to the police in Dakar and elsewhere. According to one officer with the coastal surveillance brigade, such factors made it easy to detect would-be 'illegal migrants'. By contrast, as a Guardia Civil chief in Dakar put it, bus journeys are different: 'we can never demonstrate that 50 people in a bus are migrants' (Andersson 2014: 125). In short, the mode of transportation matters.

Migrants learn what police are looking for and how to adapt. They have to navigate the ways they are visible and invisible, marked and unmarked in relation to vehicles and journeys (Coutin, 2005). If backpacks and biscuits are a risk indicator, then perhaps it is better, if possible, to mimic the look and the bodily comportment of the tourist (Andersson, 2014: 141). Or in the very different context of sprawling US cities like Atlanta, where traffic patrols on city streets and highways are becoming a way for local police to apprehend undocumented migrants, different challenges are faced. As Stuesse and Coleman (2014) have shown, there it is a matter of improvising other modes of mobility in order to survive, perhaps using taxis, or social media to warn about traffic stops. This is what Stuesse and Coleman call 'altermobility'.

Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013: 189) report a kind of limit case in which the destruction of one's vehicle serves as a tactical move. They mention the case of some young women who, having left the cities in the Horn of Africa, attempted to enter Greece by boat from Turkey. In this instance, with Frontex patrols in the vicinity, they destroyed their boat in the hope that they would be transported as 'shipwrecked asylum seekers' to a camp in Greece. This case reminds us that vehicles not only navigate geographical space. They are simultaneously embedded in systems of law and culture. In this incident perhaps the migrants counted upon the conventions of rescue at sea. Yet, as the infamous case of the 'left-to-die' boat suggests (Heller et al., 2012), in today's Mediterranean maritime space, nothing guarantees that the conventions on rescue at sea will be upheld.

The picture being assembled from these encounters is quite at odds with the mediascape of viapolitics I sketched earlier. What emerges is not simply desperate people crammed into a truck or a boat and transported as human cargo. What becomes evident instead are the multiple ways in which humans interact with vehicles under strategic circumstances. In one of my opening epigraphs Steinbeck voices the migrant swept up in the great exodus from the dust bowl of the 1930s. An anxious man behind the wheel. 'Listen to the motor . . . Listen to the pounding old jalopy with all your senses.'

Steinbeck's jalopy driver is a highly masculinized figure. If there is something universal in this figure, something relevant to our wider discussion of vehicles and politics, it is its theme of the embodied relationship to the vehicle. Steinbeck uniquely captures the *work* of mobility: the fact that mobility does not just happen to people but calls forth interactions with the vehicle that involve skill, sensation, attunement, judgment, endurance, faith and other affects. Quite patently, mobility is crafted through mixings of humans, vehicles, and other tools. If migration is a struggle, it is not carried forward by bare people but rather subjects who, like Daedalus with his wings of wax and feather, have no choice but to re-purpose, to develop 'techniques unexplored before and [alter] the laws of nature' (Ovid, 2004: 303). In these re-purposings, it is as much the *national* as the *natural* order of things that is at stake.

Under certain circumstances, vehicles and their infrastructures become the objects and settings of political action

A focus on the material properties of the mode of transportation offers insights about its affordance for politics. Such a focus can illuminate how different vehicles and their systems offer limits and possibilities for migration politics.

If my previous discussion considered the vehicle as a milieu of governance and power relations, here I want to focus more specifically on vehicles as settings for political disagreement. Studies of material publics have shown how artefacts and infrastructures have affordances that shape social and political action (Harré, 2002; Marres and Lezaun, 2011). They have underscored that political action is not generic but expressed through tactics, forms and innovations that take shape under specific material constraints. In this final thesis I want to connect this important insight to the analysis of vehicles and viapolitics.

Under thesis II, I argued that a whole field of otherwise overlooked struggles is brought into view once we investigate migration from the angle of its vehicles. Such

struggles are no doubt a constant feature of these journeys. Somewhat rarer are those occasions when a vehicle becomes a 'polemical scene' that frames and expresses political dissent before a public (Rancière, 1999: 41). Let us now examine the situation where the vehicle becomes a site of political action.

I shall conduct this discussion by focusing on a particular practice: deportation by air. This focus has the additional benefit of bringing aviation into the wider discussion of migration, transportation and politics. While the space of airports has been examined at some length in relation to borders and migrations (Salter, 2007), this analytical gaze has usually stopped at the departure gate: the plane and its route rarely feature in migration studies. Despite its profound centrality to global migration, the plane typically flies under the radar of migration scholarship.

Historically forced transportation takes many forms. The deportations which underpinned the most brutal regimes of forced labour and genocide of the twentieth century would not have been possible without the modern railway network (Presner, 2007), whereas today's programmes of removal for the 'failed asylum seeker' and the 'illegal migrant' rely heavily upon systems of commercial aviation. For some time now, states have bought space on commercial flights, typically seating deportees at the back of the plane. Transporting people, often against their will, in the confined space of the aircraft cabin and close to regular travellers is a tricky business. This modern exercise in discipline and banish has called forth innovations in the microphysics of migration control. A spectrum of measures now exists. At one end are the experiments in assisted voluntary return run by experts in the political relocation of people like the International Organization for Migration (Collyer, 2012; Geiger and Pécoud, 2010). Assisting with travel documents and offering a resettlement payment, such schemes seek to oil the wheels of the deportation machine. Configuring 'removal' as an act of 'voluntary' departure, they aim to nurture a compliant subject who will walk him or herself onto the plane and out of the country. At the other end of the spectrum are the forced removals. A whole economy of force now exists comprising such figures as escorts (security personnel who specialize in the application of force), deportation doctors, and most recently, human rights monitors. To subdue the deportee throughout the flight this economy utilizes force – or as official discourse would have it, various techniques of restraint and control (Birnberg, Peirce and Partners, 2008; Fekete, 2011). When one such forced removal culminated in the unlawful killing of an Angolan man called Jimmy Mubenga on board a plane departing London's Heathrow airport, the resulting public inquest shed light on these techniques and the wider culture of the practitioners engaged in this activity (House of Commons, 2012). Journalists and campaign groups are revealing a pattern of abuse and fatality in airports and on board planes.

The fact that commercial flights are being used to conduct the forced transportation of deportees at the very same time they are conveying tourists seeking adventure, and business people seeking opportunities, is not just a cruel irony. And it is not just a reflection of the ways in which states are seeking to normalize deportation. It also speaks to our wider theme of vehicles and migration. It reminds us that the ways in which vehicles matter for migration is indeed quite diverse. In this instance we are reminded of the carceral functions and properties of vehicles. Future research will no doubt seek to situate the deportation flight within wider mobile carceral geographies and histories (e.g. Mountz, 2011).

Yet deportation by air has proved a difficult and complex operation, not least because migrants, campaigners and sometimes other passengers have resisted these flights. And it is this point I want to emphasize here, asking how the specificities of commercial aviation shape the forms of such resistance and political action.

Resistance involving deportation by plane comes in multiple forms. First, consider how there is now a counter-apodemics regarding the deportation flight. It is concretized in many forms, including guidelines and information circulated by anti-deportation campaigns. These suggest that making appeals to airline officials and captains can sometimes be an effective measure of last resort. In the airport, the border police and migration authorities reign supreme. But once the cabin door closes the regime of authority instantly shifts. Under the Tokyo Convention, the pilot has ultimate authority for ensuring the safety of the passengers and the crew; they have a 'legal power to refuse to carry a passenger if they think it would in any way put the flight at risk' (National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 2012: 108). The deportation apparatus is not homogeneous but in this case is contoured in complex ways around the very space and route of the aircraft, offering opportunities for a last-minute interruption of deportation. It is in instances where the deportee appeals to the pilot's authority that we see how the legal and normative powers of captains and pilots can interact in contradictory and not always predictable ways with the border regimes of states.

There are also situations where passengers have intervened in deportation flights, either spontaneously or on an organized basis. Despite the fact that travellers sometimes face harsh penalties for protesting in airports and on airplanes (Fekete, 2009: 92–4), acts of solidarity are not uncommon. For example, in 2011, an Air France flight transporting a man in bonds from Paris to Bamako was forced to return to Charles de Gaulle airport when 17 passengers acting in outcry refused to sit down (Indymedia, 2011). Here again the plane presents a specific milieu. Note that the plane is an unusually disciplined environment. Flying people at great speeds and great altitudes is a risky operation. Flight attendants might smile a lot but they are also part of a mobile governmentality, exercising a watchful gaze over the passengers. Fasten that seatbelt! Raise that chair back! The sit-down is of course a well-established form of collective protest. On the deportation flight, passengers have shown that undoing the seatbelt and standing up has sometimes been a tool to disrupt and halt a deportation flight.

Disrupting the flight may only offer a particular migrant a temporary reprieve. They may find themselves deported at a later date, perhaps on a charter rather than a commercial flight. Indeed, in recent years governments have looked to specialized charter flights to effect large-scale deportations (Fekete, 2011; Corporate Watch, 2013). The Council of Europe (2001: §47) recommends that commercial flights should be the 'preferred' mode of expulsion in all cases because they open this fraught activity to 'public scrutiny'. With charter flights, governments hope to distance deportation from such proximate publics and their capacity for immanent solidarity. It seems the political imperative of the charter flight is to make the siphon of deportation less vulnerable to blockage.

Nevertheless, two points should be made here. First, no mode of transportation will be immune to politicization. Every mode will offer constraints but also possibilities for political action. Hence activists have enjoyed a certain amount of success in polluting the brand of charter companies, exploiting their commercial sensitivity to bad publicity

(Hintjens et al., 2011). The wider point here is that the economic networks in which the vehicle is embedded also matter. Campaigns are also beginning to politically exploit the image of the packed jet as 'collective expulsion', even invoking cultural memories of transatlantic slavery.[4]

Second, and more tellingly, the shift towards charter flights illustrates that the kinds of struggles I have been gathering under the heading of viapolitics should not be dismissed as 'merely' micropolitics – as though they are nothing more than minor skirmishes playing out on a stage that is otherwise fixed. One of the key arguments of the perspective of the autonomy of migration is that migration is a genuine social force: in their aggregate, these myriad impulses, dreams, acts of refusal, escape and trespass do change the world. We are now in a position to deepen this important insight. Let us note that the force of these struggles is refracted through these interactions with vehicles and other materials. If the mode of transporting the deportee is in flux, this is again because of the way migrant movements do interact with vehicles and transportation norms, authorities and systems. Migration politics has typically been modelled in terms of struggles involving actors – individual and collective – structures and institutions. What I have called viapolitics calls for an expansion of this focus to include the hybrids formed by different human/vehicle connections. This move offers a fuller account of the forms and possibilities of political action.

Conclusion

Migration politics does not always and everywhere involve the spectacle of 'migrant boats', intrepid journeys and other repurposed vehicles. It does not always and everywhere entail that states and international organizations devote extensive resources to making knowable the routes of migrants, and the policing of those routes. For instance, when 'immigration' became such a prominent and controversial issue in British politics in the 1970s, the mediascapes and policyscapes of the time made little reference to journeys, vehicles or routes. Migration was configured as a different set of issues, with a different spatiality, even if there are strong resonances with the present.

This article has proposed a concept of viapolitics in order to capture these kinds of transformation. At the same time it has argued that new objects and understandings come into view once we see migration from the angle of its routes and vehicles. We have seen that vehicles matter because: (1) they are key signifiers and materialities in the mediation of migration controversies; (2) they are sites of a mobile and dispersed migration control as well as its contestation; and (3) under particular conditions vehicles and transportation systems afford opportunities for certain forms of political action. For all these reasons, this article has argued that the study of migration politics should grant greater theoretical and empirical attention to questions of transport. To the public square, the detention centre, and the border wall, research now needs to add the boat, the plane, the bus, the train and their respective routes and powers. These are quite evidently not merely conveyances but lively sites of meaning making and struggle in their own right.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. One way that transportation does appear within migration studies is with research on 'boat people'. See, e.g. Pugh (2004). I argue we need to situate these high-profile forms and practices in a much wider field of vehicles and mobilities.
2. See Wood (2000: 16–40) on the complex history of the diagram of the *Brookes*, and its continuity with other abolitionist practices that essentialized the black slave's 'passivity, innocence and docility' (2000: 23) for the purposes of mobilizing a white public against slavery. My understanding of the significance of the *Brookes* has been deepened by Julie Chu's recent work on the 'technics of migration' (Chu, 2013), and especially her discussion of the distinction between 'passenger' and 'cargo' which, as she points out, emerges only at the start of the nineteenth century, and finds inscription in the passage of the Passenger Acts in British and American law.
3. Foucault (2007: 336) observes that if one branch of the genealogy of police is urban regulation, the other is the mounted constabulary, the Maréchaussée. This was the armed force which Royal authority set up in fifteenth-century France to deal with the 'floating mass of individuals' – many the product of disbanded armies – who engaged in all sorts of 'illegalities' on the road. Compared with the history of governing cities, the history of the powers exercised over vehicles, travellers and roads seems to be a real blind spot in studies of governmentality.
4. For example, see the report *Collective Expulsion* (Corporate Watch, 2013) whose cover design consciously echoes the style used in the famous diagram of the slave ship, *Brookes*. I thank Charles Heller for alerting me to this report.

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