

Le souci de soi

The Duty of Care and the Humanitarian Politics of Life

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Le Souci de Soi: The Duty of Care and the humanitarian politics of life¹

By Anna Leander

Introduction

More than a decade ago, the then board-member and former vice president of *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF), Didier Fassin who is also a well-established anthropologist published an article about the politics of humanitarianism (Fassin, 2007). His ambition was to establish the peculiar nature of the politics of humanitarianism and the particular inescapable *aporia*² this politics generates by imposing a hierarchization of lives that necessarily violates the moral and ethical principles of humanitarian action. Fassin identifies three dividing lines along which humanitarians constantly classify lives, namely the line separating lives risked and lives that can only be sacrificed; that separating expatriates and locals; and the line separating the lives of those of those who speak from those whose lives can only be spoken of. He insists that the obvious *aporia* involved in having to classify lives along these lines are foundational not only for humanitarianism but for our present condition and its politics;³ an argument he has subsequently expanded and developed in greater detail in other places (Fassin, 2011). In this chapter, I wish to follow up on Fassin's reasoning. I will engage neither his general conclusion about the *aporia* the humanitarian politics of life nor its overarching significance but rather his view on *how* this *aporia* is generated. For this *how* matters not only for academic reasons but because it is crucial for the possibility to act on and govern with the indeed inescapable *aporia*; that is for how we understand the possibility for political agency and the responsibility associated with it.

My overall contention in this chapter is that tending carefully to socio-material dispositives⁴ at the most lowly practical level is essential for understanding *how* the *aporia* is fashioned and how we might therefore re-fashion it. Yet, following Fassin's line of thought makes this difficult. Fassin locates the distinctiveness of the politics of humanitarianism by contrasting it to biopolitics. On his account, while this politics has a clear biopolitical dimension (the obvious place of camps, migration and aid flows etc.), its distinctiveness lies in the classification of lives which Fassin suggests is not related to "technologies of power" but to "the evaluation of human beings and meaning of their existence".⁵ This delinking from technologies of power from the evaluation and of human beings and the meaning of their existence and the related separation of matter and meaning is what I will show is problematic if one wants to understand how the *aporia* Fassin is interested in is produced and how it might therefore be altered. I make this argument looking carefully at one specific socio-material dispositive, namely the Duty of Care. I will show that The Duty of Care has contributed to making the humanitarian politics of life revolve ever more around a *souci de soi* [Care of the Self] of the humanitarians and because it has made the care for their own security part and parcel of the technologies of the self for humanitarians. I will pursue each point in order, concluding on the avenues for agency these points somewhat paradoxically

open; that is on the import of focussing on socio-material practices for re-fashioning the discomfiting humanitarian politics of life (ever more) characterised by a *souci de soi*.

A Duty of Care for the humanitarian self

Humanitarian missions often face harsh critique and outright hostility from the populations they are caring for. Yet, at the same time another critique is occupying a growing space among the humanitarians themselves, namely that revolving around how the missions are carried out and in particular the security of those involved in them (Krahmann and Leander 2019). The care for the humanitarian self is moving into the centre. This discussion has many aspects and nuances. Its emergence obviously is also a complex process. Here I wish to focus in on the place of one specific dispositive, tracing *one* particular process that has deepened the *aprioa* of humanitarian work and reason. More specifically, I want to trace how the Duty of Care became established as dispositive pertinent to the governance of humanitarian action redirecting the focus toward the security of the humanitarians themselves.

The ascent of the DoC as a legal principle was far from preordained. The DoC had had a long, and perhaps happy, life in common law since the emergence of unlimited liability in the 18th Century (Introduction to this volume, Davies 1989 and Leander 2018). It was a principle making it possible to take producers of goods or services to task if they did fail to take reasonable measures to limit the risks of their customers. With the move to neo-liberal forms of new public management, the DoC became used also for public services and particularly in health care. There, it was invoked to protect the increasingly exposed and vulnerable “clients” of underfunded public services and to discipline health care personnel into caring better for them (Munro and Turner 2010; Sevenhuijsen 2003). As commercial security and military markets began to grow it was occasionally gleaned to as one of the potential dispositives that might be drawn upon to regulate the mushrooming area. It was invoked by states, organizations, companies and their employees as outsourcing increased the confusions and disagreements surrounding who was responsible for providing security to whom and on what terms.⁶ However, it was not until the Norwegian Refugee Council was asked to pay damages to one of its former employees by a District Court in Oslo, Norway, that the DoC took on any particular and specific significance for humanitarians.

The court case, *Dennis v. NRC*, was initiated by Steven Patrick Dennis who had been held hostage by a Somali militia for four days after being kidnapped while driving in a convoy through Dadaab refugee camp complex in Northern Kenya in June 2012 (OSD 2015). His convoy was taking the NRC secretary general Elisabeth Rasmussen on a visit. Dennis complained that his suffering during captivity as well as the lasting consequences it would have on his life could have been avoided had the NRC provided appropriate protection. In its judgement the court agrees with him. Drawing on statements from the involved parties but also on reports by the NRC, the UNHCR and the NGO Safety Program (NSP), the court argues that the NRC should be held “strictly liable” for its “gross negligence”. Since there is no precedent, the court posits that the NRC should pay damages similar to those stipulated by Norwegian labour for Norwegian employees in Norway in similar situations. The reasoning of the court rests on an analysis of the way that the security managers had performed, communicated and acted upon the conflicting risk assessments of the situation in which Dennis and his colleagues were kidnapped and several people shot dead. At the heart of the ruling

are the arguments that the local security management (i) did not heed previously established assessments, (ii) failed to communicate upward to the central risk manager, (iii) that did not inform those travelling in the convoy of the risks involved and (iv) handled the practicalities of the visit unsatisfactorily.⁷ As this makes clear, the court makes no direct reference to the DoC in its ruling but refers to the Norwegian labour law. However, it did locate the import of caring for humanitarians—for the humanitarian self—at the centre of discussions.

The focus on the care for the security of humanitarians drew attention to the case. *Dennis v. NRC* was hailed as a “landmark case”, “precedent-setting”, a “game-changer”, and a “wake-up call” for the aid industry (Hoppe and Williamson 2016; Wall 2015; Young 2015). The reason is that it played into the complex and often contentious relations between the “aid-industry” and its security managers.⁸ In fact it took sides in it. From the perspective of the aid industry, the security managers often impose unreasonable, too costly and counterproductive measures. They eat up the budget, hamper what should be the core activities in humanitarian crises and they claim too much say over how things should be done by and in the organizations. From the perspective of the security managers, theirs is an uphill struggle against a culture of irresponsibility dominating in an aid industry that refuses to face the all too real risks in contemporary humanitarian missions and, on top, resists the best efforts of the security managers to (in spite of this) assist and protect them. The Norwegian district court ruling weighed in on the side of the security managers. The court is well aware that precisely this is how its reasoning might/could be interpreted and therefore tries to caution against it writing that:

“The Court emphasizes that this case does not concern the security management within the NRC or the aid industry in general. The Court is to decide only on whether employees of the NRC acted negligently in connection with the kidnapping incident in Dadaab”. (OSD 2015: 15)

Caution disregarded. Not only was the case, picked upon as a “game changer”, imposing the security of the humanitarians as a central concern. The move was given force by associating the *Dennis v. NRC* judgement to a more general legal principle, namely the Duty of Care. This association had to be constructed. The DoC did not have any place in the judgement itself. It is mentioned in the reasoning of the court only in the form of a citation of the expert reports, that by NRC security advisor Chris Allen. Chris Allen in his report refers to the Duty of Care. In so doing he establishes a link to a common law principle. This is hardly surprising. Chris Allen’s is from the UK, with a degree from Essex, and has worked for security companies in contexts where common law principles would be expected reference points.⁹ However, the reference by the Norwegian court to it is strictly limited to citations of Chris Allen’s report. Hence the court writes

“on page 3 of his report, Chris Allan also concluded that: ‘*The recent critical incident demonstrates strongly that NRC is not currently fulfilling its duty of care to staff. This is clearly the case in Dadaab and may also be relevant in missions elsewhere.*’” (OSD 2015: 21, emphasis in the original).

The Norwegian court can hardly be understood to place the DoC at the centre of its reasoning and judgement. Yet, this is precisely how the case comes to be constructed in the commentaries following it. For example, a report commenting on *Dennis v. NRC* written for an umbrella organization of humanitarian NGOs [the ESF]¹⁰ is given the title: “Duty of Care: A review of the *Dennis v Norwegian Refugee Council* ruling and its

implications” (Merkelbach and Kemp 2016). The discussion the purported novel and reinforced significance of the Duty of Care then rather rapidly ushered in the launch of the *Voluntary Guideline on Duty of Care* (Merkelbach 2017). The link between the case and the DoC in other words is not only established, but used to generate regulatory instruments in its own right: the voluntary guidelines. With this, the DoC and its peculiar focus on the security of the humanitarians becomes one of the dispositives regulating security.

To clarify the significance of this establishment of the DoC as a dispositive of humanitarian security governance two further comments are warranted. Both pertain to its practical significance for those involved. First, for the security managers working in the rapidly expanding and largely commercialized “field”¹¹ of humanitarian security (or wishing to expand their activities into it!), the developments were obviously warmly welcome. It bolstered their position giving a legal foundation to the claim on which their activities are based; that precisely the security of the humanitarians themselves demanded careful tending to. Moreover, the court confirmed the responsibility of the security managers in assessing what exactly tending to this security entails (Leander 2019). Linking this to a legal Duty to Care could only be a welcome move as argued at length in Leander (2018). And, finally, the voluntary guidelines even suggested that humanitarian organizations needed to create a “security culture” for themselves. Translated to plain language, such a culture is one where security managers have a stronger say in shaping the organizations and their preferences. Unsurprisingly therefore, the security professionals were prone to affirm a reading of the judgement affirming the centrality of the DoC in this peculiar humanitarian centered edition. It provided them with an attractive key for entering and consolidating their positions in the sector and its organizations; not to say the promise of a *carte blanche* for remodeling it.¹²

Second, and perhaps more surprisingly, the humanitarians whose culture was to be changed into a security culture have done little to resist the ascent of the DoC as a dispositive pertinent for the sector. The NRC position on *Dennis v. NRC* is a case in point. The chair-person of the NRC, Jan Egeland, objected to engaging the judicial process on the grounds that it might lead to a “counterproductive witch-hunt” in the NRC (OSD 2015:1 8).¹³ When the ruling came he limited himself to express his regrets with regard to the security failures and their consequences for Steven Patrick Dennis.¹⁴ He did not tackle the bigger question regarding authority the court bestowed on the professional security management through its ruling nor did he subsequently address the way the case became associated with the DoC. With this silence the NRC is acquiescing to and in the process also reinforcing the ascent of the DoC as a regulatory dispositive. This is mirrored across the humanitarian sector. The ESF commissioning of a report on the topic and the wide range of institutions supporting the Voluntary Guidelines on the Duty of Care is a case in point. Maarten Merkelbach, the initiator of the Voluntary Guidelines, is himself committed to humanitarianism with a longstanding field experience deeply and personally concerned with the development of (in-)security in the sector. As many humanitarians and organizations, Egeland, the NRC and Merkelbach who pushed through the Voluntary Guidelines, appear concerned primarily with adjusting to, accommodating and supporting the development of humanitarian security governance the DoC is part of.

There are good reasons for this lack of resistance to the ascent of a DoC prioritizing the lives of humanitarian workers. Some are to be found in the growing securitization/militarization of neo-liberal life in general that is affecting also humanitarianism.¹⁵ However, more directly, resisting the securitization or militarization of humanitarian organizations from within is ethically exceedingly difficult. It necessarily requires arguing that the security of colleagues and co-workers should not be placed at the centre. Who would—or indeed possibly could—argue that the Duty of Care should *not* apply to them, their colleagues and friends? Even more strongly, who would not actively embrace and further the DoC? This is a stark expression of the *aporia* this chapter discusses. For the argument here, directing attention to it helps clarify why the ascent of the DoC remains unhampered and often actively supported and promoted in the practices of the humanitarians.

In sum, this ascent of the DoC as a socio-material dispositive tilts the humanitarian politics of life in a particular direction. It focuses attention on the security of the humanitarian workers. While there obviously is nothing explicit that pits this security against that of the surroundings, the zooming in on the humanitarian-self enshrines priority and privilege. The DoC concerns the security of the humanitarians, not the security they are providing. It is a DoC for the Humanitarian self. The DoC weighs in on the humanitarian politics of life shifting the scales (ever further) so that humanitarian lives weigh more. The DoC refashions the “evaluations and meanings given to life” to reiterate Fassin’s formulation. This is not to say that DoC alone could account for the shifts in the humanitarian politics of life, nor is it to pretend that the DoC reigns supreme. It does however show the significance of the neither linear nor preordained socio-material micro-processes through which contestable and constantly emerging technologies of power come to be constituted through the integration of dispositives such as the DoC. It therefore underscores the import of recognizing the link between socio-material dispositives (such as the DoC) and the evaluations and meanings informing the humanitarian politics of life and why it is therefore difficult to follow Fassin in locating the originality of humanitarian politics of life in their separation.

Inscribing the *Duty of Care* in technologies of the Self

Directing close attention to how the Duty of Care brings out a second interesting side of its relation to the humanitarian politics of life: namely the way this politics is enacted by the humanitarian subject, through processes that Foucault might have termed “technologies of the self.” The DoC fashions the evaluations and meanings that make up Fassin’s humanitarian politics of life tilting it towards the care for the security of the humanitarians. It does so by inscribing this *souci* for the own security as something the ethical and moral humanitarian should prioritize, embody and enacted. Perhaps this should come as no surprise? In work on neo-liberal governance much emphasis has been placed on the ever increasing diffusion, decentralization, individualization of governance forms that have become capillary to the extent that they often seem to decompose subjects into their biometric or digitally composed parts of an extended socio-material self (Haggerty and Ericson 2000; Muller 2010). It would therefore seem only logical that also the humanitarian politics of life could/should be understood as working at this level. This said, reasoning along these lines implies a dual conceptual move. The first deepens the argument in the preceding section showing that material technologies of power are imbricated with meaning/evaluations

(hence closing the gap Fassin posits between the two). The second shifts the relationship between technologies of power and technologies of the self. Foucault thought of these as separate things; associating technologies of self with self-initiated empowerment and technologies of power with domination tied to overarching knowledge systems.¹⁶ Linking technologies of the self to technologies of power also re-connects them to domination.

A technology of the self is a technology for curating the self in view of empowering and improving it, notably by rendering it more ethical and happy (see note 16 for full citation). As Foucault also insists, such technologies cannot be conceived of in abstract. On the contrary, to work they need to be tangible, practical. As he puts it, referring to the place of oracles: “the Delphic principle was not an abstract one concerning life; it was technical advice, a rule to be observed for the consultation of the oracle. ‘Know yourself’ meant ‘Do not suppose yourself to be a God.’” (Foucault 1988: 18). As this also underscores, technologies of the self, besides being tangible, are not formulated by individuals in isolation but generated in a context, in this case in dialogue with an oracle. The DoC does not speak and is no oracle. However, it is imbricated in the speech of authorities in matters of security, namely the security professionals who draw upon it when they posit that locating the security of the humanitarian self at the core of humanitarian work is not only important but an ethical and individual duty of humanitarians. Both *Duty* and *Care* are deeply morally and ethically charged concepts (Tronto 2013). This makes the DoC particularly effective in this sense. The force of law further adds to the effectiveness of the invocation. The DoC dispositive in clear inscribes security as a technology of the self to be worked with by each person individually. Lest the humanitarian actively turns security into something central to the self, s/he runs the risk of being morally unethical, jeopardizing operations, colleagues and therefore ultimately entire humanitarian projects. I wish to look more closely at three distinct ways in which the DoC specifically is mobilized by security professionals to inscribe the care for the own security as a technology of the self.

A first way in which this is done is through the demand that the own *security should be prioritized*. From the point of security professional this implies heeding their advice and following their instructions, including at the cost of reshuffling the own habits and priorities. A presentation about the Duty of Care at an ASIS conference¹⁷ (ASIS 2016) gave a graphic illustration of the idea. After outlining the history of the Duty of Care and its current pertinence, the presenter proceeded to link it what s/he termed a “Duty of Obedience” of the clients. S/he illustrated this point with a slide (entitled ‘A Duty of Obedience’) showing the (headless) bust of a woman with big breasts wearing a red corset and long black gloves holding a long, black whip. How, if the protected subjects failed to obey the instructions of their security providers, could they possibly expect their protectors to fulfil their protective duties? The speaker pointed out that this duty of obedience was bound to be stifling, as it would encroach on and limit not only activities and but also initiatives and imagination. This point was supported by slide depicting a male pelvis squeezed into a pair of Roman Gladiator style metal shorts.

This theme of prioritizing through obedience and the frustration with disobedience is recurring among security providers. For example, one of the promoters of a tracking-software for phones explained in a lecture at an SCTX [Security and Counter Terrorism

Expo] that: “sometimes they [clients] behave irresponsibly [...] we actually make it their duty not to leave it [the phone] behind or turn it off” (SCTX 2016). Or again, in a discussion about the place of the Central Security Officer (CSO) in organizations/companies, the representative of a professional organization argued that the greatest challenge facing CSOs was to secure a position where their instructions would be followed. He thought that the CSO needed to be integrated into the leadership of the company. As he explained, “security priorities” must be reflected in decisions at all levels and pertaining to the full range of company activities, to ensure that they do not remain “...confined to a corner called security but followed through the entire organization”. The DoC is in clear referenced to demand of humanitarians that they work to improve their own security concerns in their individual (obeying the security professional), material (carrying the phone) and collective/organizational (placing the CSO at the centre) activities. The DoC becomes a dispositive inscribing hierarchies of priorities, including a duty of obedience towards security professionals, in the technology of through which humanitarian works can realize themselves as ethical and moral subject “with the help of others” to retake Foucault’s terms.¹⁸

A second way in which the DoC contributes to inscribing care for the own security as part of the technology of the humanitarian self, is by *embodying it in the humanitarian*. Security professionals see it as part and parcel of their role to not only make their clients (or as they will often phrase it “assets”) aware of the import of their physical shape and appearance for their own safety. For this reason security packages offered to humanitarians will involve courses with instructions for how to react to threats and avoid finding oneself exposed to threats. Such courses are offered routinely as part of private packages such as part of kidnap, ransom and extortion insurances, personal security and safety insurances and indeed as part of the field preparation many organizations, including many states, the EU, the UN, or the ICRC offer their employees (e.g. de Guttry; 2015, Krahmman 2014; O’Reilly 2011). Failure to offer such training is a failure for organizations to fulfil their DoC towards their employees. This training encourages humanitarians to work on their own body, its reactions and appearance so as to care for its security. It in effect posits that caring for the embodied security is something humanitarians can and should do for their own sake but also for the sake of their operations, projects and organizations. As digital technologies have extended the self online, humanitarians are trained to care also for information security and its import (Duffield 2016). Even more strongly, as I have argued elsewhere (Leander 2019b), with the rapid expansion of tracking technologies (Thumala et al. 2015), humanitarians are increasingly asked to make integrate online security technologies into their embodied selves. Security professionals work increasingly with not only with location tracking, but also with portable video devices as well as devices tracking heartbeat, blood pressure, chemicals, and crowd movements. Tracking devices locate humanitarians, they see, hear, and sense through them, paving the way for more effective protection. Security professionals therefore demand, sometimes threatening to withdraw insurance/security coverage, that humanitarians embody these invasive tracking technologies. To be ethical and responsible in ensuring the own security humanitarians must carry out these operations on their bodies (to reiterate Foucault’s expression) extending them digitally into a security realm. The DoC in clear helps formulated technologies of the self, operating on/in the body, including its physical form and appearance as well as its digital extensions.

Third and finally, the DoC inscribes the care for the own security as a technology of the humanitarian self, positing it at the centre also of humanitarian *conduct towards the surrounding environment*. As logical prolongation of inscribing the care of the own security as a duty to obey security professionals and as an embodiment to be embraced, the DoC is also contributing to a view of the relationship to the environment that places the security of the humanitarians at the centre. This implies protecting them from the threats of this environment or making them more resilient. To do that requires that humanitarians work on their selves so that they can see their relations from the perspective of the security professionals. This perspective of course is not unified. One type of security may have a preference for working with what Hansen has termed “networked” security that is security working through close connections with local groups combined with a good understanding of the context (Hansen 2012 and this volume). However, part and parcel of the move towards a professionalization of the humanitarian security field (Beerli 2017) has been the standardization of procedures as well as a tendency to privilege the understanding of security officers located in the headquarters.¹⁹ They are prone to be interested in well-trying procedures based on lessons learned from past experience. The messiness, unpredictability and complexity of context that do not square is more of a disturbance. Instead, techniques that simplify and sanitize by dispensing with the contextual noise are therefore often preferred even if they distort and bias the images of the specific situation (Givoni 2016; Bargués-Pedreny 2019).

More than this, the very emphasis on the Duty of Care for security is itself becoming an obstacle to local anchoring of security knowledge. Insurance requirements, administrative regulations, and security procedures are effectively rendering it exceedingly difficult to gather the kind of information that would be necessary to anchor such security policies (Peter and Strazzari 2017 and Russo and Strazzari this volume). Some areas become nothing short of “black holes” in terms of information gathered by journalists or researchers working at a distance from security professionals. No outsider can or will venture in. By implication, the security thinking humanitarians are most likely to work into their conduct towards the surroundings is one formulated at a distance, where generalized suspicion and defensiveness takes the place of closer engagement. The consequences are palpable and have been well described in the literature on the evolving relationship of humanitarians to security. Trust is hollowed out and increasingly replaced with a sense of looming danger. The physical morphology of humanitarian work itself comes to reflect these transformations and reinforce them. Humanitarians circulate in armoured vehicles and confine themselves to well-guarded compounds and hotels serviced on an international level (Smirl 2015). They therefore become cut off from their surroundings, protected from its potentially risky intrusions and end up exchanging ideas mainly with themselves and other outsiders in an increasingly “bunkerized” environment (Duffield 2010). To be ethical and moral, to protect themselves and their operations, humanitarians are effectively encouraged wear a thick protective belt shielding them from the surroundings.

The DoC in sum, lends support and legal backing to practical rules regarding the technologies through which humanitarians might work on and re-fashion their selves. I have just discussed three such rules: rules about the own actions (requirement to prioritize the own security), rules about the own body (requirement to accept embodied security technologies) and rules about the own sociability (requirement to follow

guidelines in the interaction with surroundings). However, unlike the Foucauldian technologies of the self that allow individuals “to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1988: 18), here these technologies feed into technologies of production, of signs and of power.²⁰ The commercial-professional rules regarding the own actions, body and sociability deepens the dependence on commercial security professionals. It accentuates the awareness of the own mortality and imperfections, the limits to the own wisdom, and the impurity of humanitarian missions. For the humanitarian worker the consequence seems more likely to be frustration than a state of happiness. For the account here this matters. This likely frustration tells us something about how the performative effects of the Duty of Care on the humanitarian politics of life. It expresses the deepening *aporia* they deal with not only because the Duty of Care is reframing their work from without but because it is transforming the technologies of the self they themselves work with from within. To understand the evolving humanitarian politics of life we in clear need focus not only how socio-material dispositives such as the Duty of Care frame this politics ever more *as a souci de soi*, but also how it works *through a souci de soi*.

Conclusion

The above account of how the Duty of Care generates a humanitarian politics of life working both as *souci de soi* and through the *souci de soi* is discomfoting. The first section sketched the improbable ascent of the DoC as a socio-material dispositive governing humanitarian security. It related it to an increasingly commercialized professional security context where the possibilities to consolidate and expand military/security related activities are welcome and seized upon. This includes the possibility of reading the Norwegian court case *Dennis v NRC* case as if it revolved around the Duty of Care when it only mentions it in passing as part of a citation and then mobilizing this reading to prioritize a focus on humanitarian security. The second section deepens the discomfort by detailing how this unlikely ascent came to inscribed the care for the own security as a technology of the humanitarian self. This not only perpetuates and deepens the humanitarian *souci de soi*. It turns the care for the own security into a matter of moral and ethical import. Caring for the own security becomes a matter of self-improvement for humanitarians and a condition for the completion and success of their missions. This is discomfoting. However, as should also be clear from the above, this argument is not an ideological critique of humanitarian. Rather, I could readily borrow (again) from Fassin in formulating its intent:

“Far from the ideological criticisms traditionally aimed at humanitarian organizations—which their agents in any case readily take up themselves—this critical perspective stresses the contradictions that exist in contemporary moral economies, well beyond the sphere of intervention of humanitarian organizations themselves, in what characterizes the political disorder of the world: the inequality of lives” (Fassin 2007: 520).

However, while Fassin concludes positing the *aporia* of the humanitarian politics of life characterizing it as an expression of the political disorder of the world more broadly, I wish to move the discussion into the realm of agency.

Is there any scope for influencing the humanitarian politics of life and its *aporia*? The account provided here offers some pointers. By providing a micro-level account of how the DoC has contributed to perpetuating and deepening the *aporia* it also, perhaps paradoxically, suggests how such perpetuation and deepening might be countered. The unlikely ascent of the dispositive could have been (and can be) countered by alternative

interpretations of the significance *Dennis v NRC* for example by emphasising the import of generating alternative dispositives linking the security of humanitarians with that of their context. Also its inscription as a technology of the self could have been differently framed for example as resting more on the kind of networked security knowledge often advocated by local security managers and area studies specialists (Hansen in this volume and elsewhere). Pointing to possibilities for political agency such as these requires focussing attention on the *aporia* is generated at the micro level, through socio-material dispositives—such as the Duty of Care discussed here—associating meaning and matter allowing for technologies of power to merge with technologies of the self. More generally it requires a willingness to acknowledge the link between the anti-politics of domination and the alter politics of imagining alternatives to borrow the terms of Hage (Hage 2015). This kind of linkage may not offer a magic potion strong enough to infuse political agency with the force necessary to entirely displace the *aporia* of the humanitarian politics of life (let alone its place in our broader present). However, it does provide some sense of where there might be scope for more modest forms of agency of the kind de Certeau might have termed tactics as well as how such agency might stand a realistic chance of becoming influential (De Certeau 1984). Looking closely at the DoC is yes a way of underlining its role in deepening the domination of a specific politics of life but it is also a way of highlighting the uncertainty and fragility of this role and hence the possibility for influence it, and through it the politics of life. This, at least to me, is a promising beginning.

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Endnotes

¹ This chapter draws on arguments I have earlier developed regarding the Duty of Care (Leander 2018; Leander 2019a) and my work on the marketing of security technologies (Leander 2019b). Financial support from the *Doc:Pro* project, funded by the Norwegian Research Council, that made this research possible is gratefully acknowledged. It also benefited from the generous and constructive comments by the editors of this volume.

² Aporia refers to an irresolvable difficulty, something one does not have the resources to move beyond, a point of doubt and indecision. I will follow Fassin and use it for this argument.

³ In full Fassin writes: "... By describing these problems as an aporia, I intend to demonstrate that these contradictions are both constitutive of the humanitarian project and effectively insurmountable within the value systems of Western societies, particularly when considering the tension that exists between the claimed sacredness of life (which is no more viable in the context of wartime violence than in conditions of structural violence) and the expressed force of compassion (which makes it possible to maintain up to a certain point the thread of solidarity, even at the price of ontological inequality)." (2007: 519)

⁴ Here is use dispositive loosely following Foucault who played with this French terms which banally refers to a legal statement, judgement or similar, a machine, apparatus, or mechanism intended to regulate something. At present there is a momentous discussion around the concept "dispositive" e.g. Foucault (2004);Deleuze (1988);Agamben (2007);Stengers (1995) that I merely hint at.

⁵ "What I call 'politics of life' here are politics that give specific value and meaning to 'human life. They differ analytically from Foucauldian biopolitics, defined as 'the regulation of population,' in that *they relate not to the technologies of power* and the way populations are governed but to *the evaluation of human beings and the meaning of their existence.*" Fassin (2007: 500, emphasis added).

⁶ See Græger and Yennie Lindgren (2017) and Okano-Heijmans and Caesar-Gordon (2016).

⁷ It was not kept sufficiently confidential. Drivers were Inexperienced. Instead of going to the less risky IFO I, the convoy went (for no good reason according to the reports) to the more risky IFO II. The management allowed delays in the program.

⁸ For overviews of the issues at stake see e.g. Joachim and Schneiker (2012);Spearin (2015).

⁹ He has been security advisor for NRC and became Global Security Advisory in October 2013. Previously he worked for Armadillo/Safer Edge in DR Congo, Afghanistan and Rwanda conducting risk assessments, preparing and implementing security plans and procedures, conducting training, <https://no.linkedin.com/in/christopher-allen-a5896a90> accessed 29 August 2017.

¹⁰ The "European Interagency Security Forum" is an independent network of Security Focal Points who currently represent 85 Europe-based humanitarian NGOs operating internationally. EISF is committed to improving the security of relief operations and staff. It aims to increase safe access by humanitarian agencies to people affected by emergencies. Key to its work is the development of research and tools which promote awareness, preparedness and good practice.

¹¹ For an analysis of its development see Beerli (2017).

¹² For example in the 2016 ASIS Europe program the DoC figured prominently as a seminar theme but also in the marketing of the companies present. ASIS is one of the main professional security associations.

¹³ <https://www.nrk.no/nyheter/flyktninghjelpen-domt-i-kidnappingsak-1.12577647> accessed 29 August 2017.

¹⁴ <http://www.vl.no/nyhet/tidligere-ansatt-krever-millionerstatning-fra-flyktninghjelpen-1.421541?paywall=true> accessed 29 August 2017.

¹⁵ This is a bombastic but important comment to make. There is no space to delve on it here but for discussions see e.g. Enloe (2007); Stavrianakis and Stern (2017).

¹⁶ Foucault explains that: "As a context, we must understand that there are four major types of these "technologies," each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which

permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and semis, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. These four types of technologies hardly ever function separately, although each one of them is associated with a certain type of domination". (Foucault 1988: 18). Reinforcing the positive connotations Foucault attaches to technologies of the self he explains that in earlier work "I have tried to show how we have indirectly constituted ourselves through the exclusion of some others: criminals, mad people, and so on. And now my present work [on technologies of the self] deals with the question: How did we directly constitute our identity through some ethical techniques of the self which developed through antiquity down to now? (Foucault, 1988: 146).

¹⁷ ASIS is a central association of security professionals.

¹⁸ These changes and the erection of the DoC as a regulatory dispositive endowing commercial professional commercial networks with authority is not only shifting location of the legitimate authority over the use of force, it is playing into all manner of discussions surrounding protection including into the understanding of whether or not citizens are entitled to protection from their home states (Hansen this volume), whether or not those employed by armed forces can expect protection from the state of that armed force (Søby Kristensen this volume) or whether or not researcher will be protected when/legally allowed to carry out research in conflict areas (Russo and Strazzari this volume).

the use of security are affecting also other areas than the humanitarian one. Also course are reflected well beyond are far reaching including a refusal to protect those who refuse to obey (Hansen this volume) and

¹⁹ We see this play out also in *Dennis v NRC* where one of the reasons given by the court for its judgement was that the local security officers did not consult the regional or Oslo security professionals but acted on their own initiative. Local security claimed that they had tried to do so but gotten no response. The reasoning and the response alike underscore the hierarchy of relationship in the security field locating it at a distance from the field, as close as possible to the central HQ (Leander 2019a).

²⁰ Although as I insist in the main text Foucault treated technologies of the self as emancipatory, he himself opened the kind of ambiguity I am arguing for here when he suggests that his different kinds of technologies "hardly ever function separately" (Foucault 1988: 18).